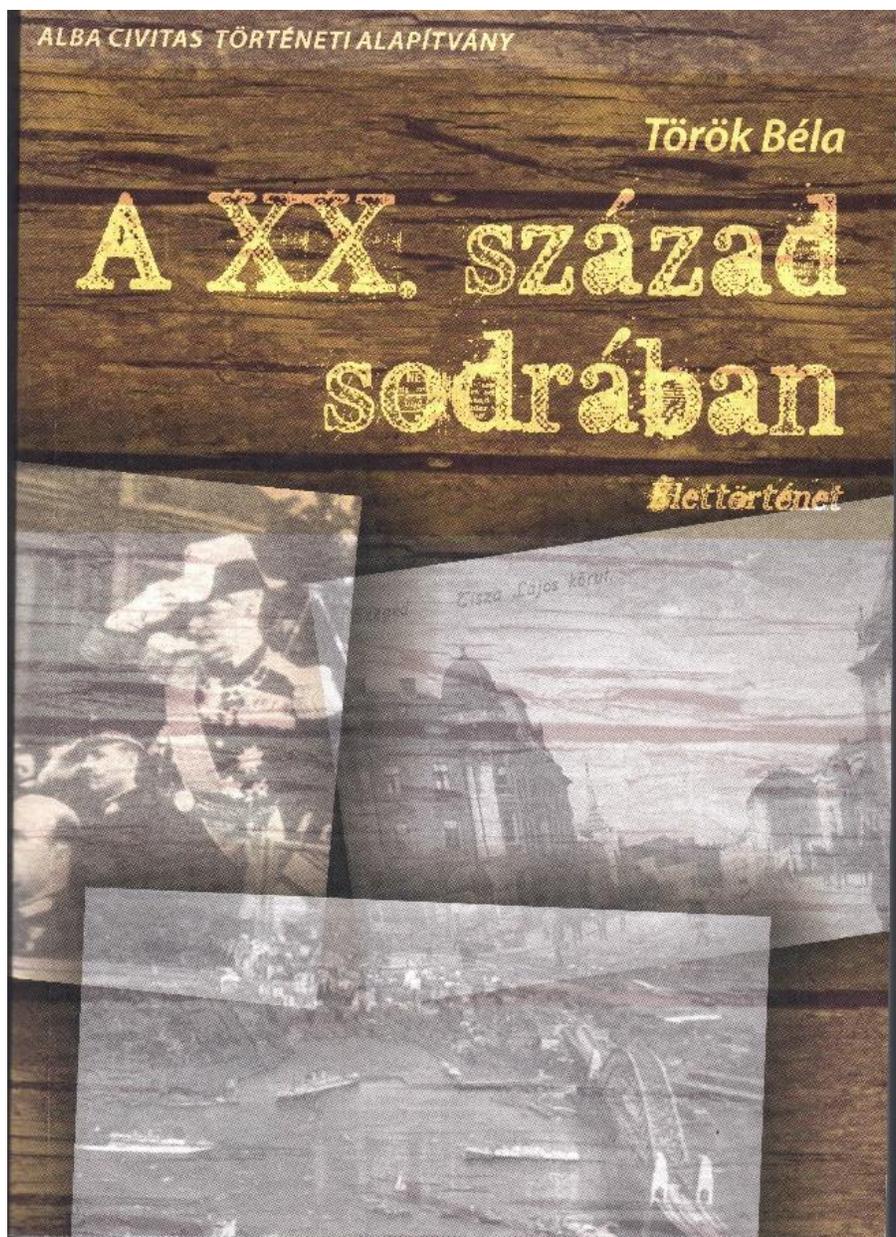


**IN THE MAINSTREAM OF THE XX CENTURY-  
Living History**

**Török Béla**





I dedicate these remembrances to my beloved wife, Ica, who was my loyal partner throughout the decades of our exile.

## Table of Contents

4	<u>Forward</u>
6	<u>My first memories</u>
12	<u>My Father and his family</u>
21	<u>My mother and her family</u>
28	<u>My Student years - 1920-1932</u>
46	<u>University Years 1932-1936</u>
64	<u>Portraits of Szeged</u>
85	<u>I am an Armoured Car driver – My volunteer years</u>
94	<u>Berlin 1937-38</u>
118	<u>Home 1938</u>
129	Berlin 1939
155	Changes in my Life during 1940
171	<u>Swept into War 1941</u>
182	<u>In the service of the Ministry of Justice 1942-1943</u>
197	<u>Personal Secretary to István Antal and Gábor Vladár</u>

(The published book in Hungarian has been translated by Leslie (László) Török into three parts. In Part 1, the author writes extensively about his father, childhood, tertiary education, university degrees, and early employment. Part 2 covers his family's life as refugees in Germany and migrant experience in their new home in distant Australia. Part 3 is assessment of the politics of that period and how he views future possibilities.)

**Editors: Maureen and Christopher Torok**

# Part I -Childhood, University and Career in Hungary

## FORWARD

In the twilight of a human life, it is natural that almost everyone looks back on the past, trying to evaluate their achievements and endeavours in order to pass on their experiences to those who came after them. This is an especially strong feeling for my generation. We have lived through one century and now at the beginning of the new millennium we are witnessing much change in the world around us. I feel that it is important that future generations to be given a better understanding of their past.

Life histories and memoirs are often written by those who have played a leading role in the hustle and bustle of life and so might be better equipped to explain the events of the past. The question arises: why I now feel the need to record my life and thoughts in this log?

I left Hungary when I turned thirty, and so as a child, student, university graduate and new government employee I was not able to play a role in the country's political life. I have always been interested in political philosophy- not so much in academic study as in research work. My military service, too, was limited to peacetime, and as fate would have it, only in the last months of the war.

At the end of the Second World War, my family and I- after a period of four years in refugee camps and emergency housing in Europe, found ourselves abroad seemingly at the end of the world: Australia. With hundreds of thousands of countrymen, I never gave up my Hungarian roots and have used all my talents and opportunities to maintain my connection to the fate of the Hungarian nation.

During the final months of the Second World War, we had to make a decision whether to look to the East or West and the ancient sentiment cried out:

**"Rather be a hero for a moment than a slave for a lifetime."**

Many people bled to death in the fighting during the last months, but those who stayed behind had to endure a lifelong slavery.

Those who stayed at home suffered through the trials and tribulations of the Russian occupation. Their situation sometimes improved for the better and on occasions they had more bread, better housing, and there was hope for better times. The Marxist utopia and the corrupt leadership used the country's military to further punish the country.

And we, who were in the "free" West, had to struggle to establish economic self-sufficiency and face the pressures of assimilation in these new circumstances. For many decades, people at home believed we were in the lands of milk and honey, but knew nothing of our problems and struggles. Perhaps we, too, did not fully understand the situation at home nor the pressures the occupation placed on those who remaining which compromised their spirit of freedom.

How did so many Hungarian exiles end up in distant lands overseas. How did we see the fate of Hungarian people, and how did we view the global political situation? The writer seeks to answer these questions in this book through the events of his life. Maybe after the resurrection of the nation this will assist a Hungarian historian to accurately reflect on this generation of living victims.

## **My first memories**

When astrologers produce their horoscopes, they establish where and when the person was born. They think that everyone's fate is determined by the attraction of celestial bodies to the earth. When using scientific methodology, you cannot agree with this view, but we cannot deny that a person's date and place of birth are of great significance. We have to consider other factors as well. A man's destiny is also governed by his nationality, religion, social status, and the historical period in which he lives.

To be born Hungarian carries its own fate especially when you look back on the nation's thousands of years of history. It is significant that the people lived in peace for only two decades throughout that history. There was almost no Hungarian generation that lived out its earthly course without suffering because of its nationality.

My generation who lived in the twentieth century had to face most serious upheavals-and who is to say, when we reflect, that every step taken was correct.

Each time when we have to decide whether to turn left or right, we are naturally influenced by our faith. Christian Hungary, as a result, was limited in the exercise of its free will as it could not deny its faith. Often the decisions and compromises turned out to be incorrect, but peace of mind can only be found in the Lord.

Family traditions and social situations define and limit the freedom of one's actions. No matter how much one rebels, one must always consider the circumstances of your society and family.

I was born on 6<sup>th</sup> day of October 1914 in the city of Szeged. Franz Joseph was the emperor and the historic Great Hungary was then complete. Ferenc Deák the country's respected statesman was responsible in achieving reconciliation with Austria, which gave the nation decades of peace after having nearly bled to death. The people were under the illusion that this was the beginning of the second millennium of a development and growth for the nation.

A few months before my birth, the guns were again fired - but at that time it was still the age of European cooperation. The wars had a dynastic complexion and overwhelmingly fought over racial interests. Soldiers marched to the front covered in flowers.

The various faiths were not independent of the state. The state specifically identified itself as Christian but was liberal in dealing with the historic religions, providing protection to the Jewish and Muslim faiths as well.

Parliamentary life gave limited freedoms to the people, but individual freedom was not affected by these limitations; rather, they opened a path for future progress.

Szeged at this time was not as advanced a university town as it is today. The great flood scars were still recognizable by all. Areas outside the main ring road were more rural in nature. I saw the light of day in Fodor Street in the *koroda*. This area contained the city's maternity hospital and I remember that in my youth people still talked about the 'koroda'. Later this word became outdated due to the language reforms introduced to eliminate artificial words. The word hospital won over the word *koroda*.

The Török family's house was in Zrinyi Street. In its place the Bishop's Palace was built in the 1920s. Our first home was in Fekete Sas Street (Black Eagle) and belonged to the parish church of St. Demetrius and it was here that I was baptised. Today, only the "Broken Tower" reminds us of the memory of this old church.

My father was 34 when I was born. He opened his attorney's office in 1912, and his practice developed nicely but was interrupted by the war. As a lieutenant, he went into military service. In his memoirs, which are in my possession, he describes the winters of 1912-15 with a recurrent severe arthritic condition and the Army assigned him to the Pöstyén spa for recovery where both my mother and I spent a couple of months. All this, of course, I do not remember, but I know from my mother's story it was a lovely Slovakian nurse who took care of me. My father was eventually decommissioned and declared unfit for service on the front. In 1916, we moved to 22 Deák Ferenc Street a beautiful four-bedroom apartment that also became my father's law office.



***Author and his father***

**My first memories-scattered images-come from this period.**

Family tradition says that I was particularly fond of my father's mother, but of course I have no memories of this. Only when she was taken to the Budapest hospital for treatment, I felt a great loss, and I remember standing there near the hem of the curtain, which showed interlocking squares, and, in my imagination, I transformed it into a train which was taking away my beloved Nagyanya (grand mummy).

I also have memories that on the **17<sup>th</sup> of March 1917**, Kata, my little sister was born, and while the family was anticipating a boy to be named Miklós (**Nicholas**) I declared that "I do not mind, just that she had arrived safely."

I still remember my parents and me watching from our window a Zeppelin airship passing over the city. The Zeppelin's trajectory suggested that it was probably connected with German plans against Romanian disturbances.

It is understandable that the tragic outcome of the First World War and the historical significance of these events took hold of the little boy's attention. I have strong memories that the population of Szeged feared that the Serbs who occupied part of Újszeged wanted to blow up the main bridge. We lived nearby at the Milko palace and we children hid amongst the furniture.

In my memory I still have the image of the colorful Moroccan French troops walking on the Promenade trying to make friends with the public.

My father remembered that the French occupation and administration sought justice and were not opposed to the general public. My uncle **Lieutenant ittebei Kiss Miklós**, who was fluent in French, was assigned as a liaison officer to the Headquarters and thus had the opportunity to translate the needs of the population who were living in difficult circumstances.

I did not understand the political aspects of the Chrysanthemum Revolution but learned about it later from my father.

In my school years while walking with my father, we met people whom he welcomed heartily. Later he explained that these gentlemen were exposed as revolution sympathisers, but at the end of 1918, simply no one could see clearly the political situation. My father believed that these people were driven by feelings of pride in the independence of Szeged and saw the Chrysanthemum Revolution as a way to shake off the Habsburgs.

When the events of 1919 the events occurred, I remember that my father was a member of the recently set up officers' patrols, and I was very proud of my soldier father.

I later found out that my father was an active member of the ABC, the anti-Bolshevik alliance, and, with his friends, played an active role in policing and organizing a new political life.

My father was very proud of his role during these months, but he stressed that the communist opponents were mostly honest people who bravely confessed their political beliefs and sometimes faced death without fear.

During the warm summers my family lived on the shores of the Tisza and family pictures showing when I was one to two years old depict me splashing happily in the waters of the Tisza.

There are also memories from those times of Szatymaz. My paternal grandfather owned a grape farm in 1917, which was later inherited by Aunt Kálmán Falcione as her dowry. We went there a few times on vacation and the sweet fruit, hot sand and neighbourhood pals are still fresh in my memory.

In the early 1920s, my memories included the night when a lot of military material was placed in the basements of the farmhouses and surrounding buildings. Later I understood that Hungarian patriots were attempting to circumvent the Entente representatives' inspections, as they could not tolerate the idea that Hungary should not be able to stand up against any invading neighbours without weapons.

I also remember Horthy Miklós visiting Szeged which I assume took place in the first part of November 1919, following the entrance parade in Budapest. My father had a good friend on a second-floor balcony, where we viewed the event, and my young sister Kata cried out in a loud voice, "Long live Horthy the helmsman." (As the daughter of a member of the Szeged Rowing Association this could not be taken the wrong way ...)

I did not see much of the First World War loss of life, hospital admissions or suffering. However, I do remember visiting my uncle Miklós Kiss, over many weeks, in the Calvary military hospital. Fate had it that, after four years on the front, was eventually wounded. While serving in the inaugural Trans-Danubian National Army, his service pistol went off in his pocket, and we were afraid that he might have to have his leg amputated.

I also remember my maternal grandmother, Widow Baron Podmaniczky Béláné at her River Tisza home... The relationship with her was not as warm and familiar as with my beloved Nagyanyikó (paternal grandmother) which I did not understand at the time and the visits were quite formal.

My parents later explained that she had objected to my father's marriage plans. My father was a talented man, very good-looking and his law firm started well. The likely reason for the opposition was that the *ittebei* Kiss and the *ebeczki* Blaskovich families



*Szatymaz cottage -pic 2004*

belonged to the gentry, whereas the *nemescsói* Török family was of the nobility. In addition, my mother was very beautiful and accomplished young woman, but it seems that my grandmother was hoping for a marriage that would increase the family fortune... My mother's aunt, Ilona (Helena) Blaskovich hosted my mother at her Banat estate hoping that the long absence from my father would alienate the lovers.

My grandmother was forced to give in, and the young couple were wed on 7 January 1912.

We called her **Grossmama**, and often spent time with my uncle, whom we called Niki bácsi (Uncle Niki). He was an excellent soldier but very careless. The family often recalled that on one occasion, while cleaning his service pistol, he pointed in the direction of his mother and was reprimanded by Mama. He declared that the gun was unloaded, and pointed it at the ceiling, pulled the trigger- **it was loaded....**

Grossmama's first husband, my mother's father, *ittebei* Elemér Kiss died at a relatively young age. Grossmama later remarried, to Baron Béla Podmaniczky, who was the commander of Mezőhegyes Stud Farm. From this marriage came my mother's half-sister Judith, who was 10–12-year-old girl. We loved her very much; she often took care of us and played with us in the park or the banks of the Tisza.



**Mezőhegyesi Stud Farm**

The park was, of course, the Stefánia walkway, which is now called the Castle Gardens. Our nanny took us there, and I have family memories of eating some berries, which caused a stomach upset, but I recovered quickly. From our Milkó apartment, it was easy to run down to Stefánia, and when I was a student, this was our **Wild West** where we enjoyed all varieties of games.

My childhood's most significant experience, which also impacted my later life, was that my parents divorced in 1922, when I was eight **years-old**. I still do not know what caused them to separate. I have a faint recollection that there was an intense argument and some reference to my mother's side of the family.... My mother moved to Budapest, and my sister Kata and I stayed with my father. He tried using housekeepers to solve the problems of maintaining a household with children.

It is interesting that neither I nor my sister ever got to know the reason for their separation. Both my mother and my father just said that they did not understand each other, but they remained friends, and we never heard a bad word between them about each other. Later, I will write a few words about their friends.

As I wrote, I was born on October 6. Later, I pointed out to my friends that this day represented a national disaster. But this date of my birth also has another significance. An ancestor of the **nemescsói** Török family, my great-grandfather's cousin, was Ignác Török, one of the martyrs of Arad. From my early childhood it is understandable that I was influenced by my family history, and, having received a strong nationalistic education from my father, my development took an almost pre-determined path.

To this is added a trick of fate: that my mother's family were descendants of **ittebei Elemér** Kiss. The history of the Banat Lords (Western **Romania**) is inextricably linked to the 1848 War of Independence, as is Ernő Kiss, another of the Arad martyrs. My mother's paternal grandfather was my great grandfather's cousin.

The Török family was not wealthy. Their estates were dissipated by the 1848 Revolution, as family tradition has it that it was Török Ignác who convinced his cousin, my great-great grandfather to sell the estate and invest all the capital in Kossuth bank bills ... My father



was therefore a member of the Hungarian middle class with no assets. However, he was conservative-minded, and I was raised this way. This is the way I started out on the long and bumpy road that eventually led me to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

**Lajos Kossuth Governor during the revolution of 1848-49**



*Ignác Török*



*Ernő Kiss*

## My Father and his family

My father was born in Szeged on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1881. He was young when he lost his father, who was only 42 when he died of pneumonia. His childhood memories were captured in his memoirs penned in his old age while living with my sister Kata and her husband, Dr. Béla Csabai, in Székesfehérvár. In the decades following the Second World War until his death in 1969, he lived in retirement without a pension, under very difficult circumstances, but at my request, he wrote his memories, which he gave to me. With regard to the political situation in Hungary at that time, it is understandable that these writings focused on *just personal* histories, and the political situation of the time was omitted. Yet these records were very valuable to me, because they reinforced my memories of Szeged and formed an image of life during that period.

Thus, the following pages will often quote my father's notes as well.

My father wrote about his father, Török Sándor (Alexander), a lawyer in Szeged: *"He was a much sought-after lawyer who was successful, and he built a house in Szeged, and purchased a vineyard in Szatymaz, and invested in government securities. His first wife was Anna Vadász, but he soon became a widower, and, as fate would have it the children of this marriage died young. Then, he married péterfalvi Etelka Koór, who was a young widow. Interestingly, his brother János (John) married Etelka's sister, Teréziá Koór."*

Török Sándor died young, and therefore he could not influence the fate of his children; family stories have it, that while on one of his knees was young Sanyi (Sándor), and on the other knee was Béla, my father. He kept repeating an ode that Sanyi would be a general and Béla would be a Bishop... This had the consequence that, when my father reached the appropriate age, he entered the priestly seminary at Esztergom. My father completed year VI and VII, but eventually quit and transferred to the Szeged Piarista (Pious) Fathers **School** for the rest of the high school years.

At that time, the exchange of students between institutions was very fashionable, and this consisted of the southern exiled Hungarians sending their children to Szeged to speak Hungarian, and Szeged residents, in turn, sending their children to the Southern Regions to learn some German. It is questionable how successful this system was in terms of learning another language, but, in any event, it helped the exiles to maintain their ties to Hungary. My father spent time in a high school in Temesvár.

My father's memoir continues: –

*" My grandfather, Antal (Anthony) Török, was a wealthy man. His father was also named Antal Török and was the governor of the estates of **Earl Károlyi**, and later was a county judge. But my grandfather sold all his estates at the time of the War of Independence and invested the proceeds in Kossuth Bank bills. These, after the loss of the revolution in 1849, became worthless. The family was now impoverished, and, after the Compromise of 1867 (with the Austrian Emperor), he undertook a financial advisory position. His wife was Hermina Preiszler, who was the daughter of the Makó salt merchant, and it was through this union that the Török family became related to the Verdes family, whose ancestor was Ritter von Tannenwald Preiszler. István (Stephen) Verdes was a prominent figure in the management of the Tisza River.*

*My mother's first husband was Lajos (Louis) Czettler, a teacher. From this marriage, I had a half-brother, Gyula Czettler who we all really liked and who became a pharmacist. His cousin was Jenő Czettler a university Professor and a Member of Parliament and who also maintained his paternal family relationships. "*

My grandfather's brother, János (John) Török, after the reconciliation, also became a Financial Officer in Szeged, Transylvanian Nagyvárad, Dés and Beszterce. After serving in World War I, he settled in Veszprém as a refugee and worked as a tax office officer until retirement. He died at the age of 87, and I even met him in 1933, but by then his memory was blurring.

About my paternal grandmother's family, my father writes:

***"The family comes from the County of Ugocsa, the village of Péterfalva. János (John) Péterfalvi Koór was a doctor in Jászberény and a landowner. His wife was Terézia (Theresa) Lachmann, a daughter of German descent from Buda. He was manager of a 600-acre estate, but, despite a busy schedule, had 21 children. Of these, only six survived, and my memories are focused around Aunt Flóra (Flora), who was my godmother, and her husband, Sándor (Alexander) Nagy, an attorney in Szeged, who was my godfather. Sándor (Alexander) Nagy was a very talented writer and was editor of the Híradó (News) of Szeged, and, in his later years under the name Senex, was a writer of the portfolio Newspaper, Budapest.***

***A truly beautiful article farewelled my brother, Laci's heroic death, in which he is embraced by the martyr, Ignác Török (his ancestor), taking him to heaven.***

***His writing resulted in his neglect of his legal profession, and, in his old age, he was supported by his daughter, Ibolya (Violet) Nagy, a life member of the National Theatre.***

***Both Sándor and his daughter, Ibolya, lived to their nineties. Ibolya had a great friendship with the famous Mari Jászai and Kornélia Prielle, artists who sat by my bedside when I was recuperating at my godmother's house, sick with an inflamed appendix."***

After graduation, my father joined the army. As a foot soldier, he received training in the joint Army Corps. He completed his officers' exams with distinction and was discharged as a reserve lieutenant. After several military training courses, he enrolled in the law faculty at the University of Budapest. He admitted that he lived an easygoing, rollicking life in Budapest. This also contributed to his eventual move from Budapest to Kolozsvár, because this was a rural campus, and it enabled him to concentrate more seriously on his law studies, and gave him better access to the teaching professors.

After obtaining a doctorate in law, he chose a career as a judge, and he worked in Szeged for four years as a clerk in the district court. He completed his judicial exam in March 1909 with honours. However, he decided to become a lawyer instead, as he was in debt, and hoped that a law practice would bring him into a better financial position. He had a partnership with a lawyer from **Nyiregyháza**. As he writes, he decided to terminate the agreement because he was homesick and he came home to Szeged.

On his return to Szeged, he opened an office, and this talented and hard-working young man became quite successful.

In 1913, he met my mother. After the death of Béla Podmaniczky, she moved to Szeged from Mezőhegyes with my grandmother, my mother, and her half-sister, Judit. Uncle Niki was at the military academy at this time, but he often spent the holidays with his mother.

My father had two brothers, Sándor and László. Sándor became a railway official but died young, László was a bank clerk; he died a heroic death in the Carpathian Mountains in the 1916 Russian offensive during the First World War.

Both his sisters, Etelka and Margit (Margaret), were married in those pre-war years.

Etelka's husband, Dr. Kálmán Falcione, was a teacher. The family was of Italian descent and proudly wore the **de Cardezza** name. They lived in the Southern Region and were good friends with Dömé Sztójay, who later became one of the last prime ministers of the independent Hungary. I will discuss the family's fate in more detail later.

Margit (Margaret) married Jenő (Eugene) Faragó, an army officer, who died in the Second World War, her second husband was Zoltán Pápay, an officer with MÁV (Hungarian

Railways). Aunt Margit's son from her first marriage was my cousin, László. I will discuss his problems later.

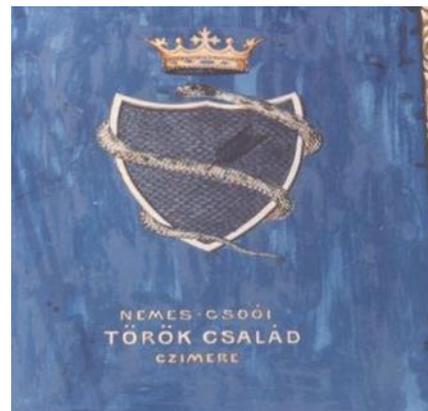
The nobility of the Török family was not in dispute. My great-grandfather and my great-great-grandfather's birth certificates both displayed the **nemescsói** name. My father explained that, in the nineteenth century and the last two decades of the twentieth century, people often did not explore their roots. It was the age of liberalism, which arose from the French Revolution's motto: *liberty, equality, and fraternity*, and these basic ideas reached the broad strata of **the society**. Contributing to this ignorance was the fact that the family did not have a father, and the boys were influenced by their sisters and mothers. Later, my father also complained that the women of the family had, on occasion, refashioned the legacy of the historical Hungarian jewellery into fashionable pieces of the day.

It was a surprise that the interest in genealogy started at all in our family, and it became one of my father's favourite occupations. His in-law, Jenő (Eugene) Faragó, accidentally read in the *Official Gazette* that a **nemescsói** Béla Török graduated as a lieutenant. The young lieutenant contacted my father, and it turned out that we had found the Western Magyar (Hungarian) branch of the family. The young lieutenant's father was the Chairman of the Orphans Organisation at Szombathely, and possessed all the family records dating back to the 1720 Nova donations. They knew about our branch of the family and with their help we were able to complete a full **nemescsói** Török family genealogy.

Interestingly, it was found that, while the coat of arms of the Great Plains branch of the family was an arrow piercing a snake - a drawing is preserved among the family papers- the western branch of the family used a different coat of arms. My father proceeded to the National Archives, and there he was reassured that it was customary, when families were separated into different branches, for the main branch to adopt a new one, and that, in their opinion, the use of the coat of arms was sanctioned by the legal custom of the day.



***Paining of Section of Family Tree***



***Török Family Coat of Arms***

My father acquired copies of the relevant documents from the National Archives, and they are still in my possession. So, the family should be considered as the descendants of Mihály (Michael) Török. He was a landholder in the village of Nemescsó, whose nobility was, along with several other noble families, confirmed by Károly VI (Charles) in 1720.

The *Nova Donation* said:

**“The Nemescsói noble estate owners and residents, who had not once, and not one place, answered faithfully the requests of the Hungarian kings, be granted the Nemescsói noble estate in its entirety. This estate is located on lands in Vas County, and was in their peaceful possession, use, and ownership (there were formal documents evidencing ownership to the Vas County), and their predecessors, who lived only by the memory of its descendants, and they themselves, who are now living, had sufficient evidence and attested not long ago, but only recently, because Hungary’s recent strife was destroyed. These parishioners and their descendants were donated a new gift ... ”(No. 33, royal original book, pages 280-281.)**

It is also possible that the crest that our branch of the family used was the original family crest, and was even used before 1720. My father wore this coat of arms on his ring, and Count Pál (Paul) Teleki (later became Prime Minister of Hungary, 1941)-a close friend of my father’s - said that the coat of arms, in its simplicity, suggested that it originated a few hundred years ahead of the *Nova Donation*. Missing from the coat of arms is the baroque ornament, putting the crest’s origin to the XV - XVI Century.

My father conducted further research, wondering what could be the earlier family history. He raised the possibility that perhaps the Török family name-as is the case in other parts of the country-shows that possibly a Turkish soldier, who was so named, stayed in the Hungarian homeland and thus formed a new Hungarian family. This, however, is inconsistent with the coat of arms, which we have discussed, and it is also unlikely that a remaining soldier would have so quickly gained nobility in Transdanubia. The Török family name is widely recognised, and it is a fact that the Török family name was known prior to the Turkish occupation. Enyingi Bálint (Valentine) Török (1502-1550) following the Battle of Mohács was one of the most influential and richest noblemen of the country. The Török family name is more a reflection of the historical fact that the emerging Hungarian nation included Turkish tribes, and the general perception among historians was that the militant sections were of these Turkish elements.

The western Hungarian branch of the family died out on its male side, because, as already mentioned, Lieutenant Béla Török died in 1918, and his father's grief over the death of his son led to his suicide. Mihály (Michael) Török had two sons: György (George) and József (Joseph), but the geographical division had not yet occurred, and the two branches lived in western Hungary for two to three generations. At the turn of the eighteenth-and nineteenth-centuries, our family branch split again. One branch ended up in Gödöllő while the other gravitated towards Csongrád county, and finally, in Szeged.

Ignác (Ignatius) Török an army general, was born in 1795 in Gödöllő. He graduated from the Vienna Imperial and Royal Academy of Engineering Faculty. He later taught the doctrine of fortification for the Royal Hungarian palace guards. It is not necessary here to discuss his role in the 1848-49 War, but I want to mention that, in 1849 when he completed the fortifications of Szeged, he was in contact with his cousin, Antal (Anthony Török), my great-grandfather. A family tradition has it that he bestowed a crested signet ring to my great-grandfather. Another version has it that he sent this ring to my great-grandfather from Arad. However, as it happened, this ring became one of the most treasured family memorabilia and was worn by both my grandfather and my father. In 1967, my father gave it to me for safekeeping, but I will speak about this later.

My father was an otherwise altogether good-looking, athletic man, who was above average in water sports. The Szeged Rowing Association was the centre of his social life. His sporting performances were featured in the monograph series of Hungarian towns issued in 1927 in Budapest, under the city of Szeged.

The book writes about the Boating Association and his achievements and my father writes:

***"The first, in the true sense of the word, was the Szeged Sports Association, and was the third in the whole country. This club was most prestigious, where strict ground rules governed admission. The club played an important role in the social life of Szeged, and became a major factor in the Hungarian sport of rowing. In a later era, a new provincial competition started. In 1913, the following were the members of the first eight: Csenky Lajos, Kaszó Elek, Bába Lajos, Balog Tamás, Polczner Erős, Török László (my brother), Szendrey László, Dr. Török Béla (stroke)(me) and Milkó Ferenc (coxswain), winning a large silver cup, defeating Újvidék and Eszék. "***

This champion rowing eight counted my father as stroke, and also my father's younger brother, László Török, who died a heroic death in 1916.

My father's memoirs commemorate these sporting events, and I quote him:

*"My first friends included a rowing four, of which I was part. In this team, the members consisted of:*

*1st Bába Lajos, 2nd Laci Török my brother, 3rd Sümegi Tivadarbaby and 4th was me. The helmsman was my friend, Feri Milkó.*

*This was a closely knit group, and we always pulled together. Amongst other events, we took part in rowing to Arad -a 130-kilometer trip.*

*We never thought that we would become competitive rowers; we didn't live the training life. We were requested by our club to enter the Tisza Association National Regatta rowing competition.*

*Our Club was so confident in us that they ordered a racing size four boat. But, as it happened, a part time helmsman sat in on an occasion and directed us on to rocks, destroying the boat.*

*Nevertheless, our association insisted that we take part in the tournament and so we took our relatively heavy recreational boat to Szolnok and were teased by the gathering rowers....*

*But, after seeing our style and realizing that our overall work was excellent, it was decided that instead of two fours against us they would put up only one, more powerful four as our opponent. Unfortunately, we had a bad start- my friend Lajos Bába, slipped off his seat, and we were behind by three boat lengths.*

*Yet, we worked hard and finished behind by only one meter. The competition, however, was very appreciative of our performance, and the metropolitan newspapers praised our performance. "*

The peaceful years of Szeged, however, quickly passed, and the tribulations of World War I caught up with my father. He writes thus about this in his memoirs:

*"I had completed my 12 years of army reserve service, and at the outbreak of World War I, I was commissioned as a militia lieutenant. However, due to recurrence of arthritis, I was declared unfit for military service.*

*The district headquarters of the Szeged military chief of staff was looking to fill a vacancy for someone with legal knowledge so I accepted this military officer's posting and once again locked my legal office.*

***In the summer of 1916, I became a lecturer to the mobilised troops. In the autumn of 1918, after the lost war, I lectured on disarmament issues and was discharged at Christmastime.***

**During my military service, I reached the rank of captain, and the district commander, a lieutenant-general, nominated me for the 'Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph'. But since this was at the close of a lost war, it was too late to be conferred. "**

1919-1920 was an age of revolutions, and my father, as I have already mentioned, took part in the preparatory work for the establishment of a new governing system. The Szeged Rowing Association was one of the social centers where the prominent statesmen fled during the French occupation. Miklós Horthy often had discussions in the Association's club house, and my father later recalled that he had lent the future governor one of his bathing suits, as Miklós Horthy arrived in Szeged from Kenderes with very few clothes.

My father told us later that he had a good relationship with Gyula Gömbös (also a later Prime Minister), and spent hours walking along the promenade in Szeged discussing and challenging the political situation in Hungary. My father remembered him as a highly skilled soldier who had good insights regarding the future of the country.

As a 38-39 -year-old lawyer, he had to take care of his wife and two small children, he couldn't seek a political career. Later, he explained to me that, to take a political role, you needed some wealth, because, if you had no assets, it was impossible to preserve your intellectual independence.

My father participated actively in public affairs of Szeged, and, in recognition of this work, was appointed, in September 1920 to the Szeged free royal city as Honorary Chief Prosecutor by the Lord Mayor Károly Aigner.

In 1919, he met Count *Pál (Paul)* Teleki. However, about this relationship I quote from his own memoirs:

***"The friendship with him (Count Pál (Paul) Teleki) until his death remained unchanged. When the time came for the post-revolutionary parliamentary general election, he was nominated for the 1st district. His opponent was the liberal candidate, István (Stephen) Bárczy who was the Lord Mayor of Budapest. The consensus turned to me and I became the director of the Teleki election party and I took full responsibility for the running of the party's election process. For three months I did not set a foot in my attorney's office. But the painstaking work had been worth it, despite the fact that we had only 150,000***

*crowns, while Bárczy had 10 million. Teleki won by a majority of a thousand votes. Great was my honor. Teleki offered me a reward by proposing that I assume the title chief government advisor, but I countered this saying 'If I do not have enough dignity without the title, then you give me the title in vain ... and if I have the dignity, it's useless. Teleki then hugged me, kissed me, saying I respect you from now on even more.'"*

But my father also had widespread interest in the literature, as he writes,  
*"When I was young and a giant, I wrote portfolios, verses and articles for the newspapers in Szeged. Moreover, I wrote a social drama called 'Feeble Souls' which I sent to Imre Pethes for his comments. Imre was one of the outstanding theatre and film artists in Hungary, and had a close relationship with my mother. The essence of Imre Pethes's criticism was that this piece was better than most of those written today to catch the attention of a crowd but still requires work. Write better. I was disappointed, but at the request of a theater director in Szeged at the time, they ran the piece. It was not successful. Still, when I re-read this play again and again, I am not ashamed to admit that it is mine even after many decades. Many of my writings have been lost because of the war; though from a literary point of view, they do not represent losses. A poem, however, still vividly alive in my memory, is recorded here:*

*We have forgotten each other...  
My path led to the left, hers turned to the right.  
I thought she was happy, and she couldn't think otherwise.  
Yet years later she wrote me a letter,  
There was no sign of sadness in it.  
It just said I do not know what's wrong; I just needed to write to you."*

Indeed, these verses are not of significant literary value, but are reflective of my father's spiritual world. Their marriage broke up, but, in our long life, the love remained- at least that is how I feel, and I believe the above lines clearly express the state of the souls of my parents...

## **My mother and Her family**

My Mother was born on 11 August 1894 at Királyhegyes, at the ancestral mansion of ittebei Elemér Kiss. Her father- my maternal grandfather, Elemér Kiss-was a wealthy landowner who held 20,000 acres in the County of Torontál, in Begaszentgyörgy (now Žitište Serbia).

I do not have exact data on the origins of the Kiss family, but from my parents' discussions-as well as through relationships with other members of the family, and notes from my father- I am able to offer some insights into their family history.

The Kiss family's roots may be traced to Transylvanian Armenian Hungarians who acquired property after the Turkish occupation of Banat. They participated in the region's reconstruction following the liberation from the Turks. They were involved in commerce and pig-farming -activities that culminated in significant economic success, symbolised by the family estate of 80,000 acres held by ittebei Ernő Kiss, a future martyr of Arad.

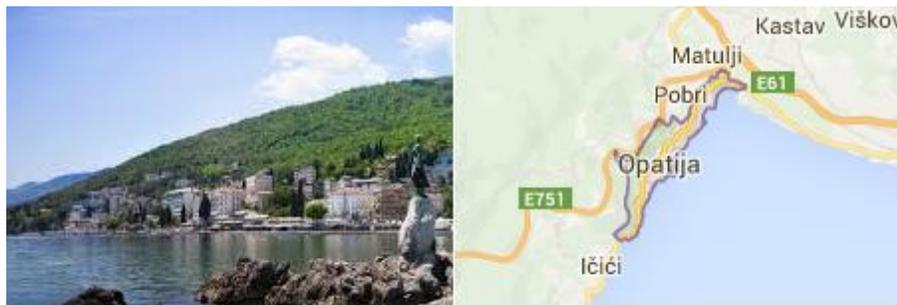
Ernő Kiss was a cousin to my great-grandfather on my mother's side. His historic role is the well-known: he established a hussar regiment at his own expense and was responsible for early victories against the Austrians. The battle of Perlasz (in Serbia) recounts his historical successes.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the family was not only extremely wealthy but had strong connections to the leadership in Vienna. When Ernő chose to side with the freedom fighters, he risked jeopardising the family's interests. His relationship with the royal family was so favourable that -when his death sentence became inevitable and execution by hanging was proposed-the royal court commuted the sentence to death by shooting.

My maternal grandfather married ebeczki Gisele (Gizella) Blaskovich. I will write later about the family Blaskovich, but for now I will note that they too were wealthy. My great-grandfather had a 7,500-acre estate in Nagykirályhegye, in Csanád County. My maternal grandmother was accustomed from childhood to privileged living, and perhaps this explains extravagant lifestyle. Indeed, they truly squandered their wealth, and eventually my grandfather had to seek support from Stephen (István) Blaskovich, his in-law.

The extravagance can be characterized by the following story, which was repeated as a family anecdote and has been documented in my father's records.

The couple once read in the newspaper that Patti, the famous Italian singer, was touring in Vienna. By telegraph, they ordered tickets for a private viewing box, costing 5,000 florins (Hungarian Currency). Then, they hired a special train, which took them, and their numerous staff, maids and butlers to Vienna. They also carried with them a four-horse carriage. They rented an entire floor of the Grand Hotel. Then, they decided to spend a few days in Abbázia (Opatija Croatia), and traveled there with a small number of servants. However, a few days became a few weeks, while they left behind the rest of the staff and the four-horse carriage.



**Abbázia (Opatija) in Croatia**

My father sums up their life thus:

**"Elemér your grandfather, might not have understood financial management, but it is certain that he did not even care. The result was bankruptcy, after the completion of which he was allowed to save 5,000 acres of the estate for himself ..."**

I should mention here that Miklós (Nicholas) was the brother of Elemér my grandfather and who lived in Vienna. He married Katalin (Catherine) Schratt, the famous Viennese dramatic actress. It is well known that Katalin (Catherine) Schratt later became Emperor Franz Joseph's companion. The marriage of Miklós Kiss and Katalin Schratt produced a son, also named Miklós (Nicholas), who was later elevated to the rank of baron by the Emperor. This Miklós (Nicholas) Kiss died after the Second World War.

My maternal grandfather also died young. He and his wife had four children: Ernő, Miklós and two daughters -Clementina and Katalin, my mother.

The still young, well-educated widow soon remarried. Her second husband Baron Béla Podmaniczky the commander of the Mezőhegyesi stud farm. From this marriage came aunt Judit (Judy).

My mother spent most of her childhood and young adult years in the Béla Podmaniczky household. She could tell a lot of stories about the Mezőhegyesi years. She received a good education, and the children had a French nana, and later she graduated from the Institute of Notre Dame de Sion in Budapest.

She was a very beautiful girl, and many young Mezőhegyesi men courted her. Then, she also met Béla Hensch of Mezőhegyes. There was a young, student-kind of love between them, but my grandmother kept a strict watch over my mother to ensure she did not marry below her rank. Later, they met again...

My mother was “presented” to the community at the Arad County Ball. The family was in friendly relations with the Purgly family, and, from these times, came a good friendship for my mother with Tibor Eckhardt, who was her second cousin.

In 1912, there was a big royal military exercise in Mezőhegyes, and my young, beautiful mother showed how brave she could be by accepting a joy flight with the famous pilot, Uzelác, in his fragile flying machine, and the family was often amazed to see pictures of our brave mother in her leather helmet.

At this time, Béla Podmaniczky died suddenly, and his widow could not stay in Mezőhegyes. Then, it turned out that, even during the Podmaniczky marriage years, my grandmother’s lifestyle was without financial boundaries, so it fell on her daughter, Clemmy, and son in law captain Sándor József, to restore her budget, and she moved to Szeged.



**1912 style  
leather helmet**

This is where my mother met my father; great was their love, and, despite opposition from Grossmama, they were married. Since their marriage only lasted nine years, it is understandable that, as I have already written, I only have snapshot memories of these years. I can only write that my mother was a very beautiful, vivacious woman, and perhaps this contributed to the divorce, as my parents had quite a big age gap. My father was 32 years old at the time of his marriage, and my mother had not yet reached 20 years of age. The war years and my father’s painful joint disease contributed to their eventual divorce.

It must have been very painful for my mother to have to leave us, her children, but she obviously realised that it was in our interest to be brought up in an established household with my father. (In those years custody of the children was often given to the male.) But we missed our mother's warm love. Our father tried to ensure that we lived in

an orderly manner, but a mother's love can never be replaced. Maybe my mother's love was a little excessive in those earlier years expressed by her fear for our safety, which she expressed by protesting against my attendance at kindergarten, and later public school.

This is perhaps contradicted by the fact that, during the summer vacations, we were with her many times in the river Tisza-swimming and splashing amongst other bathers. She was a pioneer in this respect as few women in those days joined in- just as she was also a pioneer in the sport of flying.

Grossmama slowly reconciled with my father and us children, but unfortunately, she could not control her own spending and frivolous lifestyle, therefore becoming indebted again and again. She lived surrounded by the wealthy Blaskovich relatives, who, at times of crisis, helped her financially. But her brother, Aladár Blaskovich, who managed the family fortune, eventually came to realize that rather than supporting her by direct cash transfers he pays only for specific needs.

Then, when their father, István (Stephen) Blaskovich, died, it was discovered that the estate was to be distributed between the two male children, and the girls were confined to designated stipends. The girls, including my maternal grandmother challenged the will, and this eventually resulted in a compromise. As a result, Grossmama also received 200 acres of land, but this small fortune was exhausted in a few years. She then moved to Budapest and lived on a widow's pension.

Of my mother's brothers, Miklós (Nicholas) Kiss, whom we called Niki basci, was the closest to us. As a young lieutenant, he told us many war stories, and we heard from my mother of his many mischievous activities as a youngster.

He went to school in Szeged and graduated at the Ludoveca Army Officers Academy as a cavalry second lieutenant in 1912. He took part as a member of the Hussars in the Russian offensive. It is well known that the Hussars suffered serious blood sacrifice in the assault against the Russian positions. Uncle Niki's regiment, following the charge, had only three officers who survived.



**Ludoveca Officers  
Academy**

He then sought to transfer to the infantry, and by the time he reached Doberdó, he held the rank of lieutenant and was commander of the assault battalion. Miklós (Nicholas) Bonczos, the later Hungarian State Secretary for the Interior and then Minister, told us that, under him, the slogan "forward boys!" was not used. Instead, he attacked with a knife in his

mouth and hand-grenades in his hands- leading the charge with his troops following him. He received awards on top of awards, but the culminating achievement of this young lieutenant was receiving the Order of Leopold- which was usually only achieved by generals. For him, this was not enough. He asked that he be transferred to the Western Front and became a flight observer. Near Ypres (Belgium) he suffered gas burns, but other than he emerged unscathed.

We, as children, hardly knew Aunt Clemmy and her husband. Uncle Józsi (Ernő/Ernest) was known in the family as uncle Neszti. However, later in my life, I had contact with them, but I will discuss this later.

As I have already written, my great-grandfather on the mother's side was István (Stephen) Blaskovich, a large landowner of Királyhegyes. His wife was zombori Amália (Amelia) Rónay. The Rónay family was of Bavarian decent; Oexel was the original German family name, and they were the pioneers of the brewing industry in our country. They established a large estate, and in 1826, gained royal permission from the king to use the name Rónay and the forename zombori. They formed kinship with the Almásy and Karácson families.

I will write a few words about my great-grandfather's children.

I have already written about my grandmother, Gizella. Prior to her death, in my Budapest years, I met her many times and found her a very clever, precious lady. It is a shame that her previous lifestyle adversely affected her life in old age. She was the only one of my grandparents to whom I was able to say good bye to, partly because the rest of my grandparents died young, when I was still a child.

Gizella's sister, Jolán, married baróthy Béla Huszár, a landowner. Of their children, Aladár Huszár stood out in accomplishments- he became Lord Mayor of Budapest and later the President of OTI (The National Social Insurance Institute). He kindly arranged employment for my aunt, Judith Podmaniczky, as an OTI official.

The husband of Erzsébet (Elizabeth) was gyergyószentmiklós János (John) Kövér, a landholder.

Borcsa married zombori Aladár Rónay. About their children, all I know is that Martha's first husband was a German industrialist, and her second husband was Kázmér (Casmir) Vay. Béla, their son, married Franci Schiffer.

Baron Erneszt (Ernest) Urbán married Elzá (Elsa). Martha's husband was Károly (Charles) Lázár, who was the commander of the Horthy bodyguards. They had two boys-

Péter (Peter) and Erneszt (Ernest)- who eventually inherited the Blaskovich estate. I've never met these remote relatives. My father later wrote that, in the 1960s, he located Peter, who was by then the driver to the Belgian consul, to provide for himself and his family. I understand that a Rónay boy migrated to Australia. I did get in touch with him but lost contact since the 1950s.

Aladár's fate undertook some interesting changes. My father said he, as a young man lived for many years in a privileged lifestyle in London. He fell in love with Baroness Gizella Fehérváry, the daughter of former grand marshal and "Darabont" Guard of the Prime Minister, but she eventually married Baron Ferenc Gerliczy, a wealthy landowner. Family stories said that, in his grief, he returned to his family estate, totally neglected himself, withdrew from all social life, and worked as a laborer on the farm.

My father met him a few times as a legal client initially as a military tutor, and later when Aladár sought his help in a military exemption case and a previously mentioned inheritance dispute. He did not acknowledge the family relationship, and they generally treated each other as strangers.

Aladár, a few years after his father's death, inherited the tápiószentmárton Ernő Blaskovich 10,000-acre estate, including the Kincsem racing stable.

Ilona (Helen) was my maternal grandmother's sister, whom I also met. She was my mother's godmother, and was always very attentive to her. When the family tried to stop my mother and father's planned marriage, she stepped in and hosted my mother, hoping that the relationship would calm down. When it became clear to her that my mother insisted on her choice, she ended the arrangement.

Similarly, Aladár had a disappointment in love and never married. The Blaskovich family lived very modestly in a Reáltanoda Street house, with many antique furnishings. There was a great hall in the house- probably designed for evening parties and dancing- and this room contained memorabilia of the famous race horse, Kincsem, including trophies, cups, and a silver horse statue. During my years in Budapest, we often visited aunt Ilona (Helen), and while there we usually admired mementoes of this famous horse. (undefeated in 54 races throughout Europe)



**Kincsem the most successful [thoroughbred race horse](#) in Europe,**

The house had a private chapel. In her last years, Aunt Ilona (Helen) was only able to think about the afterlife, and placed her beautiful jewels on the statue of Mary.

Her estate remained intact, because she lived a very modest life, and was inclined to forgo expenditure, and, in her will, she left her estate to the church, except for 20 acres which was left to her house maid.

## My Student years - 1920-1932

When I was 6 years old, I learnt reading, writing, and arithmetic, and, as I said my mother was very fearful of letting us out into the world, and so I studied privately. At our Deák Ferenc address, there lived a lady who, I think, was a widow, and held a teaching qualification, and she undertook to instruct me, and a few other people's precious offspring. I do not really remember those years- at least my school time. Amongst the children was the Machanszky surgeon's children, but my memory of their faces is now blurred.

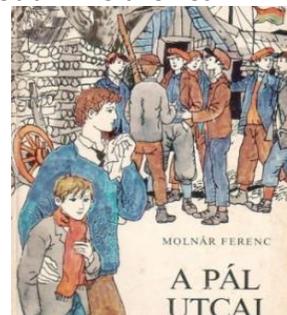
I have more memories of the time when my parents separated and I attended the inner-city elementary school, and I can still see the teacher in front of me. Imre Rózsa had a nice, manly face, and he displayed a great love and effort in dealing with us. I remember well that, after the fourth element, at the examination celebration, there were many flowers in the classroom. We all sang beautifully, but, for me it was humiliating end of the ceremony, because at the end of the long celebration, I had wet my pants and was ashamed and did not dare to move out of my place.

Stefánia Place (a botanical garden) was where my friends and I- not unlike the real Paul Street Boys -committed our rascally activities.

My best friend at the time was Pityu (Timmy), the son of the director of City Theatre, whom I loved. The Kotormány boys belonged to our group. They were lucky, because they lived in the Museum, as their father was an officer of the Museum. There were two or three other boys who belonged to our group. When I think back, the names Póokay, Vida, and Grünwald come to mind. There was, of course, another group of boys who played games against us as police men and robbers. We knew

all the hiding places on the boardwalk. Ferenc (Frank) Móra was at that time the director of the museum and the library of Somogy, and we certainly caused a lot of annoyance to him, as we were noisy and must have disturbed the readers in the great scientific library room. In particular, we caused a lot of trouble for many in winter, as we declared the Museum's entrance a toboggan slope for ourselves.

Within my family, however, Sityi Kaszó was my very best friend. His father, Elek Kaszó, was the city treasurer at this time and my father's best friend. His mother, Aunt Böske (Betty), was on very good terms with my mother as well, and so it was natural that



*Paul Street Boys-  
Novel*

we would, play together. Together we committed various pranks. Once, we escaped out of the house while the parents were happily drinking and chatting, and it was here that I was introduced to my father's bamboo stick, which he was swinging. I knew that my dad was serious when he had 'Samu' ("Sam"), the cane.

Uncle Lexi was a very gentle man- he just flicked his briefcase, and Sityi escaped corporal punishment, and I envied my friend.

Someone encouraged us to make anti-Semitic slogans in chalk on the asphalt of Promenade, while my parents sat quietly in chairs on the Promenade. Of course, they soon became aware of our activities and I was punished by my father, but Uncle Lexi just laughed ... He had every reason to be angry. I found out only later that Aunt Böske (Betty), my friend Sityi's mother, was of Jewish descent, and therefore Sityi was considered half-Jewish.

Szeged did not have much basis for anti-Semitism. Szeged did not fall into the big east migration path, and the Jews there belonged to the old Szeged Jewish population. Perhaps this was the reason that the Kun-Szamuël movement in the age of revolutions had only minor influence, and so the reaction was also moderate in Szeged.

Later, my father also informed me that our family also had Jews by marriage, because my Aunt Margit's (Margaret's) first husband, Jenő (Eugene) Faragó, a military officer, was of Jewish descent. My cousin, László, was therefore half Jewish. Laci's father died for his country, and my father loved and raised the young Laci like a son for many years. As a war orphan, Laci attended a military boarding school and was scheduled to attend the Ludovica Military Academy in 1926. But then, his Jewish origin was discovered, and his enrolment was rejected. My father's influential friends, both civil and military, however, enabled Laci to begin his studies at the Ludovika Military Academy. I think that he graduated in 1930. My father's main argument in favor of Laci was that his father had fallen for his country, and that his blood contained not only Jewish but also the blood of Ignác Török, a martyr of Arad.

The anti-Semitism of the age also intruded on me. Our Stefania gang decided to establish a proper club, and we thought that it was most important to elect a president, secretary, and officers. All this, of course, had to be recorded in writing, and so we went into the paper shop of the Grünwalds, which was located then at the beginning of Miklós Horthy Road. We selected a small notebook within our budget, when all hell broke out. Pali (Paul) Grünwald burst into tears, as it was decided that young Pali could remain a member,

but could not be an officer because he's Jewish. Aunty Grünwald tried to find out the reason, and we explained that the Jews crucified Jesus, so all Jews are responsible. Aunty Grünwald gently corrected us, explaining that it was the Romans who crucified Jesus not the Jews. I do not remember the actual result of our conversation, but the friendship remained.

Of course, this issue was discussed at home, and, in an attempt, to reconcile the differing views, my father said that a distinction should be made between the Hungarian Jews, who had been in Hungary for hundreds of years, and the recent influx of Galician refugee Jews.

One day my father dragged me to the dentist - I always tried to avoid this white torture chamber - and I'll be happy to note that, while Rosenberg the dentist and my father discussed the Jewish question, I was almost forgotten. My father spoke of the Rosenberg family as part of the old Szeged- his grandfather's 1848 Hungarian decorative picture still hung on the surgery wall. He urged Rosenberg, as an assimilated Jew, that they should make a stand against the newly arrived Galician Jews. And I can still hear Rosenberg plead: **“But Béla they too are Jews...like us.”**

I then learnt about the Catholic-Protestant rivalry. Sityi Kaszó's family was Calvinist, and suddenly, he confronted me by reciting the sins of the Renaissance popes. I knew nothing about all this as we were still studying the catechism- doctrines and apologetics and would only be studied in upper secondary school. My parents had to intervene in this matter, and they explained to us that we were today's Catholics, and not so promiscuous.

The Kaszó family was in close contact with the acting profession. Aunt Böske (Betty) was a Békefy girl. Her father was a renowned journalist in Szeged, while her brother, István (Stephen), was a famous lyricist and husband of Ida Turay, and Clare Tabódy was a sister-in-law. László Békefy a famous cabaret announcer was also a cousin of Sityi's mother.

My father gave me a good interest in Hungarian history and national poetry. Sityi from an early age, showed interest in the theatre. In our apartment, we often arranged performances. These included magic acts, singing, and, due to my influence, historical dramas. The audience consisted of our parents and their friends, and the entrance fees were strictly collected by us. But, while Sityi appeared in hilarious musical scenes, I wanted to play Dugovits Titus in heroic self-sacrifice scenes.



### **Dugovits Titus**

During the summer months, the Tisza (River) was our playground. My father quickly taught us children how to swim, and the "test" at the age of six was that we had to swim across the river Tisza. The punt carried us a couple of hundred meters from the Rowing Association Headquarters, and there the candidate had to jump into the river. The finish was the bridge where they fished us out. (Tisza in Szeged is about 300 meters wide.)

Both Sityi and I soon became good swimmers, and we were soon diving off the jumping board of the Rowing Association. My father's young friend, who was an organizer of the Tisza-Maros District Swimming Association, arranged a competition for us, and we both came away with medals and a certificate.



### **Rowing Club of Szeged**

The certificate said, "To the noblest Sityi Kaszó and Béla Török junior, " and it ended with the words, "I welcome you in the spirit of sportsmanship and friendship." The text of

these kind words was signed by him. The letter is still in my possession- yellowed with over 60 years of memories. Unfortunately, all I know is that we called him brother Feri, and his signature was illegible. Sadly, I cannot ask my father now.

Then we became big boys, and I was selected to attend the Piarista (Pius) Fathers High School, officially called the Andrew Dugonics Roman Catholic High School of the City of Szeged, under the leadership of Pious Fathers order.

At that time József (Joseph) Prelogg was the director of the institute. He was an outstanding educator and had a great musical literacy and managed to get to know the students, but he decided that football was a "rough" sport and therefore was banned it at the school. We, the students, were afraid of him and became quiet when we met him in the corridors.

We were aware that because of the loss of the First World War, the school had to provide space for the state capital high school for a couple years. Classes were held sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the afternoon. Joseph Prelogg died suddenly in 1927. His replacement was István (Stephen) Kiss, who was the master in my first year. We really liked him because he was nice, peaceful, and yet a decisive man.

Amongst my teachers, I have sincere regard for Jenő (Eugene) Csaba, who was my history teacher and scout master and who led us on many field trips. We toured Zirc and Pannonhalma with him, and he fanned my interest in the study of history.

Lőrincz (Lawrence) Hantos tried to teach us the German language. Here, I was not a great success, even though after my parents separated, my father contracted a German lady with the goal of teaching us German in addition to running the household. The rule was that at dinner we could only speak German. As a result, my sister and I usually remained silent. Despite all this parental effort, in my old age I still say "Mahlzeit" (German word for meal, 'enjoy' is implied) before or after each meal.

My father insisted that I should be further educated in German and spend the summer holidays in Austria at a resort called Vöslau in Ferienheim, and my sister was sent to Neulengbach. It was then I began to speak German and professor Hantos was pleased with me.

My Latin teacher at the time was Sándor (Alexander) Szalay. He was a tough, strong-minded man who did not shy away from the physical threats. Even if we made mistakes while serving as alter servers, we were terrified of his response so we became afraid of him.

I also remember that the rabbi told him that one of the boys skipped the Jewish religion classes. The boy was caught in the hallway and received corporal punishment. I don't think he missed any more religious instruction.

I believe I could have been a second-year high school student when the drawing teacher, Bertalan (Bartholomew) Novak, celebrated the jubilee of 50 years of teaching. I can still see him repairing our dubious efforts with his fine pencil strokes. My father liked him and always spoke of about his kinship to our family.

Ipoly Fekete was another Piarist (Pious) Teaching Father who was frequently mentioned and talked about. Uncle Ipoly had already retired in 1920 but I met him occasionally in the company of my father.

I only remember some of my classmates. I was good friends with Pali (Paul) Szandtner. His father was a university professor who was transferred to Budapest, and so we lost contact. The same thing happened to Bottka boys. Their father was chief of police and they too moved to Budapest.

I was also close to Elemér Buócz. I kept in touch with him later. He was trained by the fencing master Eduardo Armentano, and we were also university colleagues. In fact, we met later in Berlin.

Two years above me was István (Stephen) Bíbó and János (John) Csíky. I came into contact with them when I applied for a job at the journal *Zászlónk* (Our Flag). I was required to write a paper on Prince St. Imre. I tried very hard and was fortunate to have my father edit it before submitting the thesis, to my surprise, I won three awards.

Pista (Steve) and Jancsi (Jack) were in classes two years older than mine, the age difference between us was big, but they noted my tendering success and we became friends. We did not know that, in the course of our lives, fate would bring us together. All three of us ended up working in the early 40s at the Royal Hungarian Ministry of Justice.

In our family life, the major change was that my mother remarried. She met Béla Hensch at a social gathering in Budapest.... he was then serving at the ministry of Agriculture as Chief of Staff... and was known from the *Mezőhegyesi* times, during which time they had also seen each other. This renewed friendship between them, (they were both free) led to their marriage. My father was also glad that my mother was able to resume her life.

Our first home in Budapest was in Mester Street and later at Pacsirta Street in Óbuda (**a historical city in Hungary, united with Buda and Pest in 1873**) we acquired a

beautiful, modern apartment. This gave my mother opportunity to have her children with her from time to time. My father had no objection to this, and it particularly helped during the school holidays and outings.

My father met my mother's new husband Béla and they took a liking to each other. It turned out to our benefit as it became possible for my mother and her husband to come down to Szeged at Christmas. Both parents were able to be present on Christmas Eve when the children rejoiced with the coming of Baby Jesus. (The custom at that time was that Baby Jesus brought the presents, and Santa Clause only had a role on St Nicholas Day.)

The holidays spent with my mother are amongst my favorite memories, and they include uncle Béla who loved nature. We often went hiking and we got to know the surroundings of Budapest. We visited the Hármashatár-hegy (Three Borders Mountain), Jánoshegy (John Hill), Normafa and Schmidt Castle- these became lasting impressions of our youth.

Often, we visited the famous English Park, which was every child's dream. The joys of the English Park included roller coasters and the enchanted castle and we had a lot of fun. One episode caught my attention and stayed in my memory. In the evening we went to dinner at an English Park restaurant, and a Russian balalaika orchestra provided the music. Then Uncle Béla drew our attention to the fact that the musicians were not professional performers, but were military officers and civil servants who fled the Bolshevik Revolution now lived in exile, earning a living through music. This story impressed me very much. I viewed with respect the difficulty and bitterness they had to endure in their exile, though I did not yet imagine that I too would have to shoulder similar fate in the future.

We lived with our father's household during the weekdays of the school year. My father's law office was the apartment where he lived, so he spent almost the whole day at home, and we lived under his constant supervision. Occasionally he had to attend the court, but generally when we came home from school, we had lunch with my father. He continued working in the afternoon after a short nap, often until 5 or 6pm. He helped us with homework and dealt with me separately in literature and history - despite his own very active role in the city's administration of public affairs.

Not only was my father a member of the City Council, but he also belonged to a small group that formed part of the effective leadership of the city. He was also a Committee member of the Arts Affairs and was often invited in oratory roles. He delivered the city's

eulogy in 1933, for Albert Apponyi. (Board member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, nominated for Nobel Peace Prize five times)

At around this time, John Hamsworth, son of Lord Rothermere, visited Szeged amid great crowds and almost royal pomp. In retrospect it is clear that the British government involvement in the Justice for Hungary slogan and the formation of the Hungarian-friendly committee in the House of Commons was a diplomatic move intended to offset Frances move with its plans of European hegemony. The gullible Hungarian masses, as many times throughout history, had misunderstood the situation.

In those years Hungarian society was saturated with the revisionist spirit, which ultimately shaped our position in European politics. My father also attended the reception of this English statesman in his Hungarian state robes. I looked at his photo many times and I began to dream of the rebuilding of the Greater Hungary.

My father, decorated in his Hungarian robes, often represented the town at the procession of the Holy Right (hand) of St. István on Stephen's Day, 20 August. Later, in exile in Australia, I saw an old Hungarian newsreel and saw my young father on the screen in his Hungarian uniform.

When I finished the year IV of high school, my father told me that next year I will attend the Gábor Klauzál high school, because he thought that it makes no sense to learn Greek when it is more important for me to start learning French. I didn't rebel against this parental decision until later, when I began to regret that I cannot read Plato and Aristotle in its original language.

The following September I was enrolled in the new school in Deák Ferenc Street. Breaking away from accustomed environment was not pain-free and I was reminded of this by my dear friend, Imre Juray who recalled these days:

***"In autumn 1929 the playtime bell rang at the Gabor Klauzál high school. In the courtyard during the break, amongst the hundreds of students, I saw a student who was very upset. He was in the year below me, in fifth class. On enquiry, of my fellow students they told me that he was called Béla Török. I walked up to him and consoled him with the help of my friends"***

Slowly I found my place in the new class. Józsi (Joe) Aigner, whom we called Szepi, became one of my dearest friends. When I was sick, he brought home the material necessary for the missed lessons so I would not be left behind. All too soon we parted ways, because at the time he appeared to "dislike" female companionship; he did not want to

attend the school dance and turned from his regular friends. He also had troubles with his studies and only showed interest in nature studies. But when it came to the college years, he changed and became a doctor, and he found great success in this chosen career. His case was proof to me that the school's academic results do not necessarily determine a man's future.

The class had two outstanding students: József (Joseph) Ladvánszky and Andor Csaplak. József became a doctor. He came from a very poor family, but he was hard-working and kind-mannered boy who wore his role of class dux with modesty.

Andor/Bandi Csaplak also learned life's difficulties early in life. His mother was widowed and had to earn a living as a seamstress. Bandi's contribution to alleviating the problems of his family was his hard work and discipline. The teaching staff probably drew attention to Bandi's talents when Sándor (Alexander) Tonelli, Secretary General of the Chamber of Commerce, sought an eminent student to study alongside his son, Sanyi (Alex) a classmate. Sanyi (Alex) was a very talented, but his interests were so diverse that he struggled to focus on his studies. So, the solution was that Csaplak family was given a small apartment near the Chamber of Commerce so that Bandi and Sanyi (Alex) could study together. Sanyi was not happy at first, but later the two boys grew to work together and the solution proved successful.

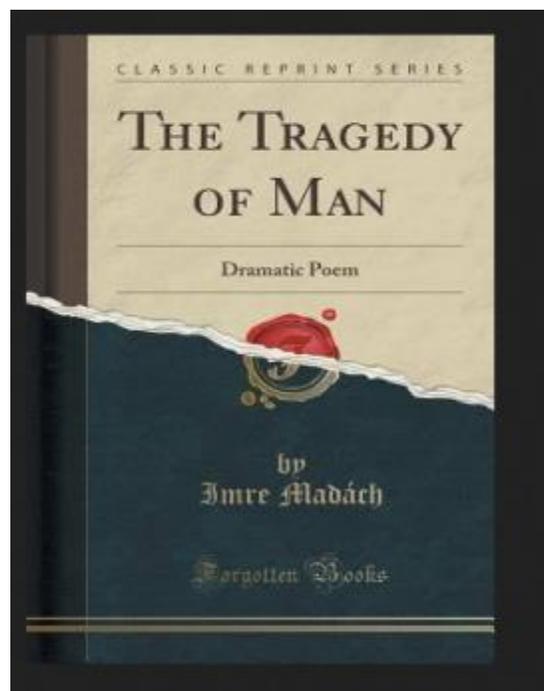
Bandi Csaplak became a physicist and had success in other areas of interest. Sanyi (Alex) became a chemist and, I think lives in Toronto, Canada.

Today, when I read through the list of class mates- sent to me by my dear friend Gyuszi Veszely Palffy on the occasion of the high school's 50-year reunion- many memories flashed before me. Unfortunately, the amateur photo sent me did not allow easy identification of the old faces with the nice young boys who were my friends. Life then brutally dispersed us. Of the graduation class of 61 students, the number of dead and missing was estimated to be 26. In addition to the victims of World War II, nine boys left the country permanently. But even as I pondered these resurrected memories with sadness, I will always think fondly of Jung, the chief doctor, who tolerated our mischief during the afternoon health science lessons.

Andor néhai Majoros (Marcsinkó) is still alive, and I think of the following scene: István (Stephen) Bucsy, our Hungarian literature teacher, was trying to expand our understanding of literature. He brought to our attention the fact that Sándor (Alexander) Petöfi (Eminent Poet and martyr 1848 Hungarian Revolution) wrote not only poetry, but

he also wrote a play. After nobody could tell him the title of the piece, our teacher said that the title included two wild animals. This is when Marcsinkó happily jumped up and announced 'Rome and Juliet'. The class burst out laughing, especially when told that the piece Petöfi wrote had the titled The Tiger and the Hyena.

Amongst the teachers Stephen Bucsy was closest to me. He loved the beautiful Hungarian language, and his quiet but decisive actions in class provided discipline and interest. When our class, under his leadership formed the usual self-training peer group I became the secretary and worked diligently. **The Tragedy of Man** by Imre Madách was the theme and I gave a presentation to the class. My teacher rewarded me, because the same topic was chosen for our final year.



**The play (Published 1861) considered as a major work of Hungarian literature**

I also remember the great poetry competitions organized for us and Gyuszi Pálffy recited so beautifully Ady's 'The Autumn invaded Paris' that, sometime later while walking in Paris by St. Michael's, I wrote him a small postcard. Our German teacher was István (Stephen) Schwerer. The Students gave him the nickname "Stumpax". He was a literary man, and discipline was not his strong side. Often, he became angry and he scolded us. I myself had to face him. He noted that I had not been writing the new German words into my book and asked why this was so. I declared that I know of all the new words. Well, he

interrogated me extensively, but thanks to the summer vacations, German was not really difficult for me.

The humanities subjects never caused me problems. Reverend Virágh once organized a competition between Géza Havas and me. One after the other we had to speak about various subjects that had arisen during the year. I had the advantage of being extremely fast- when I read the material a couple of times, I could recite it almost word-for-word. However, I soon forgot it. In contrast, Géza Havas learnt globally, not verbatim, and would answer intelligently. I lost because Mr. Virágh stopped questioning me by asking me to sit down, as I was only answering in verbatim.

I loved history, and Imre Bakonyi was our teacher. His family name Peidl, but he Hungarianised it when he was admitted to the Knightly Order. He was an excellent historian and a good Hungarian. He played an active role in the Catholic Church and saw the restoration of the Habsburg Hungarian system as a hope for the reconstruction of truncated Hungary. This put him in conflict with my views. From my early childhood I grew up with the Arad martyrs and Rákóczi and Kossuth were my leading torches.

Imre Bakonyi regarded me as one of his best students, and was friendly to me, and gave me the topic of Lajos Kossuth for my graduation assignment. I began: "Lajos Kossuth was greatest statesman of Hungary," and he interjected, "one of the great statesmen."



**Lajos Kossuth**

From then on, my testing was successful.

I was not very interested in science, and I wasn't outstanding in botany, chemistry, and physics, and I was glad to get a B for these subjects. Similarly, I thought that I didn't

have a talent for math's either. Thanks to Sándor (Alex) Molnar who was able to present this vast subject matter in an easy to understandable manner I survived this hurdle too.

The languages were easier for me, because by then I had a good knowledge of German, and my father also made sure that I had extra lessons in French from lady Paukert. The only problem was that she had a couple of pretty and flirtatious daughters, and I was very distracted by their presence. When lady Paukert noticed my discomfort, she ordered the girls out of the room.

Lajos Bölcskey was my French teacher. He was a kind-hearted gentleman who tried to encourage us to be thorough. Once when I didn't do so well, he raised his curved finger and just said, "Boy, boy, you'll regret it,"

Much later, after the loss of World War II, when refugees in the German camps were looking for work and a place to start a new life, I began to learn English and brush up my French. Verily, I remembered Lajos and his warning ... And indeed, it is ironic that at a later stage of my life, I worked as an accountant in a foreign language.

In addition to school life, there was sport, and I went regularly to learn how to fence. Firstly, master Armentano and then Kálmán Koós tried to teach me the sport, which was regarded at that time to be a Hungarian specialty. My father also believed that this was necessary, because in his social circles, dueling was a way to settle defamation cases. I knew that my father was often a dueling assistant, and he had seven or eight silver cigarette cases as mementoes in his room. The fashion was that duelist assistants were thanked for their support in this way.

I also learned that my father had a duel with Kálmán Shvoy, which resulted in a head wound victory- he struck his opponent over his fencing visor. I practiced diligently, I loved this sport, but I never had to fight a duel. By the time I was growing up, most of the cases were settled using a chivalrous register.

My friendship with Imre Juray (Trischler) was strong during these years. We went to dance school at Ili Kurbos's and got to know many girls there. Kata, my sister went with us at the same time, and my friend Imre began courting her. A high school love developed between them that lasted for years. However, Kata left Szeged after graduation, and this romance only left a precious memory.

I was not a great dancer, but was often forced to participate in the dances. Stii, it aroused an interest towards the opposite sex. Of course, there were lots of girls who

showed interest in me because of my sister Kata. They were Csöpi Rácz, Judka Geley and Dundi Borbola -and I still remember them with pleasure.

I was interested in Évi Kovacs, but since she was my age and was very pretty, she was more interested in the leather-jacketed pilot volunteers and was not aware of my budding love for her.

We went to the skating rink for ice skating, which the mild winters of Szeged allowed. I did not like to skate- I was clumsy, had significant falls. It was more interesting to help the girls with their skating equipment. At this time, I tried to woo a girl named Lonci with some success...

In the summer, Tisza was the center of our life. We went to the Soldier's swimming pool on a regular basis. I learned from my father that in the late '20s, there was a palace revolution in the Szeged Rowing Association's board and many left the club- including my father- and instead went to the Soldier's swimming pool. We had a summer pass for the pool.

Imre had a small boat, and we paddled along the river shore. Sometimes, even we got to use a speedboat. Kálmán Shvoy had a speed boat with a powerful engine- probably one of a kind in Szeged- and my sister and I were given rides.

Later, we swam a lot in the SzUE pool, and later with my Ica. Through Imre, I got to know Dodo Aigner and Miki Tompa, and the four of us became really good friends. But Miki soon left and went to Budapest, and our group was transformed into a triumvirate. Then we started to walk along the promenade, took bike trips, and we became interested in football. Later, we became fans of KEAC football club...

In my family life the change was that Uncle Bela Hensch asked to be transferred to Kisbér. He took a role as cashier of the stud and then manager of the Nádas property. So, we no longer had our vacation in Budapest, but at Kisbér



**Home of the Kisbér Félvér (Half Blood) breed of horse**

I could have had every opportunity to ride, but I had turned into a bookworm and spent my time in the Kisbér Library reading Jókai volumes all day long. However, I had access to a Flaubert gun and went hunting in a small pond at Nádas.

Kisbér attempted to establish a swimming pool at the time. It was not paved, but a natural pond- and it certainly was not a hygienic. But for us young people, it was great, and we diligently practiced over the summer for the season-ending swimming competition. I performed well, but my competitive swimming career came to an end.

I learnt some financial management skills with the help my mother by buying some pigs, fattening them, and then selling them. Of course, this was possible only because my mother diligently encouraged "my endeavors," I thought it was all due to my efforts and I was able to buy myself a good camera.

During the Kisbér years, I got to know my great aunt, Aunt Clemmy, and her husband, who was the commander of the Kisbér stud. We used to be with them in the castle, much of which consisted of a park and the statue of Kincsem, whose trophies were in aunt Ilona's (Helen) house in Budapest.



**Kincsem – undefeated in 54 races**

Uncle Sándor (Alexander) Józsi went into retirement at that time, and my mother and husband moved to Nádas. They built themselves a small family house with a little land around it at Bakonybánk. There was also a cart with two horses in the yard and a driver who saw to the house duties and carriage responsibilities. I remember their most the adorable Puli dog.



**Puli a clever sheep dog**

This very smart dog became attached to us. With regard to their health, they later had to move to Buda, and lived in a nice little flat at the Italian Alley district, but they often recalled their Kisbér- Bakonybánk years.

My father had a growing law practice from 1922 to 1929. Our apartment acquired one Persian carpet after another. He was a great supporter of artists, and our apartment was full of beautiful images. It was at this time the later famous Margit (Margaret) Balogh (1898–1965) painted my grandparents and my mother's portrait and made pictures of us children as well.

In 1926 he took a trip to Italy and told many stories about his experiences.

Our household these years was headed by Olga Grillwitzer. Tante Olga was an Austrian officer's widow-an elegant lady- who looked after us children. She was meant to teach us German, but she was not very successful. We improved a lot in German, but in fact we taught her more Hungarian, and within a few years, she became a frequent member of the Szeged Casino lending library.

My father never married a second time. He appeared to be interested in women, and it became clear to me later that he maintained friendly relationship with a number of female artists from the Szeged Theater. However, at that time, we had no idea about this.

My friend Imre Juray knew the joys of radio. With his help - I've never been one with manual dexterity - we built a crystal radio. Antenna was drawn through opposite attics across the street. It was an exciting experience when we first heard from afar sounds, and when we could pick up the distant Budapest radio.

Later, I managed to convince my father to buy a major appliance with which we could receive European broadcasts. The German station at this time had exciting material. The Weimar Republic faced fateful choices for the future, and this produced a new political party-, the National Socialists- with their leader, Adolf Hitler.

Tante Olga, the former officer's widow, favored Hindenburg. However, I-if only to tease Tante Olga- was a Hitler fan. My father, of course, tried to explain the situation to me. He said that he believed Hitler to be a demagogue, but was of the opinion that this party would help the German public accept militarization.

Our fathers could clearly see that the Hungarians would not be able to achieve the revision of the Trianon Treaty through the League of Nations (pre-United Nations), and that the German strengthening in the European balance of power might help us. The German's supported the Pan- German concept, whereas my father's age group could still saw the relevance in the Austrian Habsburg connection. The memory of the king, Rákóczi, and Kossuth still lived in the older generation.

Indeed, in those centuries, the Hapsburg family and the Austrian representatives promoted the southeast advancing 'drive eastward' policy (Drang nach Osten). As a result of my upbringing, the hated color was yellow and black (Habsburg Flag), and only the name of Kossuth was approved in the hamlets of Szeged.

My father told me that once, when a pro-government program was canvassed, the old Hungarian, who had been listening, twirled his mustache and asked, "What would Lajos Kossuth say?"

We, the young people, wore mourning armbands and a Trianon 'T' badge on June 4 as a sign that we would never forget the injustices of Trianon. At the athletics tournaments our group spelt out the words 'Down with Trianon!' So, it is understandable that Germany offered us hope- especially because the temporary recovery of Transylvania and the role of the Mackensen Hussars in the First World War were still very fresh in people's memory and the subject of many heroic stories in the press.

My father read the 'Pest Magazine' and I became a diligent reader, it represented strongly and enthusiastically Hungarian revisionist thought.

Hitler's anti-Semitism at this stage was of a beer hall standard, and the Hungarian Jews were wholeheartedly in favor of the fight against the injustices of Trianon suffered by the Hungarians. The Hungarian Jews in the occupied territories called themselves Hungarians and the press magnates welcomed the idea of national redistribution of territories.

I was particularly influenced by the perception of events in Germany, and he encouraged me to write a study of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. For weeks, I continued my studies and I was a frequent visitor to the Somogyi library. From my source work, I learnt all the horrors of this revolution. My father also drew my attention to the competing forces of this revolution, which included the Slavic countries advance towards the Balkan Peninsula in World War I.

I was particularly influenced by the revolution's opposition to the Church and its atheism. I talked a lot about this issue with my father, who was of the opinion that the red leadership would be replaced by the white leadership in the Russian army.

In addition to political research, my favorite pastime was literature. In preparation for my final exam in year VIII, I attended afternoon lectures by university professor Sándor (Alexander) Sik in the humanities auditorium. I liked Sik's educated and refined style. Graduation came, and I was happy because I felt that the three A's and three B's reflected my abilities. I was looking forward to the longer holiday breaks of university life. We walked proudly on the promenade with a walking stick in hand, in the company of our good friends-also students-now proudly wearing the black Turul (Hungarian Falcon) Association hat.

A completed secondary education, of course, raised the problem of career choice. I turned to the humanist courses and there must also have been an inherited component in this: my great-grandfather was a panel judge, both my father and grandfather were lawyers. To this, add the fact that most of my friends chose a legal path, so that I took it for granted that I would join my father in the legal profession.

My career choice was however under scrutiny due to my father's financial problems. The great economic crisis of these years ruined the agricultural industry, and lawyers similarly felt the economic stagnation. My father was looking for a low-cost diploma for me, so he gave me a great surprise one day when we were walking on the promenade. He waved to brigadier Kálmán Shvoy, who congratulated me for my

graduation and told me that they would provide a place for me from the Szeged quota- an invitation to apply for the entrance exams of the military Academy of Ludovika.

It caused a big disappointment for my father when I said I did not want to be a soldier and would like to be a lawyer. Naturally he did not force me to change my mind, but he still wanted me to avoid becoming a lawyer - the economic crisis disillusioned him enough to recommend that I enroll in the medical faculty. But I was stubborn, and ultimately my father accepted my decision.

I didn't ponder this decision instead, I organized a bike tour with my friend Imre which became one of my fondest memories: Szeged-Baja, Mohacs, Pécs, around the lake, Zirc, Cuha Valley, and finally home to Nádaspusztár at Kisbér, where we were expected by my mother.



My father was obviously disappointed about my plans, but that year there was one satisfaction: he was appointed Chief Government Counselor. About this my father wrote in his memoirs:

**"In 1932 Károly (Karl) Aigner was Lord Lieutenant (Sheriff). He, along with the Bethlen government, failed at the elections. He wanted to acknowledge my services, but knowing that I would avoid public recognition, and without consulting me he wrote down my story and put me up for the Chief Government Counselor appointment.**

**This appointment was made "in public acknowledgment of my merits" in the month of August 1932. Of course, it would have been rude to refuse"**

## University Years 1932-1936

In light of the financial crisis (World Great Depression), my father decided to wind down his household expenses by giving up his housekeeper. The fact that my sister Kata was getting to be a "big girl" also contributed to this decision. Because we lacked a mother, it became increasingly more difficult in Szeged to maintain an appropriate mix of social life, which included arranging home parties for us young people. Therefore, Kata was placed in a boarding school in Szeged, with the plan was to stay there for two years until graduation. During school holidays, we could visit our mother at Kisbér and later at Bábolna.

I was placed in the Horthy College as a law student to begin my career. I was assigned a beautiful two-bed room and I enjoyed the company of boys with the same age and interests. I became too distracted by the freedom of university life, and I often came in late to the dormitory, which aroused the supervising teacher's interest. Géza Deák was one of the supervising teachers, who later told me that he was amazed that a well-known lawyer had sent his son to a Szeged dormitory school. The director also knew my father and must have reported that his son was enjoying his independence.

My father decided that after the first semester I would leave the college and instead lease a small apartment in 2 Deák Ferenc Street. From then on, we ate together at the casino restaurant in Szeged so he could keep an eye on me and make sure I didn't take things too far.

My father struggled frugally with the then very sluggish economy. We had breakfast and dinner at home, and so we usually bought assorted cold cuts, lunch was our more costly eating style. My allowance was very modest, and I certainly had to think if I wanted to go to a football match or a movie or show.

My father was a very conservative-minded person who was reluctant to get into debt in these hard times. Later I came to the conclusion that my father was not cut out to be in business, because in difficult times instead of hiding his financial condition, he let people know how tough things were- including wearing refurbished suits. Despite this always dressed elegantly impressing his acquaintances.

His entertainment was also governed by the economic conditions. After work, he usually took long walks. His friends could not keep up to him because of his habit of walking with great vigour. Thank God he was in good health during these years. There had been a period in 1927 when he was suffering from recurrent rheumatoid arthritis and was

almost bedridden for a few years. Of course, his health also contributed to the decline in his legal practice.

He took- half-hour walks and then we had dinner. I studied after dinner, while he usually dropped into the theatre, where the members of the city's Theatrical Committee had a box reserved for him. He viewed a scene or two from the ongoing show, then perhaps drink a glass or two of wine at the casino, but even so was home before midnight.

After the first month of freedom, I studied diligently and attended the lectures. The professor of Roman law, Albert Kiss, was a good friend of my father and he personally attended to me. He stressed the importance of rereading every day the material covered that day, because he thought that was the only way to be really prepared for the exams.

I was interested in public law, since the Hungarian view of history has always been constitutional in nature, and I was deeply keen on Hungarian history. Ödön Polner was our teacher- a man of the Austro-Hungarian Empire- but he was independent-minded and sympathetic to me.

Béla Iványi taught the history of law in the spirit of the Catholic Church, and thus gave us a more complete picture of the subject. Barna Horváth introduced us to legal philosophy, and at that point I felt that this subject area was made for me.

Naturally I became involved in student life. My friends- Imre Juray, Dodo Aigner and Mickey Tompa- were involved in the Turul Alliance. Mickey Tompa was a son of a Transylvanian nobleman from a Protestant family and of course did not join the Catholic Emericánás Society. So, Dodo and Imre both decided to join Turul Alliance and the Budapest lawyers' Verbőczy Fraternal Association. This meant a non-contest decision and I joined my friends.

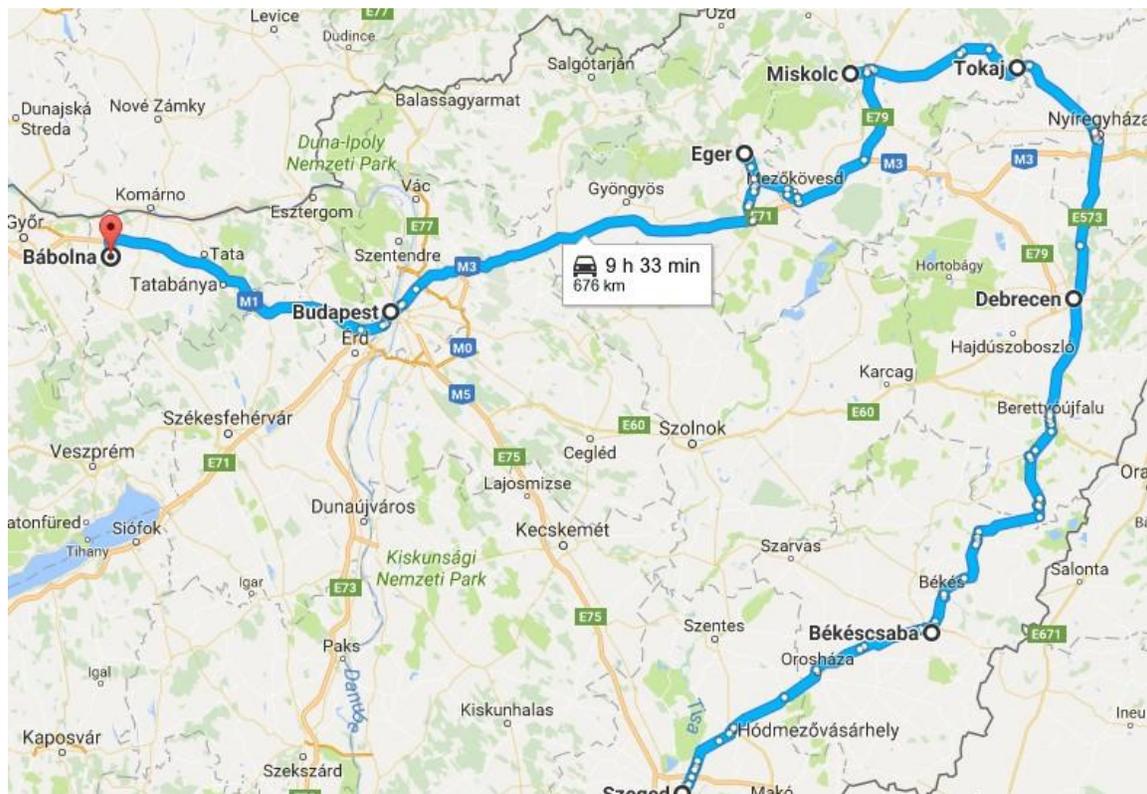
My father did not oppose this. He himself was a religious Catholic, regularly went to confession (reconciliation) and holy communion, but his best friend was Lexi Kaszó a member of the Reformed Church and my father was willing to criticise both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches if necessary, and was an advocate of Christian unity. In addition, he was a very proud man, but never thought that he should seek help from the churches.

The Turul Association was later subject to political attacks, but in our first years it taught us a national identity and discipline, and enabled access to entertainment- including dances organised for the community. The association was under the watchful eye of Albert Kiss a conservative professor with a national outlook.

I took part in a few dance evenings and got to know other students of the faculty as well. There were also 'wet' camps where we had a few drinks with friends, arguing about what interested us. But at midnight, we became serious because it was time for the "memento". In a darkened room, the voice of a designated speaker over the radio talked to us by candlelight. The subject was about the lost homeland territories- including Erdély (Transylvania), Felvidék (the Highlands) and Délvidék (the Southern Region)- vowing that once the time came, we would be prepared to die for the Greater Magyarország (Hungary). The first year sped quickly and so soon after the oral exams, the first major obstacle was the basic written test.

Fortunately, I had success in the exams in May, and so I could look forward to a worry-free year-end vacation.

There were changes in my mother's household, as her husband Béla moved to Bábolna and took over the leadership of the Central District. So, this year the bike tour took in Bábolna-we had planned it for months with my friend Imre. The road map for the tour was: Békéscsaba, Debrecen, Tokaj, Miskolc, Eger, Budapest and Bábolna.



**Planned bike tour**

My father was very worried about us in our first journey into the world. He had a good friend in the police headquarters, and they issued us with a certificate/request to the head of the Csendör (Gendarme/police) to support us if needed.

We first used this "safe conduct" letter when arriving at the Békéscsaba's main square, where we stopped to rest. The square was full of unemployed labourers, and we became involved in a conversation with them. Suddenly two strangers in civilian suits appeared and called for identification. We produced the certification from the Szeged brigade headquarters. They apologized, but we tried to explain- to no avail- that we were simple hiker students. They did not believe us and were convinced that we were counter-intelligence agents.

Later, we used this certification often and we asked the local police chiefs permission to pitch our tents. Sometimes we even received the honor of free beds for the night when we reached our destinations.

When we reached Miskolc, I remember there was a flood of school girls on the roadway, so that we had to get off our bikes while the children crossed. Later, I thought that perhaps my future faithful life-partner, my dear Icuka, could have been one of these girls- she was still in high school at the time. She was probably unaware of the two dusty cyclists ...

We were looking forward to stopping in Budapest. On our program was the English Park, the Beketow Circus, and other sites. We planned other adventures as well. We happened to be near the English Park and inadvertently entered a "museum," and there we saw horrific images depicting the results of syphilis and other sexually transmitted diseases. Upon exiting, we promptly forgot our plans.

Unexpectedly, our tour of Budapest also ended. My friend received a telegram from home to come home immediately. As it turned out, his father, Uncle Toni's plans had suddenly come to fruition and Imre had to go to Stuttgart in Germany for a few months with some friends to brush up his German.

Uncle Tony was a man of German descent from Bácska (Bačka), who married a Hungarian girl from Szondy and considered himself Hungarian. In their home they spoke only Hungarian. But in researching his family, Uncle Tony found the family roots near Stuttgart, and it became possible for Imre's study trip. His German language skills grew.

So, I arrived home at Bábolna on my own and began a very pleasant summer vacation.

Imre Kelemen was director of the stud at the time, while the commander of the stud was Tibor Szandtner. They were both sociable people and who gave much to the officers and stud estate owners and were on good terms. Tibor Szandtner was a horse-breeding expert who, largely at his own expense renovated the Bábolna "castle" so that we would never have reason to be ashamed in front of foreign visitors.

He took part in the Bábolnai social set and, though he never drank a drop of alcohol, he danced for hours in the szupécsárdás (Csárdás Dance), holding a large towel used to occasionally wipe away his sweat ...

Imre Kelemen, together with his brother- the president of OTT- also built a small swimming pool. Of course, the swimming pool could not be completely open to the public, and so the board wrote at the entrance a sign that said that the swimming pool is open only to people who came from or appeared to come from the "middle class". Both the younger set and I found this to be socially offending and the board decided to remove this sign....

In the afternoons activities also picked up on the tennis court, and I too had a go at learning this beautiful sport. The mixed doubles games, of course only served as an opportunity for the young to get to know the opposite sex.

I met Edith Kelemen, who was the daughter of Kornél Kelemen the OTT President. She just graduated from high school, and later I realized that she became a guest of Imre Kelemen to enable her to look around for marriageable young men. I really liked Edith- she was a nice, delicate, blond haired, blue eyed girl who was well-mannered and a good dancer. But she only looked at me as someone of the same age, and my courting was not reciprocated. Soon a great love affair evolved between her and Tony Kovács, and I missed out.

My first memories of Bábolnai go back to Christmas of 1932. That Christmas, the situation was reversed-it was no longer celebrated in Szeged, but instead we celebrated in Bábolna. In previous years, my father's household had been visited by my mother, and now my father traveled to Bábolna for a few days to be with the children and both parents on Christmas Eve.

On January 30 1933 we set of to return to Szeged, I remember well that before the train arrived at the Western Railway Station, I read the Pest Newsletter bill board on the Kaiser Wilhelm road. One of the main news items announced was the appointment of

Hitler. The Chancellor of Germany became a popular leader, and the caricature of a man with the small mustache and hair hanging into his face came to rule our destiny.

Amongst these political memories was the conclusion of the summer holidays and my return to Szeged in September. My mother accompanied us to Budapest, to Kelenföld. From there we tried to catch a tram to the city centre. In that area, we got swept up into a big crowd. Some of the industrial workers had organized mass demonstrations demanding wage increases. In their button holes they wore red carnations and waved red flags and the atmosphere was very dangerous. The police were called out in large numbers and there were more severe disturbances. We were very shocked by the images and the threat of an imminent Bolshevik uprising.

We arrived in Szeged, and in the warm lowland city we soon forgot our fears. In the evenings we strolled down the Korzó (Park) with my friends, we courted one girl then the next, but our leisure time was mainly taken up by football. The university team KEAC was very successful at the time-we were there at almost every game, cheering for our team. The opposition teams included Kiskunfél-church team, Makó and Hódmezővásárhely. They all knew us for our big-letter 'E' flags and our encouraging chant of "**Bring It on KEAC**". If we won, we sang that "... **you cannot make fun of the University.**"

Sometimes we missed going home to be due to car troubles or too many drinks. I still see our trainer Nagy dancing on the table. We surely caused many unnecessary concerns to our parents.

We also spent many months and years in Szatymaz, where my friend Imre's father had a vineyard. Here, we lived in our world of riding horses and kicking a football. Sometimes we had many sips of Uncle Toni's. '**Sand wine**' (wine produced from grapes grown vineyards built on sandy soil) and occasionally we got in such a condition that we were not brave enough to cycle back and so we slept outside. At that time there was no telephone communication at the vineyard and our parents certainly waited anxiously for us at home.

<b>Full name</b>	Szegedi Egyetemi Atlétikai Club
<b>Founded</b>	1921
<b>Dissolved</b>	1999



Home colours

**The club was founded in 1921 as ‘Kitartás Egyetemi Atlétikai Klub (KEAC)’**

In addition, we drifted from the undergraduate student life. As an old member of the Turul club, I was assigned the job of training the first-year students into the club spirit. I got to know Laci Regdon, the district chief of the society. He was already a clerk in the district court, and his main objective was to promote the Turul Association within the Szeged society.

The Emericana society was in an easier position, thanks to the support it received from the Catholic Church. Thus, Laci Regdon sought out the descendants of the old families of Szeged to encourage serious recognition of our Turul Alliance socially- with our help.

First and foremost, we created the Turul Club. We rented a room, and there during the weekends the students were able to have fun cheaply and with some supervision. For the prom season we won the right to organize the University Ball, which later became an important event in Szeged society.

Despite this I began to be seriously immersed in my legal studies. I attended various seminars on Roman private law and criminal law and wrote papers on these subjects. Later, I wrote essays on constitutional law and international law. I was awarded diplomas by the University and received small money prizes for these modest works.

But in 1932 the fun turned into sorrow for me. On March 4 my mother’s second husband died from a heart attack. We really liked Béla. He was 49 years old. My mother was only 40 years old and so the loss of her husband was a tragedy for the whole family.

Exams were coming again, and I hid in the books- my second-term basic exam was coming. This test was held on June 1, 1932, and I received unanimous honors. My father was happy with me and allowed Imre Juray and me to take a trip to Austrian.

We took a ship in Budapest and we travelled the Danube to Linz, delighted by the scenery. After visiting Visegrád and Esztergom, and seeing the castle of Pozsony (Bratislava), we experienced a major part of the old Hungary. Then the natural beauty of the Wachau region of Austria caught our attention. After Salzburg we spent a couple of days in Zell am See.

To the great shock of the locals, we dived into the icy lake as we used to in Szeged - but to the amusement of the spectators we quickly climbed out of the water with red skin.

Our stay was somewhat disrupted by political events. It was at this time that the infamous Nazi coup in that country occurred in Austria, and you could also hear the guns crackling between opposing paramilitary forces. Then the guns fell silent, and the depth of the crisis was clearly shown when, one morning, it became apparent that most of the population had shifted to show German sympathies. As a result of a Berlin radio call, a great mass of men wore white stockings and the women wore edelweiss insignias.

Our holiday was over, and after Semmering we reached Vienna, where we caught our ship heading for home. I said goodbye to my friend Imre somewhere around Győr and joined my mother and my sister Kata.

My mother moved from the spacious house of the central stewardship to a small apartment until she was able to plan for her changed circumstances. These months at Bábolna were not as cheerful as in previous years. I especially grieved the loss of my small cat. The cat was so fond of the house and did not want to leave her home- soon perished because of the changes.

This summer however at Bábolna, however brought happiness. My sister Kata, who had just graduated from high school, she was a nice, sweet girl, found her perfect match in the person of Dr. Béla Csabai a local doctor. Béla was a close friend of Uncle Hensch and maintained his connection with the family after Uncle Béla's death.

The Courtship turned serious, but after my mother had to leave Bábolna and her living conditions were unsettled, Kata accepted Falcione family's invitation to live with them for a year.

In the fall of 1932, university lectures resumed, but on October, Croatian patriots murdered the Serbian king and the French foreign minister. The subsequent crisis affected Hungary as well.



**King Alexander's Assassination (1934)**

It appeared that the many Croatian refugees were living at Jankapuszta, and repressive measures were taken against the Hungarian minority in the Bánát and Bácska regions by Yugoslavia. They were thrown on masse across the border near Szeged and the city became responsible for the care of these refugees.

In this work, of course, the university students also took part. Our circle of friends worked diligently to establish sleeping quarters for the exiles in a school near the Rókusi Church. We participated in a variety of collection actions and we went out to the streets on masse, demanding that the government take action against Serbia in retaliation.

The government, however, was in a very difficult position. The Hungarian stance as defended by Tibor Eckhardt in Geneva, and mass demonstrations and riots would only have worsened the situation. Yet in our youthful vigor, we had not contemplated all the complexities.

As I later learned, Gömbös ordered Béla Buócz, the police commander in Szeged, by telephone that street protests and riots be eliminated. Police units on horseback, wielding swords, eventually herded us into the City Hall courtyard. Bela Buócz then explained the situation to us and urged us to keep calm and not provoke the authorities, who were obliged to preserve the tranquility for international reasons.

The youths' exasperation was channelled into an organised framework. The humanities faculty announced a rally of all the clubs in the auditorium and after the

speaker from Budapest, I spoke on behalf of the university students in Szeged. My oratory skills were in germination and received acclaim, as shown by the fact that for the next two months, I was invited to speak on two further the occasions on behalf of the university students.

At the country's flag raising ceremony, I spoke of our commitment for the restoration of Greater Hungary. At the 15 March 15 commemoration, I stood in front of the statue of Kossuth and expressed the youths' desire for social renewal of the country. It was understood that, given the circumstances of the time and the official nature of the celebration, the organisers would be provided with the text of the speech to be presented. As my speech encompassed the then erupting reform mood- criticizing the past and calling for a social transformation- even my father feared it would be censored. To my surprise (although the censor was the chief of police), there were no amendments, and I successfully delivered my brave words.

At that time my interest increasingly focused on legal and constitutional politics, and the philosophy of law. The lectures of István (Stephen). Csekey interested me greatly. Around this time, our professor published the results of his visit to Estonia and described to the Hungarian society the Estonian view of the legal aspects of 'cultural autonomy'. Having recently achieved independence, the Estonian nation had to face a Russian minority and they saw the solution in cultural autonomy, which ensured that the local Russians could maintain their linguistic and religious freedom- hoping that this concession will win Russian acknowledgement of Estonian leadership in this Baltic region.

From my studies, I began to develop the components that would eventually shape my political worldview. In communism, we saw bloody revolution and atheistic worldview; we saw that the revolutionary movement was used to control production, distribution, and consumption, and ultimately to enforce public ownership. We viewed the elimination of private property as unnatural and firmly rejected it.

Social democracy at that time insisted on the Leninist-Marxist principles, and the difference between social democracy and communism was only that the former sought change through constitutional consultation rather than revolution. Our laws stated that revolutionary organizations aiming to change the existing state and social order were illegal, and our youth organisation had to act constitutionally within the existing social framework.

I was an avid reader of the researchers' works and Imre Kovács's 'A Silent Revolution' had made a big impression on me. I was keen to improve the fate of three million beggar Hungarians. The agrarian question became important to me especially as I became aware -during those years at Kisbér and Bábolna- of the local farmers and hired workers. My mother often visited the families struggling with financial troubles, and I saw the fate of many who barley had enough to eat.

The young economics students often pointed out these difficulties, and in particular, the conditions in the nearby large church estates were so poor that the Bábolna parish priest was known to be strongly criticized in friendly conversations.

A belief developed in me that radical land reform was needed, and without it, the rebirth of the nation was not possible. The root of the problem was the lack of land for smallholder class. This was one of our goals.

I stated these views to my father repeatedly, and I remember that once I became so passionate that he accused me of being a communist.

I continued to read and study this issue and did not conceal my view. Strangely, at this time, it happened that an art student-whom I only knew superficially- and a colleague invited me for a friendly chat, saying we had a guest from Budapest and could discuss Hungarian issues. I went to a meeting somewhere on the Boldogasszony Avenue, in a small family-rented flat and we spent a few hours together. We agreed on many issues, but somehow there seemed to be a gap between us.

Eventually it became clear to me that he wanted to recruit me as a member of a left-wing socialist group in Szeged.

I was also noticed by the right wing. My father belonged to the liberal wing of the Unity Party, but my oratory and my membership of the Verbóczy Fraternal Association (Turul club) made it clear that I was fighting for national and social renewal. Captain István Mészáros, a hardened Székely soldier and a friend of my father from earlier years, was aware of my ideas. To my surprise he unexpectedly invited me to attend a meeting at the chief of police's office, where I also met politicians from Budapest.

I took part in this reunion and it was suggested that I join them in the renewal of Hungary. 'Love of the country' was the name of the association, and I soon discovered that Árpád Taby, renowned master of the Order of Maria Theresa, was the leader. I had to take an oath never to abandon my desire for national renewal. Moreover, they emphasised that the association was secret, and were not allowed to publicly discuss the oath under penalty.

I observed this, but no one approached me again, and I finished my political activities. I kept the national question as my priority, and that is why Francis Szálasi's: 'The Road and the Goal' and his ideas of Hungarians took my attention.

I was already aware that restoration of Greater Hungary implied that it would be difficult to govern large, diverse populations. It was because of this that I was interested in Professor Csekey's advocacy for the Estonian autonomy-culture plan. The old St. Stephan's state idea followed this line, but the nineteenth century nationalism, which stressed linguistic unity, made such a view impossible.

I saw an opportunity to introduce the idea of Hungarianism as a means to live in a federal system with all the nationalities of the Carpathian-Danube Greater Hungarian Homeland, while ensuring Hungarian governmental control. However, the leaders of Hungary did not see this as a solution, and any plan involving separate territories was regarded as treasonous.

My father saw the situation similarly to his generation and strongly criticized any such federal experimentation. I did not argue with him then, but sadly I finished the conversation and suggested that if this was correct, then Ferenc Szálasi could become the last dreamer of greater Hungary.

The German rebirth was spectacular and had a strong effect on people. Increasingly, a variety of national socialist parties emerged, slavishly imitating the German party in appearance. I did not like the fact that, although they tactically demanded the right to vote in secret, they- apparently following the German example-wanted to achieve a one-party system. I did not agree with this.

I was not a supporter of parliamentary democracy either, following the example of Germany and France, as they were unable to form a unified leadership. During my studies I preferred the old Hungarian parliamentary and county system. My idea was that the counties and cities to choose their representatives for the National Assembly, and that these representatives should be subject to recall to serve the will of the electorate. It was my plan that, after my university years, I would study this issue further.

Later this subject was dealt with in my Berlin scholarship years.

Finally in June 1934, I complete my third-year exam, achieving honors. In the summer I returned to Kisbér, where my mother was given accommodation at the stud. She was still trying to recover from the tragic death of her husband. It was a quiet summer. I

prepared for the final exam and read Barna Horvath 'Legal Philosophy' in the original German and made notes on each chapter.

Then autumn came, and I returned to Szeged to begin my exams to earn a doctorate in law and political science. My friend Imre completed his doctorate in September and enlisted in the army as air defense officer, leaving Szeged. So, of the triumvirate only two of us remained-Dodo Aigner and I. Together, we frequented the Korzó, and on the weekends we attended the KEAC football matches.

However, these months were quiet, as the hard work required for final exam preparation taking up most of my time.

The Turul Alliance no longer took up my time. In the past year, I had been a candidate for election as a lieutenant, but my friend Pista (Steve) Széchenyi proved more popular, and so I was left free.

At this time, there was an unpleasant interlude for me in the Verbőczy Fraternal Association. My good childhood friend Elek (Sityi), who was one year younger than me, returned to Szeged. After graduation, he had gone to Budapest and, with the Békefy family, tried to find a job in the theatre world. His father, uncle Lexi-who was a good friend of my father- died in 1932, and Aunt Betty was unable, on a widow's pension, to support Sityi in his attempts to get work in the theatre. Therefore, they decided to return to Szeged, and Sityi enrolled in the law faculty.

Even though I was a member of Verbőczy Fraternal Association, Aunt Betty suggested that Sityi should join the Turul Alliance. Sityi obtained the candidate papers and asked me to recommend his application for admission.

For me, it was certainly a very unpleasant task. I knew that my friend was of Jewish origin, and a declaration that the applicant is not Jewish being a condition of admittance. I also knew that his connection could not be hidden, because the family was well known in Szeged, and sooner or later it would have become very uncomfortable when he was exposed and excluded from the association.

So, it was up to me and my father to tactfully explain the situation to them. Sityi understood the problem, but Aunt Betty, with the natural bias of a good mother did not want to understand. She cared nothing of the politics and even stated that she did not mind if Szálasi comes to power as long as nothing would hurt her son....

She eventually calmed down and Sityi did not submit his application.

During these months I studied with my cousin Lóránt (Roland) Falcione. At this time, my sister Kata lived in his household and we became closer to the family.

That autumn held special significance for me-it marked my first meeting with Ica, my future life companion. I remember the date clearly, as it lived in both our memories: October 20th 1935. After a football match we stopped off at the Kass Szálló dance hall, where the Verbóczy Fraternal Association was hosting a dance. There, I once again noticed a beautiful, slender blond girl whom I had first seen at the Turul club two weeks earlier. On that occasion, I hadn't the courage to ask her for a dance-she seemed surrounded by on that first occasion as she appeared to have many prospective partners. She had recently arrived in Szeged to attend the School Teacher College, studying mathematics and physics as a first-year student.

At the Kass Szálló, I overcame my shyness and approached one of the directors to introduce myself in accordance with the strict social etiquette of the day. Our first exchange became a standing joke between us: Ica wanted to tease me, claimed that another girl then dancing Kata Simon-was her sister. This was a misstep because Kata Simon was my sister's best friend and someone I had known since childhood. The white lie was immediately unmasked.

From then on, we met often-initially by chance in public places and at afternoon dances, but soon we were walking together almost daily in the Cathedral Square arcade or along Stefánia Street. We grew increasingly close. Ica was surprised to receive a bouquet of flowers from me and as she told Kata Simon, with whom she shared a room at the Horthy College, Kata immediately declared: "... if Bela sent you flowers, it means he is in love with you ..." My dear friend Kata was right. But this part of our courtship remained very disciplined; Ica knew that I was studying hard and did not want to stand in the way

The final semester of law school was approaching, and conscription loomed. The rule was that if someone was drafted in the army, the second half of the fourth-year exams were deferred, though one could apply for the final examinations upon completion of the service. I had mixed feelings as the day of enlistment approached. I feared being declared unfit by the draft board, which would have been a source of embarrassment. Among the young people at the time, nationalist sentiment was so strong that some who were declared unfit had even taken their own lives.

Fortunately, my fears were unfounded-I was enlisted and I planned to apply for training in the armored division, which was considered fashionable and modern. By

chance, my father helped facilitate this. Around this time, Szeged welcomed Vilmos (William) Kircsfalusy, a decorated officer who had previously commanded RUISK-the Police Recruitment School'. Vilmos arranged to have my name registered in the 1936 as a volunteer and I knew that I would start my military year in Budapest.

On 2nd of December 1935, I sat for the first jurisprudential exams and succeeded with unanimous honors and started my Christmas vacation. Ica also went home to Miskolc, where her family lived. Her father was a teacher there at the Fráter (Brother) György (George) high school.



**Ica's Mother and father**

They were refugees from the Felvidék (Highlands), specifically Szepes County in what is now northeastern Slovakia. My future father-in-law refused to renounce his Hungarian citizenship and take an oath to Czechoslovakia following the post-World War I annexation. That Christmas was the last I spent at my mother's home in Kisbér. She had since moved to Budapest, living on a modest widow's pension.

We often went out with our cousins in Szeged. Éva Falcione was now a big girl and became a good friend of my sister Kata. Lóránt (Lolo) studied diligently and he also prepared for military service. Aunt Eti was very busy during these months as her home often became a gathering place for young people. We spent many hours there debating and arguing, while she teased us affectionately.

At this time, I was an admirer of the poet Endre Ady. The older generation remained skeptical of such a revolutionary figure. Uncle Kálmán had arranged for Lolo register as a member of the Emericana club and himself leaned politically toward the Catholic viewpoint. I wore the Turul black cap very proudly, and once, when Eti brought up Ady's relationship with Léda, she asked how I could reconcile this love of Ady and my overall philosophical outlook. I remember replying that Ady's private life was irrelevant to his poetry, and I quoted a line of his: "We are angry with both the arrogant Counts and the wealthy Jews."

The two younger Falcione boys, Kálmán (pimpi) and Márió (Bábó) observed our fierce nationalism and later became brave soldiers, committed to rebuilding Greater Hungary and defending our independence during the Second World War.

On 16th March 1936 I completed all the exams required for the constitutional doctorate and received honors on 20th March.

Over the summer, I spent more and more time with Ica. We planned to spend a couple of weeks at Lake Balaton. Ica's aunt-our future 'Ilumama'-agreed to act as chaperone, and the two of them managed to book a room at the Teachers House. I planned to find a room in the village for myself, and we would eat together in the Teachers Hall.

I faced the problem of how to finance this trip. I did not want to burden my father, as his legal practice earned little, so I decided to sell my bicycle. At that time, it had value, and Louis Bába-a comrade and friend from my father's old rowing club- bought it for his son. Thus, the financial problem was solved for the summer vacation.

Another comprehensive examination was successfully completed, and I looked forward to a relaxing time at Lake Balaton. These two weeks have truly become one of my most beautiful memories. In these weeks, our love with Ica was fully realised, and the hot Hungarian summer, the warm waves of the Lake Balaton, the wines of Badacsony and the cozy walks on the surrounding hillsides accompanied us throughout a long life



**Lake Balaton**

Later, we saw many beautiful and magnificent sights, but the memories of this Hungarian summer could not be dimmed.

Then I returned to Szeged and continued studying for the final exams, which were due at the end of September. In the meantime, the future cast shadows-I would soon serve in the army and be separated from Szeged, and more importantly, from Ica. We were already discussing the possibility of applying for a scholarship after my military service, as my professor, Stephen Csekey encouraged me to apply for a scholarship and promised his help.

And what would happen then, no one knew. Job prospects at the time were uncertain. Ica still had three years of study and I felt that I had no right to tie her to me. But I had no strength to stand aside-not yet.

These weeks-my last days in Szeged-were very busy. The date of Kata's (my sister's) wedding was announced, and I had to prepare for my final exams as well as my entrance into the army. Ica, having also returned to Szeged, begun her second-year studies, which gave us the opportunity to meet daily.

However, the impending separation cast its own symbols. I remember showing her my uniform through a single-story window-she felt it was a sign of our coming parting.

On 22 September, I passed the final comprehensive exam, and a few days later, on the 26th, I received my doctorate summa cum laude (with highest honors) from the University Council. But there was no time for celebration-my sister's wedding was imminent.

My mother came to Szeged and met the choice of my heart. She accepted Ica as her own daughter and was very pleased for me. My father liked Ica very much, but like me had concerns about our future.

Kata's wedding-after a civil marriage-was at the Fogadalmi (Votive) Church. She arrived with my father in a four-white-horse carriage at the steps of the church, and many friends, relatives, and friends filled the pews. After the ceremony, the guests gathered for the wedding dinner in a special hall of the Hotel Tisza. The mood was joyful; all celebrated these young couple's union. They were naturally eager to head for Budapest, where they planned to spend their honeymoon.

Two days later, the moment came for me to say goodbye as well. I had to separate from Ica, embrace my father-whom I had spent the last four years with and to whom I was very close-and leave Szeged, the city to which my youth's memories belonged.

Of course, I thought that I might be home in one or two years, but I felt the links were now broken, and perhaps I would only return to visit.

On 5 October, at 5 o'clock in the morning, I loaded my green military chest onto the carriage. Szeged did not have many cars or taxis. I hugged my father once more and the vehicle started. It chugged along the Boldogasszony Boulevard, and the city slowly disappeared from view in the foggy autumn morning.



**Béla in Military  
Service**

## Portraits of Szeged

As the Pest fast train carried me away, my spirit said goodbye to my city of birth... Since then, more than half a century has passed, and due to a twisted fate, I landed on the shores of the Pacific Ocean. The change in time and space has made it very difficult to recall the memories of my youth. It should also be noted that I basically lived as an adult in Szeged only 2-5 years and my judgment of people is limited when it comes to drawing character portraits.

It should also be pointed out that I cannot write a monograph about Szeged, because the middle-class students would not have understood the city's artisans, traders, and farmers. Therefore, only very sketchy memories can be recorded on paper.

On the other hand, a great help to me was that my father, in his old age after the World War II, while living in Székesfehérvár, wrote his memories of Szeged at my request. Perhaps his remarks concerning peoples of public interest-his friends and acquaintances-who were well-known figures in Szeged at the time, will offer some insight.

My father gave me a publication about Hungarian towns, including Szeged, published in Budapest in 1927. This brought me close again to the picture of Szeged my hometown. The nineteenth century Szeged of course could not have been known by me personally, but the cited monograph also showed that my father's ancestors-Zombori Rónay, the Blaskovich family and István (Stephen) Vedres-played a significant role in the history of Szeged.

During the great flood, amongst the more senior persons, I had personal connection with Senator Antal (Anthony) Zombori, who was very proud of his vineyards. Few people loved their city as much as he did. His whole working life was devoted to Szeged. Being a water person, he also handled the flood periods with great intensity.

The Zombori couple, both in their nineties, lived in the Milkó Palace at 22 Deák Ferenc Street. This was also where our apartment and that of my father's law firm were



***Szeged 1879 Big Flood Monument  
only 265 of 5,723 houses remained.***

located. We often, we saw lady Zombori, who had always been an industrious housewife, reprimanding the servant-girls. Uncle Tony was shuffled off to the casino and but always maintained mental sharpness.

I remember that he once visited my father's law office and requested help in a minor rental case. It was not a major issue, but my father treated him with great reverence and resolved the matter to his satisfaction. My father often spoke about him as one of the most revered citizens of old Szeged



**Author's Father's Notary Law Office -**

Then they almost simultaneously left this world, and there remained only an inscription on the headstone above their coffins.

I knew, of course, Kószó, Aigner and Gál families and became friends with the younger generation.

I personally did not know Laszlo Szivessy, a lawyer who was one of the most prominent figures in the Jewish community in Szeged. In my day, only his son, Lehel Szivessy was mentioned by people as one of the most notable members of the city's political life.

My father once told me a joke from Szeged. According to the story, the Szivessy grandmother, who did not speak much Hungarian, was asked, what the name of the new-born grandchild was--the future 'Lehel' (an old Hungarian name meaning 'Breath') Szivessy. Her answer was: from the grandmother was: "I do not know, something puffing ..."

I remember Ferenc Kiss, the Chief Forestry Councilor, well. He devoted his whole life to the treeless, barren sand dunes and lowland forests, working to create and promote

natural growth for better agricultural management. I often met him at the Casino, and we had many friendly discussions with my father about the problems of Szeged.

I can still see the figure of Gábor Papp, the eminent painter. My father was very fond of his images and was a loyal customer. In his final years, he was in very poor financial condition and lived in quite disturbing conditions. He often visited us at lunch time, and my father always invited him to join us. As children, we often smiled at his movements, not understanding that they were the result of serious health issues.

One of the outstanding personalities of the Szeged's music world was Peter König, director of the municipal music school. Many times, we saw the artist's figure on the town promenade, in his gown and white beard. He was born in Styria, Austria, studied with the Benedictines in Graz, and came to Szeged in 1902. On the banks of the Tisza, became very Hungarian in spirit, though you could still detect traces of his German past.

There was also a nice anecdote about him. Peter König was asked if he knew of another word in Hungarian starting with the combination of "ty" like the Hungarian word for chicken "tyuk". Peter König replied, according to the anecdote: "tyufa, tyertya ..." (both were wrong because he couldn't distinguish the difference in the pronunciation between 'ty' and 'gy').

But now I will give over to my late father, and I will quote from his memoirs so that I can help preserve more of his thoughts about ancient Szeged.

***"Lajos (Louis) Bába was a descendant of old Szeged. He worked for MÁV (Hungarian Railways) and retired as Chief Executive Officer. He was a member of the famous Szeged Rowing Association's rowing fours, and we shared a warm friendship. When returning from the farm with fresh cherries or other fruits, he never failed to bring us a little basket for tasting. I was his son's confirmation sponsor. Tivadar (Theodore) Sümegi, another member of the quartet had great musical talent. Even though he never learned to play music and could not read sheet music, after hearing a light operetta, he could flawlessly play it on the piano- he was a natural. He died in 1925.***



**Milkó Palace Apartments**

*Feri (Frank) Milkó was from a very wealthy Jewish family. The family owned the Milkó Palace, where we also lived.*

*He was the rowing four's pilot. I have pleasant memories of him.*

*Elek Kaszó, Chief Cashier of Szeged, was my best friend through thick and thin. We were always there for each, other no matter the circumstance. Warm-hearted and honest from head to toe, he was an unselfish man-a peaceful, joyful human being. If any controversy erupted at the regatta, he was able to tip the situation by saying proverbial wise words: "love one another" ... He was Calvinistic and a faithful son of the Church.*

*Socially, he was the tireless treasurer of the Skating Club, the Casino and the Regatta. In general, he was held in great esteem in the whole city. His money management was a benchmark for the times. During inflation, when millions were exchanged in a day, incredible security was needed-complicated by the vicious pace of change.*

*In 1935 he was diagnosed with kidney cancer and was operated August 1<sup>st</sup>. At 2 pm in my presence he died and I cried for my friend. At his coffin, I bid him farewell on behalf of his friends.*

*Dr. Endre (Andrew) Taschler - my son Béla's godfather- died in 1925. He was a city clerk of Szeged, highly paid and wealthy. He was extremely cultured, able to read scientific and literary works in the original German and French. In addition to being a true bohemian, he was known for the following:*

*'On the eve of a planned foreign trip, at his farewell dinner- drinking much wine and singing until five o'clock in the morning- he walked up the road and across the bridge, then distributed all his travel money among the hemp factory workers heading to work. When he returned, he laughed and said:" I have just returned from my foreign trip". From then on, he spent his holidays at home.*

*He was not an argumentative spirit and he never wanted to hijack the standpoint of others. However, if the town meeting passed a resolution he disagreed with, he would scuttle the plan by not forwarding it to the interior minister. Instead, he left the resolution in his desk drawer. When the council repented and sought to alter the original resolution, he would laugh, pull out the file from the desk drawer saying," I thought this would happen, so I did not submit it for approval ...Now it will be easier to correct the matter."*

*When a vacancy occurred in the mayor's office, public trust turned to him. But he declined this honor by saying: Look, I'm a bohemian man and can afford to do what a mayor could not. I do not want to sacrifice that independence for any mayoral role.*

*In his obituary they called him "Master Elegantiarum" of Szeged. He was a beautifully balanced, harmonious soul. When challenged by heart disease- due to his exaggerated convivial lifestyle. I was grieved for him. He just smiled and said: 'Béla- I had fun, and now I pay. This is natural'.*

*His brother, Dr. Joseph Taschler criminal district judge, who had died in the Great War. He was also a very interesting personality. Despite their father coming to Szeged in the Bach era as a police officer, the whole family became thoroughly Hungarian. His sons could not have been more Hungarian if Arpad was their father's ancestor.*

*He spoke the language of the people, like István (Stephen) Tömörkény-who himself was originally named Steingasser.*

*One of the characteristics of Joseph's judgements was that very few appealed, such was the trust that people had in him.*

*As a former court clerk, I remember one event vividly: A Szeged farmer was accused of theft and he put up a devious defense line. Joseph listened and listened and then said: "Not a single word of this is true because it was you who stole... And if I believed everything you said I would have to include maybe even a wheelbarrow. But you know what? I will sentence you for three days and the holy God in high heaven will accept this judgment. " The defendant said, " No, no, you're right respected judge-it was indeed stolen. But can I be interned only after Pentecost? I have been asked to be a groomsman."*

*He was a big prankster, but never hurtful. On one occasion, when the chaplain was at our table Joseph spoke about his experiences in Rome: visiting the Vatican gardens when suddenly he heard someone call: Joe! ..He looked around but saw no one. Then again and then a third time, he heard the cry. Looking up to the second floor, he saw Pius- the Pope. Joseph knew him from his time as chaplain in the Bácska. Pius invited him up, brought a bumzert (a liter of wine and soda) and they started drinking spritzers.*

*Then Pius asked: "Joe, can you still bowl?" He took him to the garden, which was full of beautiful marble skittles, where the Cardinals were in charge of picking them up. Pius handed him the ball-Joseph knocked down five. Pius got three. Then Joseph got seven,*

***Pius five and then nine. Pius has a zero. He throws a wild one and swore." I've even forgotten how to bowl while here at the Vatican"***

***The chaplain, who seemed to believe everything, said he doubted the Holy Father would say such things..... it was only that Joe was a wild Hungarian and he didn't even know one word in German.***

***At all patriotic celebrations he took part with 'kuruc' (anti Habsburg rebels) gusto and beautifully recited patriotic poems.***

***The Taschler brothers' nephew was my friend Gyula Wagner, process engineer. From head to toe, a correct Hungarian man, he was close to the whole family.***

***When Béla my son won in 1937 a scholarship from the Berlin Collegium Hungarica, it meant that I had to dig deep in my purse, because the scholarship covered only the most necessary expenses.***



**Author's Scholarship to College Hungaricum Berlin**

***Since at that time my law firm was still very much feeling the effects of the economic crisis, I went to the Szeged Csongrád Savings Fund, of which I was a shareholder, intending to raise the necessary funds through the sale of some shares.***

***At the bank I met my friend Gyula Wagner, to whom I explained my business. Then, despite my protestations, he immediately offered the amount in question and insisted that I accept. He refuted my objections, saying that he was the heir to Endre (Andrew)***

*Taschler and that "Grandfather", as he was known in Szeged, was my son Béla's godfather- and so it was a natural obligation to fulfil. He did this in such a gentlemanly way that I could not refuse.*

*Amongst our friends in the post-war years was Dr. József (Joseph) Boros, who was without property but earned his living from his engineering knowledge. He was a brilliant and famous surgeon- a genius- whom the Jewish doctors affectionately called one of their own. In addition, he was a good-natured man who joked that the best results came when he was in a good mood ...*

*He had a wide-ranging literary knowledge; his favorite reading was Cyrano de Bergerac in Hungarian translation. He was a rowing fanatic, and we rowed together often.*

*Tragically, it was at Endre (Andrew) Taschler's funeral, where I gave the eulogy, that Josef Boros came to me and squeezed my hand, and-perhaps jokingly-asked that if he died, I would give the eulogy for him too.*

*Just two weeks after Endre Taschler's funeral, to my greatest astonishment, Josef Boros died on Whit (Pentecost) Monday, 1925. He was a victim of a plane crash. And indeed I gave him his eulogy- but my heart was broken.*

*Almost the entire city accompanied his body to the cemetery, and grateful patients outside the hospital erected a memorial portrait of him.*

*Dr. Josef (Joseph) Szakáts was a lawyer and a friend from younger days. In those early years, we had fun together and endured hard financial times side by side. But all that was lost between us when, through his marriage, he achieved financial security by becoming co-counsel to the Pallavicini family.*

*Material wealth seemed to have caused him to forget his friends, and instead of becoming serious, his extravagant lifestyle almost knew no bounds. Amongst friends, we described his financial position as if he were pushing a wheelbarrow of gold-money he spent on women, cards, drink, and truly threw out the window.*

*He lost his wife early and had two daughters, Magda and Kata, who were much neglected. It was common knowledge in the town that he had a relationship with the maid and let her be the mother of his children.*

*Eventually, Margrave Pallavicini found his lifestyle inappropriate, and he lost his lucrative position. He served as a Member of Parliament for a period, but was now financially ruined and spent his final years in a small room in an apartment house. He*

*was probably an alcoholic and left me- and many others -with bitter memories. Dr. Péter (Peter) Polgár was also a lawyer and old pal. We were in first elementary school together with Lajos (Louis) Bába. I graduated alongside Péter. He had an extraordinary mind- his comprehension and memory were astonishing. What he read once, he never forgot. Despite these abilities he lacked self-confidence. He kept deferring his examinations, but eventually graduated with honors and was belatedly awarded a doctorate in law. When he graduated, he returned to Szeged with his doctorate, and given his talents, he was hired by a local newspaper to write the editorial page. But he had difficulties to overcome, including chronic procrastination. He would spend hours chewing his quill, writing very little, and then abandon everything to go to a cafe or bar. The editors, desperate for the editorial, would send a journalist with dictation skills to the café. His circle of friends would raise a topic, and Peter would immediately launch into a passionate speech. The reporter would write down everything, and the next day, a valuable and meaningful editorial would appear in the journal- dictated by Peter Polgár. At the Casino, we were always surrounded with university professors, who, in Peter's company, would not dare to open their mouths. His opinion was highly respected, and he was invited to the Friends of the University to give lectures on various topics. Peter accepted this offer and, without any preparation, delivered impromptu premier treatises. Later, he was invited by the University Council to choose whichever academic department he preferred so they could name him as a lecturer. The condition that was that he writes a one-hundred-page study by autumn. This study was abandoned, even though he was in great need of a regular income. His companion in the same law practice was Dr. Pál (Paul) Bokor, but he too produced little income. Bokor maintained the practice mostly for appearances, as he was a wealthy man. Peter essentially lived rent-free in his pensioner sister's apartment. He spent his days in cafes, and his consumption was usually paid by his circle of friends. He scoured the newspapers, wrote political articles and smoked 70 cigarettes a day. In the end it was lung cancer-and death... Peter's partner Dr. Paul Bokor, was a good warm-hearted friend. I stayed in touch with him even after the loss of the Second World War. He died in exile. He went abroad*

*because he was a very active leader in the ABC, the anti-Bolshevik Committee in Szeged. In the First World War, he was a private, but after being awarded valiant medals, he was appointed as a lieutenant and was discharged as an officer.*

*Dániel (Daniel) Pálffy, a good friend of mine, was the son of an iron foundry craftsman. He didn't pursue formal studies but went to work as a laborer in his father's workshop and later completed three years military service. In contrast his brother Dr. Joseph Pálffy later became mayor of our great city.*

*He was a very clever man, self-taught, and eventually formed a small iron foundry and machine shop. Over time, he established a large factory from which he earned a respectable income. He had a passion for hosting-often entertaining 8-10 guests at his table- which eventually caused him financial pressure. He was a gourmet cook, famous for serving halpaprikás (fish stew) to 20-30 guests.*

*He not only ensured his guests were well fed, but he himself could eat an incredible amount. For example, one time he ate a pack of 100 carp fillets- known to absorb a lot of fat during cooking. I clapped my hands in astonishment and asked how he could manage it. He Brought out another hundred pieces, saying only then would he be satisfied.*

*Coupled with the apatite, he had tremendous muscular power. On one occasion, to win a bet, he broke off a marble piece with his bare hands while sitting at the Kass cafe round marble table. Another time, when two ruffians attacked him at night behind the town hall, he grabbed their heads and knocked them together until they passed out- then carried them to the police station.*

*He was the president of the industry body and took an active part in public life, eventually serving as Member of Parliament and the Secretary of State for Trade. This was the career he fashioned- from simple blue color worker to Secretary of State.*

*He had a beautiful díszmagyar (traditional Hungarian) costume and all his furniture consisted of massive pieces that symbolized his individuality. From the first moment of our acquaintance, I became friends with him. He was my best man at my wedding and remained my friend until gastric cancer took him in 1926. I gave the eulogy at his funeral....*

*I have fond memories of Gyurka (George) Sirchich, my son Béla's confirmation sponsor. In appearance he was like the Trenčín rock of the region he came from (now in*

*Slovakia). In spirit, he had immense treasures, -though he gave the impression of austerity, he was truly friendly and understanding.*

*He came from a very well-respected Highland family, with a lineage traceable to Árpád. His ancestors included many national public dignitaries. He came to Szeged as royal Attorney General and married Emilia Fabiny, daughter of the then Court of Appeal president. He was later appointed as a notary, first in Bácska, and then returned to Szeged.*

*Their marriage was tragic, and they divorced - I was the lawyer in what proved to be a very difficult and problematic process. Later, his ex-wife was sent to a mental institution. However, my friend Gyurka (George), though not required to do so, agreed to cover the costs.*

*On his deathbed, of all his friends he wished to see me only. And again, I had another good friend to farewell-and weep over his coffin.*

*My friend Elemér Harsányi was a strapping man-full of character and individuality. He found it difficult to make friends, but once he knew someone, he valued them deeply. He worked as Royal Deputy Attorney General in Szeged and retired at the age of 53.*

*The history of his retirement was very interesting and very typical of him. During World War I, Szeged saw a surge in lawsuits and criminal trials related to army transports. After the war, the government eased these cases, and the Minister of Justice summoned the documents, which were then stalled.*

*Our friend Harsusz, as we called him for short, was extremely annoyed by this, because he considered the procedure unfair. When the Minister of Justice ordered him to submit a case that was ongoing at the Szeged prosecutor's office, he flatly refused.*

*Naturally, this led to a conflict between him and the minister. The Minister wanted him removed from service and asked him to lodge an application to the judicial appointments board to continue in his position. Our friend refused this request as well. Whereupon, he was asked to put in a request for retirement. He complied.*

*At our request, Pál (Paul) Teleki's became involved, asking the justice minister to desist from forcing Harsányi's retirement. The minister promised to do so. Still when he lost his position in the Parliament his final act was to sign Elemér Harsányi's retirement papers.*

*From then on, for the next twenty years until his death, he lived modestly on a monthly pension of 8-900 pengő (Hungarian dollars). He was an unassuming bachelor who*

*lived in a furnished room and was unable to spend his monthly income. He lived by the principle that he did not want to take any surplus to the next month. On the last day of the month, he would spend the residue on champagne with friends.*

*From top to bottom he was a gallant man and I have often enjoyed his hospitality. Many times, I tried to reciprocate his kindness. On the occasion of my daughter Kata's graduation from high school, I invited him for a family dinner. The Casino's restaurant served a good meal, and we enjoyed ourselves. But when I wanted to pay, it turned out that Harsusz had already beaten me to it. As the maître d' said, "Mr. Attorney General has paid for the entire bill".*

*After the Second World War, he fell upon lean times. The pension he received was not enough for food, let alone wood for heating. I understand that he caught an awful cold in the winter of 1946, which resulted in pneumonia and he died aged 75.*

*I will never forget his memory and still think of him with the greatest affection.*

*My friend Béla Olasz came from Nagyvárad (Oradea Romania) and I know that he arrived in Szeged in 1928. In Oradea, he had a house and vineyard, and his law firm employed two associates and a large auxiliary staff. After the Romanian occupation, his practice was ruined. He left his hometown and assets behind and moved to Szeged at the age of about fifty.*

*Of course, due to his lack of familiarity with the district, his new practice produced only just enough income to live on.*

*He and his wife lived an unhappy married life. I conducted the divorce. Naturally, I did not ask for fees for my work, and he surprised us with a gift of a radio, which made my children Béla and Kata, very happy.*

*My brother-in-law, Falcione Kálmán, also loved Béla Olasz and he was often a guest in their home.*

*When Hungary regained Nagyvárad in 1920 I asked Eugene Lutilszky presidential chief of the Department of Justice, to help Béla Olasz. The Justice Minister appointed him as council president of Nagyvárad. It was the happiest moment of his life.*

*Unfortunately, this happy time only lasted for two years. When Oradea was handed back to Romania, they dismissed him from his post, left him penniless in retirement, and did not even allow him the opportunity to return to Szeged.*

*He spent his final years in destitution, doing some office work with the Reformed Church. Occasionally, a niece in America sometimes sent a little help...*

*My friend Elemér Korpássy was, I think, known by the whole city as "Stork". From the first-year as a law student he was known by that name. He was a descendant of Bácska (Bačka Serbia) families, and in his youth was an elegant, well-mannered and talented. He was a gifted pianist and completed a university degree at the music conservatory. But as he joked, he was not fond of "Fingerübung (repetitive exercises)," and so his talent was not really developed.*

*He was very popular and frequently invited to social events for his charming manners and piano skills. His regular attendance at these gatherings led him to be accustomed to drink, and this eventually he became addicted to alcohol.*

*At first, he worked as a clerk at the courts, and it became evident that qualifying for judicial exams was a hopeless task for him. We did manage to appoint him as the city's orphan assessor.*

*He always conscientiously attended to his law practice, but his indulgence began with a daily "snack-of-wine" and his office became rustic and neglected. Eventually, his behaviour became uncomfortable for everyone due to his worsening manners.*

*He accompanied me to Italy once. He also wanted to sight-see but his passion for the drink often prevented it.*

*In Italy, I remember that one day after swimming in the sea, I hurried back to the hotel for lunch and I saw a large crowd in front of a restaurant, laughing heartily. There was Stork, downing his twelfth glass of beer.*

*In Milan he did not want to company me to the top of the Duomo di Milano to enjoy the views, saying he would wait for me. But by the time I returned to the bottom, he was nowhere to be seen.*



Duomo di Milano

*Eventually, I found him in a restaurant that sold beer from Munich. I encouraged him to take a trip to Lake Como, but he dodged the invitation. When I returned to the lodge, he was not there. However, I found him in a nearby tavern, drinking his third liter of wine.*

*The older he become, the more deeply he succumbed to drink. All his friends gradually turned away from him, uncomfortable in his company....*

*Yet, despite everything, he was a warm-hearted, good-natured man, whose eternal shame was that he lost himself. He died around 1927.*

*My brother-in-law, Captain Eugene Faragó, introduced Kálmán Shvoy to our group the "golden boys" in 1902. We did not accept him immediately, but with his suave manners soon won over the group. However, he adopted a Caesar like attitude, which came between us as. I could not always agree with him; at times the conflict subsided, but at other times was tense.*

*When the First World War broke out, he sent me some military items and frequently wrote from the front, reporting on the progress of battles and illustrating his speculations with drawings. Our relationship warmed again.*

*Then I could not understand why, when his brother, Stephen Shvoy became my commanding officer (chief of staff), he was so unfriendly to me. I had an inkling that Kálmán was behind his conduct.*

*At the end of the war, I wanted to retire. But when Kálmán returned from the front and took over the position of Chief of Defence from his brother, and he asked me to remain in my post temporarily. I agreed. However, when remuneration was due, he denied it, saying "You were not officially working."*

*I complained of this outrage to the military Chief Protection Supervisor who exclaimed, "This person is responsible for 53 million, and this amount is not material". He then paid me the amount due, and, I was discharged.*

*For a long time, our relationship remained strained. In 1923, we had a duel and I nicked his scalp. But afterwards we became friends again. For the next one and a half decades, we maintained a relatively good and friendly relationship.*

*His political appearances I observed, as I had moved away from Szeged in 1939 following my notary appointment.*

*After the Second World War, when I was in Székesfehérvár with my daughter's household, we met several times when Kálmán visited his brother, the bishop. We sat together in the city park, and he shared reports of the days issues in Szeged- which, sadly, were filled with sorrow.*

*A very good friend of mine was Professor Albert Kiss, with whom I practised fencing. Our friendship was revived in Szeged when the University resumed its operations there.*

*I highly prized Sz. Vilmos (William) Szigethy, the famous journalist of Szeged, who was known to his friends as only "Bob". We often walked together on the Szeged Széchényi Korzó (Promenade).*



**Szeged Széchenyi Korzó**

***I also remember Pali (Paul) Lehel, attorney; General Vilmos (William) Kircsfalussy, Bandi (Andy) Rácz, Chairman of the Bar and Dr. Pista (Steve) Magyar, our family dentist. "***

In these lines the older generation of Szeged came to life-those who walked the streets of the city during the first half of the century and who were truly characteristic of the life at that time.

I long, somehow, to be young again-to meet them once more, or at least try to relive the times as I experienced them: as a small child, a youth, an adult, a university student and then as graduate. This period, of course, spanned only a short decade, and therefore can only be remembered in a sketchy way.

Much has been written by politicians and commentators about the ideas and spirit of Szeged. Perhaps there is still a place where I might contribute-however modestly-to the development of a more open-minded attitude to the political scene of those days.

So now I will try to outline the then political structures on my canvas.

Much has been written about the ideals of Szeged in editorials by contemporaries, and after the war in 1945, indictments were drafted against some individuals, with verdicts that were often brutal. Yet politically, the spirit born from the counter-revolution was not

biased-it was, in essence, moderate. This policy reflected the national sentiment of the day. It could not have been otherwise. Hungary had lost two-thirds of its territory, and three and a half million Hungarians had come under foreign rule.

The new boundaries were not drawn based on where people lived, but rather to serve the economic and transportation interests of the successor states. Had the been drawn along ethnic lines-had Pozsony, Komárom, Kassa (Kosice), Nagyvárad (Oradea) and Arad remained Hungarian, and had Szeged's border not be drawn at Rösztke, with Subotica and Bácska (Bačka) remaining under Hungarian control -then the formation of the revisionist policy might never have occurred. Yet it did, and ultimately defined the political situation in the years to come.

It is worth noting that the revisionist policy was not significantly different between across political parties. Hungarian Jews were among the most hard-advocates for revision, and even under the communist rule of Béla Kun, they mobilized the remaining Hungarian forces against the Czechs and Romanians.

Radical elements of the counter-revolution in Szeged also advocated for social transformation. They called for land reform, the elevation of the industrial working class, and the introduction of social insurance-measures that were ahead of some Western States. The demand for religious revival was not without cause, as public morality had been deeply corrupted during the war. There was a need for a renewal in the spirit of Prohászka.



**Ottokár Prohászka Roman Catholic theologian, Bishop of Székesfehérvár 1905**

Much of the subsequent debate focused on the steps taken to solve the Jewish question. It was broadly accepted that uncontrolled Jewish immigration-enabled by Hungarian liberal spirit- had become problematic, as the country could not assimilate the ever-increasing number of migrants. In the 19th century, Jews proved to be hardworking

and talented, and as a result, they came to dominate the workforce in the professions and retail trade. Many Hungarians felt compelled to defend their own position.

The Numerus clausus (closed numbers) laws could not solve this issue. The era of revolutions was behind us, and the country needed to establish a parliamentary democracy to confront the peace imposed by Trianon. In this democracy, mutual respect among members was intended to act as a brake-alongside the non-secret ballot and the extensive powers of the head of state. Yet democracy prevailed only in a limited way. This is why people said that despite the formalities the "system" prevailed.

And this system's political form was, at the time, the ruling party. The party's name changed several times over the years, often calling itself the "United Party"-. But it was anything but united. It was a coalition that, in all circumstances, sought to maintain the dominance of high capital and large landowners. The representatives of these forces were the aristocracy, the clergy and big business-including Jewish representatives-who worked together to consolidate their positions.

Strong anti-Semitic forces were present, often behind the scenes. Their opposition was not only directed at Jewish big business but also the aristocracy and privileged landowners. There were also many who believed the country needed peaceful development and that high goals should be achieved gradually-especially the improvement of conditions for the industrial working class and the expansion of the middle class.

The church was also active within the system. In addition to religious revival, its hope was to end the current governorship as soon as possible, believing that the restoration of the House of Habsburg offered the best path to national security and ecclesiastical stability. These political nuances were evident in Szeged as well, and each direction had its supporters within the ruling party. Szeged, of course, was not involved in high politics, but it participated during the occasional mixed parliamentary elections held for a few weeks at a time.

There was no doubt that a conservative wing existed in city politics. Károly (Charles) Aigner, the sheriff, and József (Joseph) Pálffy, mayor, could be characterised as devotees of the gradual, slow-rebuilding theory.

The church also made its presence felt. Bishop Gyula Glattfelder worked closely with his priests to ensure that the Church's influence remained strong in the city's affairs. The Emericana (Student Association of Catholic and Monarchist leaning.) sought to expand its influence by creating and developing women's branches.

Within the ruling forces, another characteristic Szeged group emerged-those being from the "rural south". The Bánát and Bácska regions were always considered Szeged's country cousins, and families from these areas regularly travelled to Szeged for both work and leisure.

The Trianon treaty mutilated the country, and many Hungarians were forced to leave their homes. A significant number of army officers and public officials found refuge in Szeged. These newcomers were warmly welcomed by the city as adopted sons, and soon they were assimilated into the civic life of Szeged.

Naturally, they held together, helped each other, and gained serious influence in urban politics. The grassroots of Szeged certainly noticed this development, and so a certain antipathy arose between the old and the new. This refugee group had a good relationship with the merchant, industrialist and civic elements, and they were proponents of social development.

But there was another layer-these were the very grassroots of Szeged, who entered the political arena to preserve the old world, the old homestead lifestyle. They were essentially conservative. My father called them the "sandy belly buttons."

Outside the government, there was a strong and outspoken opposition. Szeged had secret voting, and thus a more effective democracy. The Jews in Szeged naturally followed the direction of political events and consistently ensured Károly (Charles) Rassay held the mandate for the parliamentary seat.

The industrial working class supported social democracy, but around the mid-1930s, they left the old working-class party and joined the larger emerging national-socialist forces.

My father was an active participant in the city's domestic struggles for more than a decade, and I trust that it is not immodest for me to try to draw a portrait of his political life. As a loving son, I am likely to be biased, but I have tried to separate the father from the public figure I will now describe.

My father entered politics in 1919. Later he became acquainted with several leading figures of the revolution and befriended Pál (Paul) Teleki. Their relationship endured until the tragic death of that Hungarian prime minister. There was a bond between them that went deeper than politics. I have seen letters addressed to my father that expressed Teleki's full confidence in him. I believe their friendship was rooted in shared thinking.

Pál Teleki was regarded as a moderate politician, but he stood firmly by the principles he represented. Various political factions tried to woo him, but he never truly fitted in any of them.

Such was my father.

He was very proud of his family origin, but he never saw the nobility as a matter of class. To him, it was a sign of the family's connection with the ancient Hungarian land. The martyr spirit of his ancestors echoed the Kuruc tradition, yet the temperament of Deák Ferenc was recognizable in his political style.

He was an advocate of land reform. He deeply appreciated the fact that the Hungarian peasantry was the most valuable segment of the nation, biologically and culturally, and essential to its survival. He understood how difficult reform would be without adequate compensation, and this not a theoretical concern- he had been actively involved as a lawyer in land disputes around Szeged.

He was not biased on the Jewish question. He had many Jewish friends and therefore was regarded as a liberal by the right-wing. Yet he did not conceal his views and spoke with courage about what he saw as the disproportionate influence of Jews in certain sectors of society.

He never participated in national politics. His service was devoted to the development of his beloved city. He worked to raise the standard of the Szeged theatre and helped organize the city's Skating Club.

In the early 1930s, he was regarded as a member of the prestigious list of elders. However, he did not belong to any particular faction and could be described as "grey eminence". He was not a pushy person. He never spoke in his interest, and it is understandable that the public often thought that he should be the Lord Lieutenant of the city. But this never came to pass -he never sought favours from anyone.

He retired from active political life in 1936 for financial reasons. Later, he turned to his longtime friend of Pál Teleki to support his application for a notary appointment. Teleki's influence prevailed, and on 22 December 1938, was appointed to Balassagyarmat.

It was painful for him to leave his hometown, but he had to accept the solution offered

In 1940, there was an opportunity to return to Szeged. Pál Teleki invited him to take up the position of sheriff of Szeged. It was difficult to refuse this lucrative offer, but he

chose not to give up his notary post. As noted in his memoirs, Paul Teleki had a deep understanding of his decision.

His friends from Szeged naturally gave him a warm farewell when moving to Balassagyarmat and Vilmos (William) Sz. Szigethy wrote a farewell poem which he read at his farewell dinner in the Szeged Casino.

In memory of my father, I now attach this poem.

To Béla Török

• January 13<sup>th</sup> 1939 –

*I sing no ode—for in our quiet circle,  
We never start with pomp or loud acclaim.  
Yet old, good friends deserve more than silence,  
Not just a curt farewell without a name.  
We cherish even the rosebush that once  
Bloomed under sunlight's gentle, golden touch.  
And when its years are spent in faithful service,  
Even the old boot earns its honored clutch.  
But you are no retiree—you begin again,  
Breaking new ground from the very start.  
Though no parcel was granted on native soil,  
Here, the Magyar slowly fades apart.  
For what they call "deep plowing" now prefers  
Elbows, not ploughshares, to till the land.  
Your unblemished elbow, pure and untouched,  
Never appeared on the thick-skinned list—  
Thus you preserved your forebears' noble strand.  
We dwindle fast. A long line has departed,  
Those bound to us by warmth and soul's embrace.  
As if fate held treasures by the thousands,  
It squandered them with reckless, lavish grace.  
You know this best—for you kept record  
Of all that was upright, noble, and true.  
And if you no longer speak our final word,*

*Then dying itself loses meaning too.  
Cities rise from stone, outwardly enduring,  
But time will cover all with drifting sand.  
Yet something survives the march of ages—  
Unyielding traces of spirit remain,  
To inspire descendants with unseen hand.  
We too have crumbling bricks—but how many  
Of our embroideries are loose and thin?  
Yet what you wield to triumph over all  
Is thought, and character, and selfhood's thread—  
A timeless fiber, a vein of adamant within.  
We dwindle fast, and replacements come grudging.  
Our hourglass nears the twilight of its sand.  
But even if a new world dawns tomorrow,  
Something of you will stay: your youth unmanned,  
Those Maytime dusks, the dew that softly scattered,  
And summer's wonder, smiling like a child.  
If the present dries up all that once mattered,  
And reality kills the dreams we styled—  
Then let this be your resting place, your balm,  
For nothing offers better travel fare.  
Walk in sunlight, even in winter's season.  
And if the shadow of gloom should dare,  
Just flick the soul's electric switch to gleam—  
And rainbow-memories will pierce the misted air.*

*Sz Vilmos (William) Szigethy*

## **I am an Armored Car driver – My volunteer years**

I arrived at the Budapest Western (Nyugati) Railway Station on 5th October 1936, and the 'Váci út' tram took me along the Hungária circuit to the artillery and armored cavalry barracks. The large barrack yard was already full of rookies in green soldier uniforms, and I soon found the gathering place for the recruits of the reconnaissance battalion.

After a two-hour wait, we were directed to a nearby location -only to wait again. Later, I learned that waiting was one of the most important military occupations. Meanwhile, our future officers began arriving, and we were informed that we were going to face difficult times. We started to get to know each other and meet our future comrades, and thus the first day passed.

The next day it turned out that the organisation of the volunteer battalion would be postponed for a few days, and we were allowed to leave the barracks in civilian clothes. This, of course, delighted us. The local Pest residents suddenly disappeared, and I myself did not know what to do with my free time.

Then I read and heard that Gyula Gömbös, Hungary's prime minister, had died in a nursing home near Munich. As half a soldier and half a civilian I was able to attend the funeral of the deceased leader.

I sincerely mourned Gyula Gömbös, because in him we lost a good Hungarian-a great military man who understood the lessons of Hungarian history. When, in parliament he stated that Hungary's political foundation should be the Berlin-Rome axis, the major press outlets derisively branded the idea as ridiculous, especially since Rome had adopted cautious stance toward German forces.

The fascist "revolution" in Italy was, in fact, quite restrained. Its corporate involvement was centered on constitutional and formal mechanisms to address the doctrine of class struggle, and it did not represent a full embrace of socialist principles.

In Hungary, the Duce was very greatly respected at the time, as he was the first statesman to raise his voice against the injustices of Trianon. He was also honored-for the Lateran Treaty, which satisfactorily resolved the relationship between the state and the Church in Italy- a development appreciated in Hungarian ecclesiastical circles.

In contrast, Berlin was directed by the Protestant Prussian intellectual circles, which viewed with suspicion the old struggles between Pope and the Emperor.

I, however, based on my historical studies, regarded this imaginary axis as representing a Central European unity. I had always felt that in Hungarian history, only when there was a strong, unified Central Europe did Hungary have the opportunity to enjoy peaceful development.

I hoped that perhaps in my lifetime this force might be reborn, and that Hungary would once again have the opportunity to renew itself -both territorially and socially.

I did not foresee the tragedy that would unfold during the Second World War. And so, I sincerely mourned Gyula Gömbös- the man, the politician, and the good Hungarian.



**Gyula Gömbös Prime Minister of Hungary from 1932**

Then these interim days of half-civil, half-military life came to an end, and our volunteer battalion was formally established.

Armored warfare in those years was still evolving and, at least on paper, consisted of three branches. The armored car units-later part of the reconnaissance battalion-formed the mobile front line and the fighting corps. Tank personnel who were tasked with adding weight and strength to break through enemy positions. There was also a separate armored train corps, responsible for protecting supply lines and occasionally supporting unexpected reconnaissance advances.

Our volunteer battalion was already designated to one of these three groups and after completing officer school, we were dispersed accordingly. I was assigned to the tank division and eventually the Reconnaissance Battalion.

But for now, the basic training had just begun. After six weeks of specialised instruction, we left our civilian lives behind and became soldiers.

Soon we met our officers, and we became acutely aware of their presence-particularly Imre Szabó, our section leader, who exercised the most authority over us. We survived the first weeks of "jokes" as well. They asked who had university degrees, and

those who were "Doctors" were ordered to clean the toilets. Later, this task was assigned to two regular privates, but we learned quickly that we had to start from the bottom.

We also had to keep our boots in parade condition. The platoon leader was never satisfied and always found dust or a dull shine. Most of us took this in stride, but I remember my friend Thomas Simák-son of a landowner- who polished his gear for hours. When he received no praise, he burst into tears. Seeing this, the sergeant changed his approach, and Thomas gradually overcame those first hard lessons.

The sergeant major, a Mr. Péntzes, was one who used hard methods to break the rebellious citizens into disciplined soldiers.

One day, tired and cheerfully singing while enduring the "alert" command- which meant jumping into roadside mud- we returned to our barracks. We looked forward to lying down on our beds. But when we entered our room, housing approximately 30 soldiers, we were stunned to find all the furnishings -beds, straw bags, blankets and emptied footlockers-piled together in the centre of the room.

We didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But what else could we do? We began sorting through our belongings and reassembling our beds.

Our platoon commanders became aware of this incident. Zoltán Damien and Zoltán Muhoray, were two young lieutenants who took over the leadership of our regiment, were reportedly unhappy with how Sergeant Major Péntzes had treated us. They felt he had exceeded his authority in disciplining us this way.

Such incidents occurred in other forms. Imre Szabó was particularly fond of harsh discipline. While dressed in marching fatigues, we were ordered to practice gun drills in a heated room. The sweat poured off us. I myself was once on the point of throwing my rifle at him. But he noticed my flashing eye and, proving to be a good psychologist, suddenly declared that I was the only one doing the drill correctly and he exempted me from the next round I couldn't help but laugh.

That's how the tough weeks passed. Regular soldiers were warned by the service sergeant that sloppy behaviour would result in reassignment to our volunteer unit.

Gradually, I came to understand that this tough basic training had its purpose-both immediate and long term. Later I saw that the American forces employed even more drastic methods. Eventually, I came to believe that what we experienced was a necessary evil. It's the only way for a soldier to reach the mental state where commands are executed without

hesitation. If an army reaches a point where soldiers begin to question whether it is meaningful to sacrifice their lives, it ceases to be a military unit-and the battle is lost.

I still remember those who were close comrades in arms. They included Fric Heuthaler, known in sports as Helmeczi, a famous member of the hockey team. A strong, athletic man who carried himself well in public, he was the sort who- if no one was watching- would not extend himself. He was a good comrade and well respected among the boys. After curfew, some began to complain in the dark about missing female company. Fric waved them off saying that in their exhausted state, they'd be incapable of starting anything with a woman. We all laughed.

Ernö Bartók, a boxer, became a good friend. He claimed women liked him and looked down on those of us who didn't chase after girls. Jóska (Joseph) Keszey and I were on good terms, and I later visited him and his family often at their well-known restaurants.

I also remember Gyula Pálhidi fondly and remained in contact with him for some time. Zoli Török, the parliamentary stenographer, was my friend and I competed with him in officer school. I remember Zoltán Neumann-his family had a business near the Museum, and after many years, I met him in Sydney.

I handled the difficulties of the training well. I was not athletic or a strong, but my willpower helped me overcome my weaknesses. In the cross-country races, the leaders were always Ernő Bartók and Fric Heuthaler. I lagged 2-5 meters behind, keeping pace with one or two "champions". In truth, most others fell away and tried to finish in a group..

I came love military life. I had no friends in Budapest and was basically alone. Frankly I didn't have money for going out and was limited to the occasional theater performance. Of course, my mother often hosted an afternoon snack.

Later, my cousin Laci tried to support me and got me a ticket to the MAC dance. He bought the ticket and encouraged me to get acquainted. I was shy at the time and afraid that my advances would be rejected-and that I did not want to endure.

My relationship with Ica weighed heavily on my Budapest life. We loved each other deeply, and our bond had grown to the point where the next natural was to ask for her hand. However, when viewed through realistic eyes, this was not a well-judged decision. Around this time, I received official papers regarding my scholarship application to the Berlin Collegium Hungaricum, which was warmly supported by Professor Stephen Csekey. It was to be expected that after my year of volunteering, I would go to Berlin for a year.

Ica had commenced her second year of college. We wrote letters to each other diligently, and it was clear that she was deeply attached to me and loyal. But I felt that I had to consider the situation carefully. It would have been irresponsible to tie her down when our paths were so uncertain and as she still had three more years of study ahead.

So, one night after completing my service in the barracks, I wrote a "breaking-up" letter and I encouraged her to feel free.

Less than a year and a half later, we met again and grew close once more. After more than half a century of happy marriage, she often reminded me of my transgression by reading that letter aloud-despite my mea culpas.

After the hard weeks of basic training, the months at officer school were easier. By then, I was no longer lagging physically but was among the front runners. This phase was not only about learning theory-we were also trained to drive the armored cars. The vehicle we used a one-and-half-ton truck, and we had to learn the basics of driving through the streets of nearby towns. These streets were not too busy but stony, snowy, and slippery.

Sergeant Major Péntzes sat beside the drivers, issuing loud commands that rattled our nerves. His constant nagging made it a miracle that we learned the secrets of gear shifting. Yet this strict authoritarian figure grew friendlier with us. After each lesson, when a new student took the wheel, we had a short rest, which we spent in a pub around the corner. We welcomed the arrival of the Sergeant Major with a good cheer, which made him contented. Those not driving enjoyed the warmth in the pub until it was their turn.

We also had guard duty, protecting various metropolitan sites. In our heavy boots, we were often exposed to heavy snow and numbing frost.

The officer's examination day arrived, and our two lieutenants couldn't decide who should be ranked first Zoli Török or me. Zoltán Muhoray arranged a run off between us. It was difficult to separate us, as we both answered all questions well. Finally, Muhoray posed a decisive question: *how can you determine what size army a country is able to support?*

Zoltán Török was unable to answer. I recalled that many sources proposed a general rule-a country's population can usually support an army of about 10 per cent. I had read this many times and so I gave the correct answer and was awarded first position in the ranking.

We completed our driving exams, and the volunteers were separated to join their respected units. I reported to the First Reconnaissance armored car squadron.

Of course, at that time, we did not actually have armored vehicles. Operating under the alias of the Police Freshman's School, we had two Armstrong armored vehicles. These were officially permitted only for maintaining internal order, as per post-First World War regulations.

However, we trained with ATRAPs-vehicles built on a truck frames, covered with light steel plates to resemble armored cars. A turret was built in the middle, and a machine gun symbolized the cannon. Our training was conducted in these wagons.

As volunteers, who passed the officer examinations, we were given phase-command duties. This meant that each officer candidate was allotted three vehicles.

There was no shortage of military spirit in our group. One of the volunteers, after the Kiev encirclement in the Second World War, captured more than a thousand Russian troops and was decorated for his deeds; That man, László Merész, later migrated to Australia and died here.

In the summer period we were moved to Lajosmizse, which was near a military training ground. Here we were introduced to the grenade. During my time there, a serious accident occurred when a grenade throwing instructor officer, Lieutenant Béla Hadházi, had a grenade explode in his hand, taking his right hand. I remember that when he was brought in on a stretcher, he, with a sad smile said to his fellow officers: "Guys, I can no longer go and fight in a war" ... But I know that after healing, he continued to serve and was able to use his wooden hand on a modified gearstick and continue to drive armored vehicles.

We had two three weeks holidays each year, and I spent this at Bábolna with my sister Kata's household. I got along very well with my brother-in-law Béla. I often went with him on his municipal medical rounds, and he let me drive their DKW and later Fiat cars, so I was able to increase my driving skills. I remember it was strange to drive a small passenger car after the military trucks

Otherwise, I was quite busy at Lajosmizse, because in my free time I was asked by lieutenants Zoltan Damián and Zoltan Muhoray to assist with a translation as they prepared for the General Staff course entrance exam. My task was to translate the German "Wehrmacht" military journal on armored forces into Hungarian.

By then, my military training reached the theoretical basics for the deployment of German armored forces. It was interesting to read about the training problems of air and

armoured forces-principles that were still being debated in the world's literature on a case-by-case basis as raised by various writers.

Then came the so-called 1937 Tisza military exercise in which our troops also took part. Not with the ATRAP's but the real thing- by then they had acquired the Fiat Ansaldo small two person tanks.



**Ansaldo-Fiat L35/Lf**

Unexpectedly, I was sent with a group from Lajosmizsér along the coast road leading to the Tisza. The journey went well, technically the tanks travelled well. It was not comfortable in these vehicles. The dust and noise were almost unbearable, but typical of young people, we handled it. I myself, as second in charge on the long road, had no problems and I managed to sleep for two hours.

The essence of the exercises was that the attacking enemies from beyond the Tisza River had to be held at the Tisza bend, and a counter attack organised later. I was moved me from the armoured car and assigned to Zoltán Muhoray, who was serving as an umpire.

There were two episodes in this war exercise that I want to capture.

One was that, according to the umpires, the attacking Ansaldo Fiat tank unit broke through the opponent's positions, but it was not easy to bring the "battle" to an-end. The opponent was tough, and their infantry corps-finding pumpkins, fruit, and a variety of clods in the field-used them against the tanks and refused to surrender.

Zoltán Muhoray designated a small group of soldiers as prisoners of war, but a good-blooded Hungarian soldier confronted him and, beside himself, shouted that he was not a prisoner and wanted to continue to "fight". Zoltán Muhoray clearly felt that his conduct was an outstanding manifestation of his fighting spirit and did everything to calm him down, which included almost pleading while threatening him to carry out his orders. I then knew that the Hungarian troops, if well-led, were capable of high performance.

The military exercise was over, and we returned to Budapest. The time was approaching for the disarmament of the cadets, and we received the title and rank of sergeant. Most of the boys were joyfully waiting the date of decommissioning. I was unsure of the future. I met my father, who has made no secret of the fact that he wanted me to stand on my own feet now, because his law firm was still performing very poorly. He suggested that I choose between the army legal administration and a career in the gendarmerie. A law degree would help in both and ensure rapid progress. Whichever career I choose would result in a short few month to a really nice starting salary and I would be able to stand on my own feet.

My father was informed that my request for fellowship in Berlin was not progressing favorably, as there were quite a lot of candidates, and it was not impossible that my application will only be dealt with in the next year.

As much as I loved the military life, I wanted to be a civilian, and then had the idea that by signing for an additional period, the decision of my career would be postponed. In my situation it seemed beneficial. All other subsequent military service obligations would take into account the additional service and it was expected that after a few months I would receive a warrant officer appointment. If the Berlin scholarship came through it would not be an obstacle to resign and follow my original goals.

They accepted my application, and instead of disarmament, I continued my service as a cadet-sergeant.

Our troops were already in the Arena Train Barracks, and I was assigned to the armoured reconnaissance battalion, and became a deputy commander.

Similarly, my friend Gyuszi Pálhidi made the same decision, and we chose to join forces to organise our new military life. Together, we rented a furnished double room not far from the barracks. The room was not too costly and did consume a large part of our sergeant's wage. The arrangement was not considered final- it was uncomfortable, as private life was limited- but at the time, we were not well-off young people, and this is how we all began.

I was very pleased with my scheduled barracks. The new recruits had arrived, and I was now an officer candidate responsible for shaping these citizens into soldiers. My direct commander was Lt. Paul Topay, with whom I formed a very warm friendship. During training, when the immediate work was in the officers' hands, we would often walk together and discuss the situation of the country. During these years, reform ideas began to

be implemented, and the highly qualified Pali (Paul) Topay genuinely hoped for the rebuilding of the country. At this time, the revisionist views of the coming years cast their shadows, and he too waited for the day of restitution in sincere faith ...He fulfilled his duty later, and I mourned deeply when he died on the shores of the River Don.

Several times, I served as the barracks duty officer and "tortured" the new volunteers-smiling inwardly -when I inspected their dormitory and, despite all their efforts, I found errors...

However, barely six weeks had passed and I received a telegram from the Minister of Culture awarding me a fellowship in Berlin and asked me to go to Berlin as soon as possible and present myself to the board of directors of the Collegium Hungaricum.

A separate letter also stated that Béla Udvarhelyi, secretary of the college, resided in Budapest and would organise the departure of the New Year's group of students. Naturally, I welcomed this assistance, got in touch with him, and arranged my planned travel for early November.

I bid farewell to my superiors, who were not pleased about the sudden and, to them unexpected resignation. However, they understood the situation and did not place obstacles in my way.

For me, this last year was very enjoyable. I definitely liked the military life. Many times, I returned early from my free time to the barracks and, at nine o'clock in the evening, sat at the windowsill listening to the curfew...

I was very proud of my weapon. In those years, the armoured forces -alongside the Air Force-were the units that most attracted the interest of young people, and their reputation enhanced team spirit. Previously, this had been true of the hussar cavalry knights, and characteristically, the Germans called them "black hussars" based on the dark uniforms of these units.

Enthusiastically we sang the armoured forces' marching song:

***I'm an Armoured Car soldier, my good humour accompanies me in every storm,  
Enemies I do not know...***



**Botond Truck, 1940  
Transylvania**

## Berlin 1937-1938

In early November 1937, we began our journey. The Berlin fast train departed from the Eastern Railway Platform, where that year's Collegium Hungaricum scholarship students and their relatives had gathered. My mother accompanied me to the station. On the platform, I met István (Stephen) Arató, who was also going to study legal subjects in Berlin. As I recall, was not accompanied by anyone- my mother and I were his company. We both listened to her maternal cautions and good wishes for our trip, and we waved from the train window as it pulled out of the station.

We soon reached the Hungarian border, and at the Czech border, new train personnel boarded. As we were travelling directly to Berlin, there was no customs inspections. The train raced through the old Hungarian Upper regions, and Pista and I spoke about the past. He told me that he intended to study private international law in Berlin, with a focus on the International Law (Völkerrecht) Library located in the old imperial Schloss building. I was unfamiliar with the conditions in Berlin and listened to him with interest.

At the German border, the customs inspection was only formal. The German train operator politely checked our tickets.

After two German stations, when German passengers had joined our cabin, the door suddenly opened and two men in black SS uniforms entered, greeting us with the infamous "Heil Hitler" salute. Our cabin had been filled with quiet but lively conversation-now, silence fell. The SS officers requested our supporting documents, and we wordlessly handed over our passports and papers. There was no issue; our documents were returned without question. But the silence in the cabin made it clear: we had arrived in a totalitarian state.

Later, of course, we became used to this new reality. We also realised that behind the uniforms there were individuals who were often were very helpful. It turned out that many Germans were aware of their rights, and I witnessed several occasions where citizens challenged officials on their legitimacy. I even saw a scene where the party official was explaining his authority to an objecting citizen.

In Berlin, we disembarked at Friedrichstrasse Station. Our luggage was taken by porters, as organized by Béla Udvarhelyi, while we walked in groups towards the college at No 2 Dorotheenstrasse. After two or three minutes, we arrived.

The college, before being purchased by the Hungarian state, had been the palace of a German banker. It was an imposing two-story neo-classical building, with a third floor added to accommodate the scholarship students.

On the ground floor were the offices and the doorman's booth. Herr Schaeffer, the porter, was an old Berlin resident-from him we first heard the Berlin dialect. From the entrance hall, a wide, showy marble staircase led to the first floor. This level housed a ballroom, dining room, and living room furnished with comfortable leather armchairs. The atmosphere was almost casino-like, with large and spacious rooms.

The accommodation was first-rate for scholarship students. Everyone had their own room- not overly spacious, but sufficient for personal belongings. Each floor had a generous number of restrooms, and the bathrooms with showers were modern. There were enough facilities that there was no queue, even in the mornings.

The dining room was managed by a German lady who also cleaned our rooms. The food was adequate, although the German kitchen did not impress us spoiled Hungarians. The cleaning women often complained about the heavy cigarette smokers among the young men, who regularly scattered ashes throughout the rooms.

The director of the college was kisbarnaki Gyula (George) Farkas. Nearby, on the banks of the Spree River as viewed from the Museum Insel, stood the University of Berlin's Hungarian Institute, also headed by Professor Gyula Farkas.



**Museum Island**

He was a German citizen; his wife was German, and he served on the college's board of directors. He lived in a pleasant private apartment on the ground floor of the palace.

Gyula Farkas had a joint mandate from both the Hungarian and the German authorities-a role that required diplomacy and delicacy, so as not to offend either the Hungarian or German sensitivities. Farkas was a party member and wore his party badge on official occasions. We knew, however, that as a linguist he was far removed from politics and not a supporter of the German system. In those years, party membership was considered an honour-one he had not requested but was granted in recognition of his achievements and his significant contributions to the cultural life of the University of Berlin.

The Hungarian Institute in Berlin also employed Lothar Zach, a young Prussian-German who was deepening his knowledge of the Hungarian language. He had a room in the hostel and his role was partly to help scholarship students improve their German language skills and support them in adjusting to life in Berlin.

Whether his work was effective was questionable. Unfortunately, we were too prone to speak Hungarian among ourselves, and Lothar was more inclined to improve his Hungarian than to teach us German. He visited Hungary several times to practice the language, but he complained that whenever he tried to speak to someone on the streets of Budapest, they recognized his accent and usually switched to German.

Still, we learned a great deal from him about German culture and social customs. Later, we discovered that as a young university student, he had been a supporter of the Catholic Centre Party. After the Nazi seizure of power, with no hope of significant progress in that political direction, he chose to pursue linguistic research at the Hungarian Institute.

We quickly became familiar with Berlin's public transport system. The S-Bahn and U-Bahn networks were truly ahead of their time. Even now more than fifty years later, as I write, I must point out that having experienced the American, British, French, and Japanese rail systems, these networks are still striving to catch up to Berlin's railway system as it existed before the second world war.



**1930 Railways and S-Bahn map**

We only used the railways on the weekends. For us lawyers, all the institutions that supported our work were within walking distance.

As a scholarship recipient in the field of politics, I first wanted familiarise myself with the new German geopolitical entity. This area of study was offered at the Hochschule für Politik, located almost opposite the Unter den Linden Ehrenmal, and reachable by a five-minute walk.

The institute had a spacious and busy reading library. To get acquainted with it, I began browsing the catalogs and wrote down the titles of books that piqued my interest. When I had listed eight titles, I approached one of the officers and asked if he could retrieve them for me.

Upon reading the list, the librarian responded-almost rudely- that he doubted these books were available, and then disappeared into the large library. I was unsure of what to expect. These were my first days as a foreigner in this world, and unfamiliar with the local customs, I didn't know what to do as the officer remained gone for eight to ten minutes.

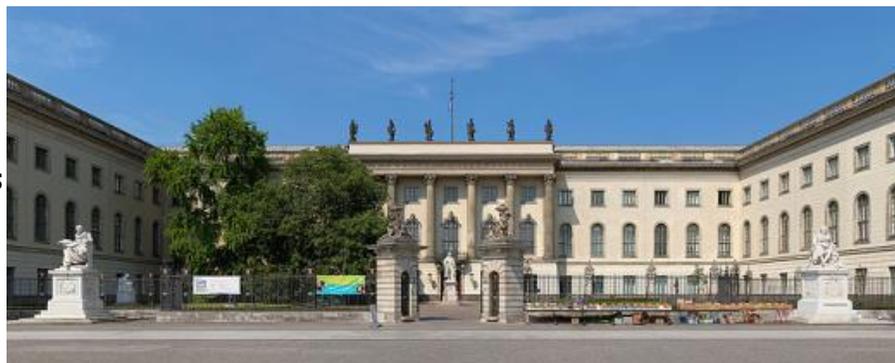
Then he reappeared, weighed down by the books I had requested, and dropped them on counter, saying simply, "These are the books you asked for".

And so, it was-all the books I had listed were there.

Later, I reflected on this scene and came to see it as a very typical example of the Prussian mentality: rigid, almost brusque, lacking diplomacy, yet dutiful and thorough. He did exactly what was required him, without waiting for thanks, and without outward friendliness. But you could count on him.

I continued visiting this library for a few weeks, but soon realised that the material it housed was heavily biased. On the recommendation of my friend Pista Arató, moved to the Völkerrecht (International Law) library at the Friedrich Wilhelm Institute. This library proved far more suitable for my research, and I became a regular visitor at the Schloss.

**The Humboldt  
University of *Berlin*  
previously known as  
Friedrich Wilhelm  
Institute**



I wanted to study in detail the subject of monarchy and republic. This topic was classified within the German Allgemeine Staatslehre framework, which was comprehensive and included works from French and English traditions.

Visitors requested books in a central hall, and the librarians placed them at the researchers' disposal in small rooms accommodating two to three people. After working in these rooms, we could leave our materials and notes overnight to continue the next day. I found this system highly satisfactory, and thus my scholarly life in Berlin became centered around the Schloss (German for palace or chateau).

The guiding principle of my planned work was that the forms of monarchy and republic gradually lose their original content over time- that is, the quality of the constitution becomes the true measure. In ancient times, the monarch was truly hegemonic-one ruler-governing by the grace of God. From this evolved the concept of constitutional monarchy. For example, in Italy, the monarchical form coexisted with the fascist party system.

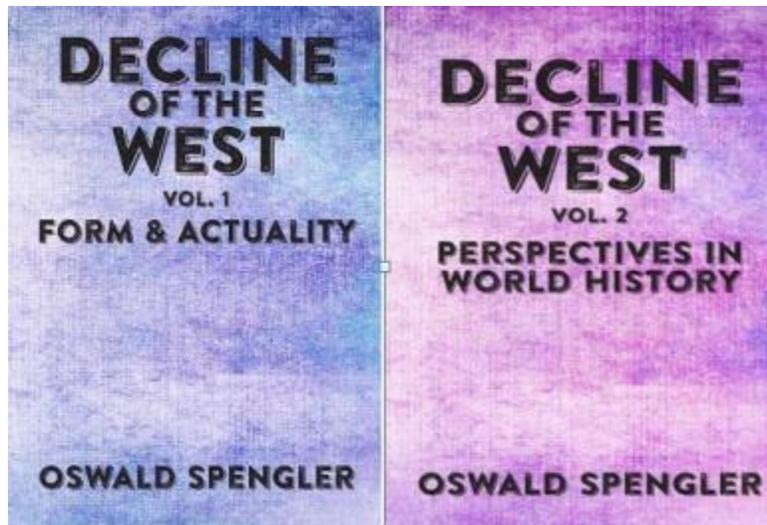
On the other hand, the republic has not always presented government by the people. The Soviet Union's version of democracy is a clear example of this contradiction.

I continued to see an element of security in the continuity of monarchy. Particularly in the Hungarian context, I understood that we Hungarians-who had so often fought against royal high handedness- still clung to the national symbol of the Holy Crown. The end of the Second World War demonstrated the transitional force of monarchy: Mussolini's reign was ended by the King under the guidance of constitutional guidance, and Japan's post war revival drew upon several thousand years of imperial continuity.

I began my first few months of scholarship work with a steady rhythm. After morning study, I returned to the dormitory with Pista for lunch around noon. Then we resumed work and we finished for the day about 2pm. We truly appreciated the relative freedom to pursue our chosen fields of research.

I took the opportunity to visit the Humboldt University for my own orientation. Almost opposite our college was the university's large reading room, and it soon became a habit for me to scan the newspapers-stretched over wooden frames- before beginning the day's work.

I had another large project. During my university years, I read about Spengler's great work: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the West)*. I knew of it through various critical interpretations, but I had not yet read the work in its original form.



### **Der Untergang des Abendlandes probes the origin and "fate" of our civilization**

It was among the first books I requested at the university library. My plan was to read a few hours each evening and gradually digest this monumental work.

To my surprise, the library officer informed me that the book was subject to indexing (**the List of Prohibited Books**) and could only be accessed if my application was approved after review.

I was referred to the head librarian, apparently a party member, who interviewed me and asked why I wanted to read the work. I explained that I was a Hungarian scholar studying the theory of the state, and that the book was essential to my research.

Without argument, he noted our discussion and granted permission for me to borrow the two heavy volumes and take them to our college. I followed through my plan, reading 20-30 pages each night. It was not easy-Spengler's writing style was complex and demanding.

However, I soon understood why this book had been placed on the index. Later, I read commentary in the press and in National Socialist literature that Spengler's pessimism was incompatible with the party's worldview of a dynamic, reborn society. The party saw itself as an organizing force behind the German people's resurgence. In contrast, Spengler-who published his work in 1917-wrote of the decline of the Western Christian civilization and predicted, even before the appearance of Stalin, Mussolini, and Hitler, that we were on the eve of the age of Caesarism.

At the time I was reading the work, this prediction seemed almost fully realised. I could see with my own eyes the emergence of the new Caesars. The more I read, the more

engrossed I became in Spengler's political philosophy, and I fell under its influence. I simply could not imagine how our civilisation-already global in reach-could ever be toppled. The analogy of the fall of the Roman Empire, with its invading barbarians, did not fit the modern world.

Eight years later, as an American prisoner of war, I read the Stars and Stripes military newspaper, which for the first time reported the deployment of the atomic bomb. In that moment I thought of Spengler.

And in the decades that followed, I began to appreciate that we mortals witness the arc of development or decline only within the narrow span of our lifetimes. Now, in the late 1990s, I believe that the Spenglerian process is still in motion. More and more, I feel that there is nothing that can stop the fate outlined in his book.

The college management also took care to build relationships for us within Berlin's academic circles, and in this respect, the German academic world was a great help. From time to time, we received invitations from Berlin professors, who usually welcomed us to their homes in the evenings or afternoons for coffee or tea. These gatherings often included prominent German and foreign academics, providing valuable opportunities to establish contacts.

To some extent, the organisers also considered the areas of interest pursued by the Hungarian students, bringing together individuals with similar academic focuses whenever possible.

Our friend Lothar Zach reminded us that we were not in Budapest-so if the invitation was for 8 o'clock, we were expected to ring the doorbell at exactly 8. It was not considered polite to arrive half an hour late, as was customary back home.

The get-togethers were pleasant and memorable. I danced with a Chinese woman doctor and talked at length with a Japanese professor, already an older gentleman. He recounted that, as a young man, he had been in Budapest during the celebrations marking our one thousand years of existence, and when we inaugurated the first phase of our underground railway. He said he could imagine how the network had since evolved. I became embarrassed and somehow managed to sidestep the question.

I visited Döme (Dimitri) Sztójay, who was then serving in Berlin as the Hungarian ambassador. I brought him a message from my uncle Kálmán Falcione, who had been his regimental partner before the First World War. He warmly inquired about the Falcione

family, returned my uncle's greetings, and offered me some advice as a member of the Collegium Hungaricum.

He emphasised that all Hungarian scholars in Berlin were, in effect, Hungarian diplomats, and should strive to present a positive image of Hungary before the German hierarchy. He stressed that Germany's influence in European politics was growing. He also pointed out that, regardless of our opinion of the German system, we should refrain from interfering in their affairs, as doing so would be considered an insult to our hosts.



**Sztójay became Prime Minister March – August 1944**

I also came to know other members of the Hungarian embassy. I often spoke with the military attaché and several Hungarian journalists in Berlin, many of whom were frequent guests at our hostel. Bandi (Andi) Gellért, who at that time I believe was the Új Magyarország (New Hungarians) correspondent, became a good friend of mine. We often had extensive discussions about politics-but I will report on those in detail later.

Meanwhile, we closely followed German political developments and had the opportunity to attend one or two Nationalist Socialist (NAZI) party gatherings, which were indeed large-scale mass movements.

In 1937, the German National Socialism had been in power for four years, and the character of these rallies had changed significantly compared to earlier times. Attendance now required connections. Generally, larger institutions received a number of tickets for distribution. We lawyers worked as independent researchers, but some of our fellow scholars were occasionally affiliated with various institutions and were offered tickets by their supervisors. This is how we gained access-courtesy of our colleagues

It may have been in November that we were able to attend a planned rally at the Sports Palace.



**Sports Palace Berlin 1937**

Our friend Lothar warned us to arrive at least an hour before the official start, because typically the entrance gates were opened twenty minutes prior, and the crowd waiting on the street would pour in to claim the remaining free places. We took our places one hour before the start and we became part of the crowd of 25,000 people.

During the waiting period, a party band played marches, and several local leaders addressed the crowd on topical issues. The audience was attentive and politely applauded the speakers, but it was clear that everyone was waiting for the Chief to arrive. We knew that the main speaker would be Hitler himself, and we waited tensely for his appearance. I was particularly interested-as a student of political science and someone who had studied mass psychology-having heard a lot about his reputed strength as a leader.

Then, suddenly, as if an electric shock had surged through the crowd, a roar of excitement nearly drowned out the sound of the marches. It was later explained to us by insiders that the playing of the Badenweiler Marsch signaled the arrival of the Chief, and that it would only be a matter of moments before he entered the hall.

And so it happened- we saw Hitler enter. The celebrating crowd held up their hands in greeting. Behind him came many leading politicians. I recognized Goebbels, the propaganda minister, who dragged one of his legs due to a physical defect.

The president of the congress welcomed the chief with a few words, and Goebbels led the program. He was an insignificant-looking man, but spoke beautiful north German

dialect, which was the source of much of his political power. His final words marked the beginning of the main event: *Der Führer spricht* (“*The Führer speaks*”).

Undoubtedly, I felt that the speaker had a big impact on the crowd. However, when one later studied the text of the speech, it was difficult to understand what triggered such intense emotion and enthusiasm. His appearance was not particularly striking.



**Adolf Hitler's speech at the *Berlin Sports Palace***

I've thought a great deal about what it was that contributed to Hitler's undeniable impact. Eventually, I came to the conclusion that the great majority of the German people saw in him a reflection of themselves-someone from the lower middle class. The proletarian workers did not accept the landowning squire class and saw through Hitler themselves. The German lower middle-class citizen was the real victim of the First World War, having lost everything became fully supportive of the rise of nationalism.

We also heard a lot about how Hitler dominated his immediate surroundings, and that even his opponents often fell under his influence.

Soon, I had the opportunity to observe the leader from closer vantage point-no longer just a small grey figure among thousands. The University of Berlin had completed a new wing, and our colleagues enthusiastically reported that Hitler would inaugurate the building. The event was not published in the press, and the date fell on a weekday. A few of us headed towards the university and entered the district at just at the right place and time. We noticed an SS group lining up, and it became clear that their task was to receive the leader.

There were only just a few hundred people in the area, so we quickly found a spot just a few steps from where the military was assembled.

Suddenly, without any ceremony a black Mercedes and accompanying bodyguard cars arrived. To the drumbeat of a small SS band, we saw Hitler in his party uniform, walking slowly as he began his inspection of the ranks of honor. Occasionally, his arm swung up in greeting to the soldiers, and then-his hard, stinging eyes met mine.

In that moment I understood what the masses meant by the leader's charisma. Much has been written about Hitler's piercing gaze, and now I knew what they were referring to. He projected immense willpower, and his stare was likely one of the secrets of his success.

As Christmas season approached the academic year came to a natural pause. Universities and libraries closed, and we celebrated Christmas in the dormitory. On Christmas Eve, the candles on the Christmas tree were lit, and Gyula Farkas wished us all a merry Christmas in keeping with our old traditions. Each of us received a book as a gift from the college board of directors. There was a festive dinner, and while we enjoyed ourselves, we missed our families deeply.

Our youthful good humor did not abandon us. On New Year's Eve, we tried to take part in the traditional Berlin celebrations, even though they felt a little foreign to us. It was fashionable at that time in Berlin to greet the New Year- 1938- in the streets amongst dancing clowns.

I would like to recall some of my scholarship friends. Unfortunately, more than fifty years have now passed since these young "researchers" - to use the modern term - lived together over those months. It is understandable that for most, not only their faces but also their names have faded from memory. Yet there were a few whose memory and friendship remains vivid in my soul.

István (Stephen) Arató, who was also in Berlin, was closest to me. By then, he was a legal reporter, and we understood each other well. Much of our free time was spent walking together discovering the interesting details of Berlin's grand squares, and almost without pause, discussing the challenging problems facing Hungary.

I also made friends with Péter Kemény, a Lutheran pastor studying theology. He was my age and joined our group on weekends and day trips. I met him frequently in Budapest, and as fate would have it, he later migrated to Australia as well- settling in Perth, Western Australia.

Similarly, I met Ákos Oláh, who was on a German Wirtschaftstag scholarship and a resident of the college for three months. He was selected as one of the future leaders of the Hangya (Ant) Cooperative society. I maintained my relationship with him in Budapest and

fate brought him also to Australia too-this time to Cooma, as part of the Snowy Mountains Scheme. We continued our warm friendship here in Australia.

Feri (Frank) Csík belonged to our group; he received a scholarship for further medical training. He returned to the scene of his memorable Olympic triumph.

Csík Feri won gold in 100 m freestyle in 1936 Olympics and bronze in 4×200 m relay.

I saw in him a humble, great man-truly a good friend. On occasion, we accompanied him to the Olympic pool where his name had been immortalized. When he jumped in for a fifty-meter swim, the Germans often noticed him, and once they realised who they were watching, we all basked in his reflected glory.



**Feri Csík**

I mourned him deeply when I later learned that he was killed while performing his medical duties during the final American air attacks on Szombathely (Hungary).

I spoke often with Irma Eckert, who studied folk art. Her subject in Berlin, if I remember correctly, was the comparative landscape traditions of the peoples of the Duna region and the influence of the German folk art upon them. She had been educated in Szeged and earned her qualifications at Eötvös College. We spoke of our shared Szeged experiences, as one would expect of old Alma Mater students. She knew my Ica, and I knew that she was being courted by someone who later became a well-known researcher.

I also remember two Protestant clergymen. László Révész conducted theological research within the framework of the Reformed Church. The other was Bálint (Valentine) Tóth, a Protestant minister born in Sibon, who insisted that we call his native village as "Zsibó" (Jibou), believing it to be the correct form. He was a clever Transylvanian man, and I owe it to him that, with a journalist certificate in hand, I was granted many opportunities to get to know the people of Germany, its institutions and its way of life.

Indeed, once registered with the Propaganda Ministry, one received regular invitations for a variety of functions, complimentary railway tickets, and access to many of the most important landmarks of the German Reich.

József (Joseph) Kovács was a teacher of German and French. I was on friendly terms with him as well. Unfortunately, in my final years in Hungary, he was teaching in the countryside, and I have not heard from him since.

Guszt (Gustav) Bodó stood out to me among the Dahlem physicists and mathematicians. Though a withdrawn scientist by nature, he was always available for a friendly exchange of views and a variety of excursions-especially if they involved getting acquainted with Berlin's many entertainment venues.

I also remember Zoltán Szabó, another physicist who worked at one of the Dahlem institutions. When I arrived in Berlin, he was already in his second year at the college and had fully embraced German life. He had a German girlfriend, and I recall Zoltán, somewhat embarrassed, asked us for advice. His girlfriend had told him that if he left Germany and ended their relationship, she wanted to have Zoltán's child. I believe we managed to persuade Zoltán to talk her out of this plan.

From what I understand, Zoltán went on to have a distinguished career and was later awarded the Kossuth Prize.

Life at the Collegium Hungaricum was briefly disrupted when the embassy approached us with an unexpected request. The authorities had decided that, in the interest of strengthening Hungarian-German relations, they would organize an embassy ball. The event was to begin with a formal presentation of the Hungarian Palotás Dance.



**Formal Hungarian Palotás Dance.**

They believed that at least 12 young men from the college could volunteer to introduce this beautiful and ancient Hungarian dance to the German audience, dressed in decorated Hungarian traditional costumes. The embassy would arrange for lady partners by asking the cultural attaché to invite the daughters of leading German statesmen to accompany the Hungarian boys in full Hungarian attire.

Once the college youth volunteered, the embassy made the necessary arrangements and invited the selected young women. The invitations were accepted, and the dance group began rehearsals. One of the dance masters from the Budapest Opera House—who also had a contract with the UFA—agreed to teach us, and the embassy ordered the appropriate costumes from the Opera House.

For several weeks, during the evening hours, the Mercedes would roll up to the college, and the German girls participated in the lessons with great enthusiasm.

Today, I don't even remember the name of the girls, because after a few weeks of lessons and the ball itself, we had no further opportunity to maintain contact. This was likely due to the embassy's clear instructions: we were to behave properly. It was emphasised that the girls were daughters of leading statesmen, and the embassy wanted to avoid any diplomatic complications should the young men exceed the bounds of good manners.

My partner was Helga Lammers. Her father was the chief of Hitler's Chancellery. I recall that Feri Csík's partner was the daughter of captain Wiedeman, who later became German consul in San Francisco.

We treated the ladies with courtesy, mindful of the embassy's warnings, and refrained from any romantic overtures. Helga was very pretty—with dark hair and eyes, a vivacious spirit—who clearly did not appreciate our reserved manners. After I walked her down the wide marble steps of the college to her car, she turned to me and said: 'Aber wo ihr habt Ungarn Eure Pepper?' (But where are your Hungarian peppers?)

To that I had no answer.

The ball was held at the Esplanade Hotel, and the famous Barnabás Géczy dance band performed. Both the German and Hungarian sides were elegantly represented, and the event drew a distinguished crowd, including a large contingent from the diplomatic corps.

The evening began with the entrance of the dance team, and the band played the national anthems of Hungary and Germany. We Hungarian boys stood at attention, while the German girls raised their hands in salute. I remember we chuckled quietly, as they simplified the salute by resting their hands on the girls in front of them during the long duration of the music. No one seemed to notice, and all went smoothly.

Even the Palotás dance brought no embarrassment, despite the fact that amongst the many scientific researchers, some found the choreography challenging.

The German leadership had made efforts to ensure that those studying in Berlin become acquainted with professors and members of the older generation. But there was a flaw in this arrangement—we were young, and naturally, we wanted to connect with our own generation.

Berlin was a vast, cosmopolitan city. Families lived in the suburbs and mixed in their own niche social communities. As a result, we could only meet young women in the entertainment districts around Kurfürstendamm and Budapester Straße (streets).

However, at that time, these areas were frequented by the more promiscuous crowd, which made it difficult to form meaningful relationships. On the other hand, in the interest of mastering the German language and understanding the nuances of everyday social life all obstacles had to be overcome.

One of the more effective solutions, recommended by the younger leaders of the college, was to attend one of the larger coffee houses where a live band played. These venues had telephones at each table, allowing guests to call one another and arrange dance partnerships—a charming and practical way to meet someone new.

This is how I got to know a good-looking German girl named Ilse Rosenstrauch. Her family was of Huguenot descent. I later learned that her father was an official at the Siemens Company and lived in the district of Spandau.

Despite courting her for several months, I was never invited to the family home. In our conversations, I discovered that her parents disapproved of her being with an *Ausländer* (foreigner) and were not pleased that we met through a coffee house. Ilse later explained that Germans were generally quite conservative, and such relationships were often viewed with disdain.

Nevertheless, a pleasant relationship developed between us. She gladly accepted my Hungarian gallantry—joining me for dancing on weekends and picnics in the countryside. I

took her to a prom at one of the famous Berlin Kunst Akademie dance parties, an annually recurring, lively and noisy gathering for Berlin youth.

For the next few months, we shared our lunch-breaks eating sandwiches and walking in the Tiergarten. My knowledge of the German language improved greatly.

Of course, while dating neither of us intended to build a serious relationship. It was understood that at the end of the Berlin scholarship, I would return home, and our paths would naturally diverge.

We also tasted the musical soul of Berlin. We promoted Hungarian culture in the German capital, and whenever Hungarian musicians visited, we attended Hungarian concerts featuring Bartók and Kodály. We were swept up in Wagner fever-the Berlin Opera House renowned for its Wagner cycles, and the college was only a few hundred meters away. However, obtaining tickets for these performances was no easy task. Berliners were devoted music loves. So, we had to organise ourselves to ensure that we could enjoy at least one evening of first-rate opera. About thirty of us arranged a relay system, taking turns to stand in line-this was considered perfectly acceptable at the time. Each of us stood for two hours. At noon, we launched the "relay" and the line stood all night until the ticket window opened the next morning. That's how I secured a ticket and attended a Siegfried evening.



**Tiergarten Berlin**



**Berlin Opera House**

We also observed the German political life. After all, German National-Socialism was the subject of constant debate-not only at home, but here in Berlin as well. The National Socialist dictatorship was not as severe as the Russian system, but it was more restrictive than Italian fascism. At the time, the cabarets still cheerfully mocked the party's mission though they were shut down in 1939.

In our circle, people joked about the system. Interestingly, the most frequent target of humour was Göring, who was said to love extravagant uniforms and was thoroughly mocked. Still, I found that despite ridiculing this human weakness he was basically spoken of with a degree of respect.

With Göbbels, it was different. His interest in women was widely known. While his intellectual strength was acknowledged, he was not liked in the same way as Göring. Perhaps this was a Berlin-specific sentiment-Göring was from Prussia while Göbbels came from the Rhineland, and these lingering regional differences often led to tension.

However, everyone spoke with respect about the Bavarian Rudolf Hess, whose idealism was never doubted. I held a particularly sympathetic view of this leading figure in the German establishment. He was always in the party shirt and wore the Iron Cross medal.

Under the one-party system, one could feel the cautious atmosphere in Berlin. If you walked down the street and encountered a group of National-Socialists, it was customary for passers-by to greet their flag with a raised arm. As foreigners we did not comply, but our German companions always reminded us of this custom. It was wiser to raise our arms discreetly, as there were stories of individuals being challenged by over-zealous believers.

The Hungarian colony in Berlin also faced its share of difficulties. We heard that on one of our national holidays, the Chairman of the Hungarian colony-a Hungarian Social Democrat and master tailor-in his speech in which he criticized the German system. As a result, he was summoned by the infamous Gestapo. He was warned to stay away from politics, or risk losing his residency permit in Germany. I understand that he resigned from the association's presidency but was not willing to give up his lucrative business.



***Berlin played host to a vibrant and vivid night life***

I believe that after this incident Vilmos (William) Szigethy, an artist and painter, became the association's president. In that role, he often visited us at the college and became friends with many of the collegians. As a result, I also became acquainted with him.

He lived comfortably and was very hospitable. We often visited him and his pretty German wife in the suburb of Wilmersdorf. He would tap a small keg of beer, and we poor young students certainly appreciated the generosity.

Commercial art and poster design were his specialties, and they proved to be a lucrative profession. He was 35-40 years old and had an artistic past in Budapest. Although he was not anti-Semitic and had many old Jewish colleagues back home, he did not oppose the German political system. In fact, he welcomed the idea of Germany's national rebirth and the economic revival that accompanied it. His own well-being was closely tied to this German economic upswing.

Thus, he was considered a suitable person to lead the colony's association.

At that time in Berlin, the Jewish Question was not openly discussed. By 1937-38, Jewish journalists, artists and bankers had largely been sidelined, and doctors and lawyers were already preparing to emigrate. Most Jewish -owned stores had been taken over by Germans, and the first-generation Jews from Eastern Europe tended to live in the far eastern district of the capital, around Alexander Platz-so we rarely made contact with them.

The general public believed that the Jewish question had been "solved", and many supported Jewish emigration applications. The real difficulty, however was that the receiving countries were not eager to facilitate the process.

I was well aware of the problems within the National Socialist movement and studied them thoroughly- after all, political science was my profession.

After breakfast, I usually spent an hour reading the German newspapers and gradually came to understand that each publication catered to distinct group of readers. There was a paper for the party, one for the army, another for the banking world, and one representing the workers' interests. In this way, I was able to monitor the internal shifts within the system.

I studied the legal and constitutional literature and gradually formed an image of the system.

The one-party system was foreign to me. I carried in my blood the politicizing and debating spirit of our lawyer ancestors, and always held firm to the belief that a nation's sovereignty resides in its National Assembly. The Hungarian nation's five-hundred year-

struggle for freedom was enshrined in its Constitution, and I could not accept the rule of a leader with unlimited power. The most I could acknowledge was that Germany's current great national effort had been entrusted to the destiny of one man.

The sovereignty of the people was, of course, proclaimed as the cornerstone of National-Socialism-but in practice, it was only occasionally exercised through referendums.

The 12th July 1933 the referendums stated that the imperial government could ask the people whether they agreed with a specific plan or one already carried out by the government. However, it was clear that this depended entirely on whether the government chose to consult the people in a given case. While people could request a referendum, it was also true that the laws or regulations would be rendered ineffective if the vote rejected the proposal. Yet the law remained silent on the consequences of such a rejection.

In the meantime, I took steps to obtain a certificate in journalism, which I believed would offer many opportunities to better understand the country. I contacted the editor-in-chief of the "Szeged New Generation" and offered my services free of charge to serve as Staff in Residence in Berlin, provided I could obtain a certificate to that effect.

The editor understood my intention and obligingly sent the requested certificate along with a kind letter. However, he noted that there was little point in me reporting, as the editorial panel was under the influence of church advisors who would not welcome any article that might appear favourable to the Third Empire (NAZI Rule).

This did not trouble me, as I had no desire to become involved in politics. Nevertheless, I visited the Ministry of Propaganda's department responsible for journalists and had my name and address registered. As a result, I regularly received invitations to various meetings and excursions.

On an occasion, I had the opportunity to participate in a bus tour to view a National Socialist Ordensburg.



**NAZI Ordensburg**

There were perhaps two to five such institutions, regarded as a kind of party college. Their aim was to resurrect the knightly spirit and traditions of the past, inviting talented young people to train as party functionaries. The students enjoyed comfortable working and sleeping conditions and had access to the most modern scientific and athletic tools.

One of the leaders explained to us journalists that the curriculum included glider flight training and required each student to complete at least one parachute jump. When someone asked why this was necessary, the answer was simple: a leader must be ready to execute any command.

Then spring arrived, the college commemorated our March 15th National Day-the anniversary of the 1848 Revolution against the Austrian Rule. That year, I was asked to deliver the ceremonial speech. The Hungarian Embassy was represented by Minister Jenő Ghyczy, who warmly congratulated me on my address. In my speech, I expressed, on behalf of the new generation, our desire for a renewed March 15th spirit of reform. He assured me that he understood these aspirations and shared a personal affinity with them.

March shook Europe: the German Empire finally annexed Austria (Anschluss). Mussolini did not resist, and we Hungarians had mixed feelings about the news. The Third Reich became a direct neighbour. There was no doubt that the majority of Austrians jubilantly welcomed the change, and the Germans felt that the entire German Empire had been reborn. While a significant segment of Germans resented National Socialism, the majority observed the one-party rule passively and critically. On this occasion, however, I saw no distinction they warmly welcomed the return of Ostmark (Austria).



**German soldier welcomed in "Anschluss"**

From a Hungarian point of view, this event raised serious questions. It was widely known that the Stuttgart German Institute kept a track of the German minority in Hungary, and this sparked fears that, following Anschluss, the Reich might attempt a power push toward the south-east.

Since the National Socialist seizure of power, the behavior of the German minority in Hungary had changed. Until then the Magyarization had been gradual, with Germans increasingly absorbed into Hungarian culture. But Germany's recent revival exerted a strong influence on the German minority in Hungary, naturally arousing resentment in both the German and Hungarian circles-resentment fanned by Allied propaganda.

Many of us contacted the institutions dealing with the fate of Germans living abroad, and on one occasion, we met with a leading politician for an honest discussion of the issue, openly expressing our Hungarian concerns.

The meeting was illuminating. The Stuttgart institute's officer emphasised that the Danube Germans were of interest primarily due to cultural ties. He pointed out that, as in South Tyrol, German Empire consistently stressed that it had no territorial claims. He explained-cordially-that politically, annexation of South East Europe was not feasible, as Germans lived scattered amongst a considerable number of other ethnic groups. He also noted that the new German policy aimed not to expand into Southeast Europe but towards the Polish Corridor-though only if requested by the Germans living there.

He added that, in theory, the matter could be revisited by the German population in the region if they wished, and that relocation to another area might be considered. He referred to Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which expressed interest in an eastern orientation as Germany's historical task.

This was not an entirely satisfactory explanation, but it seemed to suggest our immediate fears were unfounded. For the time being, German policy appeared focused on expansion in the Polish Baltic region.

These exploratory discussions then led me to begin seriously studying the problems of German foreign policy. I reviewed the relevant literature in German and came to understand that since the previous century, Germans had been debating whether their national orientation should be to the East or the West.

The shift away from traditional Western foreign policy was rooted in the emotional Franco-German conflict. Bismarck had based his strategy on securing the Russian front as a form of insurance, while envisioning German's future in colonial expansion-inevitability

coming into conflict with the British Empire, especially as the German naval program began to materialize.

This now history. France recognized that the Russian Empire sought expansion. Its aim was to ally with Germany, dismantle the Habsburg Empire, and bring the Balkans under its influence. French diplomacy was ultimately successful in preparing the alliance that led Germany into war on two fronts, facing the coalition forces that eventually brought the Reich to its knees.

However, the situation changed with the triumph of Bolshevism in Russia. England was no longer an unconditional supporter of the French vision, which included the Little Entente alliance in Eastern European. The German school of thought began to favour permanently abandoning naval competition with England and instead turning against the Soviet Union. To this end, Hitler sought an English guarantee of neutrality. He greatly admired the British Empire and worked to have these ideas accepted by the English public.

Yet this remained confined to newspaper articles, intellectual debates, and the guarded language of diplomacy.

By then, Berlin was swept up in a fever of enthusiasm following the return of the Head of State from Austria. The famous boulevard Unter den Linden (Lime trees) was decorated with white colonnades, and the anti-aircraft search lights formed a glowing tent above the Leader as he solemnly laid a wreath at the heroic monument. Goebbels solemnly proclaimed the day of the Greater German Reich on the radio, and his speech was broadcast through loudspeakers on every street corner



**Unter den Linde after Anschluss.**

On this occasion, there was no need to manufacture a crowd. Offices, factories and institutions marched in separate groups under the guidance of trusted leaders. The public's enthusiasm was genuine. We strolled into the Unter den Linden, and the crowd literally swept over us-at times my feet did not touch the ground. In front of the Chancellery, the crowd refused to disperse for hours, and the Chief was eventually compelled to appear at the window to the cry of "Wir wollen unseren Führer sehen!" ("We want to see our Führer!")

The leadership sought to legitimise the annexation of Austria and the launch of the Greater German Reich through constitutional law, and thus ordered a referendum.

The question was essentially: Do you approve of the measures which led to the accession of Austria?

Our college friend Lothar replied cynically that it was only natural-anyone who considered themselves German would approve. But I was more interested in the mechanics of the referendum. Thanks to my journalistic license and registration, I had access to all polling stations and was able to observe how the vote was conducted, tallied and aggregated.

I saw no violations. The process appeared well-organized and efficiently managed. After the polls closed three-member committee separated the "yes" and "no" votes. Lothar was right, because the "yes" votes were overwhelming in the majority. I cannot confirm whether the advertised result of 99 percent was accurate. I could not verify that 90 or 95 eligible voters participated, but it was clear that the vast majority expressed agreement with the events.

These fascinating political events did not disrupt our daily work programme. My activities produced a substantial body of research papers, and I began to reflect on the approaching end of the academic year.

With my father's help, I applied for a court-appointed legal traineeship, and by then I was closer to deciding on a career path. I thought that eventually I would still strive for a judicial appointment, but I also wished to continue my researcher work, hoping to publish one or two scholarly pieces. My ambition was to secure an academic tutorial position and, in time, pursue a university professorship... though this remained a dream for the future.

I hoped to extend my stay in Berlin by another year, as there was still much material, I had not yet had the opportunity to study in depth. As a legal trainee, there was still a possibility that my Berlin residency could be prolonged.

Before returning home, my brother-in-law Béla asked me to buy him a good German camera-preferably an inexpensive one-reasoning that I lived in Berlin and must know the local conditions. In researching this, I came to learn a little of the East German Jewish way of life. I was advised that the cheapest cameras could be found in the Alexanderplatz district, where the Jewish community remained-not in a formal ghetto, but somewhat apart from the local German population. They lived as retailers, though they did not operate storefronts, and typically worked from home, which made their prices quite moderate.

I managed to buy a Voigtlaender camera, which Béla was very pleased with. It served the family well for many years.



**Voigtlaender 1938**

At the end of June 1938, I returned home. I stopped in Vienna and once again took the opportunity to explore the old imperial city. As a member of the college of the Berlin and Vienna Collegium Hungaricum, I received free accommodation.

The Duna steam train finally brought me home. I disembarked at Győr, where my sister and my brother-in-law were waiting for me, and my father had also travelled up from Szeged. Thus, my Berlin year was crowned with a lovely holiday in Bábolna.

## Home - 1938

I had to speak at length about my experiences in Berlin at Bábolna. The family found me noticeably thin, which did not surprise them-newspapers were full of reports that Germany was experiencing food shortages due to its heavy spending on defense. I explained that the German population was, in fact, remarkably well looked after. My thinness was more a reflection of my limited spending money. I had to tighten my belt a little, preferring to spend what I had on entertainment and exploring the city's attractions.

They also worried that I might intend to marry my girlfriend in Berlin, as the family naturally hoped to welcome a Hungarian girl into the fold. I emphasized that I had no intention of committing myself in Berlin, but I could not accept the notion that if I did find a lifelong partner, I should be prevented from bringing her home. I explained that the women who came into Hungarian households became "Hungarianised" through the home environment, and their children would grow up as Hungarians. There were numerous examples of this in Szeged.

During those days, we received news from Budapest newspapers that my application for a legal traineeship had been successful. According to the announcement from the Minister of Justice, I was required to present myself to the president of the district court in Szeged by the 30 June, 1938, take the oath, and begin my service.

In early July, my father and I set off for Szeged. We stopped in Budapest, where I visited my mother, who welcomed me with great joy after the long months in Berlin. My father suggested that we visit Jenő (Eugene) Lutitszky at the Department of Justice to thank him for my appointment. This wasn't strictly necessary-I had achieved a *juris utriusque doctorate* (double degree both in civil and canon law) *summa cum laude* (With highest



**Diploma Dr. Political Science  
summa cum laude**



**Diploma Dr. Juris Universi summa  
cum laude**

Honors), and had completed a year at the Berlin Collegium Hungaricum on a scholarship. I was therefore among the first on the waiting list.

Nevertheless, my father however felt that it would be fitting to express our gratitude. Before long, Eugene Lutilszky made time for us. He was very friendly and said to my father: *“Béla, Thank you very much for your visit. People usually come here to ask for something but very few say thank you for anything”*.

Szeged obviously meant a great deal to me. By this time, it had been two years since I left my hometown, which I loved deeply. Every stone, tree and park-and all the statues in Széchenyi Square-were part of my youth and my memories. Most of my old friends had scattered by then, but as a long-time resident of Szeged, I still had acquaintances almost everywhere, including among the business owners. People along the promenade would stop me, and I would recount my experiences in Berlin. They listened with great interest.

On 15 July 1938, I took the oath before the President of the District Court of Szeged and officially became a civil service employee. The President was Andor Rácz, whom I simply called Uncle Bandi, as his family had long been on warm friendly terms with us. His wife was a Jedlicska lady, whose father had served for decades as a public notary in Szeged. They were also related to the family of lawyer József Nagy Csikós. Among the Csikós boys, Joe had been my classmate, while Béla, a year younger, also studied law and specialized in commercial law. I'll speak more about him later, as we remained in contact for the next two to five years. Their sister Kata was friends with my sister, also Kata, and we had many joyful moments together at the Kurbos dance school.

I visited Uncle Bandi Rácz, who received me in a spirit of friendship. Despite my advanced legal education and research background, he believed my first role should be as an assistant, to learn the workings of the court from ground up. He explained that if I were to hold a leading position in the future, I would appreciate having a firsthand knowledge of the court's administrative functions. I understood this and later grateful to him, as it truly helped me become familiar with the practical challenges of handling cases.

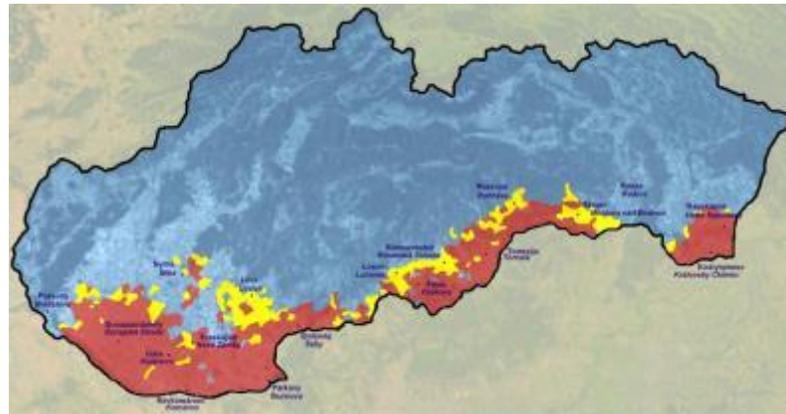
Until then, my engagement with law had been largely theoretical and philosophical. I was now eager -indeed, desperate-to understand the affairs of everyday life.

So, I commenced my work in the assistants' office. I spent a day or two in each section, learning the structure and rhythm of the Registrar's administrative duties.

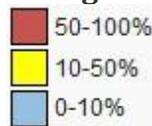
This assignment was designated by the president to last six weeks, but the military intervened and unexpectedly called me up for exercises. I could not have anticipated this,

as I completed my volunteer year only a year earlier and had served an additional six weeks as well. Under normal conditions, one would only be called up every two to three years.

Soon, the shadow of the Felvidék crisis-concerning Upper Hungarians living in Slovakia-began to emerge, along with signs of troop movements. According to the draft orders, we were to report for service at the Esztergom camp on August 2, joining the newly forming First Brigade of the Mechanized Armored Division.



**Percentage of Hungarians residing in Slovakia**



So, after a few weeks of stay in Szeged, I once again donned my uniform and reported for duty at Esztergom.

There, I reunited with my fellow conscripted volunteers. Among them the closest to me was Jóska Keszey, with whom I had shared a strong friendship during my earlier volunteer service. Csocso Láng was also with us-this was his nickname, and even fifty years later, I still cannot recall his official first name. His father was the manager of the Láng Machine Factory, and I remember him as one of the wealthier boys, especially for his small Opel car. On weekends, about five of us would cram into the car and head for Budapest.

In this group, among the older ones, was Frici Heuthaler. Joining us was Gyuszi Toronyi, who by then was already an ensign. He had begun to gain weight, which made fitting into a small car a challenge-but we could not leave him behind at the camp.

Our dormitory accommodation was shared with reserve officers. It was a spacious room with ten to twelve beds. Among our roommates were four volunteer corporals from

the armored car division. I can recall only two names. One was Louis Tardy-I do not remember his appearance, but long after the war he wrote a book in which he mentioned that we had served together. The other was Count Alexander Festetich, a well-known sports car driver. He was permitted to store his red BMW at the camp and once gave us a thrilling ride. On the local concrete road near Tát, he drove at high speed, and we, as easy-going young men, thoroughly enjoyed overtaking of the fruit-laden horse-drawn carts.

We did not have serious tanks at the time, but the Fiat Ansaldo armored cars had arrived, and we underwent regular training in these vehicles. They kicked up a great deal of dust in the Esztergom dunes, and occasionally, we managed to overturn them.

We took our lunch and dinner in the officers' garden dining room. The food was simple but the portions were generous. Uncle Deák, the dining room manager, held the rank of master sergeant. I had met him during my volunteer service years, and later we spent several months together in captivity. I will write more about him in due course.

But I remember vividly the many Hosszúlépés drinks ('long step' one part wine, two parts water), which were most welcome when we returned tired after practice.

After the evening meals, things were usually quite lively. The officers often engaged in political discussions. I was struck by the dramatic change that had occurred during my year's absence. For example, I had almost forgotten the complexities of the Jewish Question, as it had not surfaced in Berlin. On the other hand, I only had a rough understanding of the developments in Hungary during that time.

It was striking to see that many of the younger officers had already been drawn to the ideas of the national socialist Francis Szálasi. They were not particularly interested in his economic proposals, but rather criticized the current political leadership for failing to prepare the country with a fighting spirit to achieve its revisionist goals. They believed the leadership was too heavily influenced by the Jewish press, which had taken an anti-German stance.

After a few glasses of wine, some of them began singing the Szálasi song. As a reserve officer candidate, I knew my place in the hierarchy and refrained from speaking either for or against this views-I simply observed.

I felt genuine sympathy for Colonel Henrik (Henry) Riomfalvy, the senior officer in the group. I understood that his wife was Jewish, and I could imagine how the behavior of the volatile young officers affected him. He acted as though he heard nothing, but if they became too boisterous, he would quietly leave their company.

This atmosphere was intensified by news of the Governor's visit to Kiel, Germany. The officers had access to inside information about partial mobilisation and speculated that Hungary might be preparing to resolve the issue in the Highlands (Felvidék, present-day Slovakia) in alliance with Germany.

The Regent was received with great military pomp, and I regretted not being able to witness the event firsthand. However, reports of the Hungarian-German encounter soon revealed that Hungary ultimately declined Hitler's offer of a military alliance in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.

The Arrow Cross Party sharply disagreed with the Government decision, distributing pamphlets to that effect. One of these tracts accused Prime Minister Béla Imrédy of being a British spy, and some of these documents even found their way into our camp. I was handed a copy to read. It caused considerable discontent among the officers, who-perhaps naively and without fear of the risks-longed to march back to the ancient boundaries of the homeland.

Germany, meanwhile, continued preparations to implement its plans. According to my sources in Berlin, Hungary's cool response led the Reich to focus primarily on the return of the Sudeten Germans, and their military strategy was built around that objective. The Hungarian leadership had anticipated that England and France would oppose Germany's moves and feared that a European war might erupt. Hungary did not wish to participate as an ally of the German Empire.

Hungarian government circles were surprised when the Munich agreement was signed on 30 September 1938 between Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy permitting Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia. Peace had been secured-at least for the time being. However, the needs of Hungary and Poland were not addressed by the agreement, placing the Hungarian government in a difficult position. The population expected action towards regaining the Felvidék.

This was the reason that the Governor flew to meet Göring and requested that Hungary's territorial claims be activated. The German leadership gave assurances, but did not match those made during the Kiel meeting, which had supported Hungary's full historical demands. Now only the border zone of the Highlands-based on linguistic demographics-was considered negotiable. Talks were initiated with the Czechoslovak government.

In early September, I was transferred to the Budapest Train Barracks, where we waited for developments. The officer corps was disillusioned. They had expected Horthy to launch the Honvéd (Defense Forces) toward the north. In hindsight, we now know that the Army was ill-equipped and only in the early stages of development. It would not have been capable of confronting the well-trained and well-armed forces of the Czech Republic. But in the prevailing mood, common sense was overshadowed.

I remember clearly that during a moment of crisis, a well-armed train unit was dispatched swiftly to the Czech border-only to be ordered to return. When the train commander came back, he threw his 'Bocskai' hat into the corner in frustration and openly castigated Horthy in front of a stunned and silent audience.



**Bocskai hat**

In the weeks leading up to the First Vienna Award, tensions ran high across Hungarian society, and the government was under intense pressure. The opposition, of course, seized the moment, and nationalist rhetoric and editorials grew increasingly vocal.



**First Vienna Award**

(The First Vienna Award separated largely Magyar-populated territories in southern Slovakia and southern Carpathian Rus from Czechoslovakia to Hungary. Hungary thus regained some of the lands lost in the Treaty of Trianon following the dissolution of the

Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I. The Arbitration took place at Vienna's Belvedere Palace and was a direct consequence of the Munich Agreement signed the previous month, which initiated the partitioning of Czechoslovakia.).

At this time, the Arrow Cross Party announced a rally, and calling on the public to gather together in front of party headquarters at 60 Andrásy Street to demand decisive government action to reclaim the Felvidék (Highlands). The ruling party found itself in a difficult situation. Domestically, it tried to keep the national socialist radicals under control-after all, Francis Szálasi, their leader, was serving a sentence in the Stars Szeged Prison. The radical forces were unified in their call for vigorous government action, and they were not alone.

The government, meanwhile, was wary of antagonising Anglo-French opinion and drifting too far toward the German line. Yet it could not simply prohibit or prevent what was, on the surface, a non-party political rally. The demonstration was permitted, but the government stood ready to intervene forcefully if necessary, deploying armed forces should the protest spiral out of control.

Armoured units disguised as police cadets, were placed on standby. Two Armstrong armored cars-approved under the Treaty of Trianon for maintaining internal order-were readied for deployment. It was no surprise that the command was prepared to act if the rally threatened public order.

I was present in the courtyard of the barracks when the troops were inspected by Colonel Henrik (Henry) Riomfalvy, the commander. I vividly remember that as the units marched off to their designated standby positions, Lieutenant Pál (Paul) Topay called out to them: "If you have to shoot, boys, you must shoot into the air- because you must not forget, you are facing Hungarians!"

This scene came back to me almost half a century later, in 1988, when I came across Lajos Tardy's book *Szaggatott krónika* (Broken Chronicles). I was stunned to read a thoroughly distorted version of these events on page 31. The author claimed that the scene occurred "***when Szálasi Francis was confined to or escaped from the Stars Szeged Prison, or and the Interior Ministry requested army reinforcements to control the mob action of the Arrow Cross. mob***". Tardy even attributed false words to Lieutenant Topay, suggesting he instructed machine gunners to fire into first-floor windows.

***He continued:*** "machine guns stared menacingly at the street, waiting for Szálasi's group to arrive. But the gathering didn't even include low-level party officials... "

I must expose this pathetic forgery for what it is-out of respect for the memory of my friend, who died beside the Don River.

The Hungarian atmosphere at this time was marked by mass protests. As officer candidates called up for military exercises, we had no fixed assignments, so I too donned civilian clothes and joined the planned demonstrations. A large crowd gathered on Andrassy Avenue. Today I hesitate to estimate the exact number, but there were certainly tens of thousands.

The real leader of the Arrow Cross Party was Kálmán Hubay, who served as keynote speaker. His speech did not dwell on domestic issues; instead, he stirred the crowd by calling on the government to launch the Defense Forces towards the Carpathian Mountains.

The crowd's enthusiasm was deeply moving. People wept as they sang the national anthem, and then the Kossuth song rang out:

***“If he calls us again, we all must go,  
Long live Hungarian freedom, long live our homeland”***

The protest dispersed peacefully, but a few thousand people wished to continue. News spread like wildfire that the crowd would march towards Buda and the Castle.

However, the police standing by prevented the crowd from marching towards the castle. I witnessed this from the Körönd (Circle), where police units positioned in the side streets intervened and dispersed the gathering. The deployment of armored cars did not take place.

In the wake of ongoing negotiations and evaluations of the Munich Agreement, the government clearly recognised that military action would not occur. As a result, practical conscription and the limited partial mobilisation were suspended. I was discharged on October 10th and could return to Szeged to resume my interrupted legal service.

I received my first real legal appointment under Judge György (George) Kószó, serving as a notary. My supervisor was a descendant of the old family Kószó family of Szeged. His grandfather had been a prominent public figure before World War I. The family's life was deeply intertwined with the history of Szeged, and Gyurka himself knew the people, the landscapes, and was greatly respected by the farming population in his role as district Judge.

The following little story illustrates Gyurka's character and approach:

We were facing difficult days due to a corrosive defamation lawsuit that had torn the farm community into two. Twenty witnesses had been summoned, and the shadow of an appeal loomed over the proceedings.

Everything was prepared for the trial. First the complainant, then the defence appeared before Gyurka Kószó. Of course, he knew the entire group, and perhaps it would have been more appropriate to refer the matter to the President for reassignment to another judge-but that would have created a tangled mess.

Gyurka counterattacked. ***“Uncle Steve, Uncle Feri”*** he cried ***“aren’t you ashamed that such matters are before the court? This is not fitting for Hungarian men ...”*** He urged them, in colloquial Hungarian, to reconcile. At first both parties were reluctant, but Gyurka refused to relent. He appealed to their conscience, and eventually-though hesitantly- they reached out to each other.

Gyurka then tossed the thick bundle of papers to me and instructed me to draft a conclusion contemplating an order that the prosecution case be closed. I confess, I was relieved-it had seemed such a pointless affair.

Of course, there were also difficult affairs, but Gyurka always demonstrated how moderation and justice could make even the most complex judgments more palatable.

Meanwhile, I received a document from the Minister of Education extending my service at the Collegium Hungaricum 1 December 1938 for another year. I was also notified that the Minister of Justice authorized my study leave for that period. However, I was requested to integrate into my studies in Berlin the new German government’s laws on the organization and operation of corporations. This task occupied a significant part of my extended stay in Berlin.

Alongside my official duties, I once again immersed myself in social life. The Promenade and Casino offered daily opportunities to meet people. I often had lunch with my father in the small restaurant of the Casino, and we were joined at our table by Elemér Harsányi, chief lawyer, and Dénes (Dennis) Göltner, also a lawyer. I held Dénes in high regard-he was a thoroughly educated man who worked seriously along legal-philosophical lines.

Just a few weeks after I began at the office, the Rácz family invited me to an afternoon gathering. Csöpi Rácz, a college student, had invited her circle of friends-boys and girls alike. Csöpi had also been a classmate of my sister Kata and was part of the group

that attended dance school together. She was considered "eligible," and I knew that she was being courted by a Lieutenant Judge in the military.

What mattered to me, however, was that Csöpi was friends with my Ica, and I hoped that afternoon would bring us together again. And so it did -we suddenly found ourselves face-to-face once more. She did not mention my "breaking-up" letter, nor did she seem to hold grudges. We chatted and danced together again. My feelings for her deepened, and I had found in this girl a rare understanding. I felt that my life had arrived at a decisive turning point.

In the weeks that followed, we met several times. I joined her on the Korzó and one Sunday afternoon we went with a small group to the Kass café. I found myself growing jealous-without justification. I had given her a free hand when we had parted previously, yet I did not look kindly on the attention she received from a young officer in our group...

I began thinking seriously about the future. After two years apart, so much has changed that it now seemed unreasonable to wait any longer. My love for her was not in doubt. Career concerns had also eased-I had been appointed a trainee and was hopeful for rapid advancement, especially in light of the country's rebirth. Ica was finishing her last year in college, and it seemed possible that in two years we could begin our lives together.

My optimism was further buoyed by the First Vienna Award. The territorial gains lifted the spirits of young people across the country, as the dire economic crisis of recent years now seemed poised to give way to a period of prosperity.

I had only one lingering uncertainty-that Ica might refuse my proposal. She had been kind and proper with me in recent weeks, but remained somewhat guarded. So one afternoon, as I accompanied her on a stroll home from college, I gathered all my courage and asked for her hand in marriage.

I sensed that Ica did not anticipated this, and I feared her answer might be negative. But then the tender memories of our earlier love seemed to stir within her, and eventually gave her consent-with tears in her eyes.

The weeks that followed were filled with joy and excitement as we planned our future. We agreed to announce our official engagement at the end of 1939 and to hold the wedding near the close of 1940. We hoped that, as a middle school teacher, she could secure a position, and that my judicial clerk's salary would be enough to support our shared life together.

I announced our engagement first to my dear father, and later to my mother. My father had reservations. He feared-based on many examples he had seen-that young couples would soon have children, which might prevent the husband from laying the necessary groundwork for his judicial examination. The judicial career depended on this.

I assured him that both Ica and I were fully aware of the situation, and that we would make a joint effort to overcome this final hurdle.

The last weeks in Szeged were filled with many pleasures. I knew then that my father applied for a vacant notary position in Balassagyarmat, with the support of Pál Teleki (*Count Pál János Ede Teleki de Szék was prime minister of the Kingdom of Hungary from 19 July 1920 to 14 April 1921 and from 16 February 1939 to 3 April 1941*). He had strong hopes of success.

I said farewell to my hometown. I also made efforts to continue my judicial service in Budapest after Berlin. It certainly never occurred to me that not only be torn from the banks of the Tisza River-but that I would eventually be forced to leave my country altogether.

Thus, almost gleefully, full of ideas and hope, I began my journey to Berlin at the end of November 1938...



**Grandfather appointed Notary in Balassagyarmat**

## Berlin 1939

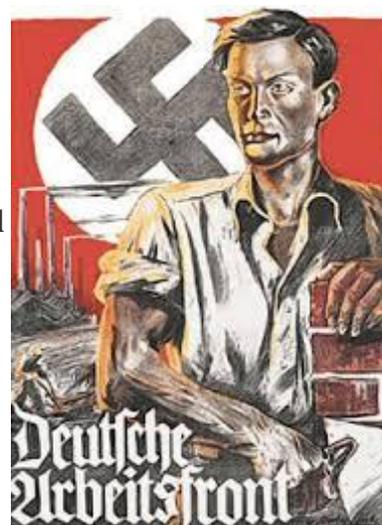
When I first arrived in Berlin in the autumn of 1937, we spent many days and weeks unfamiliar with the city until we finally grew comfortable with the environment. Now, however, we returned as seasoned Berliners. The college administration knew me well, and I was familiar with the university library and known at the Schloss, so that I could resume my research work-which, for us lawyers, was the foundation of our case studies and reading.

There were, however, significant changes in my social life. This was because I was, if not officially, engaged-and I felt that it would be inappropriate to maintain my relationship with my girlfriend Ilse. I believed it would be unfair to continue "courting" in Berlin while having a fiancée in Hungary. So, during a walk through the Tiergarten, I told Ilse that since I would only be in Berlin for a few more months, it would be wrong to tie her to me, as I was returning to Hungary and that would mean a final break between us.

I did not have the courage to reveal the full truth, but perhaps that was not necessary. She did not fully understand my behavior, but when she saw that I was resolute, she was visibly saddened and accepted my decision. I never saw her again, and I do not know what became of her.

I began visiting our embassy. I presented my credentials to the Justice Ministry to study the German Corporations Act. In consultation with the advisor for Cultural Affairs, we agreed that a thorough understanding of the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (*the National Socialist trade union organization that replaced the various trade unions*) would be the best approach to fulfill this task. Subsequently, the embassy issued a memorandum-likely through the Foreign Ministry-requesting support from German authorities for my planned research.

My life quickly became very busy. I had breakfast at the university canteen before walking over to the Schloss. I read the German press daily, staying closely connected to world events. In the afternoons, I worked at the Schloss for two to five hours, with only one-hour lunch breaks. I usually ate at the canteen, where the typical meal was Eintopfgerichte (stew). This one-dish menu was popular in Berlin taverns



**German Trade Union  
Organization**

at the time and was associated the Winter Emergency action fundraiser, which still collected weekly donations. The dish symbolised national cohesion. At that time, there was no unemployment in Germany, and many people were already living in prosperity.

In Berlin, there was growing tension in the press surrounding what would later be known as Kristallnacht. A Jewish emigrant had shot Otto Rath, a German embassy counselor. In response, the National Socialist Party organised a "mass outrage" in nearly every city. Dressed in civilian clothes, SA groups attacked and destroyed the remaining Jewish institutions and businesses.



**Kristallnacht – Passers-by at a Jewish-owned shop**

We did not witness any of this directly, but learned about it through the press, which presented the events with a clear government slant. In Berlin's western suburbs, where we lived, there were no Jewish institutions. However, in the Kurfürstendamm quarter, there was a Hungarian inn managed by Uncle Weiss, a Hungarian Jew. As a Hungarian citizen, his business thrived, and even German party members frequented the establishment because of their romanticised view of Hungary. Nothing happened to Weiss's shop.

At that time, Klári Tabódy was one of Hungary's theatrical stars, and occasionally Marika Röck also appeared on stage. The general atmosphere was pro-Hungarian. Yet my friends reported considerable disappointment in party circles that the Hungarian government had declined Hitler's offer of a Hungarian-German alliance, made to Horthy in Kiel (*near Denmark*).

The plan to extend northward and recover historic Hungarian territories from Pozsony (Bratislava) to Transcarpathia was naturally tempting. But the Hungarian government was determined to avoid entanglement in a European war.

However, following the Munich Agreement, the Hungarian government was compelled to revise its position. After the partial revision of the highlands (upper Hungary), which was accepted by England and France, the government became ready to build closer relations with the German Reich. This new direction was soon to be formalised by the Berlin visit of Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi.



**Hungarians in the now Slovakia**

The Prime Minister's program was limited-there were no celebrations, and what we would now call a working visit.

A number of journalists accompanied the Prime Minister, among them was Gyurka (George) Oláh, one of the outstanding personalities of the reforming generation. I remember that he boarded at the college, and I came to know him well.

After a busy day, he spent a few hours at the college dormitory, resting and enjoying our company. Naturally, we talked-and our central topics were foreign policy and Hungarian domestic affairs. We found ourselves largely in agreement.

When the conversation turned to land reform, we were joined by Béla Csikós, my old friend from Szeged, who had come to Berlin as a student of Professor Theodor Surányi Unger. Béla was studying on a Wirtschaftstag German scholarship and was eager to understand the principles behind the German economy.

Gyurka Oláh and I may have taken too strong position in favour of implementing radical land reform in Hungary as soon as possible We both supported the views expressed

in the work of Mátyás Matolcsy, advocating for the development of a healthy system of small peasant holdings and the elimination of the latifundium-those vast estates held by *noble or ecclesiastical hands*.

To my surprise, Béla Csikós opposed this view and presented the usual arguments advanced by opponents of reform at that time.

The debate was fierce, and Béla could not convince Gyurka or me.

I understood the background of Béla's thinking. At the time, conservative religious circles were heavily influenced by the leadership of the Szeged's bishop Gyula Glattfelder.

Later, Béla Csikós-Nagy would traverse the full spectrum of political thought, so I cannot say with certainty where he ultimately stood. I will return to this subject several times in the course of my memoir.



**Photo of Béla Csikós-Nagy 40 years later**

We celebrated Christmas, at the college once again. In addition to Béla Csikós-Nagy, another old friend from Szeged was present on a college scholarship. Elemér Buócz, also on a Wirtschaftstag scholarship, had come to Berlin, and as I had not seen him in years, many old memories were revived. On Christmas Eve, I received a telegram from my father informing me that he had finally received his notary appointment to Balassagyarmat. I showed Elemér the telegram, who warmly welcomed the news.

At the request of the embassy, I soon received detailed information about the Deutsche Arbeitsfront. A senior officer prepared a comprehensive programme that spanned several weeks and offered a thorough introduction to the organization.

Each morning, a car arrived at the college with a driver. According to the schedule, we visited predetermined factories, farms, and offices, giving me the opportunity to inspect this aspect of German life in detail.

They were attentive to hospitality, often inviting me to lunch in private homes or workers' clubhouse.

There elegant waiters in white uniforms served us-perhaps to emphasise the elevated status of the German worker. Notably, the appointed driver always ate at the table with me, enjoying a simple but hearty lunch. On several occasions, I saw Robert Ley, the CEO of the organization, dining in the company's dining room. There was no discrimination.

I had the opportunity to study the theoretical foundations of the organization, which was of particular interest to me. In Hungary, the media portrayed the Deutsche Arbeitsfront as a monopolistic corporation under state control, replacing the dissolved trade unions.

In discussions with senior officials, they explained that the old unions had been instruments of class struggle, and the German movement aimed to break this Marxist dynamic. They believed the issue could only be resolved radically and repeatedly emphasised their rejection of the Italian fascist model. Fascism, they argued, merely contained the class struggle within state frameworks, taming it constitutionally but not challenging its underlying premise.

The leaders of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront saw their main goal as bringing employers and employees together at one table to pursue shared objectives. They stressed that dividing occupations into separate union blocs was counterproductive. The party's role, they said, was to ensure that only the mutual interests of the Company were pursued.

I came to understand the German system-though it called itself "socialist" to appeal to the Marxist-educated adult generation-was not socialist in the Marxist sense.

Foreign observers often misunderstood this contradiction. On one hand, they attacked National Socialism as a tool of big capital and feudal forces, branding it "brown-Bolshevism". On the other, they accused German capital of collaborating with Nazi forces, and Hitler himself of betraying the socialist wing of the movement.

From my observations, I concluded that the Deutsche Arbeitsfront-a government-sponsored union structure replacing traditional trade unions-was not truly Marxist. The party's use of the term "socialist" was meant to signal its intent to raise the living standards of the working class and integrate them into national life, loosening their historical alienation from the constitutional order.

The institutions of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront genuinely served this purpose. Workers and plant managers collaborated toward common solutions. Political influence

ensured that management supported improvements, and I saw many well-equipped canteens, sports grounds, and work places. In some cases, the organisation addressed commuting challenges and facilitated nearby housing, even building new homes.

They also supported the cultural life of the working class by offering affordable theater tickets and organising excursions that improved living standards. The '*Strength through Joy*' foreign voyages served propagandistic aims, but the masses benefited from more modest uplifting experiences.

In the business sphere, traditional free-market capitalism remained intact, but investment was directed according to government priorities. Was there a planned economy in the German Reich? My studies at the time led me to answer in the negative.

However, the idea of profit-sharing did take shape, primarily through the payment of bonuses.

Of course, the entire system was built on a one-party state. This was precisely the point where Hungarian researchers encountered difficulties—they could not resolve how these German innovations might be adapted to a democratic system. The Achilles' heel of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront was that its solutions could easily sour without party leadership, devolving into party dictatorship.

History, of course, resolved this issue differently. The German Reich fell in the Second World War before it could reconcile this tension within its system.

Yet, half a century later, any serious thinker must acknowledge that many aspects of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront's declared key tasks remain relevant to contemporary Western systems—balancing free enterprise with the need to address social injustice.

However, the course of our research was soon disturbed by the political events of the time. More and more articles appeared in the press, sharply criticising the behavior of the Czechs and the Czechoslovak government. It became clear that they were treating Slovak national politicians with increasing favour, and reports also emerged suggesting that the Rusyn-Ukrainian population of Transcarpathia was leaning toward secession from the Czechoslovak state.

Then the headlines grew bolder, appearing on front pages, and one did not need to be an expert to realize that a crisis was unfolding. When reports of atrocities committed against the German population surfaced, we knew that the situation was reaching its climax. This was the consensus in our dormitory lounge.

I suggested to my colleague Laci Feketekúthy, that we walk down Wilhelm Strasse to see if there were any signs of the impending events. And so, we did-around 11 p.m., we strolled through the deserted streets, passing the Chancellery and the Foreign Ministry building several times. Then, suddenly, a fleet of Mercedes cars arrived. One door opened, and out stepped a towering, bearded figure-Dörnberg, the Chief of Protocol, whose photograph was well-known in the newspapers. He assisted his guest, who emerged in evening dress, top hat in hand, and paused briefly on the sidewalk.

There was no mistaking -it was Emil Hácha, the new president of the Czechoslovak state. We saw them only for a moment before Dörnberg ushered the president into the Foreign Ministry, whose gates opened swiftly.



***Emil Hácha the third  
President of  
Czechoslovakia from  
1938 to 1939***

The cars disappeared, and we decided there was no point in waiting further, we returned home.

The next day, the newspapers reported in large headlines that an agreement had been reached and Hitler proclaimed the establishment of the 'Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia'. Der Angriff' an afternoon Berlin paper, reported that Slovakia had declared its independence and that Transcarpathia had celebrated its independence under Ukraine banner.

The second edition of Angriff reported that Hungarian troops, in conjunction with German forces had crossed the Trianon border and were approaching the Carpathians.

From German and Hungarian sources, we gained the impression that, at this moment, the Hungarian government had out maneuvered German plans. It seemed the German propaganda machine had been caught off guard by the Transcarpathian development, which was of particular significance to us Hungarians.

I considered other dimensions of the situation. On the occasion of the Hungarian National Day,15 March, I was assigned to accompany a young captain from Hitler's bodyguard, who had been invited as a guest to our ceremony. That year, I did not deliver the oration, but the college administration asked me to host the officer. Naturally, our conversation soon turned to politics.

I suggested that, in my opinion, Britain and France would offer strong resistance to the German Reich, raising the real threat of war.

The officer dismissed the likelihood of serious Anglo-French resistance. However, when I pressed the point, he added that any assessment of the global political situation must take into account the Russian behavior. He said that the German Reich had learned from the First World War and would under no circumstance risk a two-front war. As for the Soviet Union, he pointed out that in recent months, there had been no articles in German press criticising it.

This gave me pause. I began to reconsider Germany's sudden shift on the Transcarpathian question. At first, I believed it was a gesture of sensitivity toward Hungarian interests. But based on this new information, I formed the opinion that the Germans were also trying to avoid provoking the Soviet Union. After all, the creation of a Ukrainian-led Transcarpathian state could have served as a kind of "Piedmont"-a springboard for a broader Ukrainian secessionist movement, potentially destabilising Soviet control over Ukraine.

(Piedmont was the launching point for Italy's unification, between 1859 and 1861, following earlier failed wars against the Austrian Empire in 1820–21 and 1848–49. This process is sometimes referred to as "Piedmontisation")

Later on, I had the opportunity to meet with Ukrainian emigrants living in Berlin, including a few senior officials who, to my surprise, confirmed aspects of my evolving views. I was disappointed, however, by their declared opposition to the German government's conduct. More troubling still, they showed little understanding of Hungary's historical grievances.

They stressed that Ukraine needed a springboard to establish its independence, and warned that Hungary's actions would only exacerbate relations between Ukraine and Hungary if an independent Ukraine were to emerge.

Of course, I responded by pointing out that Hungary had been the sovereign over this land for a thousand years. The Ukrainians—whom we traditionally referred to as Ruthenians—had arrived as guest settlers and were therefore not in a position to demand that Hungary relinquish its natural borders along the Carpathian Mountains.



***Ruthenia area in Slovakia claimed by the Ukraine***

I was studying German literature in detail—works that examined the causes of Germany's defeat in the First World War and the factors that shaped its foreign policy objectives and dilemmas. It was striking to learn that many authors acknowledged the damaging rigidity of German diplomacy. This flaw was often attributed to Emperor Wilhelm II's militarist policies—not merely his personality, but the broader Prussian character, which was unbending and showed little regard for individual life.

The literature recognised this legacy, and it was evident that the new German Foreign Office was making deliberate efforts to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. I intend to return to this issue later and offer a more thorough evaluation.

The literature identified Germany's fundamental strategic dilemma as a choice between two paths. One approach, associated with the name of Bismarck, could be summarised as forming alliances in Eastern Europe, developing maritime and colonial policies, ensuring the well-being of the population, and relocating displaced persons as needed.

The other possibility was for the German Empire to continue its historical *Drang nach Osten*—its drive eastward.

After the First World War, many writers argued that such a policy could only be pursued in alliance with the British Empire. They attributed Wilhelm II's failure to his inability to reach an understanding with the advancing Russian imperial ambitions in the Balkans, while simultaneously persisting with colonial and maritime expansion. This dual strategy, they believed, invited the fatal two-front war that ultimately sealed Germany's fate.

(*Drang nach Osten*, (German: "Drive to the East"), was a policy or disposition aimed at colonising the Slavic lands east of Germany. The term originally referred to the eastward movement of German settlers in the 12th and 13th centuries, but was later resurrected by Adolf Hitler in the 20th century to describe his plans for acquiring *Lebensraum*—"living space"-for the German people).

National Socialism, acting against Bolshevism and mobilising civil forces, made it understandable that Hitler believed an alliance with the British Empire would open the door to the East. This was the rationale behind his naval agreement with England. Officially, he did not renounce Germany's lost colonies, but he allowed British leaders to understand that the issue could be resolved through negotiation.

However, when the British Empire—if not formally, then emotionally—aligned itself with the United States and strongly opposed Germany’s eastern expansionist ambitions, Germany felt compelled to revise its Eastern policy and began exploring the possibility of coexistence with the Soviet Union.

The reaction from England and France was swift and unequivocal in their opposition to the Czech–Moravian Protectorate. British diplomacy left no doubt that it would resist any further German advances. While many within the German leadership still believed that Western resistance would not escalate into a declaration of war, German diplomacy began seeking a strategic balance and entered into negotiations with the Soviet Union.

In this respect, it could be said that German diplomacy appeared flexible, as if attempting to abandon militarism in favour of diplomatic maneuvering.

Nonetheless, gestures toward England were still necessary—signals that German policy was prepared to pivot, even if its eastern ambitions had not yet been finalised. This intention was underscored by Hitler’s renunciation of the limited Anglo-German naval armaments agreement.

As a registered journalist, I was invited to a group outing organised in Berlin for accredited members of the press. According to the programme, a special train departed in the evening, taking us to Wilhelmshaven. The train carriages were sleepers, so we arrived well-rested the next morning in the charming North German port city.

## THE BATTLESHIP *TIRPITZ*

Compiled by José M. Rico



The battleship *Tirpitz* conducting trials in the Baltic Sea during the fall of 1941.



Tirpitz Badge

The *Tirpitz*, second and last battleship of the *Bismarck* class, was the largest warship built in Germany. She was commissioned on February 1941, and afterwards went to the Baltic to conduct sea trials. At the beginning of 1942, she was sent to Trondheim, Norway in order to repel a possible allied invasion, and to attack the Russia-bound Arctic convoys. As part of the “Fleet in being”, her mere presence forced the Allies to maintain a considerable force in Scapa Flow that could have been otherwise employed in other theatres of operations. In July 1942, she was indirectly responsible for the destruction of convoy PQ-17 without firing a single shot. In September 1943, while anchored in Kåfjord/Altafjord, she was attacked by British midget submarines and put out of action for the first time. Later subjected to continuous aerial bombings, the *Tirpitz* was finally sunk off Håkøya Island near Tromsø on 12 November 1944 after being hit by 5.4-ton “Tallboy” bombs.

On the train, we learned the details of the programme. First, we attended the launching ceremony of the battleship Tirpitz. This colossal vessel—some 20,000 tons, I believe—was christened with the traditional champagne by a grandchild of Bismarck. For me, a boy from the plains of Hungary, it was a truly special experience. (1 April 1939) followed the fate of the ship throughout the war and later discovered that it sank in 1945. It became a poignant memento for me in Australia when I saw a film depicting the very ceremony in which I had participated.

The second part of the programme included an inspection of three or four submarines, which were opened to the very interested journalists.

Early in the afternoon, we attended a mass rally at which Hitler spoke. This time, I had no complaints about visibility in the large crowd—the guests were seated directly behind the lectern on the grandstand, and I was fortunate enough to observe the proceedings just a few steps behind Hitler. Next to me, I remember clearly, sat the Daily Mail correspondent. We spoke in German, and he appeared quite nervous when Hitler announced the termination of the fleet convention.

The mass meeting itself followed the familiar pattern I had seen before. Yet one small scene stood out. A strong offshore wind threatened to blow away the small paper sheets Hitler used to mark key points in his speech. He glanced at them occasionally when transitioning to a new topic. The local Gauleiter, noticing the difficulty, discreetly dropped to his knees—hidden from the audience—and offered Hitler a ceremonial letter dagger. Hitler accepted the gesture and used the dagger to anchor the papers, playing with the wind's effects as he spoke.

After the evening celebrations, we enjoyed a grand meal and returned to our sleeper compartments. The train raced back through the night, and by morning I had arrived at Friedrichstrasse station and was soon back at the dormitory.

The atmosphere in Berlin had grown palpably tense. Newspapers had begun publishing anti-Polish articles, and it was widely felt that Germany's "Great Eastern problem"—the Polish Corridor—was nearing a resolution. The rigid stance of the Western powers and their guarantee to Poland raised the possibility of war, although the general public was reluctant to entertain such thoughts. The memory of the First World War was still too fresh, and even the National Socialist movement circulated a famous poster bearing Hitler's image with the inscription: "Adolf Hitler, the front-line soldier, knows war. He is for peace."

Yet national sentiment overshadowed caution. Many imagined that, in this crisis, England would ultimately yield. The political party of the movement was increasingly eclipsed by national fervor and had become indistinguishable from the people.



**Unter den Linden at Tiergarten**

News had leaked that thousands of people would march alongside major battle units, and that this review would demonstrate the readiness of the Reich.

Following the advice, I'd received, I set out at six o'clock in the morning to secure a place along the parade route. I managed to find a spot in the third or fourth row, almost directly opposite the platform from which the Leader would receive the salute.

The parade was truly grand in scale. Fully armed troops marched in endless rows. Among the infantry were Austrian units—their appearance was somewhat lax compared to the discipline of the Prussians. The crowd welcomed them warmly, but a Prussian near me remarked with a smile, "We'll teach them how to parade..."

The large formations of armoured vehicles were greeted with particular enthusiasm, and the crowd's pride reached its peak when the new German air force planes roared overhead.

Before we dispersed, another Prussian summed it up perfectly when he said, "This wasn't just a parade—it was the Chief reviewing his army."

We Hungarians, barely a week after the parade, turned our attention to the visit of the new Hungarian Prime Minister, Count Pál Teleki, to Berlin. I had heard much about

It was in this charged mood that the country celebrated Adolf Hitler's 50th birthday. We knew that a large military parade was planned along the broad avenue of Unter den Linden, near the Tiergarten, at the heart of the Siegesallee—the Franco-German war memorial column.



Teleki from my father—they were close friends who met regularly and often exchanged political views.

I knew that Teleki was deeply averse to the German National Socialist regime and fully aware of the dangers it posed to the Hungarian state. Nevertheless, he accepted Gömbös's core tenet: that a strong Central Europe could only be secured through the geographic and strategic alignment of the Rome–Berlin axis.

It was clear to Teleki that the success of Hungary's revisionist efforts depended on dismantling the strength of the French-led Little Entente.

(The Little Entente was an alliance formed in 1920–1921 by Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, aimed at mutual defence against Hungarian revisionism and the prevention of a Habsburg restoration. France supported the alliance by signing treaties with each member country.)

This is why Teleki supported the Berlin–Rome political alignment.

(The Rome–Berlin Axis was a coalition formed in 1936 between Italy and Germany. The agreement, informally linking the two countries, was formulated by Italy's foreign minister Galeazzo Ciano and reached on 25 October 1936.)

On the other hand, Teleki spoke at length about his impressions of America. He was convinced that if a new war were to break out, Germany would ultimately succumb to the overwhelming material power of the maritime nations.

Count Pál János Ede Teleki de Szék served as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Hungary from 19 July 1920 to 14 April 1921, and again from 16 February 1939 to 3 April 1941.

He was a proponent of cautious, conservative Hungarian political leadership and hoped that Hungary's position could be secured through the introduction of a "Transylvania policy" aimed at both the Anglo-Saxon and German powers. At the time, there were serious grounds for such a strategy. The United States had enshrined its isolationist stance in a law of neutrality, and few believed that British and American interests could diverge significantly.

("Premier Pál Teleki, himself a Transylvanian, sought Axis support for territorial revision in Romania while curbing extreme rightist parties within the country. In his letter to Hitler, he stressed Hungary's inviolable sovereignty.")



**Pál Teleki**

It was, therefore, a relief to Hungarian diplomacy that—unexpectedly—we were not being asked to comply with German demands, but rather to assist in preserving the neutrality of South-East Europe should war break out. At the time, it appeared that Britain had accepted the notion of Hungarian neutrality. Unlike Romania, we were not formally guaranteed, but behind the scenes, St. James's accredited diplomats assured us that after the war, they would not permit another Trianon.

'All Ambassadors and High Commissioners to the United Kingdom are formally accredited at the Court of St James's.'

This was the basis of the joint statement published in connection with Teleki's visit. Both countries expressed the hope that peace would be maintained in Southeast Europe. For the Germans, this was especially important, as in the event of a Western war, it was vital for them to secure agricultural and oil supplies from the region.

Teleki also visited the college. We stood in a half-circle in the Great Hall, and the Prime Minister spoke to each of us individually. When he reached me, I introduced myself, and he responded warmly, saying he recognised me as the son of his old friend from Szeged. He inquired about the details of my work and immediately remarked that it would be important for me to study the Italian system as well. He assured me that he would support any future request I might make for an Italian scholarship.

The last time I saw him was on the first of May, when he stood near Hitler in the central section of the Olympic Stadium. Hitler was inspecting the youth, and Teleki had been invited to attend because of his well-known role as Chief Scout in Hungary and his deep interest in youth development.

At that time, a Polish delegation was also in Berlin and visited the University. They were university students attending a function at Humboldt University. We invited them to our boarding school for afternoon tea as a gesture of goodwill, acknowledging the Polish-Hungarian border. It gave me the opportunity to learn more about the Polish position.

At that moment, the German claim against Poland seemed relatively modest. The primary goal was to incorporate the Free City of Danzig into the Reich and to connect the city with a secure, direct Autobahn corridor.

('The Free City of Danzig was a semi-autonomous city-state that existed between 1920 and 1939, comprising the Baltic Sea port of Danzig and nearly 200 surrounding towns. It was established on 15 November 1920 in accordance with Treaty of Versailles, following the end of World War I')

The members of the Polish delegation, however, refused to entertain the idea of such an agreement. They explained that it would merely be the first step in a broader German strategy. Moreover, the offer was tied to the condition that Poland renounce the British guarantee of protection—something they were unwilling to do. Nor were they prepared to consider a German–Polish military alliance.

In other words, the Polish students reinforced my perception that German foreign policy was heading toward an impasse, and that the possibility of war in the West was growing increasingly likely.

Western diplomacy, however, failed to anticipate the possibility of a German–Russian reconciliation. Yet it was precisely this development that ultimately sealed Poland’s fate.

Spring was slowly turning into summer, and I had the opportunity to take a trip beyond Germany’s borders. My legal trainee salary was transferred each month and credited to a German Mark current account. This meant that whenever I requested funds from the Reichsbank, they released the full amount at the official exchange rate. It was a considerable advantage, as the German Mark was quoted abroad at a relatively low rate.

I borrowed 500 German Marks from a good friend and exchanged 300 Marks for British Pounds Sterling. With that, I purchased a round-trip airline ticket from Lufthansa for a weekend trip to Copenhagen.

In Denmark, I visited the famous Tivoli Gardens, admired the royal palace, and saw the Rodin sculpture of the sea mermaid in the harbour. I even travelled to the renowned “Hamlet” castle. I managed so well with the British pounds that nearly the entire amount remained unspent.

On the way back, I exchanged the remaining British pounds on the tourist market, and by the time I returned to Tempelhof Airport, I had approximately 700 Marks. I repaid the 500 Marks to my friend and still had enough left to buy a portable gramophone for my Ica—because the time of my return home was now drawing near.



### **Hamlet Castle and Rodin Little Mermaid sculpture**

But then something happened that stirred the waters around me—something that would later haunt me and expose me to criticism.

My old friends István (Stephen) Arató and Béla Csikós-Nagy arrived in Berlin for a short visit. I don't recall exactly which of them brought it, but one of them had a book titled *Szürke Könyv* (Grey Book), written by Iván Lajos, a university lecturer from Pécs. The author was well known for his royalist views, so it was perhaps unsurprising that he adopted a strongly anti-German stance. His work amounted to a large-scale propaganda attack against Germany, clearly intended to steer Hungarian foreign policy toward an anti-German direction.

We found the writing incredibly primitive, and the author appeared to have little understanding of actual German conditions.

His central premise was that the German population was vehemently opposed to the government's policies, and that the mood of the country was so volatile that the leadership had to prepare for an insurgency. He claimed that Germany's economy was on the brink of bankruptcy and collapse. Militarily, he argued that the German army was far from ready for war, and that its tanks were merely light-plated propaganda machines.

He believed that Britain and France were fully prepared for war, and that their efforts would be supported by both the Soviet Union and the United States. He even described Soviet air force and infantry parades as direct threats to the German Reich.

He imagined the coming war as a trench conflict, reminiscent of the First World War, with assaults on the impenetrable Maginot Line.

We at the Berlin Collegium Hungaricum found all of this incomprehensible. Based on our personal experience and knowledge of German conditions, we were convinced of the

book's falsehoods. In the event of war, we believed it would be irresponsible to expose Hungary to a situation that could justify a German occupation.

The next afternoon, the three of us were guests of Vilmos (William) Szigethy. As always, Vili outdid himself—a small beer keg was on tap, and we enjoyed a lively conversation. Naturally, the Grey Book from Budapest came up, and we laughed at its clearly unfounded assertions.

William Szigethy then declared that this could not be left unanswered. He insisted that, as Hungarian students in Berlin, it was our duty to respond to this propaganda. We were hesitant. We preferred to avoid politics and pointed out that publishing a response would require funds we didn't have.

Then William offered a solution: we could write the book, and he would cover the costs of its production and dissemination. That sounded far more feasible—and in good spirits, we agreed to undertake the task.

When we began to think more seriously about our somewhat light-hearted commitment to the project, we realised that we had only a short time to gather the resources necessary for the work. This was no easy task, as the only real value of Iván Lajos's book lay in its extensive use of quotations from newspapers and other publications. If we were to respond meaningfully, we could not ignore this material.

Then one of us had the idea to approach the German Propaganda Ministry for assistance in obtaining the source material. We reasoned that a rebuttal to an anti-German propaganda document would be in their interest.

As a registered journalist working in Berlin, I was able to arrange a meeting with one of the ministerial counsellors. I presented our request, and the response was cooperative. He informed me that they were already aware of Iván Lajos's book. What struck us most was his revelation that the Hungarian text was almost a literal translation of an anti-German book originally published in Paris by a German exile. Iván Lajos had made no reference to this source and presented the work as his own.

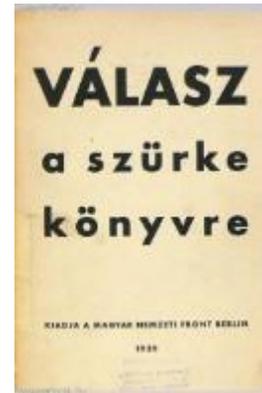
The ministry agreed to collect the requested materials and promised they would be ready within three days. And so it happened. At the appointed time and place, we were shown into a large meeting room with a long table, where the resources—newspapers, books, texts—were neatly grouped and laid out. Our task was greatly simplified.

We divided the sections among ourselves, began copying the material, and compared the quotations in Lajos's book with their original sources. We completed this phase of the work in two days.

We resolved not to be polemical in our response, but simply to demonstrate what had become clear to us during our research: that 90 percent of the quotations were distorted or did not correspond to the claims made. Given Hungary's strict libel laws, we were careful to limit ourselves to exposing forgeries and factual misstatements.

The handwritten manuscript was soon completed. William Szigethy provided a typist, and within two weeks the manuscript was ready for the printer.

I wrote a preface for the book on William's behalf, emphasising that the response was a project of the Berlin National Front and the Hungarian colony, undertaken without German financial assistance. To avoid any suspicion of profiteering, we pledged that the proceeds from the book would be donated to the governor's wife's Winter Emergency Fund.



There was very little politics in the book, and what there was had mostly been written by me. I noted that the "German question" had, over the past thousand years, been a recurring challenge in Hungary's national struggles. It was our duty to approach this sensitive issue with care and not allow public pressure to dictate government policy.

Regarding the possibility of war, I did not deny its likelihood. But I argued that the Second World War would not resemble the trench warfare of the First. As I wrote, the weight of armoured and air forces would be decisive. If the fronts became hopelessly frozen, the maritime powers' overwhelming resources would likely lead to the downfall of the German Reich once again.

When the German Propaganda Ministry read the text after its release, they were probably not entirely satisfied. It must be emphasised that the book was published by William Szigethy without censorship. The ministry took note of it but raised no objections. They did not publicise it, nor did they thank us for our efforts—which, of course, we had not sought.

With the manuscript at the printer, we turned our attention back to our own affairs. For me, the academic year was ending, and I had plans to tour Germany to become familiar with the varied landscapes of the Reich. As a journalist, I was granted authorisation to visit

designated destinations and received first-class tickets. I thoroughly enjoyed the study tour.

I visited Hamburg, Cologne, and Frankfurt. I remember well that on the way to Munich, I had to wait at the station in Kempten (Allgäu) for a few hours. I was quite tired and didn't do any sightseeing, spending my time at the station. Those few hours in Kempten stayed with me—because, years later, from 1947 to 1949, I would spend two years in exile there.

I returned to Berlin in early August, and by then we were already aware that war was imminent. The German public still did not know—or did not want to accept—the reality. I recall that on the train back to Berlin, I sat across from a young woman in the dining car. When our conversation turned to politics and I said that England would not yield on the Polish question and that war was inevitable, she froze. I regretted having spoken so bluntly.

Of course, we spoke of little else. Young embassy officials and journalists alike discussed the impending war and Hungary's fate in the unfolding crisis.

One afternoon, I walked with Bandi (Andy) Gellért along Unter den Linden, and we spoke at length about the political situation. He believed that Germany would eventually lose the war. I, too, thought this possible. We agreed that Hungary must seize the opportunities presented by the conflict to further the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, especially regarding Transylvania.

Yet it was clear to us that if Hungary drifted too far toward the German side, we might one day share in the misery of war. This raised the question: could we set aside revisionist politics and focus solely on preserving neutrality?

Bandi Gellért answered in the negative. And so, we concluded that bitter years lay ahead—but we must accept our fate.

My summer study trip had one final stop. I planned to travel to East Prussia to visit Königsberg, the city of Kant, and on the way back I explored Danzig, which was already at the centre of world politics.

I spent a day in Königsberg, and in the old medieval city I felt the spirit of Drang nach Osten—Germany's historical "Drive to the East," a policy aimed at colonising the Slavic lands east of Germany. Danzig evoked similar feelings, as did Lübeck, where the

patina of the old Hanseatic city was still visible in its architecture and atmosphere. Today, however, this was represented by swastika flags and SS soldiers patrolling the streets.

Danzig was a German city, and that alone was not unusual. But suddenly I noticed that among the marching uniformed units were members of the Berlin detachments. As an “old Berliner,” I recognised them immediately—their uniform sleeves bore the inscription: Reichsstandarte Adolf Hitler – Berlin.

In other words, the military occupation was effectively complete.

I travelled on to the famous resort town of Zoppot (Sopot), known for its spa and casino. It was a sweltering summer day, and I swam in the Baltic Sea. I had visited Swinemünde (Świnoujście) earlier in the summer when my sister Kata came to Berlin and we toured the surrounding areas. Back then, the atmosphere was still peaceful.

Now, in Zoppot, Polish and German reconnaissance planes circled overhead, and white tufts of smoke from anti-aircraft guns appeared in the sky—the first shots of the Second World War.

When I returned to Berlin, I was greeted by the news that the printing of our book was complete. It was ready to appear on the market under the title *Válasz a Szürke Könyvre* (Answer to the Grey Book), a 75-page booklet.

William and I decided that I would take one hundred copies with me on my journey home and distribute them to newspaper editors who were willing to circulate them.

***(This book was placed on the index of banned books in 1945 by the communists.)***

I remember that I left for home on August 18, which was Ica’s name-day. I brought with me the gift of a portable gramophone for her, hoping to see her within a few days and—though belated—celebrate her name-day together.

At that point, I did not say goodbye to Berlin, as this trip was intended only as a short holiday, with plans to return by the end of November. My work was not yet complete,



**Zoppot - North Riviera**

and I left everything in my room, expecting to resume my studies shortly. However, the world of politics disrupted my plans.

I departed from Friedrichstrasse railway station on the train to Budapest. I had purchased a sleeper ticket, and before settling in for the night, I met my travelling companion—these carriages were double-berth coaches. It turned out that he was a member of the ministerial staff of the German Ministry of Economic Affairs, on route to join an economic delegation in Bucharest, Romania.

Understandably, our conversation soon turned to politics. I did not hide my belief that we were on the eve of war, which visibly shocked my companion. He looked at me with disbelief and insisted that, at the last moment, the British government would relent.

I expressed my conviction that Britain would not allow the German Reich to acquire further territories and would stand in its way. From his reaction, I sensed he suspected I might be one of the anti-German Hungarians. I clarified that I was not a politician, and that I had spent the past two years in Berlin studying. I told him I felt sympathetic to Germany's efforts to overturn the Versailles system and believed that Hungary and Germany were moving in parallel.

He calmed down and reiterated his hope that Britain would eventually give in. For me, the conversation was another glimpse into the prevailing mood in Germany—one of disbelief and misplaced optimism.

Upon arriving in Budapest, I immediately visited the editor of *Virradat* (Dawn), the weekly paper. I believed they might be interested in distributing our booklet—and indeed, they were. Gábor Bornemissza received me at once and assured me that they would actively participate in its distribution. Financial matters were not discussed, as I explained that such arrangements should be made directly with William Szigethy.

*Virradat* ran an editorial in its Monday edition praising the book, and other newspapers in Budapest followed with commentary of varying length on its publication.

I do not know how the distribution ultimately unfolded. Historical events soon overtook the novelty of the book. When German tanks encircled and crushed Polish resistance within weeks, Iván Lajos's claims about "tin-plated German combat vehicles" lost all credibility.

I contacted my dear mother immediately, and we spent a few lovely hours together. Passing through Budapest, I met my father, who was staying with my sister in Bábolna. He wanted me to spend a few days with them. For many years, he had represented the city of

Szeged in the August 20th celebrations and had become accustomed to visiting Budapest for the occasion. Now, however, he had come from Balassagyarmat, where his notarial office was well established.

We spent St. Stephen's Day evening at the Hungária Coffee House, where he had attended every year on this day of celebration. At our table were Ida Turay and her husband, Pista Békefy. We enjoyed a beautiful fireworks display, never imagining that this would be the last peacetime St. Stephen's Day fireworks to illuminate the city.

Naturally, the conversation turned to the Grey Book by Iván Lajos and our response. Pista asked many questions, and I explained in more detail that the anti-war opposition had not yet fully developed, and that the precarious nature of Russian behaviour remained unresolved. The German and Russian governments were still negotiating. Pista was sceptical. But a few days later, when the German–Russian Convention was revealed, he called me and admitted that my time in Berlin had given me valuable insight.

The next day, my father continued on to Bábolna, and I travelled to Miskolc to meet my Ica and greet her family, who were waiting at the railway station. My future father-in-law, with his great sense of humour, did not wait for formalities. After all, we were independent young people and had made our commitments freely. He introduced himself with a smile: "I am who you'll be..." We were amused, and any tension dissolved instantly.

I was very fond of both my future father-in-law and mother-in-law. I simply called her "Mom." My only problem was how to say no to a second helping of food—her cooking was so delicious it was nearly impossible to refuse.

My reunion with Ica was true love. We toured Miskolc and the surrounding area over a day or two, spending much time alone, talking and making plans. That year, Ica had become a high school teacher and was occupied with the challenge of finding a suitable position. The local convent in Győr had offered her a job. Leaving the family home in Miskolc was painful, but Győr was close to Bábolna, where my sister Kata lived. It seemed that at least she would be near extended family and could rely on them if needed.

Since it was early September, Ica and I decided to travel to Bábolna together and from there visit Győr to assess the conditions before making a final decision. A few days later, we arrived in Bábolna, where the family received us lovingly.

We explored Győr. Ica did not like the job and found the accommodation offered to be very primitive—especially after four years at the Horthy College in Szeged, which was modern and provided excellent amenities. She urged her parents to help her seek another

solution. There was hope, as the family had good relations with the convent leadership in Miskolc. Her father was revered for decades as an outstanding teacher at the Fráter György Catholic High School.

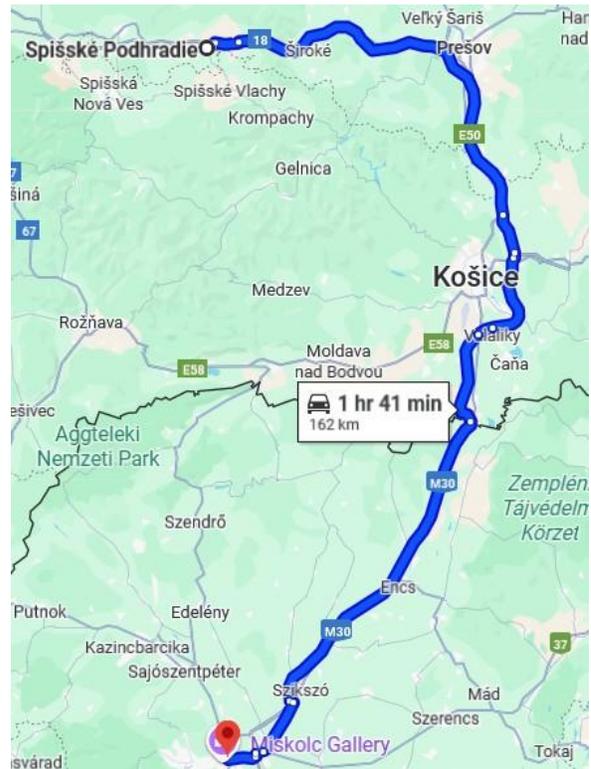
Ica's family was of Szepesség descent. Her father's family had lived for centuries in the high mountains of the Tátra, and her mother's family came from Gömör, part of the Szepesi Érchegység in the Carpathians. Her mother was born in Salgótarján, Hungary. The Treaty of Trianon had torn them from their homeland after the First World War. Her father had refused to take the oath before the Czechoslovak authorities, chose to retain his Hungarian citizenship, and fled to Miskolc as a refugee.

We were still in Bábolna when, in late August, news of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact became public. It was clear that Germany had been given a free hand by the Russians to resolve the Polish question, and that an agreement had been made to divide Poland between them. The British guarantee was now actionable, and I was convinced that a German move was imminent.

At the same time, I received mail via Berlin—an invitation to attend the Nuremberg political party events of the German Reich. As an accredited journalist, I had been expecting it. However, I was certain that the Parteitag der Frieden (Congress of Peace) would now be cancelled.

We rose early on the first of September. We had plans for the day, but I felt that events were about to unfold. I turned on the radio and tuned into a German station. Marching music played, and announcements called for all German ships in the Eastern Sea to return to port. Then came the report: at eight o'clock that morning, a meeting of the German Reich had been convened, and Hitler had spoken. A few hours later, we learned that Germany had attacked Poland. The Second World War had begun.

**We received the news with mixed emotions.**



***Migrated from Szepesvaralja to Miskolc***

We had always felt a brotherly connection to Poland, and the German attack recalled memories of old national struggles against Habsburg German imperialism. On the other hand, there was some relief that the Drang nach Osten—Germany’s drive to the east—was not directed toward us. The imbalance of power in Europe opened opportunities for Hungary’s revisionist goals. Yet war and its inevitable sacrifices stirred personal fears that lingered beneath the surface.

Two young German veterinarians working as guests in Bábolna were not only party members but also belonged to the SS. It was striking that they did not exhibit the enthusiasm of the First World War generation. In fact, both received the news of the German attack with seriousness and reservation. One of them kept repeating that his generation, like their fathers in the First World War, would fulfil their duty.

Ica, who was then an avid badge collector, had a few days earlier asked one of the veterinarians—smiling kindly—if she might have a party badge. He had refused. But on hearing the news of war, he quietly removed the badge from his chest and offered it to her, saying that if she still wanted it, she could have it. Ica accepted it for her collection.

On September 3rd, we said goodbye to Bábolna. My father returned to Balassagyarmat, while Ica and I waited in Budapest for the fast train to Miskolc. That afternoon,

between 4 and 5 p.m., we sat in the EMKE Coffee House, sipping coffee. At a quarter to five, the radio was turned on for the latest news. The café audience listened in silence as the announcer detailed the unfolding events. Then came the confirmation: the German government had not met the British ultimatum. The announcer repeated the text:

“Her Majesty’s Government, therefore, starting from 5 p.m. this afternoon, sees itself as being at war with the German Empire...”

Involuntarily, we looked at the clock. It pointed to five o’clock.

We felt the historical significance of those hours, and understandably, we asked ourselves how the war would affect our personal lives. We were full of optimism, making plans for the future—yet for the first time, we sensed that history’s devil wagon was beginning to sweep us along.

I tried to return to my mother’s home from the railway station, which was in the city, and somewhere along the Boulevard I read the latest news: Italy had declared its



neutrality in the conflict. This came as a surprise. Only days earlier, Italy had signed the German–Italian Steel Pact in Berlin, and I could still picture Ciano, the Italian Foreign Minister, driving back with Rudolf Hess from Wilhelmstraße, the old Reichstag, after the signing ceremony. This development sparked hope that Hungary, too, might be spared, as we often followed the Italian government’s lead.

I spent the following days with my mother, but also visited the army barracks to inquire whether I had a place in my battalion in case of mobilisation. They told me it was possible, as precautionary measures were being implemented. Indeed, I was called up on September 13. However, my service ended on September 19, as it became clear that Hungary could maintain its neutral status.

I also went to the German embassy, hoping to return to Berlin—if only for a few days—to retrieve my clothing, personal belongings, and study papers still at the hostel. In wartime, entry into the German Reich now required special permits. I submitted my application, and they promised to respond, likely allowing a short stay.

I travelled to Balassagyarmat to visit my father for a few weeks. I discovered this charming highland town, where my father had by then made many good friends. At one of the local restaurants, I was introduced to several of them. We dined with Jenő (Eugene) Karsay, a *csendő*r (gendarme) colonel and district supervisor. I came to know Jenő as a highly skilled and principled officer, but above all, a good Hungarian man—full of faith and hope.

He spoke with me at length and warmly congratulated me on the booklet *Answer to the Grey Book*. As a soldier, he especially appreciated the section where I argued that the war would not be fought in trenches, but would be decided by fast-moving armoured vehicles and air forces. This view was, of course, validated by the ongoing German–Polish campaign. I told him that I owed this insight to my studies in 1937, when I had the opportunity to translate German military literature for our General Staff officers.

I shortened my stay in Balassagyarmat by a week when I had the chance to be with Ica again. She had gone to teach in Győr and had inspected private student accommodations, but was still dissatisfied with the situation. Eventually, she was appointed to a position in Miskolc, allowing her to return to the family circle.

We decided to officially celebrate our engagement on New Year’s Eve, with only her family, my parents, and Ica’s beloved aunt Ilu mama as guests.

After returning to Balassagyarmat, the German approval arrived—and I was once again on my way back to Berlin

The German capital was quiet and tense. Each evening, the city fell into blackout, and the entertainment districts were nearly deserted. The old atmosphere was gone. Once again, Berlin confirmed my impression that the German people strongly supported their government, but harboured no illusions about the gravity of the situation.

I had dinner with a colleague at the Kempinski restaurant. The mood was so sombre that we left early. My farewell to Berlin was a sad one.

Back in Budapest, I reported to the Department of Justice and received my assignment. I was to report to the Budapest Criminal Tribunal.

My mother found a room for me in Újlipótváros, on Tátra Street, and thus began my new life in Budapest.



***Tátra Street Új-Lipótváros***

## Changes in My Life During 1940

My first post at the Criminal Court in Budapest was to report to a single judge as a notary. Matters at the district court level that were of a higher degree would go before a single judge, though in practice these cases were not particularly serious. Still, any case that could result in an appeal placed pressure on the judge to address all issues thoroughly.

The notary's role was undoubtedly that of a draftsman. The position required not only acting as a stenographer and recording what was said, but also interpreting and shaping the minutes. The main reason for this was that regulations did not require stenographers to be legal professionals, and their speed often meant that the minutes were not verbatim. If the judge felt that a particular sentence of testimony was especially important, he would call on the clerk to record that part word for word.

The country's difficult circumstances were reflected in the expectation that notaries own their own typewriters and be able to type. The office had two typists who could assist if needed, but to work efficiently, it was essential to have one's own typing skills. I had learned to type as a child—my father's law firm had a typewriter—and while in Germany, I had purchased a portable one. So, I was well prepared for this aspect of the job.

My personal life began to take shape. I was accustomed to independent living. I made tea for breakfast and ate lunch at a small restaurant near the court, usually in the company of young colleagues. My friend and former colleague from Berlin, Pista Arató, also joined us for meals, so our friendship continued uninterrupted.

At that time, office hours were from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., but often, after lunch, we returned to the office to finish typing work. In the evenings, I usually ended the day with a simple dinner of cold cuts.

I still vividly remember that on the weekend of December 8th, Ica came to visit me in Budapest. We completed our Christmas shopping together, walking through the snow-covered city centre. The peacetime charm of Váci Street and the visions of Apponyi Park and its surroundings remain alive in me to this day.



**Váci Street Apponyi Park now  
Városliget (City Park)**

Christmas was once again spent with my parents and my sister's family in Bábolna. During the holidays, a little girl joined our circle—Katinka, the daughter of my sister Kata and Béla Csabai—and I had the honour of becoming her godfather.

After the festivities, my parents and I travelled to Miskolc on New Year's Eve. The two families met, and a warm relationship quickly developed between them.

The exchange of rings took place during dinner, within the intimate setting of our immediate families. We young ones were not fond of formalities, and before the speeches could begin, I slipped the ring onto Ica's finger. Our parents didn't quite understand this breach of tradition and scolded us gently. But we, in our deep love, cared little for protocol. After dinner, we left them to their conversation and sought privacy in the next room, simply enjoying each other's presence.

Our parents remained at the table, talking and planning for our future. Eventually, noticing the silence from our room, they peeked in.

There was great merriment and laughter—there we sat on the couch, hand in hand, heads resting together, peacefully asleep. It became a cherished family story, retold for many years to come.

We planned to hold our wedding at the end of the year, but several obstacles stood in our way. My starting salary did not seem sufficient to support a household, so it became necessary to find Ica a position in Budapest. This, however, proved difficult, as vacancies in the capital were scarce.

Ica's uncle, Kálmán Bánó, a police councillor serving in Pécs, was in contact with Béla Imrédy, who expressed willingness to support her application. I also sought help in the capital and spoke with Stephen Bárány, the famous Olympic swimmer and personal

manager. He was candid, telling me that her application was unlikely to succeed, as many candidates were already waiting for metropolitan appointments and transfers that would take precedence.

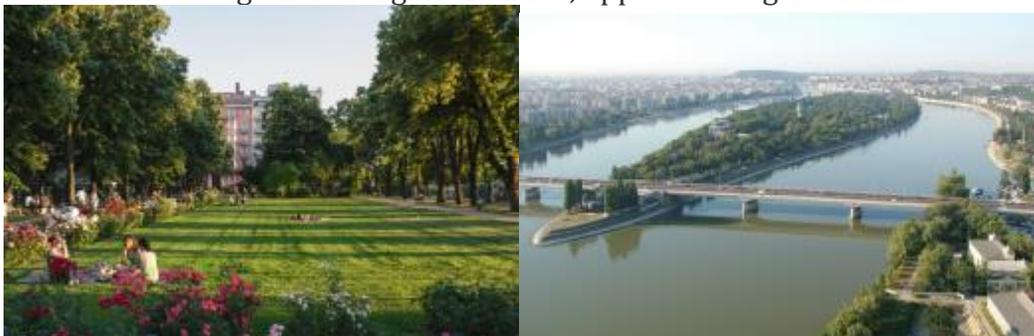
Then, unexpectedly, an opportunity arose. Due to wartime conditions, the government had established a Price-Control Office and was seeking tax inspectors with strong commercial arithmetic skills. Ica, a middle school teacher with a degree in mathematics and physics, fit the profile perfectly—many of the office’s employees had similar qualifications.

My father knew Bálint Kacsóh, the Government Price Commissioner, who saw no issue with Ica’s appointment. The salary was significantly higher than a teacher’s starting wage, and so our plans for a civil marriage became more realistic.

We found an apartment building under construction on Pozsony Street. On the third floor was a studio apartment that fit our budget. At the time, new apartments were nearly unaffordable for young couples starting out. But we felt that the key was to find a first home close to our workplaces.

I went to the lawyer’s office where the leases were arranged and became the first major tenant of the apartment, which was still under construction. It wasn’t large—marketed as a one-bedroom with a hall and small kitchen—and we later discovered that moving in our furniture would be quite a challenge.

Still, the area was lovely. From our balcony, we could see St. Stephen’s Park, and later, we often walked together along the Danube, opposite Margaret Island



**St István (Stephen’s) Park, Margit (Margaret) Island**

Ica moved up to Budapest. We felt somewhat guilty that she had to leave her teaching position before the end of the convent school year, but the sudden opportunity to join the Government Price Commission was too important to pass up. For the time being, she found accommodation at the House for Teachers.

Her office was located near the Buda side of the Lánchíd (Chain Bridge), which meant we could often meet for lunch at a small restaurant in Lipótváros.

I was not entirely satisfied with my own office position. I had been assigned to work with Judge Ferenc (Francis) Nagy, who was kind and friendly—we remained in contact later—but he was also somewhat inflexible. The contrast between our temperaments was not ideal, especially within the judicial system, about which I have already written a few words.

In essence, my role as a clerk involved capturing and summarising the testimonies presented in court. However, this sometimes failed to align with what Judge Nagy perceived as the “spirit” of the judgment. In cases where an appeal was likely, he often asked me to amend the summaries to better reflect what he believed to be the essence of the hearing. These were often matters of interpretation and nuance. At times, I accepted his judgment; at others, I challenged it, feeling that his perspective did not fully correspond with the actual proceedings.

I was a fairly stubborn person myself, and I didn’t want our professional disagreements to affect our personal rapport. For that reason, I hesitated to request a transfer. Judge Nagy, for his part, never considered one either, as he was generally satisfied with my work.

It occurred to me that a short, six-week military exercise might offer a welcome break. I had always enjoyed military service—it felt like a kind of holiday to me—and with our wedding approaching, I knew it would soon be more difficult to take time away from home.

I visited the barracks and discussed the situation with the replacement battalion commander. I was assigned to the armoured car group, which was in a state of full readiness. The commander made an interesting proposal: The First Mechanised Brigade was in the process of formation, including a new traffic division under a brigade commander. That commander was Ervin Hollósy, whom I had met some years earlier. The opportunity to transfer to his unit had just arisen.

The commander immediately telephoned Ervin, who gladly accepted my application. We struck an agreement that I would be called up shortly.

On May 10, 1940, Ica and I travelled to Balassagyarmat to visit my father. That same day, the Germans launched a major offensive in the West, and by noon it was already clear

that the German armoured and air forces were providing further proof of the viability of a mobile war.

My father and his friends in Balassagyarmat gave us a warm welcome, and we spent a few pleasant days together

By the time we returned to Budapest, my call-up papers were waiting. I said goodbye to my supervisor, who—though not pleased—was understanding, acknowledging that military service was compulsory.

I reported to Ervin Hollósy, believing that I was about to begin a six-week training exercise. Within a few days, however, it became clear that I was mistaken. My position—and the broader political situation—meant that this was not a brief training stint.

The Hungarian government had evidently observed that German forces were fully engaged in the West, and it was assumed that British and French troops would avoid exposure in Eastern Europe. This created an opening for Hungary to raise the Transylvanian question, which required a show of military readiness.

I believe it was on May 20th that our mechanized brigade participated in a parade. To our great surprise, Miklós Horthy himself reviewed the troops. The visit was impressive, and I saw him for the first time as part of the newly formed motorized mobile forces—now a genuine armored division.

A few days after the review, the brigade set off, with the village of Acsa as our first stop.

During this maneuver toward Transylvania, I was introduced to the task of traffic regulation for the division. I served as a platoon commander, assigned twelve motorcyclists and provided with a car. The challenge lay in managing traffic at key junctions, redirecting movement to side roads to prevent congestion. The entire mechanized brigade stretched for many kilometers, and parallel routes were used to maintain flow. Accommodation logistics also had to be coordinated to ensure orderly access for each unit.

Our brigade was housed in the Zichy Castle at Acsa. The Zichy family was not in residence at the time, making the placement especially convenient. The manor had numerous guest rooms, with a separate room for each officer. The crew was satisfactorily accommodated in various buildings throughout the estate.

We remained in Acsa for two to three weeks. This period was devoted to receiving additional equipment and further training for the crew. We also underwent triple vaccination and were issued identity necklaces, which all personnel were required to wear.



**The Zichy Mansion is an eclectic style manor house**

We officers also agreed that we would host our relatives one weekend. Laci Halápi, our first commander, was a married man. His wife joined him and served as a chaperone for Ica during her visit. We managed to spend a pleasant evening together. However, Ica was unwell, suffering from suspected appendicitis, and had to return to Budapest for medical attention.

Before I received any news of Ica's medical examination, our brigade was suddenly ordered to move. We marched through Miskolc, and my platoon was tasked with ensuring a smooth transit through the city. As we approached the city centre, I stopped my car to check on one of the motorcyclists—when I suddenly noticed Ica, accompanied by her mother, walking along the sidewalk.

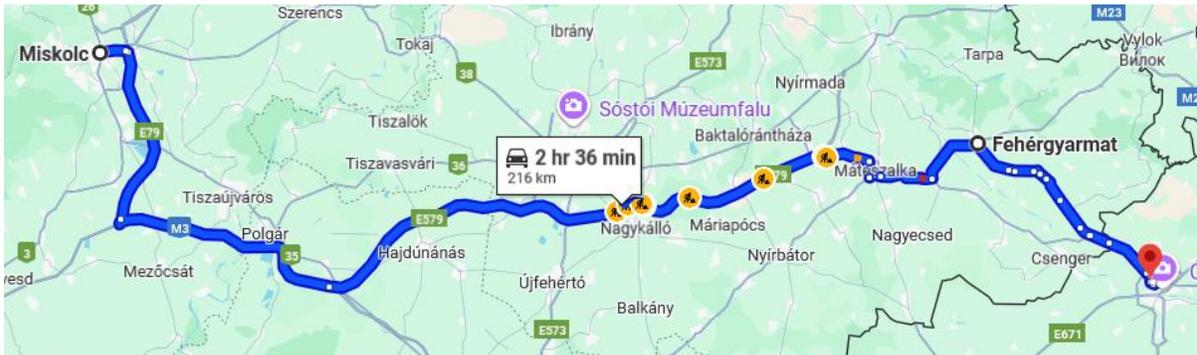
I rushed to them immediately and, in the few minutes I had, learned that the examination had confirmed appendicitis. Ica had returned to her parents' home, and they were on their way to the hospital to schedule the operation. They were both surprised by the encounter—and by the sight of the military parade passing through their city.



**Miskolc Street Scape**

By then, we knew our destination was the eastern border zone. The unexpected meeting was deeply gratifying, but also worrying. We had no time to speak at length. I had to say goodbye, and the brigade moved on.

Eventually, we reached the border opposite Szatmárnémet (Satu Mare, Romania), at



Fehérgyarmat, and it was ***Map showing route from Miskolc to Fehérgyarmat*** decided that this village would accommodate our division. Our company was tasked with securing lodging there. The placement officer reported that only four beds were available, so the crew had to be housed in a nearby barn. The brigade headquarters was located in the centre of the village, close to us, as we were in direct contact with corps command.

We remained in Fehérgyarmat peacefully, though under a degree of tension. News reached us only sporadically. We heard that the Germans had ultimately achieved a major victory on the Western Front, and we also received word that Russia had issued an ultimatum to Romania and had begun enforcing its territorial claims by military means.



***NSU 251 os WH 1940 Motorcycle***

During this time, I enjoyed a few days away from active military duties. The brigade had received an NSU motorcycle for trial, and Ervin Hollósy was tasked with submitting a report on its performance. Ervin decided that we should take the motorcycle on a 3–4-day tour of Transcarpathia. We brought a mechanic along for support.

The motorcycle handled the Carpathian terrain remarkably well—mountain streams, narrow paths, and steep inclines posed no trouble. We travelled all the way to the Hungarian–Polish border and truly explored the ancient route of Verecke. I still remember certain sections of the landscape vividly.

The local population was mostly friendly toward us, and we often purchased food directly from their homes.

The Hungarians regarded Verecke as the western gateway of the Kingdom of Hungary. The Hungarian poet Endre Ady used it as a symbol of modernism and Westernization in his poem I am the Son of Gog and Magog:

***By Verecke's ancient route I came,  
In my ear ancient Magyar songs still blaze,  
I am free to break through at Dévény?  
With modern songs fit for modern days?***

Meanwhile, we waited—hoping that something was about to happen. Then we learned that the government had begun negotiations with Romania. They wanted to demonstrate that Hungary, at least for the time being, did not intend to resort to military action. As a gesture, some troops were granted authorized “harvest leave.” I received two weeks’ leave—not on a harvest basis, but so I could visit my bride-to-be in hospital.

By the time I arrived in Miskolc, Ica had already undergone surgery, which went well, and she was convalescing at home.

We went swimming a few times at the local pool, and when I said goodbye to Ica and her family again, I no longer had to worry about her recovery. They, however, were concerned for me, hoping that the situation would not escalate into military conflict.

We spent a few quiet weeks, but the waiting in Fehérgyarmat was nerve-racking. The crew had to remain in constant readiness, as we were stationed near the border. The officers’ main task was to keep the troops occupied. We focused on theoretical training—map reading, traffic control exercises, and strategic discussions.

The summer days were hot, a true August heat wave. We organized marches along the banks of the Tisza River, and the mood of the troops was lifted by bathing and games. They sang loudly during these outings, and everyone was waiting for developments.

We, the reserve officer candidates, lived together in shared accommodation. In the evenings, we dined together. We were fortunate that one of the chefs from the Hungária Hotel was serving with us, so every night we enjoyed a first-class dinner.

Laci Halápi was our section commander. I knew he was of Jewish descent—his family owned the well-known downtown Halápi pharmacy. His father had distinguished himself in 1919 during the fight against the communist revolution, and the family had long since converted to Christianity. His wife was Christian, and we did not believe he faced any

significant difficulties. He was a close friend of R. Wolfgang, of German descent, and no conflict ever arose between them.

Laci would later prove himself a true Hungarian on the banks of the River Don—but I will return to that story later.

Joseph Czakó was the commander of the fourth division. He and I were both volunteers, and our old friendship bound us closely.

The four of us lived in warm fellowship, often joined by our commander, Ervin Hollósy, who spent much time in our company.

At the end of August—perhaps the 27th—the alarm was suddenly sounded. Live cartridges were distributed, and it was clear that the brigade was being readied for attack. At dawn, at three o'clock in the morning, the alarm rang again, and an hour later we directed the units to the border, where they took up their positions.

It was no secret that we marched with enthusiasm, preparing for battle and eagerly awaiting the moment when the Trianon borders might be breached.

Then, suddenly, the command came: the troops were to withdraw to their quarters. The attack was cancelled.

The troops were deeply disappointed. We had been ready.

It was later revealed that Berlin had intervened, understanding the threat posed by a clash between Romanian and Hungarian forces. Such a conflict would have seriously jeopardized Germany's supply lines. They had no choice but to assume the role of arbitrator, which led to the birth of the Second Vienna Award.

This news brought great joy among us. Yet many accused Germany of failing to restore all of Transylvania, and it was painful that Arad and other Hungarian-inhabited areas remained with Romania.

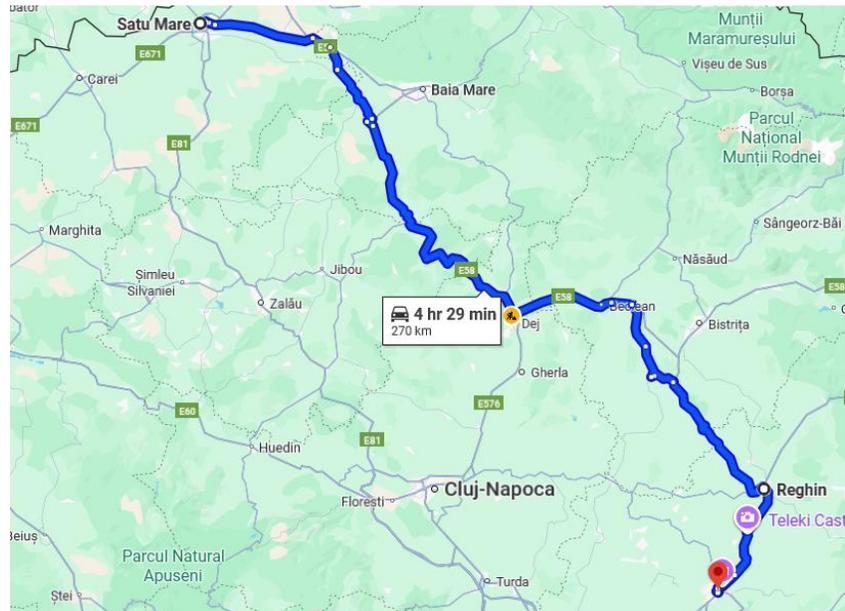
Still, sorrow gave way to celebration. The treaty restored Kaposvár and the Székelyföld (Land of the Székely), and once again our borders followed the arc of the Carpathian Mountains



***Reclaiming parts of Romania populated by Hungarians***

We prepared enthusiastically for the march, and soon we were ready for the long journey.

The commanders ordered the mechanized brigade—almost without rest—to reach the southern Carpathians within one week. The work of the traffic control division was both enjoyable and demanding. It was especially rewarding because we motorcyclists were always the first



***From Satu Mare, Reghin, Targu Mures***

Hungarian soldiers to arrive in the liberated towns and villages. Before anyone could cross the Hungarian–Romanian border, the Hungarian General Staff had to agree on the orders and grant permission for us to proceed.

My passenger car always led the entry, followed by the motorbikes under my command. We proceeded to the designated command hubs and crosswalks, where we directed the vehicles behind us—infantry, armour, and artillery formations. The division was divided into four sections, and we guided the units accordingly.

We crossed the border at Satu Mare (Szatmárnémet), but my platoon drove straight through the city without stopping. Our first real halt was at Szászrégen (Reghin). When my car arrived at the main square, we found that the townspeople had erected a welcome platform, and a large crowd was waiting for the arrival of the troops. We were mobbed—almost pulled apart—and it was difficult to maintain discipline.

Our work had only just begun. The cyclists took their positions at key crossroads and directed the various formations to their designated barracks. Just as we completed our tasks, the first troops arrived. Jenő (Eugene) Major, the brigade commander, was warmly welcomed by the Hungarian leaders of the town, and shortly thereafter, the parade of troops before the grandstand commenced.

It was difficult to witness the scene with dry eyes. The newly formed Honvéd (Hungarian Army) was represented by mostly modern units, and the love and warmth radiating from the crowd was overwhelming.

A few of my fellow officers and I were invited to dinner by a Hungarian family. We listened to their stories and shared in their joy at being liberated.

But we had only a few hours of rest—our alarm was set for 3 a.m., and by five



***Hussar from First World***



***Well-wishers welcoming Hungarian troops***

o'clock, our unit was back on the road.

The Romanian population did not behave in a hostile manner. We had been warned of possible attacks, but up to that point, we had experienced none. During a rest period, I spoke with a Romanian farmer—an older man—who fondly recalled his years of service in the old Austro-Hungarian army.

We pressed forward to our second stop: Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș). With pride, my platoon was the first unit to enter the city district. The people nearly overwhelmed us with affection—hugging and kissing the soldiers. Those hours in that great city remain truly unforgettable.

Once my cyclists had taken their designated positions and I had ensured that my instructions were carried out, the first units arrived. I walked to the opposite side of the

host platform, inspected the volunteers managing the crowd, and spoke with our fellow Magyars. The enthusiastic welcome knew no bounds.

One elderly Hungarian kept asking, “When will the Hussars come?” In our conversation, he told me he had once served with the Hussars and was eagerly awaiting the arrival of their descendants in red trousers and blue uniforms. I tried to explain that it was now the modern mechanized troops who marched before him, and that armoured cars and tanks had replaced the cavalry.

It was a magnificent sight—but I too felt a pang of regret that we could no longer hear the clatter of horses’ hooves.

For dinner, I was seated in a large restaurant near the main square, and among many senior military officers, I recognised Béla Imrédy (Prime Minister, 1938–1939), dressed in the uniform of an artillery captain, conversing with a group of guests.

I could not enjoy the beauty of the evening for long, as we were ordered to be ready by 5 a.m. the next morning to head for Székely Land. I received a briefing from headquarters at midnight, and the alarm was set for three o’clock.

Soon, we advanced into the Székely Land Mountains. Székelyudvarhely was nearby, but we had to halt near a small village because the staff officers were not yet ready for the transfer. We stopped in front of a line of Székely villagers who had gathered to celebrate. One of them threw a kürtőskalács (chimney cake) toward one of the cars, hitting the driver squarely in the face. Jonah from Szeged scraped off the sticky cake and immediately began to devour it. Then he turned to me and asked, “Tell me, Sergeant, what kind of people are these Székelys?”

I began to offer an academic explanation, but Jonah interrupted: “Well, it’s certain—they’re good people.”

(Székely Land is a historic and ethnographic region in eastern Transylvania, Romania, inhabited primarily by the Székelys, a subgroup of the Hungarian people. Its territory spans roughly 16,943 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 809,000 as of 2002.)



**Welcoming crowds in Erdély**

Our waiting time was spent near a cluster of houses. Sitting in front of one was a white-bearded Székely elder. He said nothing, but when I looked closer, I saw tears streaming down his face. That, I could not bear. Until then, the cheerful joy of the people had helped me suppress the emotional weight of the moment. But now, I too began to weep—and I will never be ashamed of that weakness.

My pen cannot adequately describe how the people of Székelyudvarhely welcomed us. Their hugs, kisses, and tears enveloped us, and we felt as though we had truly returned home.

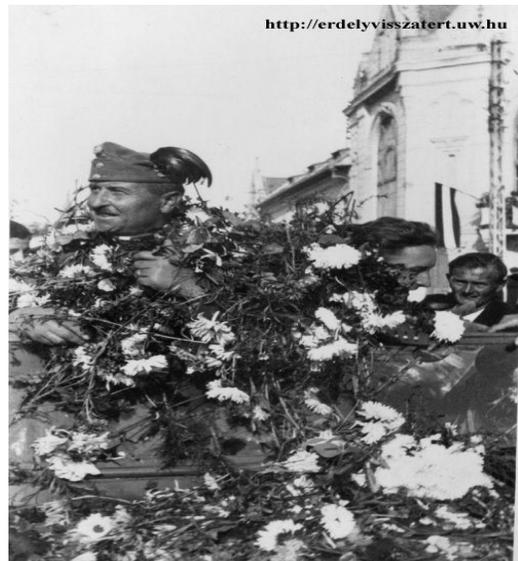
After completing our task of directing the entrance parade, we had only a short break before turning south and arriving in Barót. This village was selected as the final destination of our journey. We arranged accommodation for our crew and settled into our designated quarters.

We did not hide our delight when Commander Ervin Hollósy announced that, given our nearly non-stop service in traffic control, we would be granted a three-day rest.

We didn't even feel like eating—we simply went to bed and slept for thirty-six hours. It took several more hours before we fully recovered.

We settled into Barót and waited for further orders. The camp postal service was functioning, and I received a letter from my Ica. Back home, the construction of the apartment building on Pozsony Road had been completed and was ready for occupancy. Ica had moved into my sublet room on Tátra Street after I left for my tour of duty, and from there she helped organise the furnishing of our new apartment. During this time, she moved into the new flat. However, the Tátra Street apartment was maintained, since we were not yet married and I would need somewhere to live after my demobilisation and before the wedding.

While stationed in Barót, I was notified by brigade headquarters that I had been promoted to the



**Covered in flowers**



**Recognition of participation in events.**

rank of Ensign. A tailor sewed the new insignia onto my uniform. It was later revealed that the news from Budapest had been somewhat premature—this was only a nomination, and the promotion was officially announced in the Journal on 1 January 1941. Still, I had been appointed to the rank of Ensign in January 1940, and perhaps not undeservedly, the insignia was stitched in advance.

The situation had changed, and we were informed that we would soon be returning to brigade headquarters in Budapest. I requested discharge, as everything was ready for our wedding—my home was waiting, and I was driven by love. Brigade headquarters approved my application. Major Jenő, the brigade commander, congratulated me on my performance, and I received an open command to return to Budapest. Later, I was awarded the Transylvanian Commemorative Medal.

My journey took me through Kolozsvár (Cluj). I saw the famous statue of King Mátyás and walked the ancient Hungarian streets for hours. I cannot forget Kolozsvár.

Once back in Budapest, I immediately took care of my military discharge paperwork. The Criminal Tribunal, where I was employed, granted me an additional two weeks' leave. And so, with Ica—happily embracing—we began preparing for our wedding.

As military service and the Transylvanian events had thoroughly disrupted our plans, we decided to hold the wedding as soon as possible and to keep it within the family circle. We had just one week to prepare. I attended to both the civil and religious requirements and ensured that all the necessary papers were in order. Invitations and notifications were sent out, though it was later discovered that some friends were offended, as the guest list had not extended widely enough for such a significant occasion.

Both of us were urban residents of St. Stephen's parish and therefore belonged to St. Stephen's Basilica. However, having lived in Budapest for only a few months, we did not yet know many parishioners. We asked Béla



***King Mátyás's famous statue in Kolozsvár***



***Basilica and Interior***

Witz, a papal servant and the parish priest of the Basilica, to celebrate the wedding, and he graciously accepted.

We also needed to arrange for witnesses. This was no problem on Ica's side—she and her family wished for her uncle, Kálmán Bánó, a Police Councillor, to serve as witness. My good father approached Bálint Kacsóh on my behalf, thinking there was a connection through Ica's employment in his office. Bálint Kacsóh

accepted the invitation but later had to excuse himself due to urgent business that required him to leave Budapest. In his place, my brother-in-law, Dr. Béla Csabai, kindly agreed to serve as witness.



***Béla Witz guardian of St István's relic***<sup>45</sup>



***Happy couple on Steps of St. Stephen's***

October 5th, 1940, was a slightly windy but sunny day—one of the most beautiful days of our lives. First, we signed the civil documents, and then we were married in the magnificent setting of the Basilica, vowing eternal loyalty to one another.

In front of the Basilica—though we had organised the wedding in just a few days—a number of friends appeared, and our only regret was that we could not host a larger celebration.

The wedding dinner was held in a private room at Hotel Pannonia. Only our immediate family was present: our parents, Ica's uncle and aunt, my sister Kata and brother-in-law Béla, and my cousin László Faragó Pápay and his wife. At the head of the table sat Béla Witz, who gave us a truly memorable blessing.

We took many photographs of both the wedding and the luncheon, and even today—more than sixty years later—we still have some of them. They remain cherished reminders of the first moments of a very happy family life.

We young ones were simply waiting to be alone. We changed clothes in my father's room—he always stayed at the Pannonia during his visits to Budapest and was considered a regular guest.

For a while, we wandered happily through the city centre, then went to see a film. I honestly cannot recall what was playing—it didn't matter.

Around eight o'clock in the evening, we went to the Cuckoo's Tavern in Buda. At the time, it was a fashionable restaurant with pleasant music and good food—but our hearts and souls were already waiting for us at home.

At midnight, a taxi took us to Pozsony Street—and we were home.

The circumstances were such that we could not even consider going on a honeymoon. We were simply grateful to have taken our first steps together in married life, and during the following days, we tried to get to know Budapest better.

These peaceful and carefree hours did not last long. Our leave had expired, and we both had to return to our respective offices.

The workload for Ica at the Government Price Commission became increasingly demanding. Bálint (Valentine) Kacsóh, the department head, also served as Secretary of State for Trade and was frequently occupied in the evenings with matters of government security. As a result, the administrative department decided that employees could have the afternoon free between 2 and 5 p.m., but after 5 p.m. they had to be available to assist with any urgent government inquiries.

I formally worked until 2 p.m. and was only occasionally required to stay later. Our weekday routine therefore consisted of lunch together for a couple of hours, after which Ica returned to her nearby office near the Láncíd (Chain Bridge), and I went home. There, I could begin preparing for my judicial qualification exams, scheduled for 1941. I devoted myself fully to overcoming this final professional hurdle.

On weekends, we often had the company of my mother, who gladly helped us organise and manage the various tasks of married life—washing, ironing, and everyday domestic matters. This was not always easy, especially given Ica's demanding work schedule.

It seemed that a relative peace might prevail, as the war in the West appeared to be winding down. Although Hitler's peace overtures were rejected by the Allies, from our domestic vantage point, we did not yet perceive the gathering storm clouds.

For us, the first sign came with the steady procession of trains carrying German soldiers through the marshalling yards, heading east. It soon became clear that the Balkans would be the next theatre of war—and that Hungary could easily be drawn into the conflict as events unfolded

## **Swept into War - 1941**

After the honeymoon, my serious legal work began. At the time Jenő (Eugene) Szemák was president of the criminal court a highly skilled lawyer who had a good reputation. I introduced myself before him and he talked kindly to me.

In addition to our official encounters, I only saw him much later, in 1946, when in Munich he was very ill.

The vice-president position was filled by Felix Avedik. He was the descendent of Armenian Transylvanian family who was widely known for his criminal law skills. As a result of a busy administrative schedule, he rarely took the chair in fact Janos (John) Lengyel presided over as lead counsel. I was assigned to this Board which was regarded as a privilege. The Council was presided over by John Lengyel and he had two judges assigned to him. As coincidence would have it, a few months later Ferenc Nagy, my former boss was assigned to this chamber and so I worked under his direction again.

The Avedik-Lengyel Chamber had serious criminal cases assigned to it and often worked as an appellate forum, overriding the appeal of certain judicial judgments.

I had the opportunity to study more deeply into the issues facing the criminal justice system. Many lawyers hold the view that criminal law is not sufficiently deep and scientific and the lawyers' interest often turned to private law and its philosophical implications. I do not doubt that I drew this conclusion because I preferred Legal Philosophy and tried to immerse myself in constitutional law. Still, I learned a lot from these well-trained great practical judges. They were good Hungarian people who often considered that the criminals were often victims of society and the legal judgments tried to introduce a forgiving and educational aspect.

After the completion of the negotiation phase I especially enjoyed being present when the three judges discussed the matter expressing their individual views. They often had opposing views and after considering them a compromise resulted. In any case there was thoughtful, serious work behind quality of judgments and the then Hungarian judiciary was truly European.

By the forties the jury system had not been operating for many years and so I could not express an opinion as to the merits of either the jury system or that of judges. Later when I myself had experienced law in the English-speaking system as it functioned in the

industrialized twentieth century, I remembered the Lengyel Chamber's serious deliberations and in my opinion, the system requiring three judges for tribunals, five for courts of appeal and seven for the Kuria (Supreme Court) was appropriate.

My work, in addition to engaging with higher legal principles, was demanding—taking minutes was certainly no easy task, as I have already described. The judges were mindful that we were newly qualified notaries and often invited our opinions during deliberations. Drafting the decisions also fell to the clerks, and before long, I felt I had truly become part of the legal system.

Alongside my office duties, I had to immerse myself in the judicial exam material. At that time, the judge exams were considered among the most difficult in Hungary. Not only was the subject matter vast, but the examination was divided into two instalments, requiring thorough preparation for a comprehensive test.

The examination board was typically chaired by a senior lawyer-politician, seated alongside two sitting judges and two distinguished lawyers—eminent figures known not only for their mastery of legal theory but also for their deep practical experience. The oral examination was particularly challenging, not just because of the sheer volume of questions, but because if the examiner sensed that the candidate knew the answer, they would interrupt and pose a new question. We all feared this examination, and we knew that only the most serious study could meet the required standard.

Those months were filled with intense effort. I usually rose at five in the morning and studied for two or three hours before heading to the office. In the afternoon, I devoted at least three more hours to my books, and after dinner, another two. It helped that Ica was also very busy and typically returned home around 8 p.m.—thanks to her support and understanding, I was able to maintain this pace for many months.

Nevertheless, we were young and had enough energy to enjoy occasional dinners at the Vadászkiirt or Pannonia restaurants. We also attended the theatre from time to time, so we did not bury ourselves entirely in work.

I reconnected with my friends from Berlin, and we arranged monthly gatherings at a restaurant, sharing a glass or two and talking until late. We met our friend William Szigethy once or twice when he was in Budapest, and he shared much information that never appeared in the newspapers.

He recounted that while we were in the euphoric embrace of Sweet Transylvania—amid the cries of “We live and die for you”—Hungarian diplomacy was facing very difficult

days in Berlin. According to William, German leaders were angry that Hungary had cooperated with the Soviet Union in moving into Romania. The Germans viewed the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States as a hostile act, and William believed that Germany might decide to resolve the Russian question before the Western powers were ready to launch a counter-offensive.

So, we began to pay closer attention to the increasing movement of German troops through Budapest toward Romania.

After the Russian attack, Romania accepted the guarantees offered by Germany. The Germans requested that Hungary allow the passage of so-called “training troops” through its territory. Having regained areas of Transylvania, Hungary could not deny this access, and the region became a military assembly point—marking a clear shift away from neutrality.

According to William Szigethy, the German leadership was also apprehensive about the Italians. After all, they expected only benevolent neutrality from Italy. In 1939, the Hitler–Teleki communiqué had aimed to ensure peace in Southeastern Europe. However, it is understandable that the Russian, Italian, and Hungarian governments—following Germany’s great victories in the West—assumed that England and France might be open to a compromise peace. Each nation sought to secure its interests through legal enforcement before such a settlement.

From our perspective, Hungarian interests were paramount, and the recent decisions of the Hungarian leadership were broadly welcomed.

At this time, negotiations began with the Yugoslav government. Our contacts in Berlin reported that the Germans warmly supported Hungary’s plan to cooperate in maintaining peace in Southeastern Europe. This aligned with Germany’s strategic interests, especially in those months when it had clearly decided to resolve the Russian question—whether by peace or war.

Hungarian leaders, however, were increasingly concerned that the European conflict would not end in compromise. Observing the firm stance of Anglo-American diplomacy, they concluded that the war would escalate into a global conflict.

Hungarian society grew anxious about these developments, and a division began to emerge in both foreign and domestic policy.

This split was felt in everyday life. Western propaganda skillfully exploited the revisionist sentiments that permeated Hungarian society, stoking anti-German feeling. It

was argued that the positive outcomes of the two Vienna Awards were limited by Germany's hostility toward Hungary, and that what had been gained was largely due to Italian influence. Critics accused the government of using the slogan "We want all lands returned" with chauvinistic fervour, while failing to acknowledge that it was Hungary's moderate policies—seeking to avoid a new world war on Germany's side—that had led to Slovakia's independence, with Pozsony (Bratislava) as its capital, and the annexation of Pozsonyiligetfalu (Petržalka), which demonstrated Germany's lack of wholehearted support for Hungarian aims.

Still, there were those in Hungarian society who remained sympathetic to Germany, believing that a victorious Reich would eventually break the Slavic encirclement and secure Hungary's future. Others remained wary of German imperialism; a force well known in our thousand-year history. The names of Rákóczi and Kossuth were invoked by English radio broadcasts, paired with patriotic slogans aimed at influencing Hungarian opinion.

The Russian question was understood by only a few. The German–Russian compromise was recognised by Hungarian leadership as a means of restraining Soviet aggression in the Balkans, and Hungary itself had attempted to maintain correct relations with the Soviet Union.

Germany's dazzling victories on the Western Front inevitably led part of Hungarian society to fall under the influence of National Socialism. Yet these movements lacked true leadership. Ferenc Szálasi might have developed into such a figure, but the conservative Hungarian political establishment initiated a politically motivated lawsuit that resulted in a three-year imprisonment, most of which he served. Thus, at the most critical juncture, he was absent from political life. Upon release, he became head of a movement that he had to adapt to, shaped by pre-existing factions.

Politically, Szálasi's original insights into Hungarian identity and the nationality question—within a framework of federated liberal governance—were ahead of their time. However, he was compelled to conform and slavishly imitate the German National Socialist system. In foreign policy, he supported the German federation, but as later events showed, he was unwilling to accept German demands that conflicted with his own convictions, even under the most difficult circumstances.

The development of far-right movements was further inhibited by a government decree banning public servants and employees of state institutions from joining political

parties. As a result, only those with nothing to lose—or those who were entirely financially independent—could participate. In post-Trianon Hungary, such individuals were few.

Hungary was, in essence, a middle-class society, and politically, this was the only class capable of meaningful action. Yet it was divided—not only in foreign policy but also in domestic affairs. Its conservative mindset did not permit radical land reform or programs for social renewal.

My generation saw ourselves as the new Hungarian reformers of the twentieth century. It is therefore understandable that my circle of friends and I spoke often of social renewal and advocated for radical land reform. At our gatherings, we regularly criticised the government's overly cautious policies. While we did not fully agree with national radical and noted historian Ödön Málnásky's complete rejection of the Horthy regime, we did support the direction of national revival.

My colleagues and I in the judiciary were far removed from daily politics. According to the principles of judicial independence, we did not consider affiliating with any political party. However, some among us felt differently and chose to disregard government regulations by joining political movements. My friend Béla Csikós Nagy joined the Arrow Cross Party. He was full of enthusiasm, influenced by German ideology, and believed that the National Socialist system would soon prevail.

My own view differed. I understood that the German National Socialist leadership did not support foreign parties aligned with their ideology, preferring instead to cooperate with existing conservative powers. We teased Béla by asking, "When will you take over power?" In response, he would deliver impassioned speeches, often invoking the name of Pál Vágó, one of the party's leading figures and its economic policy strategist.

The Hungarian government was well aware that Germany had no real interest in supporting foreign National Socialist parties. It capitalised on this by using administrative, police, and judicial means to suppress or discredit these radical forces.

The Szemák Council presided over the criminal trials of Kovarcz and his accomplices, who were charged with conspiring to remove the Governor. I observed the proceedings closely and came to believe that the trial amounted to political harassment. For an idealistic young lawyer, it was deeply disillusioning—both in its conduct and its final judgment.

Among us were those who, inspired by the English model, believed that only slow but consistent work could transform our fundamentally underdeveloped country.

Despite our differences, we remained good friends—and as young people, we were full of hope for the future.

German policy at the time appeared far more flexible than during the First World War. Their treatment of the French and the Franco-Spanish governments seemed moderate, leaving us with a favourable impression. Shortly after the conclusion of the Hungarian–Yugoslav treaty of friendship, it was publicly announced that Germany guaranteed Yugoslavia’s peaceful cooperation. This gave rise to hope that Hungary might still avoid being drawn into a wider world war.

The turning point came when British diplomacy succeeded—through revolutionary means—in toppling the Yugoslav government. The conspirators were officers under British influence, but it was clear they came from Serbian circles, motivated by fraternal sentiment toward Russia.

The revolution was violently anti-German, and a German response became inevitable. The winds of war swept through our region.

There was no doubt that the Hungarian–Yugoslav treaty of friendship had lost its validity. A key condition of the treaty—a *sine qua non*—was Yugoslavia’s benevolent neutrality toward Germany, essential for preserving peace in the region. Hungary had no conflict with either the new government or its predecessor, nor did it have an alliance with Germany that would have obligated it to enter the war against Yugoslavia. Yet now that the treaty had lapsed, we were forced to suspend our claims to the ancient Hungarian lands of Bácska and Bánát. At the same time, it seemed impossible to stand idly by while Germany might take possession of these territories.

The situation was further complicated, as we later learned from Berlin sources, by Hitler’s willingness—contrary to his usual stance on military alliances—to accept Hungarian sovereignty over Bácska, Bánát, and Croatia, and to offer Hungary access to the port of Rijeka (Fiume).

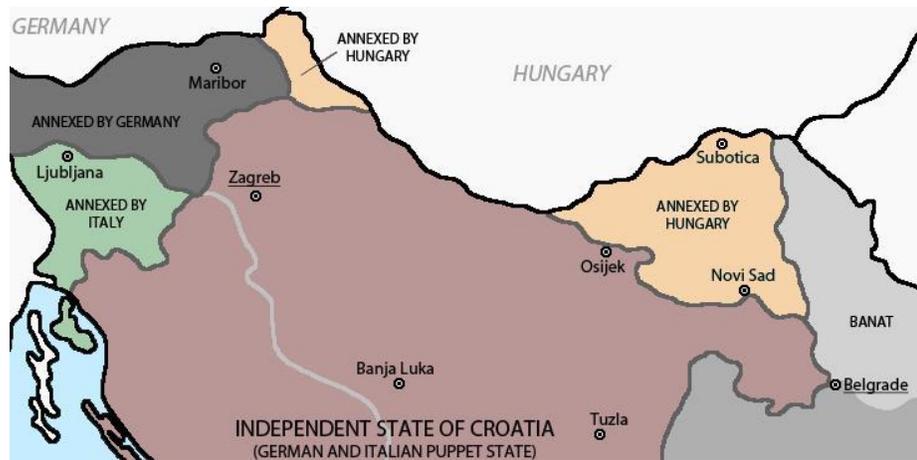
What leaked from government circles was that a sharp debate had taken place within the cabinet over how to respond. Pál Teleki served as a moderating influence, and it was ultimately decided that Hungary would only move into Bácska after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The region had, without doubt, a Hungarian majority, and it was hoped that such a move would not be opposed by the Western powers.

At the time, I believed it made little sense to reject the German offer. Preserving Hungarian neutrality seemed increasingly impossible, and my friends and I grew critical of

the decision not to join the German offensive. However, after the war, when I revisited the question, I came to appreciate that Teleki's decision had merit. A compromise peace was still conceivable, and it was important that the Anglo-Saxon powers remain benevolent toward the future reorganisation of Europe.

Nonetheless, I began to question the viability of Teleki's so-called "Transylvania policy," which sought to balance relations between the Anglo-Saxon and German powers. In reality, such a balance was nearly impossible to achieve, as communication between the German military and Anglo-American forces had broken down. The Balkan campaign made this abundantly clear.

Teleki eventually collapsed under the weight of these pressures and



took his own life. We mourned him sincerely. As German armoured columns advanced along the Danube, beneath the gaze of the Castle, they seemed to symbolise the final hours of our peace.

Following the joy of reclaiming Bácska, which marked the return of this region to Hungary, Anglo-Saxon propaganda broadcasts attempted to stir Hungarian nationalism. They did not accuse Hungary of "treason" for occupying Bácska, but instead attacked the German Empire for failing to return the Bánát region. They even described a fictitious "plan" in which Germany intended to establish a "Gau" (administrative subdivision) in the area.

My unit, the First Mechanized Brigade, participated in the military operation. Soon, however, we faced guerrilla warfare, as elements of the Serbian army and civilian population violated the laws of war. Several incidents occurred, and I was personally affected—my friend, the section commander of the armoured car company, was killed. Not in combat, but while attempting to negotiate a surrender with a surrounded Serbian unit. He stepped out of his vehicle and was shot by a Serbian officer. In response, Hungarian

soldiers opened fire, resulting in multiple casualties—tragically provoked by the officer's unlawful conduct.

The Balkan war ended swiftly, and for a few months, it seemed no fatal diplomatic consequences had followed. The British Empire did not declare war on Hungary, though it did sever diplomatic ties. Hungarian diplomacy attempted to portray Teleki's suicide as the result of German pressure, and Churchill, speaking in the British House of Commons, stated that Hungary would have a place at the peace negotiations table.

Still, I was troubled by a snippet of news: on the eve of the German attack, the Soviet Union had concluded a military alliance with Yugoslavia. There was no indication that the Soviets would initiate hostilities, but—as in the Napoleonic era—they appeared poised to respond if attacked. Diplomatically, this signalled that the Soviets anticipated a German offensive. Propaganda suggested that Stalin was caught off guard, but I believed that the agreement between Russia and Yugoslavia confirmed that, following the failed Molotov negotiations in Berlin, the Soviets understood that war with Germany was inevitable.

Yugoslavia's defeat came quickly, but British diplomacy still achieved its aim—Germany was forced to postpone the originally scheduled May 20th launch of Operation Barbarossa.

For the time being, I withdrew from political concerns. The first stage of the judicial exam was approaching. In early June, Ica took a few weeks' leave to visit her parents in Miskolc, and I was granted two weeks of study leave. Thus, the first half of June was spent almost entirely immersed in books. I rose at four in the morning and, without pause, studied the voluminous material until ten at night.

The exam was scheduled for Monday morning, June 23rd. I remember clearly that on Saturday evening, I went out to get something to eat and bought a copy of Hungary, which was then an afternoon paper. I didn't even glance at it—my focus remained on studying.

On Sunday morning, I woke at 4 a.m. and resumed my revision. Suddenly, my eyes fell on the newspaper left on the table. The headline read: Berlin is waiting for a quiet weekend. I believe this came from Andor Gellért, a friend of mine, and I understood the true meaning behind the phrase: Berlin was waiting for something serious to happen.

I immediately turned the radio to a German station and was shocked to hear Ribbentrop announce that, at five that morning, Germany was at war with the Soviet Union.

Before the German–Russian clash, I had observed events with the belief that Germany had a significant chance of winning the war—especially after its successes in Norway and France. Mussolini’s hasty actions in the Balkans, however, seemed reckless. Based on my father’s stories, I never fully trusted the Italian military. He always spoke highly of the Italian officers, but not of the infantry. This proved accurate on the Albanian and Greek fronts. The strain on Germany increased, and it seemed the Anglo-American forces now had an opening in southern Europe to strike the German Empire.

Once it became clear that the Anglo-American powers intended to continue the fight, and Germany had entered into war with the Soviet Union, it had to be acknowledged: the German Empire was once again embroiled in a two-front war—something it had always sought to avoid. The fate of the conflict now hinged on whether Germany could defeat the Soviet Union before the Anglo-American forces were ready to launch a counter-offensive.

I remember vividly how the war news shook me—my heart sank.

The next day was exam day, and I tried to set aside my concerns and focus on my studies.

The exam went very well; I received confirmation that I had passed this major hurdle with honours.

The second phase of the exams was scheduled for October 23rd, and I allowed myself only a few days of rest before resuming the hard work. For the moment, it seemed that peace had not entirely collapsed—our government had only severed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Still, we knew this state of affairs could not last. Germany and Italy expected stronger action from Hungary. Later, we learned that the German Foreign Office had expressed displeasure with Hungary’s conservative stance.

Germany’s Barbarossa offensive was supported by Romania and Finland, while Slovakia and Croatia formally declared war on the Soviet Union.

The compromise solution to the Transylvanian Question now appeared uncertain, and German dissatisfaction threatened to undermine the gains Hungary had made.

The dilemma of the Hungarian government was resolved by the air raid on Kassa (Košice). In response, Hungary declared a state of war with the Soviet Union. We joined Germany’s campaign, and my unit—the First Mechanized Brigade—crossed the Carpathian Mountains and fought on Ukrainian soil. I was not drafted at that time, but it was expected that I would be called up as replacements became necessary.

The draft never came, and so I continued to follow developments in the newspapers, often reading them at the famous Café Konrád. Meanwhile, I carried on with my judicial work and preparations for the next phase of the exam.

The weather had turned to autumn when I had the opportunity to speak with Professor Orsós, who frequently appeared as an expert witness in criminal tribunals. He had recently returned from Katyn, where, as a member of an international committee, he had examined the mass graves containing the bodies of thousands of Polish officers. It was definitively confirmed that the murders had occurred around 1939–1940. This conclusion was based not only on the state of decomposition of the bodies but also on the dates found in personal letters. It was clear that the massacre in the Katyn Forest had been carried out by the Red Army or the Soviet secret police. The dark shadow of a devastating total war loomed ever larger.

One honour that followed my exam results was an unexpected transfer to the Royal Court of Appeals. The offices were located in the Royal High Court Mansion.

My room had beautiful, large windows overlooking the Parliament, and when I was not working, I was free to continue preparing for the second phase of the exam. The atmosphere at the High Court was markedly different from the bustling criminal tribunals. Here, we dealt only with matters of high complexity, focusing exclusively on legal questions without investigating facts.

Council members were lawyers of exceptional ability, and I truly enjoyed their deliberations. In many ways, I believe that during these months I attained the higher standard of legal knowledge expected of judges.

By this time, I hoped that upon completing the second phase of the exams, I would receive a judicial appointment. I had already begun considering whether to choose a post in Miskolc or Szeged—both towns held significance for our family. A Budapest appointment would likely entail a long wait.

On 23rd October 1941, I completed the second round of the judicial exam and received my degree, awarded with honours. Ica and I kissed each other, and I thanked her again and again for standing by my side throughout the long study period. I promised her that this would be my last exam...

Of course, this promise was later recalled many times by Ica during our years in exile, when I had to start over in order to practise law again. But at that moment, we were happy—planning our future together.

To my surprise, the President of the Department of the Ministry of Justice called and asked how I would feel about serving in one of the Ministry's departments. It was an immense honour and also ensured that, following my exams, I would be eligible for a judicial appointment in Budapest. This decision effectively meant exchanging a judicial career for administrative work within the Ministry of Justice.

At the time, my intention was to revise and publish my research materials, with the aim of securing a private teaching position—eventually leading to a university appointment. The Ministry would have supported this endeavour, so I accepted the invitation with gratitude and soon submitted my application to Jenő Lutilszky, the presidential chief of the department.



***Palace of Justice building now  
Ethnographic Museum***

## **In the Service of the Ministry of Justice 1942-1943**

Farewelling the judicial path was not easy. I loved the work and cherished the independent atmosphere of the courts. I was also aware that the Department of Justice, as an executive branch of government, could never be entirely independent—even if it aspired to uphold the highest ideals among its members.

We were often visited in Budapest by my father's old friend, Láng-Miticzky, Chairman of the Szeged Court of Appeals, who openly criticised my decision. I could see that he had hoped I would pursue a judicial career, and he was clearly disappointed that I had accepted the offer from the Department of Justice.

The President of the High Court received the news with mixed feelings. Still, in the official document approving my transfer, the court expressed both good wishes and congratulations.

The transfer document read:

“The Minister of Justice has ordered that you, Mr. Secretary, be employed by the Ministry of Justice.

I wish to inform you, Mr. Secretary, that under my leadership at the High Court, you have served with excellent success and exemplary zeal. In recognition of your work, you are hereby released as of the 27th day of November, 1941.”

The document was signed by Jenő (Eugene) Lutitszky. The ministerial notification the following day stated:

“Dr Béla Török accepted his position today.”

I then learned that I had been assigned to the Legal Reviewer Department. Alongside the Law Preparatory Group, this was considered one of the Ministry's most intellectually demanding divisions. My appointment was not only in recognition of my summa cum laude degree but also reflected my time at the Collegium Hungaricum and the honours I had achieved in the judicial examinations.

It is perhaps understandable that I was both excited and nervous. It was well known that my colleagues and superiors were among the finest legal minds in Hungary, and I approached the role with an apprentice's eagerness to learn.

The department head was Andor Sárffy, who held the rank of Curia Council President.

As a jurist, he enjoyed national prominence and was considered the foremost authority on land law. His voluminous treatise on land registry was the benchmark in the field. Yet his knowledge extended far beyond technical expertise—his legal literacy was nearly encyclopaedic, and his legal philosophy was grounded in moral reasoning. As an administrator, he led the department with a steady and principled hand.

He often reminded us that an administrative officer must examine every element of a case and seek a fair resolution, rather than focusing solely on its negative aspects. His command of the Hungarian language was exceptional. While most administrators favoured long, convoluted sentences, he preferred concise, clear expression.

I myself was often the subject of his editorial guidance. He would insert a punctuation mark here, break up a sentence there, or add a word or two—transforming my drafts into lucid, well-structured arguments.

The Law Preparation Group worked closely with various departments to draft legislative proposals and provide legal opinions. Most of our work, however, came from other ministries. When a ministry encountered a case with legal implications, it would request an opinion from the Department of Justice.

Such case files typically began with the formal phrase:

“I have the pleasure to communicate to Your Excellency my opinion as follows...”

The officer responsible for the opinion would present it to Andor Sárffy. If he approved, he would endorse the document, and the file would be forwarded to the Minister. Once the Minister marked it with “may be released,” the office would retype the opinion on official letterhead, and after the Minister’s signature, it would be dispatched to the relevant Section Minister.

Andor Sárffy was not in perfect health. A childhood bout of polio had left him with a limp, and he dragged one leg. When I was introduced to colleagues in other ministries, he did not accompany me himself but instead asked a senior colleague to present me on his behalf

I did not have many friends in the Justice Ministry, having spent my formative years in Szeged, followed by my studies in Berlin, and only a brief period in judicial service. I was therefore glad to reconnect with my old friend István (Stephen) Arató, a former colleague from Berlin, who was working in the Family Law Department. He also taught international



**Andor Sárffy**  
**1889-1951**

family law as a university professor, and his clear, well-reasoned arguments were often adopted in case deliberations.

László Gál, a descendant of an old Szeged family and a close friend of my father, worked in the Criminal Department as a ministerial advisor. His nephew, Aigner Dodo, from Szeged, was one of my dear friends. Uncle Laci (László Gál) welcomed me warmly and wished me success in my new position.

In the Law Preparatory Department, I found another familiar face—Jancsi (John) Csiky, who had also been a student at the Piarist high school in Szeged. His father was the director of the Star Prison in Szeged, and we shared many mutual friends and acquaintances.

István (Stephen) Bibó also worked in our department. He was from Szeged, and we had become friends during our time at the Piarist high school. His father was head of the Szeged University Library, and we often reminisced about our shared past. When our department moved to the second floor, about half a year later, our rooms were adjacent, and we spoke almost daily.

I remember well his habit of pacing up and down his office for hours. To the uninitiated, it may have seemed idle, but he was in fact arguing with himself—working through the complexities of a difficult legal issue to arrive at a sound resolution. He was a gifted thinker, especially in the realm of legal theory.

At that time, the Ministry was headed by László Radocsay—a serious professional with deep legal knowledge and skill. His appointment was not based on political merit. The Hungarian political system at the time was characterised by the fact that ministers were typically professionals, not career politicians. This differed from the Westminster model. One did not need to be an elected representative to be appointed minister; professionals, soldiers, or civilians were eligible. Of course, in the case of a district vacancy, a minister could stand for parliament and eventually become a true representative.



**ID card for the Department of Justice**

Each minister had two personal secretaries. The senior secretary served as the liaison between the minister and the various departments. At that time, this important role was held by Béla Térffy, the head of the ministerial department. He was a well-mannered, diligent man whose name carried weight in legal circles. The famous Térffy Legal Pocket Book—a critically acclaimed summary of Hungarian law—was in the hands of nearly every lawyer. It had originally been compiled by his father, Sándor (Alexander) Térffy, and was periodically updated by Béla himself.

Next to him was László Trócsányi, a magistrate by training, who managed the minister's personal affairs. He handled correspondence, arranged visits, and oversaw all matters referred to him by the minister.

The Presidential Division of the Justice Department ensured the seamless operation of the organisation. At its head was Jenő Lutilszky, a powerful figure whose office oversaw the appointment of assistants, draftsmen, and judicial officers. He was strong-willed, highly organised, and strove to act impartially—no easy task given the political pressures of the time. Naturally, he had enemies, but only when viewed through the lens of higher political interests.

The deputy head of the Presidential Division was Lajos (Louis) Radovics, a ministerial advisor. I remember him as a tireless worker who, even during the serious events of 1944, maintained his objectivity.

I also recall the office director, Kádár—a loyal and hardworking member of Lutilszky's staff. His son studied law and, during my time, took a position in the Administrative Department of the Ministry.

For a period, István (Stephen) Antal served as State Secretary to the Minister of Justice. He worked closely with department managers and draftsmen and often remarked how much he had learned from the Ministry's legal experts during those months. He later became Minister of Propaganda, and in 1944, returned to us as Minister of Justice.

The department entrusted with the preparation of new laws at that time was headed by Gábor Vladár, who held the rank of Chairman of the Curia Council. He was a highly qualified lawyer with quiet manners, who wisely guided his subordinates and treated them as colleagues. The division was filled with well-trained, knowledgeable jurists. I have already mentioned János (John) Csiky, a constitutional law expert. He worked alongside Ferenc (Francis) Bacsó, who had contributed to the codification of the modern Defence Act II in 1939. Béla Csánk specialised in international law and legislative

diplomacy. I also recall Károly (Charles) Visky and Ferenc Windisch as important members of the Law Preparatory Division.

I was often in contact with this department, as it was customary for the Reviewer's Department to be consulted on significant legislative matters. Occasionally, the Act Generator Division would also seek our opinion. In one case of considerable commercial importance, they forwarded a legal matter to us, and Andor Sárffy assigned it to me. My analysis diverged from the position taken by the Law Preparatory Division. Sárffy appreciated my reasoning and returned the case to them, endorsing my comments. With a smile, he remarked, "Once or twice, we too can lecture our friends..."

It was then I realised that our legal training had certain gaps in commercial law—areas we often left to accounting professionals. I came to believe that a deeper understanding of double-entry bookkeeping should be part of a commercial lawyer's education. Later, in exile, I was compelled by circumstance to obtain this qualification, and once I resumed my legal practice, I found that this commercial knowledge served me well.

Initially, my work covered a wide range of issues, but over time I became the department's constitutional and legal expert on matters of citizenship. Around 1942–43, this area of law became increasingly complex. Many people—particularly of Jewish origin—fled from the former territories of Greater Hungary to Hungary, seeking refuge from the harsh German-aligned regimes in Slovakia, Croatia, and Transylvania, where they faced grave danger.

Our department was tasked with determining whether these refugees should be recognised as Hungarian citizens. If the answer was no, the Ministry of the Interior would expel and deport them back to their place of origin. The responsibility placed upon us was immense. Despite the prevailing anti-Jewish sentiment, we adhered strictly to a proper and humane interpretation of Hungarian law. In many cases, I recommended to the Minister of the Interior that, based on the available documentation, the individuals in question should be confirmed as Hungarian citizens. In such cases, Andor Sárffy typically approved my proposals with the quiet affirmation, "I think you're right."

During this period, an article of mine appeared in the Miskolc Lawyer Life magazine. It addressed one of the more sensitive issues of the German National Socialist regime—specifically, the question of the Führer's succession, based on data I had gathered while on scholarship in Berlin. **(The article was later banned by the Communist government in 1945.)**

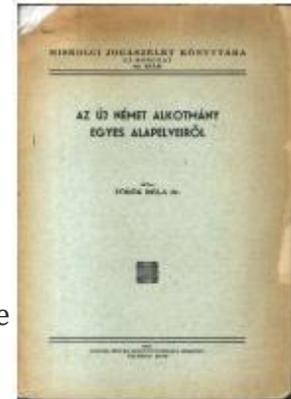
Andor Sárffy, known for his lack of sympathy toward the German system, criticised the article, remarking that the regime was so confused that even German experts could not make sense of it. I never denied that I supported international cooperation with Germany, nor did I conceal my desire for radical land reform and improved conditions for Hungary's industrial workers. However, Sárffy was more conservative in his views on domestic policy. Still, the Justice Department was a place of independent thought, where differing opinions were heard and often debated. In over two years of working under Sárffy, we never had a disagreement regarding the management of departmental affairs.

When he did disagree, and felt it necessary to make his position clear, he had a way of putting his interlocutor in an awkward position—always with quiet precision. I recall one conference with the Ministry of Agriculture on a significant issue. They sought the Justice Department's opinion to ensure the legal soundness of their proposal. After a lengthy presentation by the Ministry's representative, he turned to Sárffy and asked whether he agreed. Sárffy replied, "Maybe I'm limited, but I do not understand all this..." The stunned silence that followed made it clear that he did not support the proposed solution. In such instances, the Minister of Justice consistently stood by his legal experts and never approved a decision that lacked the support of the responsible professional and their superior.

The Reviewer's Department operated in this spirit. Among my colleagues, I particularly remember Sándor (Alexander) Kálnoki Bedő, Ministerial Secretary, whose office was next to mine. He was only four years older than I, but far more experienced, and he often helped me with complex legal questions. He was one of the most capable and seasoned draftsmen in the Ministry. When questions arose regarding the validity of marriages, Alex usually had the answer.

As fate would have it, we later spent several years in exile together. The only regret was that he and his family emigrated to the United States, while we ended up in Australia—and so we were torn apart.

As I have already written, István Bíbó was another neighbour. We spoke daily, discussing both legal and political matters. Alajos Degré was particularly proficient in



**Some Basic  
Principals of The  
New German  
Constitution**

Sabbatarian cases (those concerning the observance of the Sabbath). He became a recognised expert in the field, and his fair-minded proposals were, in most cases, adopted.

Another good friend of mine, Jenő (Eugene) Csorna—who was my age—also worked with us. Sadly, it was only in 1943 that we came to know each other more deeply. He had spent many months on the Eastern Front as an artillery officer.

Panel Judge Lóránt Nyeviczky was a diligent and insightful man, known for his hard work and clarity of thought. László Semjén, Ministerial Counsellor, was an old-fashioned Hungarian gentleman. These were difficult years for him, as we all knew his wife was Jewish, and he lived in constant worry about what the future might bring.

I remember Lajos (Louis) Klivinyi with warm affection. We had a personal friendship and often visited one another. Miklós Nagy and Lajos Slezák also worked in our department and contributed meaningfully to its collegial spirit.

By this time, Ica and I had been married for nearly two years, and we were growing concerned that there was still no sign of the long-hoped-for “little one.” Ica began seeing Dr. Balassá, who found her a little weak but otherwise healthy. He prescribed some “strengtheners,” and we were overjoyed when we soon learned that she was pregnant.

This happy news immediately raised the question of housing. It was clear that once the baby arrived, our small studio apartment on Pozsony Street would no longer suffice. Finding a reasonably priced apartment was extremely difficult. Fortunately, the Ministry had a housing assistance program for staff, and we were allocated a flat on Káplár Street—a second-floor apartment with two rooms and a hall. The rent was quite high, but since we were both working, we managed to fit it into our budget.

On June 30, 1942, I received my official judicial appointment, and my salary was adjusted accordingly. The transcript of the ministerial judicial registration read:

“His Serene Highness the Governor, on the 30th day of June, has appointed you, Mr. Secretary, as a Judge in the Royal Budapest Criminal Court.

With this appointment, Mr. Judge, I consent to your continued service in the Magyar Royal Justice Ministry under my leadership.”

I took the judicial oath on July 13, 1942, before my former supervisor, Félix Avedik.

That spring, we visited my father-in-law in Miskolc for a few days. While we were there, the city was bidding farewell to a division of the Second Hungarian Army, departing for the Eastern Front. Ica said goodbye to an old childhood friend, Lieutenant Eugene

Vuskics, who was among the departing troops. Tragically, Eugene was later killed in action during the offensive.

My unit was once again on the move, though I still had not been drafted. A few months later, I was saddened to learn that one of my comrades, Laci Halápi, had been killed in action. Laci's fate was especially tragic. Though of Jewish ancestry, he had not previously faced discrimination. But I later learned that his superiors had decided he would no longer be permitted to serve with his comrades across the border. Laci, I understand, could not bear the pain of this exclusion. On what would be his final mission, I believe he voluntarily sought death. I later took part in a ceremony at the barracks, where General Jenő (Eugene) Major presented Laci's widow with a posthumous award.

That summer, around St Stephen's Day, the Assistant Governor died a hero's death. The city was awash with rumours about how the fatal accident had occurred. Much later, in exile, I had the opportunity to speak with his fellow officers and the then-commander of the airstrip. They assured me that the crash was caused by pilot error and firmly denied the malicious rumours that had circulated. Years later, I read a memoir in which the author attempted to blame the accident on the Germans. I contacted my air force comrades, who indignantly rejected this irresponsible slander.

In early September 1942, Budapest experienced its first air raid. The City Manor Church was struck, and since we lived nearby, we could see the damage with our own eyes.

We had expected the baby to arrive at the beginning of October, but unexpectedly, at noon on September 16, Ica's contractions advanced rapidly. By 4 p.m., we drove to the Üllői Street Clinic in Pest. My mother joined us. Ica's pain intensified, and we waited anxiously



**Üllői Street clinic**

for the big moment.

At that time, it was not customary for family members to be present during childbirth, so my mother and I left the clinic for a few hours and wandered the city. When we returned around 8 p.m., we were overjoyed to be told that a son had been born to us. We showered Ica with kisses.

Due to the curfew and blackout regulations imposed on the clinic (because of air raids), we could not stay long. The staff worked under somewhat chaotic conditions. Although we had made prior arrangements for a private

room for Ica, she was placed in a large ward, which limited visiting opportunities. Nevertheless, she befriended a few of her fellow patients, and in time we met them and were introduced to each other's little ones.

Thank God, there were no complications. The official report read: "Mother and child are doing well." Soon, we brought them home.

By then, we had a domestic worker named Piri, referred to us by Ica's mother in Miskolc. She was very fond of the little boy and cared for him lovingly until the end of 1944. Thanks to her help, Ica's household duties became more manageable, and the Government Price Control Department, where she worked, retained her position.

At the sacrament of baptism, our firstborn was given the name László Béla Sándor. I wished to honour my uncle László; Sándor was my grandfather's name, and Béla was both my father's and my own.

Later, Ica began to call him "Maxi"—a name that stayed with him throughout his life, even in distant Australia.

The joy of Maxi's arrival was overshadowed by the grim developments of those weeks and months, which marked a turning point in the war. We all sensed that the Battle of Stalingrad signalled a grave and growing threat.

The national mood darkened with the catastrophe that befell the Second Hungarian Army. The Soviet forces, vastly superior in number and equipment, effectively annihilated our poorly supplied troops. This devastating blow, sadly, had long been foreseeable. Officers returning from the front confided in relatives and friends that their equipment was inadequate and morale was low. From the trenches, the soldiers viewed the carefree, almost peacetime atmosphere of Budapest with bitterness. Many felt—perhaps rightly—that the government, under German pressure, was sacrificing them without taking the necessary steps to reinforce the Hungarian front.

Later, in exile, I read British historian David Irving's account, which noted that Hitler had recognised the Hungarian and Romanian fronts as the Axis's Achilles heel and had instructed his staff to strengthen them. It appears that some German generals sabotaged these orders, and the reinforcements were never implemented.



**Mother and child**

Hungarian society was increasingly forced to confront the reality that we were being drawn deeper into a global war. Few truly grasped the situation, and many were unable to comprehend the government's position. The leadership at the time sought to minimise bloodshed, hoping that a compromise peace might eventually emerge. In the event of a German defeat, they believed that England—adhering to its traditional “balance of power” policy—would not permit a return to the punitive Versailles system in Europe.



***Dr. Miklós Kállay Prime Minister March 1942 to March 1944.***

Prime Minister Miklós Kállay also worked to keep open the few remaining lines of communication with Britain, regularly informing the British leadership of Hungary's views. On the domestic front, he strove to uphold the rule of law, engaged in dialogue with the Hungarian Social Democrats and other opposition parties, and sought to reassure the Jewish population that their situation would not deteriorate further.

Hungarian society was increasingly divided by the conflicting pressures of the looming war. Some still hoped that, if not a total German victory, a compromise peace might emerge—one in which British understanding would safeguard Hungary's territorial integrity and preserve its existing state and social order. By this time, the right wing began to realise that the tide of war had turned in favour of the Russians, and alongside the spectre of old Russian imperialism loomed the threat of Communism.

Others saw Hungary's future in aligning with the Anglo-Saxon powers and rejecting collaboration with the German Empire. As the wife of my colleague Lajos (Louis) Klivinyi once said to me: “Béla, I so trust in the English...”

My friends and I grew increasingly concerned. More and more signs pointed to the fact that, here in Eastern Europe, the principal danger was Russian imperialism—and that Slavic Bolshevik rule could mean the death of the Hungarian nation.

This threat was felt not only in society at large but also within our office. Fierce debates erupted among colleagues as we discussed the situation and pondered possible outcomes.

During these months, we spent nearly an hour each morning in István Bíbó's room, trying to make sense of our predicament.

István's views were always thought-provoking. He came from a Transylvanian Protestant family and had married one of the daughters of Bishop Ravasz. His Protestant, anti-Habsburg background inclined him against the German Empire.

A highly educated and distinguished legal scholar, István argued that National Socialism lacked any scientific foundation and was merely a revival of German military imperialism. In contrast, he held a favourable view of Soviet governance and admired Hans Kelsen's Pure Theory of Law. He believed that the excesses of the Bolshevik revolution would eventually be outgrown, and that Stalin's dictatorship was not central to the Politburo's collective leadership. For him, the effort to establish the rule of law was paramount.

Our colleague Jenő Csorna, who had just returned from a long tour of duty on the Eastern Front, tried to counter this view. He described the Russian people as uninformed and backward, and the communist rulers as exercising a brutal, totalitarian dictatorship through unimaginable warfare. István dismissed this as German propaganda and declared that he would rather see a Russian invasion than a German victory.

This philosophical divide was echoed among other colleagues. Soon, we began to identify one another as either "English friends" or "German friends"—a shorthand for our respective political leanings.

Very few agreed with István's theoretical embrace of the Soviet orientation. I knew only one such colleague: Tamás (Thomas) Simándy, born in Transylvania, who deeply loved his people and believed in the need for social regeneration. He openly confessed his socialist sympathies.

Under the Horthy regime, such views could be expressed freely, provided they did not seek to overthrow the existing social and political order by force. We could openly discuss these matters with Tamás and István, and neither was ever brought before the courts or reported to the authorities.

After the war, however, some individuals sought to portray this atmosphere of free speech within the Justice Department as a form of "resistance." It is understandable that some tried to bolster their postwar standing. What they failed to anticipate was that the communist regime did not regard such intellectual dissent as sufficient resistance—and, in time, many of these individuals became victims of the very system they had hoped to appease.

One such man was Kálmán Zolnay, whose brother László Zolnay later exposed the truth in his biography. Kálmán went so far as to denounce his uncle, László Gál—a kind, conservative man who had little interest in national politics—because, in early 1942, he had remarked in a family gathering: “It seems that the Germans have won the war.”

Meanwhile, our life continued, and our happy marriage promised another blessing. We were expecting the arrival of our second child in October, and we decided that Ica would resign from her position. With two small children, it was clear that she should be at home.

In the later stages of her pregnancy, her mother came to help us, and we allowed ourselves a brief respite—a two-week holiday in Balatonföldvár.

Ica did not do much swimming, but she spent many pleasant hours relaxing in the shade of the old Földvár trees. I, however, went to the lake for a swim. Lili Murata was also holidaying there, and she brought the news of Mussolini’s fall... We felt that our world was in motion, threatening to drown us in its upheaval.



***Balatonföldvár***

By chance, I met my old friend Miki Tompa on the grounds of Földvár Park—someone I hadn’t seen since our days in Szeged. He was now a lieutenant in the Csendőrség (Military Police), and he spoke bitterly about the conditions in Bácska, which made life extremely difficult for the militia forces.

My friend Nicholas, toward the end of the war, left the country as a divisional commander of the Szent László Battalion. He lived in England until his death.

My sister Kata and brother-in-law Béla Csabai visited us, and we spent many happy hours together.

Upon returning to Budapest, I met my uncle Kálmán Falcione several times. He was the legal defender of the defense forces in Szeged and often came to the capital as a representative for Márton Zöldi, the gendarme officer implicated in the Novi Sad massacre. We discussed the case, and my uncle admitted that Zöldi’s reaction had been excessively



**Italian dictator  
Benito Mussolini**

harsh, provoked by the unsightly atrocities committed during the partisan war. We agreed that the brutalisation of the Eastern Front had distorted the conduct of war.

My uncle, a veteran of the First World War who had spent many years in Russian captivity, recalled that officers were once allowed to keep their swords. It was not like today, when soldiers faced the grim reality of suicide as they contemplated the horrors of becoming prisoners of war.

(Hungarian troops participated in the Nazi invasion and partition of Yugoslavia in 1941. In January 1942, they conducted brutal anti-partisan raids in which up to 4,000 civilians—mostly Serbs and Jews—were killed in the Novi Sad region. In 1943, the Hungarian government investigated the massacres, and those responsible were sentenced to death. However, when Yugoslav partisans recaptured Vojvodina, they carried out mass and systematic revenge executions of ethnic Hungarians: around 40,000 civilians were tortured and killed between October 1944 and May 1945.)

At this time, my cousin Lóránt Falcione also visited us. He was then a military judge lieutenant and had spent time on the Eastern Front. He recounted how partisan warfare made military operations difficult to manage, and he struggled with the moral weight of military judicial executions—even though international law did not prohibit such retaliatory measures.

Meanwhile, our second child signalled his arrival. At first, we drove to the clinic in vain. But a week later, on the night of October 5th, Ica felt the time had come. I was fortunate to catch a cab quickly. We had no telephone, so we used our neighbour's, and managed to arrive at the private sanatorium named after Zsuzsanna Lórántffy, known as the Városligeti Otthon (City Park Home).

This time, we did not have to wait long. By three o'clock in the morning, our second son Béla cried out into the world. Coincidentally, it was also my 29th birthday. We had not planned to name him Béla, but since he was born on my birthday, we decided to call him Béla Sándor Lóránt. My cousin Lóránt Falcione became his godfather.

It was about 4 a.m., and I did not go home. Dr. Balassa, the obstetrician, kindly drove me to the Gellért Hotel, where I took a spa and slept for a few hours before heading to the office.



**Béla Sándor  
Lóránt born 6  
October 1943**

The baptism was attended by my parents and Ica's mother and father. The family was filled with joy. Thank God, everything went well, and we basked in the happiness of our growing family.

We did not lead an active social life during these years. In the early period, I was preparing for my exams, and Ica was busy with her work. Later, with the arrival of our children, our time became even more limited. My mother was often with us. At that time, she was living with her third life partner, Dr. Károly Móricz, who became our family doctor. He cared for the children with great affection and taught us basic pediatric knowledge—skills that proved invaluable when life later swept us into unfamiliar surroundings.

Occasionally, we visited friends or received guests. We kept in touch with István (Stephen) Arató and Péter Kemény, colleagues from Berlin, and with Ferenc Nagy, a magistrate, and his wife, who eventually became close friends. We also spent time with my cousin László Pápay-Faragó and his family, who visited us several times from Bábolna, and later with my sister and brother-in-law Béla from Székesfehérvár. Sometimes my father came to the city, and we enjoyed fine dining and an evening at the theatre.

We old Berliners did not see each other often. Wartime blackouts and military assignments disrupted our circle and limited opportunities for reunion. I joined the German–Hungarian Youth Society in their activities. My friend Péter Kemény served as youth secretary and asked me to contribute a short presentation for a booklet in the *Ungarische Studien* (Hungarian Studies) series, focusing on the Hungarian constitution. This publication series aimed to present Hungarian public life in German, fostering sympathy and understanding.

Gyula Rézler authored the first booklet, which addressed social issues. The second, showcasing major Hungarian cities, was written by Ferenc Erdei. The third booklet, written by me, was titled *Abriss der Ungarischen Verfassung* (Outline of the Hungarian Constitution).

The German–Hungarian Society's work increasingly reflected Hungary's efforts to appease German leadership. Even amid the crisis of war, there was no serious consideration of turning against Germany. It was clear that the German leadership was growing uneasy with Miklós Kállay's increasingly neutralist policies.

At this time, the German propaganda ministry sent a representative to Budapest. Holding the rank of Head of the Minister's Department, he delivered a lecture in Parliament on the potential consequences of an unsuccessful end to the war.

His message was clear: the Anglo-Saxon powers would likely be unable to contain Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. He argued that America would probably revert to isolationism, and that Hungary's hopes of escaping the "iron curtain"—a term coined by Goebbels—were in vain. This prediction was later published in one of the Reich's official magazines.

Many leading Hungarian statesmen attended the lecture. Among other things, I remember seeing Béla Imrédy for the last time. It is not impossible that this serious and candid presentation influenced several right-wing politicians to refrain from opposing the revolution that would take place on 15 October 1944.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Front was drawing ever closer to Hungary's thousand-year-old borders. With these concerns weighing heavily, we bid farewell to 1943 and braced ourselves for the trials of 1944.

## Personal Secretary to István Antal and Gábor Vladár 1944

We bore the weight of the threatening world situation with youthful optimism, and our two little boys filled our days with enough joy to give us many happy hours.

Spring was approaching, and my father came up once again to Budapest. We planned to spend the weekend of March 18–19 with him. As usual, he stayed at the Pannonia Hotel, and on Sunday afternoon, he visited our Káplár Street apartment. We attended Holy Mass at the Rákócziánium Chapel, just a few hundred meters from our home, and then took the children for a walk in Marcibányi Square.

It was a beautiful spring day. The neighbourhood was peaceful, and we truly enjoyed being together as a family. Naturally, I spoke with my father about the war and tried to ease his concerns by painting a more hopeful picture. Piri, our maid, prepared a delicious lunch. My father took his customary half-hour nap in the afternoon, and we spent pleasant hours together until the evening, around 8 or 9 p.m., when he said he would return to the Pannonia Lodge. I accompanied him, and after a lovely day, said goodbye at the entrance of the hotel.



***Rákócziánium Chapel***

On my way home, I bought the first edition of Monday's newspapers at the corner of Rákóczi Street and Museum Circuit, then boarded a tram. I noticed small groups of people gathered in front of the Astoria Hotel but didn't grasp the significance. As the tram rattled on, I began reading. One editorial referred to a political assembly and insisted that the right wing could not be held responsible for "what happened." The article was vague, and I couldn't make sense of its message.

The next morning, I headed to work at the Justice Ministry. On Margit (Margaret) Boulevard, I noticed an unusual number of German soldiers walking in groups. Still, I thought little of it—German troops often passed through Budapest and took short leaves.

At the Ministry, I learned the truth: while we had been walking peacefully in Marcibányi Park, enjoying a family reunion, Hungarian history had taken a dramatic turn. We were now under German occupation.

The Ministry was like an anthill. Work was impossible. We huddled in our offices, discussing the events. The shock was universal—there was no difference between those on the right or the left. My friend Jenő (Eugene) Csorna, known for his right-leaning views,

declared that if the Germans removed Miklós Horthy, the Governor and Head of State, he would join the partisan resistance.

We all agreed that the occupation was a consequence of Miklós Kállay's two-edged diplomatic policy. Kállay had never intended to turn against Germany, but he had consistently sought to assert Hungary's position with the Western Allies. Given Italy's actions the previous year, it was understandable that the German High Command now demanded guarantees—especially with the war front nearing Hungary's borders.

Soon, we heard that the Hungarian government had begun negotiations with German political appointees, and we hoped an agreement might be reached.

News spread that German security forces had arrested Hungarian politicians with leftist leanings. We all condemned this as a violation of Hungarian sovereignty.

Rumours circulated that Kállay had sought refuge in the Turkish Embassy, and it was reported that the Governor had accepted the government's resignation. The formation of a new government was delayed—almost no one wanted to take on such a thankless task.

Later, I learned that neither the political far right nor the conservative establishment initially wanted to form a government. The Germans did not support the extreme right but continued their policy of cooperating with the existing conservative forces. Eventually, our ambassador to Berlin, Döme Sztójay, agreed to the Governor's request to form a government, despite being seriously ill.

During the negotiations, many complications arose, though I knew nothing of them at the time. From the Justice Ministry's Department of Draftsmen, the most significant news was that István Antal had been appointed Minister of Justice. This announcement was warmly welcomed by nearly everyone.

Antal was well known in our circle. As Secretary of State, he had maintained excellent relationships with department managers and was deeply appreciative of the skill and dedication of the Ministry's draftsmen

Politically, István Antal's presence was reassuring. We were confident that he would only serve in a government that was indisputably Hungarian. We knew he came from a modest family of craftsmen, and his social policies consistently aimed to raise the standard of living for the Hungarian people, while maintaining a prudent distance from extremist views. I personally welcomed him as an old comrade from TURUL, our university club. One



**István Antal**  
**Minister of**  
**Justice**

of his closest staff members was the writer István Eszterhás, who had been something of a hero to me during my academic years.

Moreover, the fact that the new government had been appointed by Miklós Horthy was seen as a hopeful sign—that perhaps the German occupation might be softened or even reversed if the Hungarian government could win the confidence of the German Empire.

Refusal to cooperate seemed impossible, and the idea of partisan resistance was, at best, a romantic notion. Politicians aligned with the Anglo-Saxon cause understood that Hungary's fundamental interests had long run parallel to those of Germany. After more than two decades of consistent revisionist policy, a sudden reversal—such as the Italian Republic's pivot—would have been unthinkable, even under Prime Minister Kállay. Under German military occupation, it was even less likely.

We understood that we had to support the government appointed by the Head of State, and department heads instructed their subordinates accordingly.

We ceased our political debates and returned to our work. But then, I encountered a surprise.

I was summoned to the President's Department. At that time, Lajos (Louis) Radovics was acting head, as Jenő (Eugene) Lutilszky had recently fallen seriously ill and been hospitalised. Radovics informed me that with the arrival of the new minister, changes would be made to the Secretariat. István (Stephen) Antal wished to bring his former personal secretary to the Justice Ministry.

There was no obstacle to this. Board Secretary János (John) Lányi, a judge who had been temporarily serving in the Propaganda Ministry, simply returned to judicial service. Béla Térffy, who had long requested to be relieved of his duties, returned to the Pre-Drafting Department without objection. László Trócsányi, the younger secretary who had managed the personal affairs of Minister László Radocsay, declined to continue in a subordinate role. Antal, however, insisted that his personal affairs be managed by János Lányi, with the junior secretary acting as coordinator for departmental matters.

With Trócsányi's departure, a vacancy was created. Lajos Radovics approached me to fill the position. He explained that, given the delicate political situation and the importance of maintaining proper contact with the Germans, I was a suitable candidate—having spent two years in Germany, speaking fluent German, and possessing expertise in German institutions.

He added that he knew me well and trusted that my moderate temperament would help me navigate any difficulties. He asked me to accept the transfer to the Presidential Department. He also noted that, by custom, a personal secretary was often later appointed to the prestigious Law Preparatory Department—an aspiration shared by many in the Draftsman Division.

István Antal approved my appointment, and so I could only accept.

The other secretary, János Lányi, was a familiar and welcome colleague. His family was well known in Szeged, and we had a prior connection, so a friendly working relationship seemed assured from the outset.

I had mixed feelings about accepting this rewarding commission. On one hand, I was pleased—it was a promotion and an opportunity to further develop my skills as a legal draftsman. On the other hand, the political changes were unsettling, and I was reluctant to leave my work in the Reviewer Department. My colleagues gave me a warm send-off, and my supervisor, Andor Sárffy, wished me well.

István Antal soon settled into his role, clearly at ease in his former workplace. János Lányi resumed his duties as Antal's personal secretary. For me, the change was significant. I exchanged my modest little office for a spacious room with two large desks and four telephones that rang almost constantly. One had to be alert at all times. The work continued without pause until about 4 p.m., when we would escort Minister Antal home in the official car. On the return journey, I would disembark near the Rózsadomb district.

One of the advantages of the new post was that, within 24 hours, I was provided with a home telephone—something I had not dared to request previously due to wartime restrictions. On the downside, the luxury of a two-hour lunch break vanished; I rarely managed a bite before 5 p.m.

Given the worsening war situation, the government anticipated that the Western Allies would no longer spare Budapest and would soon begin bombing the city. As a precaution, regulations were issued for the partial evacuation of civilians. The Justice Ministry implemented a plan to relocate officials' families.

We participated in this effort. Within a few weeks, Ica moved with our two little boys to Balassagyarmat, where they were hosted by Korbás, a city councillor. Our family was kindly received and spent six months there in relative safety.

I became an orphan, and in some ways, it became easier for me to keep up with the increased workload.

I was at my desk well before 9 a.m., and my first task each morning was to read through the MTI mimeographed report, which summarised the previous day's main radio news. This meant I immediately received updates from the British, American, and Russian news services.

My job was to assess whether any news items might affect the Minister or the Ministry and bring them to his attention. I once read an English rumour that there had been an assassination attempt on my superior, István Antal, and that he had been wounded. I presented this to him, and he accepted it with a sad smile.

On my desk was the daily mail, and the typist secretaries helped by opening the envelopes. It was my responsibility to judge which letters should be brought before the Minister. Some I forwarded to the appropriate departments. In many cases, based on the Minister's instructions, when it was clear he did not wish to deal with a matter personally, I replied on his behalf. In other cases, where the writer's standing required a direct response, I dictated the reply and attached it to the letter for the Minister's signature.

Meanwhile, the phones rang constantly. After each conversation, I often had to switch immediately to another line. Department managers called to arrange suitable times for the Minister to meet with candidates or visitors.

When the Minister was unavailable to meet with MPs or journalists, I would speak with them while they waited. In these conversations, I often learned details of political developments that never appeared in the newspapers.

The work continued without pause until 3 or 4 p.m. After a few weeks, it became customary for János Lányi and me to accompany the Minister to the Pest District Rural Courthouse, where German security forces held arrested Hungarian politicians. István Antal assured them that negotiations were underway for their release, and until then, he was committed to ensuring their well-being.

This quiet, unpublicised duty was one of Antal's most admirable qualities.

In appearance and personality, he gave the impression of a quiet and humble man. He was an excellent writer and an outstanding speaker, but in private life, he was soft-spoken and reserved. During these months, I came to know him as a religious and compassionate person. Under no circumstances did ambition lead him to accept the

ministerial portfolio—he struggled, like all of us, knowing the situation was nearly hopeless.

The government declared a state of emergency in response to air attacks and imposed martial law for all offences committed during those times. Police arrested a burglar who had committed his crime during a blackout. A convened court martial sentenced him to death. His only hope was a pardon from the Head of State. The Department of Justice recommended that, to set an example, the Minister should reject the clemency petition. I presented the case to Antal. The state desired this outcome, but the Minister’s signature would mean one man’s death.



***Hungarian Jewish women wearing compulsory yellow badges.***

Antal struggled for several minutes before signing the death order. Sweat beaded on his forehead, and he said sadly, “Béla, he also is a Hungarian man...” But then he composed himself and signed the letter of rejection.

On another occasion, the Ministry placed a draft decree before him concerning the use of long-term prisoners to voluntarily participate in a medical procedure—contracting typhus to provide material for vaccine production. Antal recognised the moral dilemma: punishing prisoners versus the hope of saving others. He hesitated for a long time before approving the regulation. Ultimately, he agreed, and the resulting serum saved hundreds of military lives.

The Minister of Justice was not involved in the regulations enacted against the Jews, but I know he watched the events with deep concern.

Antal had no illusions about how his actions would be judged if Hungary lost the war. I remember one evening, on our way home from work, when Mrs. Antal was in the car. There was a traffic jam, and people wearing yellow stars (Jews, who were required to wear identifying badges) stared hatefully at the occupants of the state-owned Rolls-Royce. “What will they do to us if we lose the war?” asked Mrs. Antal. The Minister did not respond.

The Jewish question came to the fore, and we learned from visiting MPs that it had become a central issue of debate. Hungarian politicians generally agreed that it would be unacceptable for the Germans to determine the fate of Jews in Hungary.

Ferenc Szálasi was well known for his desire to maintain Hungarian sovereignty. He declared that he would not accept appointment as Head of Government if the Germans insisted on managing the “Jewish problem” themselves. Because of this, Szálasi was omitted from the list of eligible candidates during negotiations. The Germans insisted that Hungary limit its sovereignty in this regard if it wished to reverse the occupation.

In the end, the Sztójay government agreed that Germany, as the occupying power, would reserve the right to act on this issue.

The Governor ultimately accepted this condition. His vision was that if the country remained under Hungarian administration, there might later be an opportunity to intervene. Horthy’s tactics proved correct: the government was able to take advantage of the attack on Hitler, and when German control loosened, he halted the deportation of Jews from Budapest.

This was only possible because Horthy had consistently upheld the orderly administration of government regulations. The Royal Gendarmerie and police cooperated with the Germans in gathering rural Jews, but they also followed Horthy’s instructions—against German wishes—when Jews in Budapest were threatened with removal.

Even after October 15th, and before the siege of Budapest, Ferenc (Francis) Szálasi continued his policy of resisting German demands to deport the Jews of Budapest to the West.

In this delicate political situation, István Antal fulfilled his duties as a mediator within the cabinet. The government included individuals with radical nationalist views, as well as others who were essentially conservative in their thinking. Antal positioned himself between these factions, striving for balance.

The reconciliation process was laborious, and the behind-the-scenes work demanded considerable effort. The role was made more difficult by the fact that Prime Minister Döme Sztójay was not only gravely ill but had never previously participated in Hungarian domestic politics. As a result, Antal’s responsibilities extended to overseeing presidential duties as well.

When the Sztójay government had to be introduced to Parliament, it was Antal who edited the Prime Minister’s statement. He disliked dictation, so he wrote the speech by hand, page after page. When he finished a sheet, he rang for the typist, who transcribed it. The typed pages were then reviewed and revised by the Minister until the speech was complete.

Parliament took note of the government's report and voted confidence in the new administration, thereby ensuring constitutional continuity. For all that had occurred, the Sztójay government formally accepted political responsibility.

Hungarian society remained caught between conservative, moderate, and radical forces. Those who followed a moderate line were exposed to attacks from both the right and the left.

I felt this tension, even though my secretarial position did not involve decision-making. A lawyer wearing a yellow star came to request an audience with the Minister, whom he knew personally. I treated him with courtesy, seated him beside my desk, and listened. I had to reject his application on principle; the Minister could not accept it. After our conversation, I escorted him out, shook his hand, and said goodbye. This simple act drew criticism from those with radical views.

In similar circumstances, Elek Kaszó, an old friend from Szeged, visited me. He was deeply troubled. Though classified as half-Jewish, he was considered an exception, as all four of his grandparents had been Christians at birth. The situation for his mother and our Aunt Böske (Betty) was less clear. Although the Békefy family had been baptised before her birth, her Jewish descent was not in doubt. My friend Sityi asked for advice. I gave him what I believed was the best counsel under the circumstances, and we parted on friendly terms.

Ironically, after the war, when the country came under communist control, my parents asked Sityi to look into my work dossier held by the new regime. By the 1950s, he was practising law in Budapest. I learned from him, with some interest, that my communist cadre file contained only one "stain." I had forgotten the incident entirely until I read about it in the dossier—never having considered it particularly significant.

During an air raid on Budapest, we employees took shelter in the air defence basement. The Minister was away at the time, accompanied by János Lányi on official business. I was with my old colleagues, and we spoke quietly. László Semjén, a ministerial advisor, was present. He was enduring a difficult time, as his wife was Jewish. He bitterly criticised the recently published regulations, calling them inhumane, and sharply attacked the government and all those who had contributed to these laws—including the Minister himself.

A dead silence fell over the cellar, and my colleagues looked at me. It seemed Semjén had not realised that I, the Minister's Secretary, was also present.

To defuse the situation, I explained that the government had been forced to issue these regulations under German pressure. Refusing to implement them would have triggered full German occupation, which the government believed would bring even greater hardship and would not serve Hungarian interests.

Semjén did not respond, and our daily agenda soon overtook the incident. I did not report it, as I understood his desperate state of mind.

Only the churches dared to speak out against the harsh and inhumane regulations. The Catholic bishops' pastoral letter was read in churches, and Archbishop Serédi personally protested. The government, represented by István Antal, received the Archbishop. János Lányi and I waited in the stairwell and escorted him into the Minister's study. Of course, Antal could not offer a satisfactory answer.

I too witnessed the inhumane methods used in the deportation of Jews. While passing through a country railway station en route to visit my family, our train was delayed to allow a freight train carrying Jews to pass. The wagons were crammed with the unfortunate souls.



**Deportation of Hungarian Jews**

These brutal methods shifted public sentiment. Before the German occupation, there had been widespread anti-Semitic feeling. Many believed the Jews were sabotaging the war effort, and in Budapest, their behaviour was often seen as defiant. Even the Chief Rabbi had warned his community to moderate their conduct.

The harsh German reprisals provoked widespread revulsion. The German leadership pointed to the Western powers' inhumane carpet bombing of several cities as justification for their own actions, but this did not excuse the cruelty of the deportations.

Many individuals tried to help their Jewish friends and acquaintances, but these efforts could not alter the broader reality.

My father struggled during these months. Due to the anti-Jewish regulations, a vacancy arose for a notary in Székesfehérvár. At the time, my father was serving as a notary in Kalocsa, and our family had long hoped for an opportunity to relocate him to

Székesfehérvár. My sister Kata and her husband had lived there for several years. Béla, my brother-in-law, was a town doctor, and it seemed that, as my father aged, the best solution would be for him to live near his daughter.

When the vacancy became available, our first thought was that he should apply for a transfer. I spoke with Lajos (Louis) Radovics, the head of the department, who supported the application.

But after reflecting on the circumstances surrounding the vacancy—created by the removal of a Jewish official—my father, despite his desire for the transfer, decided he could not accept the position. It would disturb his conscience. He asked me to inform Radovics of his decision and to withdraw the application on ethical grounds.

Radovics simply said he understood my father's position and sent his warm regards.

The terror of losing the war loomed ever larger. A Budapest lawyer friend of István Antal, known as an "English friend," told us that the Western powers believed the end of the war was still far off, and that the Anglo-American forces would eventually turn against the Soviet Union. This information came via the Turkish Embassy.

Most people still hoped that Hungary would eventually fall under British occupation. Everyone followed the advance of the British Eighth Army in Italy with great attention. The success of the Allied landings and the attempted assassination of Hitler—clearly the result of deep military dissent—shook public confidence even in the possibility of a negotiated peace.

In late August, Finland announced it had requested a truce from the Soviet Union. While not a direct threat to Hungary, it signalled that reality was closing in. The Romanian betrayal had a direct and devastating impact on our situation. While Finland ensured the safety of German units on its front, Romania turned against its ally, resulting in the capture of a German division. The Romanians also enabled Soviet forces to bypass the Carpathian Mountains, opening the Tartar Pass and making it extremely difficult to defend the northeastern Carpathians.

My brother-in-law Béla was recently called up for military service in the Székely Land.

Horthy, recognising the urgency, made a desperate attempt to extricate Hungary from the war. He dismissed the Sztójay government and appointed a new administration under Lieutenant General Géza Lakatos. At the same time, the position of Minister of Justice changed hands. István Antal retired and was replaced by Gábor Vladár, President of the

Royal Curia and head of the Law Preparatory Department. However, the secretarial positions remained unchanged—János Lányi and I continued in our roles.

Gábor Vladár was a highly cultivated jurist, a nationalist-minded conservative who had never been involved in politics. As a result, our secretarial duties were reduced. He did not meet with political visitors, and his relationship with the department became increasingly unstructured.

The tide of battle in Transylvania was turning against us, and the evacuation of Northern Transylvania seemed imminent.

In light of this, I made preparations for Ica and our two little boys to return to Budapest. I believed we would be safer in the capital if law and order were to collapse.

I was very much alone. My afternoons were free until evening, and I often didn't know what to do with myself. One afternoon, after work, I wandered into a movie theatre on the Pest side near Margit (Margaret) Bridge and watched a film—the title of which I no longer remember. As I exited the theatre, I ran into an old friend from Szeged, Vilmos Obetkó. We began talking and eventually parted ways at the corner of Margaret Boulevard and Keleti Károly (East Charles) Street.

I had known Obetkó from Szeged. He was a member of the Emericánás (Catholic University Society), and we had often crossed paths. Béla Csikós-Nagy, who worked with Tivadar (Theodore) Surányi Unger at the Economic Faculty, had also spent a few months in Berlin on a *Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag* (Central European Business Forum) scholarship. I knew he had served in the Industry Ministry and was, at that time, a forensic lawyer. Rumour had it that while serving as treasurer of the Hungarian–German Society, he committed financial irregularities, and the Industry Minister accepted his resignation. It was also said that Jenő (Eugene) Lutilszky, head of the President's Department at the Ministry of Justice, helped hush up the affair and arranged for his appointment to the Justice Department's Drafting Division.

Of course, I did not let Obetkó know that I was aware of this episode. After reminiscing about Szeged, our conversation turned to politics. By then, Obetkó had lost faith in everything. He believed that Russian occupation was inevitable. When I lamented the horrors that awaited us, he argued that young people in high positions should not think



of fleeing—we should not abandon the people. He explained that the occupying powers would still need qualified administrative officials.

I could not disagree, nor did I offer a counterargument. I simply kept repeating, “Maybe you’re right, but I cannot imagine myself living here in Budapest while Russian soldiers stroll through our streets...” We shook hands, and I never saw him again.

Years later, I came across his name again. He had changed it to Vilmos Olty and, as Council President, took part in the show trial of Cardinal Mindszenty, the Primate of Hungary. Fate eventually caught up with him—he was brought to court on currency charges, and there were reports that he had committed suicide. More recently, however, I read in a Hungarian newspaper that he was still alive.

But then my bachelor existence came to an end. Ica and our two little boys returned home. My mother brought us a domestic worker, Maria, whom the boys later nicknamed “Mayaka.” Life in Budapest was very difficult. Procuring food was a constant struggle, and our pantry was nearly empty—especially since Ica had been living in the countryside for months. Air raid alarms forced us into the cellars far too often. Once, our building was hit by a firebomb, but fortunately, we managed to extinguish the flames.

During these weeks, Ica shared the joyful news that a third child was on the way. Yet this only deepened our uncertainty—we were unsure what the future would hold.

Conservative members of the government still hoped we could avoid Russian occupation. They placed great faith in the British Eighth Army’s advance through Venice. They refused to acknowledge that the United States and the Soviet Union had already reached a full agreement: The Soviet sphere of influence would extend to the Stettin–Trieste line.

I recall an American air raid on Csepel when all ministry staff took shelter in the cellars. The alarm had not yet been lifted, but the Minister and a few others ventured into the courtyard, gathering around Gábor Vladár, who reassured them that the accelerated advance of the Eighth Army offered hope that they would soon enter Hungarian territory. I could not resist gently pointing out that this was unlikely, as we were already within the Russian sphere of influence. The Minister did not respond.

Gábor Vladár, the eternal optimist, viewed the Russian invasion positively. Both he and Lajos (Louis) Radovics emphasised that when Soviet troops arrived in Transylvania, they were met by Bishop Áron Márton. They believed the reports of Soviet misconduct were exaggerated or false.

Officially, the government continued to insist that we must fight on. Yet the city was filled with rumours that a truce was imminent.

The Lakatos government was to be sworn in on September 16, and I accompanied Gábor Vladár to the parliamentary session.

The secretaries of the Ministers were seated in a separate area, allowing me to witness this truly historic meeting. The deputies were present in near full strength. András Tasnádi Nagy chaired the session, and General Géza Lakatos, in uniform, added a sense of gravity and colour to the proceedings.

During these months, party differences seemed to blur. No one believed that the usual divisions of domestic politics mattered anymore. The deputies were deeply concerned about the retreating front and the advancing enemy—whose ideology and methods seemed utterly alien to our social order.

Large landowners opposed to land reform, Christian national politicians, and national radicals all pondered how the nation might survive this looming catastrophe.

During these weeks, the National League took shape, joined by the vast majority of anti-Bolshevik deputies. Their newspaper declared that the Hungarian nation was prepared to make further sacrifices, and not a single soul was willing to surrender to such an alien system. Yet the League was in a precarious position. The government appointed by the Governor reiterated its commitment to continue fighting, but both officials and ordinary citizens sensed that a decisive shift was imminent.

Even then, some still hoped for American or British paratroopers to arrive and prevent Soviet occupation. Others, though sceptical of “wonder weapons,” clung to the hope that the final efforts of the German Empire might lead to a negotiated peace.

Leaked reports suggested that the government was conducting secret negotiations with the enemy. Although these talks had to be carried out with utmost discretion, Parliament viewed them as unconstitutional and remained wary of such official manoeuvres.

Géza Lakatos’s presentation speech was conventional. He emphasised that the country intended to continue the fight, but he did not address the essence of the crisis.

Then—apparently with the knowledge of the National League—Tibor Kórody, the Arrow Cross parliamentarian, spoke during the debate. I knew him personally. He was a



***Géza Lakatos***

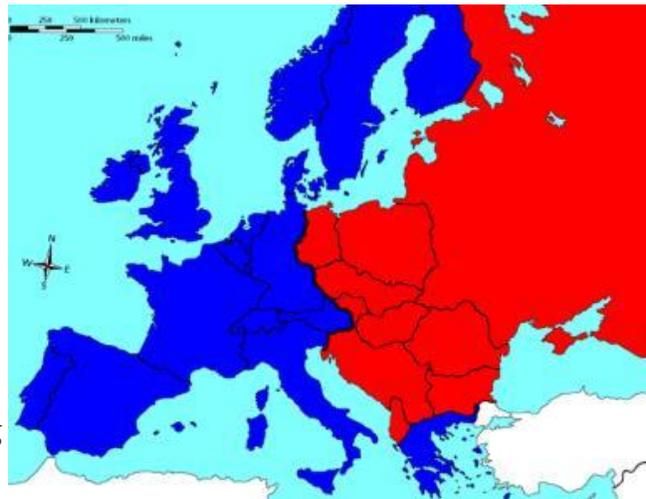
modest man and, for example, on the Jewish question, he was not unyielding. He maintained a good friendship with the Békefy family, visited them several times, and occasionally came to the Department of Justice to offer help.

In his speech, Kórody claimed to have learned that the Head of State, Governor Horthy, was conducting armistice negotiations with the Soviet Union. He could not substantiate his allegations, as András Tasnádi Nagy interrupted him, called the House to order, and declared the statement an attack on the Governor. Tasnádi Nagy explained that, under the Constitution, the Governor was the Supreme Warlord but had no authority to take such a step unilaterally. Political action could only be taken by the Governor with parliamentary approval, and the government was responsible to Parliament, which held state sovereignty. The Governor had been the honoured guardian of the Constitution for more than twenty years; it was therefore inconceivable that he would commit such a constitutional violation.

Kórody sat down, and Parliament resumed its agenda without further debate. Yet the interlude was significant. In that moment, Parliament made clear that any unilateral action by the Head of State in this direction would be considered unconstitutional and contrary to the spirit of parliamentary governance.

The National Assembly ultimately voted confidence in the government.

After the sitting, Members of Parliament lingered in the corridors. I waited for Gábor Vladár, who was attending a Cabinet meeting. As members mingled, I observed the debates. I particularly remember the conversations surrounding



***The Iron Curtain described by Churchill at Westminster College, The Stettin-Trieste Line***

the President of the Party of Transylvania. The group noted that the Transylvanian territories they represented were now almost entirely under Soviet occupation. In a confidential meeting, they resolved to adopt varied responses to these tragic developments. Some would continue to support the German line, others would pursue the Anglo-Saxon direction, and those representing areas under Russian–Romanian occupation would attempt a reasonable modus vivendi with the new authorities.

I was deeply moved by the stand taken by the Transylvanian representatives. Their courage stirred my emotions profoundly.

At this time, a general mobilisation order was proclaimed—“Officers’ Marching Orders”—requiring all reserve officers, even those previously exempted, to report on a specified date and location.

On October 6, 1944—my thirtieth birthday—I was required to register at the Train Barracks, where the remaining detachment of the First Reconnaissance Battalion was stationed.

The Justice Department’s policy was that no one requested dispensation, so it was natural to obey the command. I later learned that this recall of reserve officers was intended to ensure military discipline at the moment of an armistice.

Personally, military service now raised mixed feelings. Ica and our two little boys had just returned to our apartment. She was pregnant, and our pantry was empty. In earlier times, I had been proud and eager to serve—but now, my heart sank. The looming political truce was difficult to endure. Yet despite my reservations, I was proud to don my uniform once more.

In uniform, I returned to the Department of Justice as an ensign and said goodbye to Gábor Vladár.

The sensitive Vladár clearly understood that my call to arms might result in Russian captivity. He emphasised that the government was only taking steps it believed served the interests of the nation.

To this, I simply replied: “***Your Excellency should be assured that the front will fulfil its duty.***”

### ***Rear Page of Book.***

In the autumn of 1944, on my thirtieth birthday, I reported for military service under an officer's mobilisation order. Thanks to my assignment, I was able to take my family with me, and so we were swept together into the uncertain life of retreat. After bitter years in Germany, we were granted immigration to Australia, where we began a new life in a small bay on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, in Sydney. My three sons are now grown, and I am the proud grandfather of teenage grandchildren.

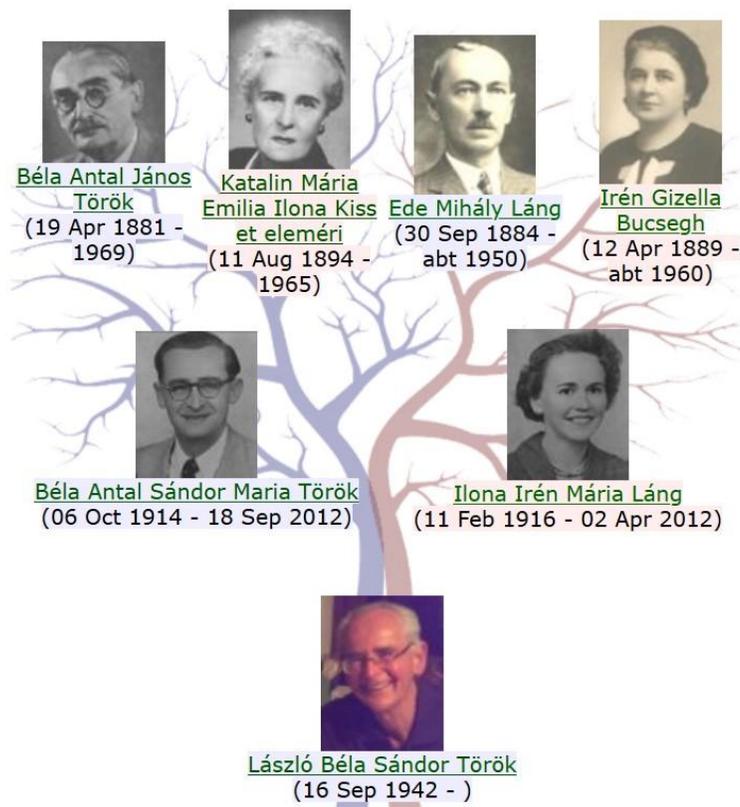


**The author Béla Török and his sons**

In the twilight of my life, I wish to pass on my thoughts to future generations through these recollections. My message is that the past must not be forgotten, for it is the key to the future. These are the subjective memories of a contemporary. I belong to those centenarians who not only studied history but lived it and helped shape it. With all my effort, I strive to remain a faithful Hungarian. I have always proudly declared that I lived under the spell of culture, science, and true stories.

I belong to those Hungarians who earned recognition in the world, whose names remain not only in encyclopedias but also in people's memories. I hope that future generations will honour the generation tested by fate, and understand that we wanted to help, not to harm. For me, historical reflection is not only remembrance but also a lesson. I was a witness to the history of the 20th century. My life's journey suggests: let us not forget—our names will forever remain on the heavy list of Hungarian losses from the Second World War.

***Török Béla***



*Immediate Török Family Tree*



**Béla Antal Sándor Maria Török**  
6 Oct 1914 - 18 Sep 2012

Brother of [Katalin Klementina Judith Mária \(Török\) Csabai](#)

Husband of [Ilona Irén Mária \(Láng\) Török](#)

Father of [Leslie \(Török\) Torok](#), [Bill Török](#) and [Andrew Török](#)



**Béla Antal János Török**  
19 Apr 1881 - 1969  
Szeged



**Katalin Mária Emilia Ilona Kiss et eleméri**  
11 Aug 1894 - 1965  
Király Hegyes



**Sándor József Török**  
16 Mar 1844 - 18 Apr 1888  
Szeged, Csongrád, Hungary



**Etel Josepha Anna Koór**  
28 Mar 1852 - 11 Dec 1916  
Jászberény, Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok, Magyarország



**Elemér Kiss de Elemér**  
22 Nov 1857 - 23 Mar 1896  
Wien Austria



**Gizella Erzsébet Tekla Blaskovich**  
30 Aug 1860 - abt 09 Apr 1940  
Csanádpalota, Csongrád, Hungary

**Antal Franciscus Török**  
05 Feb 1815 - 1886  
Bazin, Pozsony, Hungary

**Hermina Preiszler**  
14 Sep 1822 - abt 1900

**János Koór Péterfalvi**  
abt 1803 - 03 Sep 1881  
Szatmár, Magyarország

**Terézia Lachmann**  
07 Oct 1814 - abt 1888

**Miklos Kiss de Elemér**  
1813 - 05 Nov 1882  
Temesvár, Temes, Magyarország

**Helena Damaszkín**  
29 Dec 1827 - 1886

**István József Bertalan Ödön Blaskovich de Ebeck**  
abt 17 Nov 1828 - 16 Jul 1917  
Tibolddaróc, Borsod, Magyarország

**Amália Rónay de Zombor**  
26 Oct 1839 - 12 Jun 1910  
Nagykirályhegyespuszta, Csongrád, Magyarország