

THE EXPLANATION...

My daughter and her husband returned to Australia from their overseas trip. They had studied and worked in England, and visited Europe on a holiday.

While on the Continent, they visited Hungary in the company of my parents, who had left that country in 1946, for England where they made their home. To visit Hungary with their Australian grand daughter and her husband was an experience for both my parents and my daughter. For them to show the old places where they lived was important, and for my daughter to see the places where her father had survived the war was an emotional experience that stayed with her for a long time.

It might well be for that reason that when she returned to Australia, her present to her brother was a book on Hungary, written by an Englishman describing the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and tracing the reasons for it. The book was well illustrated and one of the photographs showed the public hanging of a Hungarian war criminal, Ferenc Szálasi, the self-declared Fuhrer of Nazi-Hungary.

I innocently remarked that the picture must have been taken by a photographer standing in front of or next to me. The silence was deafening. My children looked at me as if I had described my adventures on the moon. Probably they were shocked. I realised that they deserve an explanation.

This is my explanation.

PROLOGUE

It started just like any other day, but June 3rd, 1946 turned out to be an important one for me and my future family. If George Shillinger would not have come to Uni that day, or if he would not have felt safe with me to tell me his plans, or if we would not have met on campus when we did, I might never have become a citizen of the United Kingdom, married to a New Zealander, living in Australia.

George and I were first year students at the University of Engineering Studies in Budapest. We were not close friends but knew of each other's political feelings, ever since we stood side by side at one of the compulsory lectures by a visiting communist minister. We were unimpressed and being young, stupid and believing that our new-found democracy that has taken over from fascism has given us the right to have an opinion, we expressed, rather unwisely, a doubt about something or other that the lecturing politician stated.

I cannot now remember what it was that the Comrade Minister said, neither can he, for he was accused of being a Western spy and executed within the year, but we did get into trouble and were told by some fellow students, whose full-time job was membership of the Party, that if we wish to act in such a reactionary manner and show ourselves as being the same type of class aliens as our parents, there will be no place for us at the University.

Thus it was no surprise to me that George Shillinger trusted me and said good-bye. He was leaving for the border town of Szombathely that evening and meeting some of his friends in the best hotel of the small township and going across the border within the next 2 or three days.

I certainly was interested, because I heard from some rumour-monger or other that all University Students will have to volunteer for a year's service on the land or in a mine or building the railway, and having done my stint in these fields, I was less than willing. I knew that wielding a shovel in different political climates, under different dictatorships will still produce nothing but blisters and there are no long term benefits in becoming unpaid labourers.

Andrew Pór, a relation of mine has survived the Russian winter as a Hungarian army sergeant and Mauthausen Concentration Camp as a Jew, came home from Austria, waited around for a while in case his young brother returned from the copper mine labour camps of Bor in Serbia, (Leslie and thousands of other camp inmates didn't) got himself a fresh set of clothing, had a few good meals and then set off for the West. Being an experienced survivor, his opinion of the Hungary of early 1946, had to be

respected. However, it would be simplifying matters to say that people left Hungary those days to escape having to do a year's service for the Nation. The atmosphere throughout the country was such that people were restless and the great unasked question: "What next?" was in everyone's mind.

After a War, into which Hungary got involved unwillingly, yet due to her geographical and political position automatically, which gave Hungary new territories without fighting, a war during which most of its Army was not in action against the enemy, yet was destroyed, - people were confused.

There is no simple one-page history available to explain the paradox that was Hungary during the first half of the twentieth century, - and there is no history available which would suit all the Hungarians. The way I saw Hungary's past is different from the views of the person who persecuted me for reasons of his politics or due to his intolerance or upbringing. Our differences were irreconcilable.

Even the Hungarian who did nothing against me or the likes of me, but whose only worry was to survive the war thought in a completely different fashion to me. His life in the post war era became one of belonging to organisations, attending demonstrations in favour of the Government and making sure that he keeps his mouth shut. He knew that he was not free, but he did not know what it means to be persecuted, - I did.

In 1946 I was a Hungarian, who realised that I had no future in Hungary. At the ripe old age of 20, I had a past, which I did not wish to remember, which was unhappy, frightening in retrospect and unbelievable in its injustice. Having lived through it, I could not believe what happened in Europe during the 1940's, yet it was true. How on earth could I foretell or be hopeful about my future, when I had no say in my past?

When the war finished there was a hope that things for us Hungarians will be different. The German war machine was beaten and the Russians, who liberated Hungary, allowed free elections to be held.

We were hearing about our new democratic institutions and there was no reason why Hungary should not become part of the new Europe. Yet within months we started to have our doubt and disappointments. When the communists did not win the free elections, they proceeded to gain power using less democratic means. This was not dissimilar to the way the Nazis took over Germany in 1933.

The fascists in Hungary may have ceased to advertise their old ideas, but did they really change? Just a few months after the war Jews were actually killed in Hungary, only because they were Jews and those involved were not prosecuted.

In fact, one evening walking in one of the main streets of Budapest, I was attacked by a group of louts, shouting anti-semitic slogans and when I complained to the police, who

stood around watching it all, they shrugged their shoulder and suggested that I forget it.

There were many others who saw the light and left Hungary and it was obvious that getting across the border will become increasingly difficult. Already we heard of the mines, the blood hounds and the AVO, the communist political police, who have taken over the role of the thugs of the Nazi party storm-troopers. They did not need to rehearse or study what to do, - often they were the same people and to make matters easier for them, they even took over the same buildings. The cellars of these buildings used to hold people because they were Jews, now they held people because they were capitalists. Some times they were the same people tortured by the same thugs, but for different reasons. Thus, the news that George was leaving Hungary for the West has struck a cord with me and I couldn't get to my father's office soon enough.

"George Shillinger is off to Szombathely tonight. I am going with him, what do you think?" I told him and waited for the explosion that never came. He agreed. Just like that.

My mother was not that easy. She could not see how she can prepare roast chickens, cakes, goose liver and have my clothing clean during the few hours left before the train left for the border town. I agreed there should be some time allowed to prepare myself for the trip and thus I rushed off to George's home to tell him that I will be coming but not for another three days.

George was pleased that I decided to come, but regretted that I have to delay my departure for the border. He was sure that by the time I get there, he and his friends will have got across the border.

"Never mind, I'll catch up with you in Vienna" I suggested, but he was sure that by the time I get to Vienna, he will be in New York, - at least. After all, he did speak 'perfect' English.

Back home my Mother was cooking feverishly, while the maid was washing, bleaching and ironing. Father was digging up gold coins and dollar notes in the coal cellar, I was opening toothpaste tubes and refilling them with gold chains. The gold coins are to be stitched into leather belts, while the dollars go into match boxes. Where else?

The delay in leaving allowed me to say my good byes. My friends wished me luck and envied me, my ex girl friend, whom I have not seen for the previous 3 months, became hysterical, declared that she cannot live without me and I had to get her boy friend of the day to help me in getting away from her with my eyes unharmed.

I visited my aunts and uncles, who were quite surprised, at the stupid idea of my wishing to leave Hungary illegally and even more surprised that my parents agreed and aided me in this. My grandmother, a great little lady of 81, who by that time was

quite forgetful, was very sad to hear that I am leaving Hungary for ever, promptly forgot it all and when I finally left she gave me a cheerful Adieu, the Hungarian equivalent of "See you later, Alligator".

On the evening of June 6th Mother, Father and I were off to the railway station. I bought a ticket to Szombathely, boarded the train, waved to my parents and I was off. No problems with either the police or the railways, and unlike so many previous partings, there was a complete absence of tears.

There was of course no reason for any tears, after all I was not going into the great unknown, I was going to the border, crossing it to get to Vienna, from where I am to contact my brother in England and my various relations in America, all of whom will be able to arrange my immediate visa for admission.

In fact, my parents made me promise that I will go to England and wait for them there, even though I preferred to emigrate to the US. However, I promised to await their arrival for a big family reunion with all four of us together after almost 8 years apart. In fact, if there was any sorrow on my leaving my parents behind, it was due not to any anxiety, but to their being envious of my seeing my brother before they will be able to visit him.

The train journey was completely uneventful. The train was full with peasants and Jews. The peasants were returning to their villages after bringing their farm produce to the city for barter. They were loaded up with lengths of textiles, linen and ironmongery and having been able to fortify themselves with their home made plum brandy, they were in high spirits.

More quiet were the other passengers, quite obviously Jews and travelling towards the border to leave the country. While a good proportion of them were assimilated Hungarian Jews, dressed not much different from the rest of the population, the majority were bearded Orthodox Jews from Poland, Rumania or Russia, wearing their traditional black caftans and rabbinical hats. They were travelling for the past month or two and they were on their way to Palestine.

The fact that geographically they were travelling in the wrong direction did not seem to worry them. They tried getting out of Russia via Rumania, but failed to get through to Turkey, so they were advised to go via Hungary to Austria and then on to their final destination and dream: Erec Israel.

Conversation with them was minimal. They spoke no Hungarian and I spoke no Jiddish, a fact which they could neither comprehend nor forgive. In spite of the close similarity of German and Jiddish, they could hardly understand my speaking German to them, which they answered in their own language, but increasingly slower and louder. In the end they felt offended by me, a Jew who was not prepared to talk in Jiddish, the language they believed all Jews were supposed to speak. It never occurred

to them, nor was it possible to explain that Hungarian Jews were assimilated and could speak neither Jiddish or Hebrew.

We left Budapest's Southern Station at about 7 p.m. and the journey should have taken about 3 hours. It took longer and I arrived at around mid-night to the small railway station of Szombathely. I had two suitcases, it was raining, I had no idea where the hotel was or if my friend George is still there. Finally I found a sleepy railway employee, who told me where the hotel was, advised me to sleep in the packed waiting room, instead of chancing some marauding Russian soldiers, who were terrorising and robbing the population.

Nevertheless, I left the railway station and set off in the darkness for a 2 kilometer walk to the hotel. The streets were unlit, unfriendly and deserted. Obviously everyone else listened to the railway porter's advice. Expecting a cheery "stoj" from an official Russian patrol or an unofficial one, I wished I had listened to his advice.

I got to the hotel, rang the bell, and after a lot of questions by the porter, who came down from his bed in his underwear, I was admitted into the hotel. Yes, George was still in the hotel, so were his other friends. Yes, he had a bed for me, Mr Shillinger had arranged it. It was on the first floor, room 11, next to Mr Shillinger's room.

I went upstairs alone, dropped my luggage in my room and knocked on George's door. "Enter" and I did. George was in bed, smiling. His other two friends were also in their bed, they were also smiling. There was a man sitting at the table and he introduced himself as the member of the political police. He was also smiling. I cannot now remember for sure, but I think I was the only one who was devoid of all smiles.

At that stage how was I to know that being arrested was all that funny?

BEFORE THE WAR

I WAS BORN

I was born the younger of two sons, a matter I was never allowed to forget. My brother John was 5 years, 2 months and 12 days older and the age difference has always been slightly exaggerated, until it became six years. This falsification of our age difference was a major cause for the constant disagreements between my brother and me.

I also had a cousin, Eva, 3 years older than me, who could have been a sister, because she lived with us during school periods and we holidayed at her village home when we were not together in Budapest. She and John used to lord it over the little bloke, who made up in ferocity, what he lacked in age. In spite of lots of verbal and physical fights, the three of us were reasonable friends, even though adults must have had some difficulty in enjoying us.

On one occasion my Aunt Margit, Eva's mother, became quite hysterical while my brother and I had one of our not infrequent physical confrontations. The poor lady feared that we will be inflicting permanent damage on each other and she burst out crying. She was assured by her sister that her sons usually survive these bouts and will once again be the best of friends until the next fight.

My earliest memory is of my Mother being taken away in an ambulance from the huge block of flats we lived in. The combination of her being in pain and on a stretcher, watched by dozens of people from the building, caused this incident to stay in vivid memory. I can also remember visiting her in hospital, and how I ate her pudding in spite of the all prevailing stink of the ether, which was still making her throw up and retch, days after her operation. She was lucky to have survived an ectopic pregnancy, and was operated on in the nick of time.

She can recall how in the middle of the night my father awoke to her screaming in pain and suggested that she take some pain killers. When her subsequent screams woke him again, all he wanted to know why the stupid maid hadn't telephoned for the doctor, and promptly carried on snoring.

My father was undoubtedly the all-time prototype of male chauvinists, in a country and in an era when such achievement was not easy. At the same time, he was a loving, caring person who tried to get everyone to love him. In this he was not quite successful.

His wife must have adored him, but was not known to say a nice word about him or to him during the 63 years of marriage, which was never softened by the utterance from either side of a friendly word. If they were not arguing or shouting at each other, they were not on speaking terms. They were quite ingenious in finding new grounds to fight about. Yet they were devoted to each other's well being, and were quite friendly to

each other when parted. Under these circumstances it was not surprising that they were apart a lot. They hardly ever went on holidays together, nor did they take their children with them.



Father went off on his trips to the watering places in Hungary, and abroad to places like Karlsbad, Abbazia, the Semmering in Austria and to resorts in Switzerland. Mother went to visit her relations or her children who were sent off to have their holidays abroad, so they may learn foreign languages, or were sent to relations, to be out of the way.

During their absences they became very fond of each other. Mother complained about how she was missing him, while he wrote long letters, begging her to mend her ways, and not criticise and not hurt him, and if possible become even more subservient.

The minute they got together, all was forgotten and they were off on the usual shouting match. There are a few classic examples of this happening and they must not go unrecorded.

On one occasion Mother went off with some relations to Felden in Austria, and having been on his own for two weeks, Father decided to travel there and spend a week with her and us children, then 2 and 7 years old.



Mother and the rest of the family and relations picked him up at Felden station and on the walk back to the hotel, he put his arm round Mother, who complained that her hair would be ruined. Father turned round, walked back to the station, bought a ticket and traveled back to Hungary, without as much as saying "Wiedersehen".

Another time Father returned from Karlsbad with an expensive bracelet for Mother. It was handed over and Mother, far from the tactful little downtrodden girl Father would have liked her to be, said: "this is so beautiful that it must have been one of your girlfriends who picked it" at which Father picked up the bracelet, flung it against the wall, and most of the expensive carved gem stones disintegrated.

Eventually the bracelet was returned to Czechoslovakia and was repaired, and Mother still maintains that if it wasn't picked by a woman, it was given to her because Father

either got two of them cheaper and gave one to the other lady, or else because he had a bad conscience. Probably both of her assumptions were correct.

It was not really surprising that the children grew up to be rather frightened of our parents. Mother lashed into us with her critical tongue, Father bellowed at Mother, employees, and us - every one. It was not a particularly happy childhood, - but we could not compare, because we hardly had any friends.

The problem was that we were rich. Not terribly rich when measured by the standards of the Western world, but excruciatingly so when compared with the rest of the population around us. We had everything: from a refrigerator to a radio, from central heating to a car. Come to think of it we had more than just one car. We had a number of cars during the weekends, when the chauffeurs of the travelling salesmen had to deliver the cars to stand outside our home, until 5 a.m. on Monday morning, when Father's chauffeur-driven salesmen were off again to get orders for agricultural machinery and farm equipment.

Hungary in the 1930's was in the throws of the depression, just as the rest of Europe. People were unemployed and hungry, while a minority survived with the minimum of inconvenience. We belonged to this minority. Father's business was to supply equipment and specialised machinery and other requisites to the huge farming estates of the aristocracy and church and it was a time when drought animals were being replaced by tractors and farm labourers were replaced by machinery, causing even greater unemployment in the rural areas. In spite of his being most sympathetic to the hardship which farm labourers had to endure, I doubt if this caused any pangs of conscience for my Father, - why should it? Was he to refuse assisting the mechanisation of Hungarian agriculture? Certainly not, his job was to give himself and his family the best of everything, especially as regards the education of his sons. They should have the best education he never had, they should have the best education money can buy.

In any case there was only a limited amount one could do to help the unfortunates who felt the misfortune of the depression. I well remember the beggars on the street and the hungry children, who came to stand outside the footpath tables of the coffee shops, asking to be given a piece of bread by the patrons, until chased away by the waiters.

On one occasion a man was found semi-conscious outside our home and the maid called the police, believing the man to be drunk. In due course a sweating policeman, equipped by a saber they all carried arrived, having had to walk up the hill in the summer heat, and being more experienced in these matters than the maid, pronounced that the man is starving. Indeed the man, having been given some food and milk revived sufficiently to be helped by the policeman to walk downhill.

This particular occurrence was instrumental in my realising that we must have been more privileged than others. It was literally the first time that problems from outside

the iron fence surrounding our garden were penetrating to the rather insular society which we, family and the staff were.

The problems of "wealth" were manifold. We lived in those hills of Buda, where those with money congregated, yet we went to school elsewhere. Our school mates lived in the City and had no intention of being bothered with the likes of us, who had to go home after school. At home, we were not encouraged to play on the streets - on the hill there weren't any level streets to play on anyway. There were some unused blocks of land, and we played football with some other kids sometimes, but something was always wrong with those other kids. Mostly they were not supposed to be good enough for us.

We were supposed to find our friends amongst our relatives, with whom we were thrown together, whenever Mother visited her many distant relations or they were invited to visit us. The invitations depended on the scholastic capabilities of the offspring of the particular relation and we were instructed to become friends of those relations who were studious, in the hope that their example will rub off. There was nothing wrong with the idea, except that neither John nor I had any contemporaries amongst our relations.



It was not understood by our parents that we missed having friends. Not having the same mobility as they had, we could not be where our school mates were. We were envious that they were able to meet each other and get to know girls, visit other kids, go to movies, etc. We had to get up earlier than our classmates to get to school on time from the "villa" on Rózsadomb (Rose Hill). When school was over, we had to hotfoot it back to our

house on the Hill; the sweet excitement of watching the girls parading up and down the Boulevards of Budapest was not for us. Poor little rich boys!

At the same time we were always told that we were poor. We had less pocket money than the others, because we were not allowed to know that we were better off. Our good clothing could only be worn at family parties, but when we went visiting poor relations, we were not allowed our best suits. We only had toys and belongings if they helped us in our school work. We could have gold nibbed fountain pens, but no cowboy outfits. We had a Bechstein piano, but no football. We could not play the piano and we weren't that good at playing soccer either.



We had cars going from the house to Father's office next door to the school, but we had to catch the bus. If by some miracle we got a lift, the chauffeur was instructed to drop us off some distance away from the school, so our class mates would not realise that we were not as poor as they were; or as poor as their parents told them that they are.

We had no family life as such. My father visited the "Club" with his friend Julius, a solicitor, every afternoon and had dinner there or where ever. There is no doubt that he had affairs and probably always had a "steady" but conducted his affairs as discreetly as he could, and was satisfied that as long as he was discreet and provided the family with a lovely home and the trappings of well being, his responsibility ended.



He has certainly looked after his family well, or at least he was convinced that he had. He got a famous architect to design the house on the Hill for himself and the family. The architect was famous because he built a row of buildings on the shores of the Danube for thousands of people to live in flats, - he could not have been famous for designing practical homes for families.

We had a two story house, where we had two large rooms for sitting with and entertaining visitors, a dining room which was the same size as the two lounge rooms, - combined. To get into either of the lounges you either had to go out to the entrance hall, i.e. the staircase or else walk through the dining room, which was also the only way to get to the enclosed verandah, supposed to be the place for family togetherness. There was no way to approach the kitchen without passing the downstairs toilet, outside of which was the only place in the house, where an icebox and later the electric refrigerator could be placed.

It must be pointed out that the downstairs toilet was usually in use before meals by one of the six people entitled to use it and when being used by my father it's door was always open during and after. Thus the smell of the food, the kitchen and the toilet blended into a smell which I can still recall.

There were further examples of architectural stupidities upstairs. The largest room there was the laundry. Every single item laundered had to be carried downstairs, through the kitchen and hung in the backyard and then carried back to the laundry to be ironed. There was no shower, but that was in accordance with contemporary practice in Hungary. The bathroom had no hot water supplied to the bathtub, thus summer or winter the chip heater had to be lit if anybody wanted to have a bath. In the mean time in the cellar a fire was kept going all the year round to supply hot water to the bidet, and even to the tiny circular basin installed especially for washing one's

teeth. However no hot water was available in either the bathroom, kitchen or the laundry.



The house was quite large and thus it was ingenious to design it in such a way that it contained two bedrooms only. Thus my parents lived in one bedroom and, with an interconnecting door between the two bedrooms, my brother, cousin Eva and I lived in the other, as well as a governess, when we had one. And we actually lived in that bedroom, because that was the place where we three had to do our home work, play, sleep and conduct our fights. When in 1939, John left Hungary and vacated our shared bedroom, he was a month off 18, Eva was 16 and I was approaching 13. Quite extraordinary, especially because of our home being used filming movies, as being one of the outstanding homes of that era!

Admittedly, the upstairs area also had a room for two of the maids, the size of which allowed for two beds and nothing else. Their wardrobe had to be kept in the laundry but their skirts were stored under their beds. Hungarian peasant women wear up to 15 skirts (simultaneously) and therefore none of them would have had less than 30 to 50 skirts, hence the need for permanent under-bed-storage facilities.

The lady who came once a month to saw our shirts, pajamas and underwear had to sit at the top of the stairs, - there was no room elsewhere to set up our pedal operated Singer sewing machine, nor was there any room to store the clothing required by the three younger members of the family.

Lots of space was taken up by areas hardly ever used including our Hungarian veranda and the balcony used only once a year to watch the fireworks on St. Stephen's day.

It could not have been a more impractical house, but it was pretty, - from the outside.



I WAS A BOY.

After I became eight years old, it was thought that we were old enough not to have governesses, which helped with the catering and sleeping arrangements. Our governesses were Austrian ladies who forced us to speak German to them and thus we were supposed to become proficient in the language. The Governess slept in our bedroom, making it a very cozy foursome. Poor little rich children.

Mostly we had more maids than beds and therefore one of them had to sleep on the settee in the downstairs lounge. At the time I could not understand why my 17 year old brother had to go downstairs to fetch himself glasses of water, but by the time I became the same age I not only understood, but envied his opportunities.

It requires no great imagination to realise the disturbance which the occasional overnight visit of my Aunt Margit caused. Who shall camp where became an exciting game of guessing and by the time we settled the matter of musical beds, it seemed that everybody had a change. Usually she finished sleeping in our parent's bedroom on a sofa, since the sitting room settee was usually occupied by a maid. However, much greater were the problems when one or the other of the children contracted a contagious disease, such as mumps, chicken pox or some other illness, which required Government decreed isolation, such as whooping cough, scarlet fever and the dreaded diphtheria.

With three children in three different schools we all managed to have our major illnesses at separate times and the required major isolation was indeed a major affair. Everybody moved out of the first floor and beds were made in the sitting and dining rooms downstairs. The maids made their beds in the kitchen and the upstairs laundry and food was cooked and transported upstairs for the sick child and Mother, who were locked up for the duration upstairs. Outside the house a large red sign declared it off limits to all except doctors and warned that any who came in contact with the inhabitants will have to be isolated also. The isolation lasted until doctors announced the sick to be cured and the Health Department's lorry and employees arrived to wash down the walls and take away everything else to be disinfected.

Scarlet fever lasts 6 weeks, as does whooping cough, while diphtheria is usually over in 3 weeks, (provided the child survives). We all had all these illnesses, except that I escaped whooping cough, (until the age of 40), but instead I was one of three children in the Hungarian medical history of the day, who contracted diphtheria for a second time.

The first time I had diphtheria I managed to finish up with a heart ailment. The second time I became ill on the day my Mother left for a conducted tour of Italy. We waved

her off at the station and visited my grandparents on the way home, when I became sick and started to shake from the fever that suddenly erupted. My father contacted our lady doctor who specialised in children's diseases, who came immediately and suspected diphtheria, which the assorted visiting professors who were ferried up to the house at great expense eventually confirmed.

There was some question of recalling Mother, who at this stage was still on the train towards Italy, and another possible alternative was that I should be taken to a hospital. In the end it was decided that I should remain at home and our "Aunt Doctor" Miss Rella Beck moved in to live with me for the duration of my diphtheria. Also, my Father's Uncle's widow, Sari Kellner, who was almost totally deaf, came to become my nurse. Her self-sacrifice in allowing herself to be incarcerated was greatly appreciated, but as far as I was concerned it became an additional hazard to my survival. I was constantly exhausted from having to shout to make myself understood and additionally she was such a tremendously high spirited and good humoured person that she made me convulse with her stories and I had constant laughing fits, - not to be encouraged for a dying child.

On the evening when we were expecting Mother to return from her Italian holiday, she kept me laughing by telling me about her daughter-in-law who used to chew the nail



varnish off her fingers whenever she was nervous. The practical demonstration my Aunt Sari gave was allowing me to concentrate on laughing instead of being preoccupied with Dr Beck's effort in keeping my heart going with injections, while I was having one heart attack after another.

Mother arrived that evening and over night my condition deteriorated sufficiently to be declared an intensive care case and at 5 a.m. Mother and I were picked up by an ambulance and taken to a hospital where my condition immediately improved. Nevertheless, I still had to stay in hospital for some 4 weeks recuperating and even when I could return home, I had to stay another 4 months in bed, receiving daily injections to keep my heart going at the required speed.

Our routine at home had to change, because Mother became my nurse and could not leave home. Instead her relations and friends made the pilgrimage to our house. I spent my days in the children's room upstairs, or else the maids set up a deck chair in the garden and I was carried by one or two of them to lay in the deck chair all day. In the end I had to re-learn to walk again and over a period I was allowed a few minutes longer every day to be up and walking slowly in the garden.

Our garden was looked after by gardeners and Father who attempted to drown the plants by watering. In the front we had a rather unkempt lawn (these were pre-lawnmower days) in the middle of which was a flower-bed full with rose bushes. Another flower-bed, also overrun with rosebushes, was surrounded with a pedestrian path, and another one, intended but never used for cars, both of which were covered with red gravel.



We used these paths to ride our bicycle against the stopwatch and on falling off, collected the most awful gravel rashes in the process. Anti tetanus injections were handed out rather freely by our Aunt Doctor, causing John to react by fainting fits and being in much greater danger from his injection than from tetanus.

Planted in the front garden, just inside the 2 meter high wrought iron fence were two poplar trees. One of these was struck by lightning and grew up to be shorter than the other. Because of the size difference they were popularly referred to as Jancsi and Pista, my brother's and my nicknames.

Immediately in front of the house and in fact partly covering the window of the children's room was a magnificent wild-almond tree. Two stories high, it survived the building of the house, which was one of the first houses in the as yet unnamed street. When somebody asked Father if he has any suggestions as to what name he should apply for the street, Father remembered the almond tree on the site and suggested "Almond Street" and thus "Mandula utca" was born, named after our "mandula" or almond tree.

The garden in the rear was used to provide us with fresh fruit off the trees and bushes. We had wonderful cherries, including a white variety, strawberries, blackcurrants and all types of berries, which we enjoyed eating, before or after they ripened.

There was also a very small area grassed on which we were supposed to play football, but being too small it was seldom utilised. We preferred using the empty block next



door, even though it was not very level. The backyard also had some drying lines erected between trees and on the back wall of the house there was a "klopfert" e.g. two hefty wooden rollers mounted away from the wall onto which the persian carpets could be hung and beaten by cane carpet beaters. Another use for these carpet beaters was that, while we were small, we were constantly threatened that they will be used on our backsides.

The whole property was surrounded by high fences, ornamental in front, wire fences on the sides and in the rear, topped up by lines of barbed wire to keep unwelcome visitors out. In the front, affixed to the ornamental fence was an engraved marble plaque, telling the admiring public passing by that the house was designed by Mr Emil Vidor, "Master Art Architect". When somebody pinched the marble, Father received a letter from the solicitor of the architect reminding him that the contract stipulated that a marble plaque will commemorate for ever the art of Mr Emil Vidor. Mr Vidor's pride in our house was not entirely misplaced, because it looked quite acceptable from the outside, it was only the inside which was so utterly messed up.

We usually had dogs, sometimes more than one. These were not pets, but trained guard dogs, and were kept on the chain all day and allowed to roam in the garden during the night only. Unfortunately, our dogs did not last very long, they were either too vicious or too friendly.

One of them was in the latter category and therefore was sentenced to be banished into the country where a kind farm manager was prepared to accept him for re-schooling in the art of scaring off burglars.

The dog, (named Hacsek after the more comic member of a Laurel and Hardy type of cabaret act), was duly taken by one of Father's country salesmen deep into the country and poor old Hacsek was replaced and forgotten, until months later a bedraggled and thin Hacsek arrived at our door step. Of course we had to keep him and his successor, a St. Bernard monster, was renamed to become "Sajo" in honour of the other member of the comedy duo. The two dogs became inseparable and both were guard dogs in name only. Hacsek and Sajo were the closest we came to having pets. (There are several versions for the naming of the dogs, this is one of many!)

There were two cellars under our house. One of them contained the coal and the heaters, which were coal fired. The other contained the janitor and his wife and usually a child. The janitor's "flat" contained just one basement room with a toilet outside and a wash hand basin which was open to the weather. All this was underground for the most part, although there was a high level window strip along the uppermost portion of the wall, which allowed some air and light to enter.

The janitor, who also doubled as the driver of our car and his wife, who was one of the cleaning ladies, were responsible to keep the fire going in the cellar. To feed the oven with coal, about a yard from where they were living, they had to leave their room, go upstairs into the backyard, enter the house through the kitchen, get into the area where the icebox was, pass the toilet, enter the entrance hall, go under the staircase, open the cellar door and walk down the steps. Imagine this performance two or three times a day, in rain, snow and sludge, allowing the heat to escape and carrying in the mud.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

