



CANNED ROADDUST

Indjera, balalaika and some other things

JÓZSEF KOMÁROMI



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Introduction

Children, especially boys, are very prone to dream about adventurous future professions such as engine driver, boat commander, or discoverer. It comes from the fact that man is born to have adventures, this is proven by what happened with our common ancestors in the Garden of Eden according to the Bible, as when something is unknown or forbidden it will not leave you in peace, even if it takes you into trouble.

I myself have been no exception, as soon as learned to read, I wanted to do so -- there was no TV, video, for me didn't even exist cheap movie theatres with a lot of fleas in them that were open for kids in the capital, as I have grown up in a village where there was only an open air movie theatre, even that only during summer, in winter what remained was the light of kerosene lamps for reading.

I have grown out tales except The Arabian Nights very soon, which had been written for adults in my opinion, and after that adventure stories and travel books became my main delicacies. I wouldn't have become anything else than one of those I listed above, weren't life so hard to them who haven't been born rich, well, life is not mild in any way, it is a closed cage for people of the lower layers of society, so, my fate has been written decisively. World literature discloses many cases of young people dreaming about interesting futures, who had to take such trades for themselves that have seemed dullness in itself.

My brother who was my senior by four years has left us in his childhood because of a fatal accident, and I have been sucked in by his long-dreamed would be, but never come-true, profession of mechanical engineer -- he had always had an extraordinary sense of technical things -- as if by a vacuum cleaner. My parents have ne-

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ver cared that I am very far from being another genius for technology, they only wanted me to become a mechanical engineer in place of my late brother -- that even had some attraction that time, today nobody is considered a human being who is no banking or IT professional.

Well, I haven't become either any skipper, not even a captain on a river boat, although I was working on river-boats as a machinist, or a discoverer, although I made trips to Africa and have seen animals and people not widely known to everyone, even less an engine driver. I have become a mechanical engineer and later also an economist. And, just the opposite as expected, this fact hasn't isolated me from adventures and opportunities to see the world, but helped me to fulfil my dreams of childhood.

Those who commit the stupidity of taking this book into their hands, what more, wanting to read it, I ask to excuse me, if they would not always find what they were looking for. It is similar to that when you ask for the bill in a Greek restaurant and find another sum written on it than you expected. I try to talk about events and things seen and experienced in foreign places not simply to report as in a diary, but to tell the essence of them in a distilled form. A great help is the fact in it that some of them are already decades apart. But this effect is balanced by the opportunity that a reader always has: he simply turns the pages to the collection of pictures and can see all in reality what he has read. I have had my photographic hobby since I was a teenager. The majority of my nearly four thousand photographs is color slides developed mainly by myself -- although some of them had so poor raw materials that they were not worth doing it, but I couldn't afford more -- in my dark room or developing tank.

I did my best to give a kind of description of the visited places beside pictures, but it is understandable, I hope, that also occurrences happening with me and my companions got their entries. Certain details do good even for historical snapshots as I didn't go to most countries or towns from my free will, but I was sent there officially by my employers. And always there was a fair, or on the

opposite, motive in the background. In the world everything is in connection, there is no need to prove it.

It is my hope that, in spite of all the drawbacks, the following account leaves more pleasant than unpleasant experiences in readers. Maybe, if the text is not considered good enough by everyone, the pictures can compensate for its shortages.

PART I

Chapter 1 Home Landscape

Before I began -- either from my will or led by my fate -- to make trips, my parents and events in history helped me to get into more distant corners of our country (the sizes of which I mean in the corresponding time). When I was three months old I got to the southeastern corner of Transsylvania by my father's customs officer job and the Munich II Treaty. Northern Transsylvania switched back to us by the treaty got its state officials from the mother country, so my father was assigned there too. It's unnecessary to say that what I know about that country and its inhabitants I haven't learned myself personally, as my whole family joined the flow of refugees before I became three, so I couldn't have any memory of the visited villages that time.

In 1947, when I was six, my father lost his job at the Gyöngyös office of customs authority that had been reorganized after the war. He had no alternative than move with his family to Fonyód on the southern shore of the lake Balaton, the living place of his relatives including several sisters and brothers. As we have been living there for nine years, affection for the "sea of Hungary" has been sucked up by me that time.

Those distant memories freshen up also the injustices at the beginning of the '50s that were most easily sensed in small villages in the country, of which mainly such things got through to me that my mother took me with her to the woods to collect fallen wood for the winter, or sometimes we had to pick up a little cooking oil by bread from the bottom of plates for a lunch -- at least there was oil and bread. However, an intellectual child could also sense that he was not accepted by the village kids for his being different. While they envied him for the easiness he could learn embraced by a family of broader than average education, they wanted to balance that dis-

advantage with their physical force or powerful connections, and not omitted a single opportunity to humiliate him.

From among my memories the most powerful are those storing the wonderful, arresting beauty of that country. The lake Balaton has a thousand faces, first of all that can be seen from the top of the high loess abyss on hot summer days, when the surface of water, green otherwise, reflects the pale sky; and when the sun is hiding behind clouds, the whole area becomes gray like a metallic plate, but it retains its shine as before. During fall, as two-foot waves are whipped up by the north-westerly wind, you feel only the force of wind up there, but with such an intensity that twigs thrown out over the precipice spring upwards and come back like boomerangs onto the head of the caster. The color of water remains dark gray below low-flying clouds of the same shade, and the line of waves following each-other in thirty to fifty feet in a regular pattern can be seen to the farther. The waves turn to white breakers nearing the flat shore. This phenomenon produces the wonderful gray quartz sand on this side of the lake. Alas, it is gone almost completely now that the lake has been locked into a concrete trough since the sixties; this time you can only smell rotten deposit, the sand stays at the bottom; earlier sand was let down by water that flew back empty and clean, lighter deposit made some more trips up and down and at last it landed there too as free prey for small living creatures.

So many things you could find there in such cool, windy autumn days. Mainly they have been mussels -- one species of them comes from petrified broken shells of small mussels resembling fallen hoofs of goats, they are called goat-claw -- and empty shells of tiny snails, but once I have found a badly damaged toy boat. It has been the first of my model boats in a long line. Then "Robinson Crusoe" and "Mystery Island" were fresh in my brain and I wanted to try, at least in miniature, how to build a boat. This first one I have repaired and enhanced in all ways and until our moving from the village it has been an item to decorate my room. He who decides for a walk along the shore in such a weather, may count on that nobody disturbs him until he gets home, or turns into the pub to take some spirit-warmer.

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Those who live on the lake cannot avoid taking part in excursions, as a child, with fellow pupils, as an adult, with his friends or his family. This involves mainly boarding a boat and crossing the lake by it. Well that other shore! What a fine sight! The extinct volcanoes in a long line. Finest of them all is the coffin-shaped hill called Badacsony. On an average day in the summer or early fall the line of hills is tinted deep blue by the mist rising from the surface of water, the woods, vineyards and wineries -- called in our language squeezing huts -- cannot be seen clearly. But, when an anti-cyclone sweeps the vapour away, it looks as if the hills had waded the flat water of the lakeshore to come over to this side, you have the feeling, you can touch them. The four miles between you and them dissolves. You can see all clearly from the white boat at the wharf puffing up black smoke as it starts its 20-minute trip to Fonyód, to the tiny sailboats and angler boats, to the fine gardens of the well-to-do people a little higher on the slope and, even higher on the hillside, the huge vineyards, their "squeezing huts" having survived many centuries in the same style, eventually turned into living quarters.

The original forest of oak, beech and many other species that covers the hilltop as well as the collar of 300 feet below that can be seen as crystal in such a fine weather. Even people walking on the dirt roads are seen unmistakable, you can even tell, who they are, if you know them.

According to geologists, the hill of Badacsony has been created by a natural, however rare phenomenon: three nearby volcanoes in a line had so many lava eruptions that the solidifying magma filled the gaps completely up, only the three humps on the top shows you where the original cones stood. The hilly landscape from Szigliget to Tihany has its many volcanic cones in a rugged line, from Southwest to Northeast. The finest vineyards lie on the slopes going out to the lake Balaton on the south-eastern side. On the other side the climate is not so favourable, the wine got from there is not so tasteful. The solidifying lava at the north-eastern end of the hill has built wonderful stone columns, they look as giant humps of pan-

cakes. From his nature man saw in them less the natural beauty than money: large amounts of the basalt has been quarried out to use it at railway beds. I used to hear the sound of explosion several times a day when I was a child. This time the remaining basalt is in safety, since 1964 there is no quarrying any more.

There is another lava park on the other end of the oval hill, but there has been no quarry there, here stand a high stone cross. You can see it from the other shore in clear weather. The walk up to the hilltop is a good exercise, sometimes you have to climb steps.

The southern shore of the lake is low county, there are only three hills there, two of them in Fonyód, the third one in Balatonboglár. The hills in Fonyód make a really good impression on you only, when you are sailing on the lake and the sun is going low. The double hills are well illuminated and that on the right side shows you the white loess wall. It is brilliant white then. Otherwise both hills are partly covered by woods. On hot summer days it is most pleasant to sit on benches along walkways in the woods.

The two hills in Fonyód had a guardian role some thousand years ago. They safeguarded the entrance of the narrow bay opening from the lake to the Southeast, until it became locked and separated from the main body by the silt driven there by the dominant north-westerly wind. The isolated independent pond with no feed or drain were made first wetland, swamp by the natural development process of lakes, then bog and moor at last. Although the last drop of water has been pumped out, this land is still called Nagyberek, i.e. The Big Moor. When I was a child, people used to produce peat, as it was still in a bog state. The ponds left open after peat production looked like filled with red wine instead of water. Then, as the water level in the lake Balaton usually dropped in the summer season, because water from the lake fed the canal of Sió, being the waterway for boats up and down between the Balaton and river Danube, the red peat juice drained into the lake to the last drip. Today the moor is a fine agricultural land.

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The shores around the lake Balaton is fine for recreation, but only in the summer season. The inhabitants, however, live there during winter too. In winter it is a very boring place, except the ice of the lake. When I was living there, people used it for fishing under it, also reed has been cut above the hard ice surface with machines, not mentioned the special ice-sledge -- called in Hungarian a "wooden dog" -- that looks like a high stool from grandfather's dining room attached to a sledge-chassis and driven by long rods with nails in the end. Well, it can reach a considerable speed, until its driver is lucky enough not to find a wide gap in the ice. Ice has also been used for storage for the summer. Actually, the lake Balaton is no hit during winter. Life is not easy, either. The glossy surface lets the air flow freely, always there is a strong wind, and it is very cold when temperature is below zero. You find it hard to tell where is water and where is land, it looks alike.

During my years of life on the lake Balaton the traffic of trains was not very dense, although the village lies on a magistral line between Budapest and Nagykanizsa, even a side-line starts from here to Kaposvár, the seat of Somogy county. This is almost completely true today, trains are not really numerous. There was only a short period during the 60's, when, if you missed a train, you had better hurry in the refreshment room with your beer, so as not to repeat the mistake with the next one. Well there is one difference, it is not the same to have there steam engines like those in my time there, or Diesel engines. Nowadays, that electrifying is complete on that line, there go up-to-date electric trains to my old place and further. Of course, it has developed into a town of twelve thousand from the three thousand inhabitants earlier.

Fonyód's upward climb began with its becoming a district seat in 1950, the village has beaten the neighbouring Balatonboglár at it, the eternal rival. District, as a notion in administration in our country has vanished already, but the population and living standard of the settlement has been rising until today. Beside the eight-class elementary school, I have learned in, there is a secondary school too. Good Luck for people in Fonyód as before!

Of all the other settlements on the lake Balaton, although I know most of them, I became acquainted with Siófok best. Nearly one and a half year I have spent in the comprehensive secondary school "Perczel Mór" there during 1955/56. The town is frequently named also the capital of the Balaton, but this title is more apt for Keszthely at the lower end of the lake. Siófok has rather become lately the capital of another activity, namely that of the underground society of organised crime.

I have been living in Budapest since I was fifteen. About this metropolis it is very hard to tell a new detail to anybody, and I don't want to rob the precious time of my readers by listing my impressions. The only opinion worth expressing is that the city has developed as much in this 40-plus years I spent here as during its whole history. Alas, it brought with itself the negative sidekicks too. One example of these changes only: I have lived with my wife in a small rented room for six years at the start of our marriage; during that time or rather the last three years of it our neighbourhood turned a living estate with prefabricated concrete blocks from the suburban district of one-family garden houses; we moved then into our own flat also built up during that three years; it was all so new that public works involved only our living estate of four-storied blocks called the KISZ (Hungarian Youth Association) estate of the eighteenth district of Budapest. It grew up beside the so called State Estate built in 1941 for the Hungarian fugitives coming home to the mother country from Transsylvania following a twenty-year long isolation. On its other side there was a large meadow, and still farther the planted municipal woods. Part of the woods was occupied by a clay hole producing raw material for the brick factory nearby. The factory is gone, on its place stands now the out-patients' clinic.

Today the woods is framed and penetrated by roads. Part of the meadow has been wetland, almost a swamp with frogs and sedge and reed. A big bullfrog was freed there, which was given to my son by a sarcastic fishmonger for a "living barometer". The only hitch has been that it was no green frog. This time the same place keeps my cabinet with the PC on it, as it is my employer's office in one of

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