A LIFE JOURNEY WITHOUT ILLUSIONS

FROM HUNGARY TO CANADA

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TO THE WEST

ARRIVAL IN THE NEW WORLD

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THE FIRST YEAR, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, ST.MICHAEL'S COLLEGE

EPILOGUE

PROLOGUE

The youngsters, who graduated in the spring of 1956 and were anxiously waiting for the results of their admission tests to universities believed, by summer's end that the big decisions were already behind them. The lucky ones could begin their studies, the others found some kind of jobs …then the revolution happened. Thousands of youth demonstrated on the streets and squares of Budapest, blue- and white-collar workers, passersby continually joining them, without containment.

It has long been established that neither the political observers in the West , nor the Hungarians at home ever thought or even imagined that a popular uprising would shake the world in 1956
A popular uprising, which in a matter of hours , without any organization, suffering from bitterness and injustice could , if only for a short time, topple a forcibly imposed, slave regime of the superpower Soviet Union.

The communist dictatorship had unwittingly ascertained that every Hungarian, not indebted to the regime, without regard to age, sex or social status and in spite of years passed in political indoctrination would become, in a matter of hours, disciplined and determined supporter of the 1956 freedom fight.

In the fifties millions lived in a country sealed tight with barbed wire and mine fields. For many, the bare necessities for life, such as food, clothing and warmth was only possible with great sacrifices and toil.

Families were stripped of their possessions and moved to remote areas of the country, the peasants were forced to join cooperatives, persecuted many, especially professionals graduating before the war as enemies of the state. Thousands were sent to Soviet labor camps after the war and their plight never acknowledged. The lucky ones who managed to return were looked upon with suspicion

Yet, the lack of nominal life necessities were not the only reason for the anger of people manifested by taking to the streets, eventually arming themselves.

Beyond the miseries of the fifties and the injustices of the lying regime, the yearning for freedom of an imprisoned nation that gave the strength to the youth fighting with bare hands against the tanks.

As in all popular uprisings in history, this, too had its own individual heroes, martyrs and eventual prisoners or escapees from the country in the bloody months of the fall of 1956. However, the objectives of the 1956 freedom fight in the heart of all participants was the same. No one had any doubt what the people wanted. It could be said simply, they wanted freedom, that would have been enough reason for a revolution that claimed many victims. The people's anger aimed at the daily moral terror of propaganda in the face of glaring shortcomings and continual lies. This terror started in the late forties in the lives of countless Hungarian families. Every family story from that shameless period is a separate tragedy, each easily would fill a volume of criminal accusations. Common to their fate was the suffering, the injustices committed, the imprisonment of innocents, the demise of their lives.

Thus, after months of accumulated complaints and dissatisfaction during 1956, on October 23 the people, overwhelmingly from the universities in Budapest, said enough to the media serving and lying on behalf of their regime. The demonstrators first went to the Parliament buildings and then immediately to the national radio building to choke off the propaganda machine and demand the reading of their declarations for a better life: the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the independence of Hungary, free elections, democracy, freedom of religion and the press.

Even from the distance of 50 years the significance of 1956 never changed. On the contrary, the miraculous days of the revolution have assumed their just place in the history of the Hungarian people.Every participant of 1956, from teenager to the elderly have individually and uniquely lived through those historical days and have cherished the spirit and significance of those days. A handful of people rebelled against the oppressor of half of a continent, David against Goliath, what could be more exalted?

This is an individual's story, one of many of tens of thousands which begins in the last days of the 1956 revolt and follows the course of life of an 18 old Hungarian boy-man from his border crossing to the far side of the Atlantic Ocean.

However, each life begins at conception, solidifies in childhood, by adolescence this life has been shaped and molded by forces outside of the family, as well. Peter's life, like other youth's was preoccupied with the daily struggles of existence in the miserable years of the fifties. During these years they had to mature, maybe faster and with less youthful gaiety than those of similar age in Western societies.

The story's focal point is the 1956 Hungarian Revolution that allowed many to escape from Hungary and then the struggle immediately after to eke out an existence in their new homeland. However, the bitter years leading up to the revolt were equally decisive for Peter, who begins his „school of life" at around 1950, only to „graduate" with passing marks on another continent some ten years later.

THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION AND FREEDOMFIGTH.

TORONTO, OCTOBER 23, 1966.

On the tenth anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight, a solemn remembrance took place on the gray and stormy shores of Lake Ontario. The place, in front of the Toronto Exhibition Grounds, was the newly named Budapest Park.

Peter was hearing the words of the invited civic and Hungarian community leaders, but his thoughts as those of many of the other refugee-immigrants present were back in the days of October, 1956. The bloody crush of the revolution and the subsequent Soviet occupation, the return of hopelessness and despair and for all those here in Budapest Park, their escape from Hungary. They thought of the fallen in the fights, the executed martyrs, the imprisoned and those whose lives were ruined. Their somber faces testified to the humility they felt in celebrating, freely, in this, their adopted country, thinking of their relatives and friends who remained behind barbed wire and minefields. And they were thinking of their last 10 years in their new and challenging environment.

Freedom for Hungary! The newly christened memorial, Budapest Park, October 23, 1966.

As events proved later, in many homes of the country thousands of mostly young people, students, factory apprentices and workers were considering fleeing the country.

The compelling thought of leaving their homeland was not conceived only by the events of 1956 October. These events only made the escape to freedom a real and immediate possibility. The utter failure of the regime in the preceding years, the lies and the dictatorship that led to the revolt and the inevitable defeat that followed solidified for many to leave this land for something that was surely different and more humane to man.

Many had tried in the past, against all odds, to cross the borders illegally, a few made it, but many perished or were captured and sent to prison for trying to escape the communist “paradise”.

So, the idea of leaving the homeland had come to many years before the heady days of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

The murderous circle of the tanks around Budapest brought about making these vague notions of the “Free West” an actual plan on and after November 4th. 1956.

In the ensuing days the country heroically resisted the Soviet hordes, but succumbed eventually and to many, the plan of leaving this beaten country assumed action.

The numbers are not exact but it is assumed that nearly a quarter of a million Hungarians, mostly young people, decided that their dreams of a free society can only be found to the West of Hungary and have left the country.

This story is just one of many, each unique and fascinating, yet each being a replica of many untold refugee stories in the annals of history, each being its own individual Odyssey and each followed by another and another over the years, in all the continents, over the entire history of mankind.

THE ESCAPE

They met at the Calvary cemetery, November 15, 1956

It has been a gray and mournful day and not only because fall was slowly accepting the inevitable approach of winter, but even the most optimistic among them was giving up hope for the miracle. It was becoming evident that no one was coming to help preserve the exuberance born on October 23; no one could stop the retribution and repression that was soon to follow.

Fall had come and the three inseparable friends were still in their hometown as neither was admitted to university. As planned earlier that day, they met on the outskirts of the town by the ancient cemetery on this dark and sad November day.

Their daily lives were already so tied to each other that it was only natural that all three would escape together and stay together, forever. It would have been unthinkable otherwise. These youthful bonds are often stronger than allegiance to family, a few years spent together seem like a lifetime.

The three friends in the spring of 1956, III.Bela Gymnasium, Baja, Hungary

Laszlo was waiting for the other two, his face reflecting the weight of the worry he had spent the day with. He could not forsake his parents, leaving them alone to care for an older brother, paralyzed and impaired since birth. He had his first test of adulthood that day. The other two, now sullen and worried lest they, too, will change their own minds, have hurriedly said farewell and took off into the night.

They walked in silence on the dark and wet country road. Were they aware of their decision to leave the country that night, maybe captured and interned, maybe succeeding to cross the border and never to return again? Almost certainly neither did feel the enormity of their decision. Their wet faces, the silence that surrounded them in the countryside and the steady rain that was falling only underscored their plight. However, their faces would have suggested that they knew that with each step they were changing their lives forever.

They only had an idea how far the Yugoslavian border might be from their home town of Baja, but these eighteen-year old did not consider that 5 or 6 extra kilometers should be a problem if their assumptions were maybe too optimistic. So, they walked out of the town onto the old provincial road leading south. Within minutes they were soaked from the rain when out of the wet darkness an old milk truck appeared to slow down for them and come to a screeching stop. They were permitted to jump on the back, next to the empty milk containers and although the rain now seemed fortified by the speed of the camion, their progress towards the border had improved**.**

An old villager in the last village where they got off the camion showed them the approximate direction toward the border, wished them luck and hurried back into his old farmhouse. They were in the middle of huge cornfields and found the walk now excruciatingly slow due to the huge and heavy mud-boots that quickly formed on their shoes. The wet ground was almost knee deep in black mud. They have lost any sign of direction and had the feeling after a couple of hours of struggling on that they were walking in circles. There was no sign of anything resembling the border. Only little piles of what looked like tents made of corn stalks, every 100 meters or so. It must have passed midnight, when in the distance ahead they have spotted what looked like faint light and contours of a low farmhouse. They have decided to knock on the door, as their sense of direction for the border was totally lost.

The man who appeared at the door was wearing long underpants and shirt covered by a roughly made fur vest, which he was clutching with one hand. He appeared calm and friendly in spite of the late hour and the sight of the soaked and mud covered young men. They have greeted him in the only language they knew and were rewarded by a response in the same language. Did this mean that after all these hours of walking in the muddy cornfields they were still in Hungary?

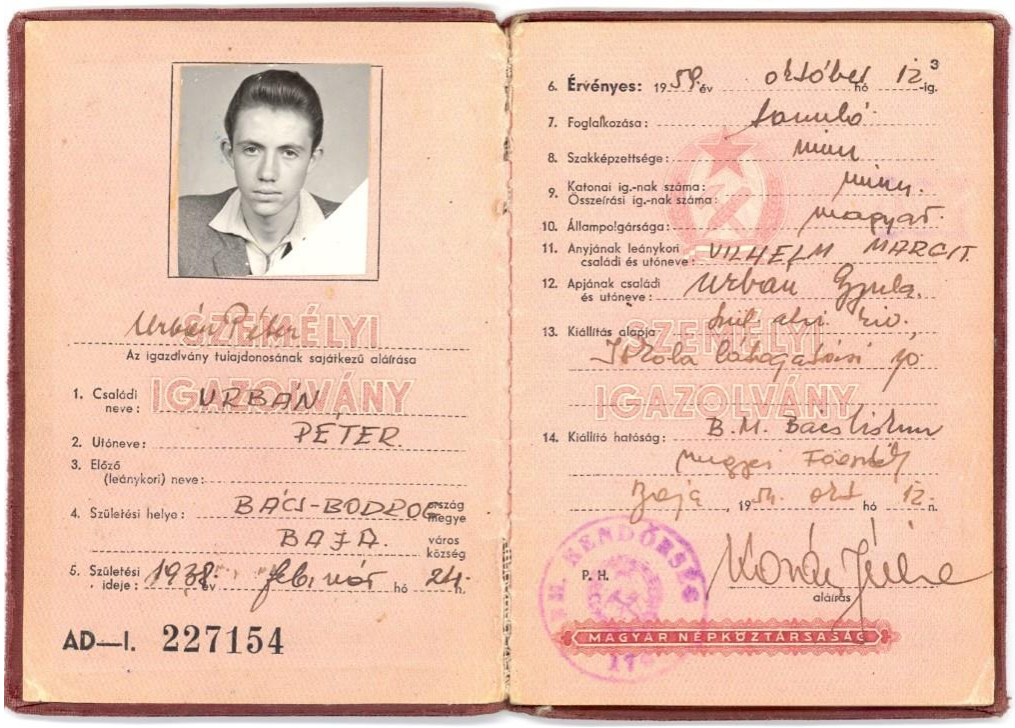
"Welcome and step inside from the rain" - said the man. Inside was just one rather small, wooden beam covered space. An oil lamp was the only light that revealed what they could smell immediately entering, the presence of animals. The sight and smell of a peacefully ruminating cow, two goats and several chickens, ducks and geese. As their eyes were now getting accustomed to the light, they spotted the huge earth and bricks made oven, with a large extended shelf on which various forms of humanity was spread out. Several children with curious glances, some asleep undisturbed, and their mother were examining the strangers. This sudden change from the miserable November night out there was welcome indeed and only in later years thought Peter that at that moment, if the information they were seeking from the farmer had confirmed that they were still on the Hungarian side of the border, they may have stayed with this decent farmer and his family until daybreak and then perhaps turned back and give up their objective of leaving the country. Perhaps.

As it turned out, the good man had assured them, they have been for some one kilometer inside the territory of Tito's Yugoslavia. While neither of these young adventurers had even imagined a trip to a foreign land some weeks before November 15, but if they had, this imaginary trip would have been, most certainly to some exotic European capital, certainly arriving by an international express train to an exciting railway station, perhaps arriving by taxi at a famous hotel and greeted by a polite and smiling doorman, offering help with their sizeable luggage. Instead, their first contact ever with a foreign land was a farmer in his underclothes, greeting them in Hungarian and inviting them in to his stable and home in a one-room house, encouraging them to sit on a wooden bench next to his warm oven and cow. Still, it could not have been more pleasant and encouraging.

There was no need for any explanation. By their question the farmer seemed to have understood immediately their situation and was already pulling on his rubber boots saying that he would be gone awhile and fetch the Yugoslavian border guards. If there was any concern in what would follow next it was not felt at that time since the warmth of the oven and curious looks from above the oven shelf took all their attention. The kind farmer was gone in no time at all.

And so their introduction to a foreign land was now a historical fact. Some thirty minutes later they heard the sound of a car and within a minute the farmer and two soldiers, with machine guns and shiny battle helmets appeared in the doorway. They were ushered outside with obvious gestures so quickly that they had no chance to say a word of thanks to the farmer or say farewell to the spectators on top of the oven. The rain was still falling and the dark seemed even more impenetrable than before. The boys were made to stand about ten meters from each other, hands in the air, and one of the soldiers had quickly searched them, top to bottom while the other had watched with his machine gun in the ready. Their identity booklets were taken away.

They did not speak too much; a Serbian word here and there was all they could hear. When the frisking was over, they just stood for what seemed like eternity. As their arms were getting tired, they slowly let them fall down but the soldiers did not object so they just stood in the rain and waited. This was the most frightful time of their entire border crossing, since they could not imagine what would transpire next. Why are they standing like this, apart and with their backs to each other? What will they do with them? Why are they not trying to communicate with them? What will happen? During this long wait, their thoughts were focusing on every possible outcome that could come before dawn would break. They were hoping that no harm would come to them most of all since in the days leading to crossing the border Radio Free Europe was continually broadcasting about many Hungarians escaping, including to the South, Yugoslavia.



Anxious minutes followed in the dark night. Peter thought of his family, then suddenly recalled his first encounter with gun-toting soldiers. Much later he wrote down the incident with the Red Army in the diary that he continued even in the refugee camps:

"The Red Army had occupied Baja in March of 1945 without any resistance, since the only southern bridge over the Danube had been bombed by the allies some 2 years prior to that, so the town had served no strategic importance to the retreating Germans. A 7-year-old kid probably could not understand the nuances of whispering and worried adults' conversations while they were huddling around their radios, listening to broadcasts about the ongoing war. However, I still remember the striking contrasts between what my father believed about the approaching Red Army and what our neighbors did.

The prevailing opinion was that these soldiers were an uncultured, pillaging and unmerciful bunch of thugs, better to be afraid of and avoid them, if possible.

The only exception voiced, characterizing the "liberators" so was my dad's. He had advanced to the Red Army, too, his basic humanistic belief of decency and honor in everyone, particularly since our town prior to the Russians' advance had been full of the soldiers of the Wehrmacht who had set up camp in the town's marketplace and had been peaceful with the civilian population.

So, optimist that he was, my father could hardly wait, so that after months of waiting and uncertainty he could finally take a long walk in the center of town, albeit now under the "protection "of a different occupying army.

He had shaved off with great care his beard of many months that made him look much older and respected, and in his freshly ironed suit and trademark, colorful bowtie he would have made a dashing and impressive figure on the soldiers of the Red Army.

So that any soviet troops, even from a distance would judge dad to be a peacefully walking , unthreatening gentleman , he got me scrubbed and dressed with similar care, much to the vehement protestations of my mother, that " for God's sake don't take the lad to those wicked Muscovites!"

Using the logic that during the previous night, as the Russians were moving into town, we had not heard even a single gunshot, father remained undeterred that Baja was "visited "by well -meaning and peaceful soldiers. What's more, any journalist worth his salt should feel his duty to rush to the scene and record events with the reliability of the eyewitness.

My father desperately tried to sell all this logic and reasoning to my mother, even though just weeks before that he was contemplating ~~of~~ fleeing Baja for the West, as did some of the families in the neighborhood, expecting the worst from the soviet "liberators".

So, as a final act of insurance for good will, father decorated his cigar pocket with a silky handkerchief. Always a careful dresser in those days, but even more of a zealot for personal hygiene! The rigors of cleanliness he made sure were adhered to by his children come war or hell. Just as an example, my older brother and I became acquainted with the taste of ordinary house soap during the war, as neither bath soap nor toothpaste was available, so the morning and evening wash-ups were followed by vigorous tooth brushing with horrible tasting, homemade soap rubbed on our toothbrushes!

So the impeccably dressed gentleman took the hand of his clean scrubbed son , carefully threading the chain of his cherished pocket watch into the left pocket of his vest and with determined steps took off on our street in the direction of the center of town. The sleepy looking soldiers lying about on top of the armored car right on the first corner of our street were, a bit reluctantly, returning my father's enthusiastic waving of hand. Most probably they were so surprised by the sudden appearance of this representative of the decadent West with his child that their sleepy gawking did not result in any action, but kept silently witnessing the parade.

Little further up the street two-foot soldiers appeared, dirty and dusty with the famous Russian "guitars" on their shoulders. Dad cheerfully repeated the now well-rehearsed greeting with the waving arm, to which he has added a striking "Welcome to our hometown" on his clean baritone voice. – He sang well, particularly after a glass or two. -

The stocky one of the two, with a somewhat oriental face approached my father, his eyes riveted to the shiny pocket watch; he then grabbed the chain and said in Russian: davai chas! While my dad did not understand the words, there was no mistaking of the intention because the soldier now decidedly pulled on the chain to which my father responded by taking several steps back onto the middle of the street, not ever letting my hand go with his left hand, and holding on to the chain of his watch with the other.

The uneven struggle could not have been going on more than a few seconds, but it seemed like eternity. I wonder whether it had occurred to my father, then, even for a second that the machinegun against his chest could have gone off, or in a lesser event its gunstock lands on his head, I don't know.

The fact remains, that this self-conscious and open-armed country writer had forsaken any common sensibility and reason, almost heroically defended his personal possession, against very poor odds while holding on tightly to my hand!

It remains a mystery at that moment that the arrival of a high-ranking officer in an open jeep was God's will or just a flick of fate.

The car came to a screeching halt in the middle of the street, to the point where the struggling soldier and civilian with kid in tow found themselves. In response to the officer's loud cry the soldier let go of the watch's chain and the sudden change in the relative opposing forces resulted in father's falling to the middle of the street, still with kid in tow.

Terrible shouting had followed, but only from the lips of the officer as the soldier being reprimanded could only stay in stiff attention. We could not understand the officer's apparent dressing down, but it was evident that father had escaped with watch and kid for the time being.

My dad had to realize that the neighbors' doubts and anxiety about the approaching Red Army proved to be correct. With quick steps, still holding on to me with force, we returned to our house, where father had collapsed on the stool in the kitchen, both hands holding his face. He sat there, trembling, for the longest time, and even as a kid I understood that a whole world had collapsed in him that day."

Soon the boys' worries were somewhat relieved when in an hour of waiting, a much bigger military car approached and what looked like an officer of some rank approached and motioned them to get into the car.

For the next hour or so they were driving across farm roads, then onto a highway and by the time dawn was breaking, the car was approaching the town of Subotica. Just before the WW2 broke out in this part of the world the town was called Szabadka and belonged to Hungary, Peter was taken by his father there on an exciting motor train from Baja when he was little. He remembered the lunch they ate at the Szabadka railway station and that his dad ordered a dessert that they both liked so much they asked the chef for the recipe and taken it home. The dessert was called Aranygaluska and became a favorite in their household from that time on. How long ago was it, when the whole family, the three boys and the parents sat at the Sunday meal, 8 or 9 years? And when again, if ever, will they sit at that table, all five of them?

The car came to a stop at what looked like the local police station and they were taken to an office where they could take some of their wet clothing off and spread them out on chairs in front of the stove. They had been offered hot tea and cigarettes. Shortly a man appeared to take notes of their impromptu visit to the Republic of Yugoslavia, speaking fluent Hungarian he told them they are not the first Hungarian "refugees", as he called them, to seek asylum in Yugoslavia, some six hundred have crossed over in the last 10 days or so.

More are expected, so much so that there is no more room in this small town for them and they will be transported shortly to another place designated as a refugee camp.

How I became a "refugee", Peter had asked himself. The revolution that exploded just three weeks before was centered in Budapest and the bigger cities. The smaller towns and villages witnessed mostly sympathetic demonstrations and sent food and medicines and other immediate aids, as best as they could to the capitol. The local high school students that graduated in the spring of 1956 and were rejected by the strictly controlled universities and colleges were still in Baja that fall and enthusiastically joined the local factory workers and students. They marched together to the nearby army barracks and begged the conscripted young soldiers to join the revolution and discard the hated red stars on their caps and uniforms. When they had successfully persuaded the reluctant and frightened conscripts to join, they then marched with them to the next army barrack, where some professional soldiers were stationed. Soon the weapon magazines were opened and anyone who wanted, found some weapon and ammunition, so now the small town had its instant revolutionary army, and named themselves National Guard.

Peter, now in possession of a Russian made machine gun, had reported to the Mayor's office, in the center of the town Revolutionary Committee and received his only official assignment. Somebody instructed him to go to the main square and supervise that all the students who regularly commuted from the nearby villages by bus are to be properly returned to these villages, as there was tremendous confusion, everyday life became chaotic.

Schools soon closed and the students were all on the streets. One evening Peter joined a group that went to the town's main park, where Stalin's much hated statute was erected right in the middle of it. The enthusiastic group had uprooted the statute following the example of the destruction of the immense Stalin statute in Budapest, carried it to the nearby canal and had tossed it in from the bridge.

It was difficult in the calm of a small town to follow the bloody fight that was ongoing in Budapest. Many had wanted to get to the capitol 16O kilometers to the North, but there was no transportation, no trains running.

Following the fourth of November attack on Budapest by some 3000 Russian tanks, Soviet armored vehicles and tanks had arrived in Baja as well. Senior high school students and some others just out of the local high school had planned an attack on the few tanks and armored vehicles that were stationed on the strategic squares in town. Some had hidden in the square of Toth Kalman, in the attics of apartment houses with their light weapons, mostly machine guns and rifles. The attack was to begin precisely at 6 PM one evening, somebody was to start firing and then all would join in. It must have been divine intervention, as was acknowledged by all later, that no one had started firing, no one dared to begin the shooting. The armored units would have caused a blood bath against the totally inexperienced students, probably killing many innocents in the apartments below, too.

The news of the fighting youth in Budapest, then, became even more heroic and tragic to the population of these small towns.

In the subsequent days amidst the news of the evolving tragedy of the revolution, only the disappointment and the anger remained with the people. Small groups of agitated people filled the little town's main walking street, mainly to exchange any news that may have come from the capitol. One such evening in the early days of November and after the Soviet invasion of Budapest, Peter was suddenly accosted by one of the well-known communist sympathizers in Baja. He had cynically asked Peter where he had hidden his recently brandished machine gun.

While this incident did not leave his thoughts, the decision to leave the country was not due to this. But all of this seemed very far and quite meaningless in the light of his present situation in Yugoslavia.

MELENCE, NOVEMBER 16,1956

The trip to this place, called Melence, was quite long. It was near the Rumanian border, far from Hungary and it normally served as a summer resort for coalminers. There were already some two hundred Hungarian beds, six to a room. Communal bathrooms were at the end of the corridor. They ate in large communal dining rooms with Yugoslavian civilians serving them. But they could not leave the compound and there were no visitors of any kind.

Life in the camp had assumed a routine while every day, newly escaped Hungarians were quickly filling up the remaining empty rooms. Towards the end of November the compound was full. None of the service personnel spoke Hungarian so there was no communication between them and the refugees.

What everybody was anxious to find out: how were things back in Hungary, and what will be their fate. No one could be sure what the future held for these refugees. Inevitably, the rumor had started that when the Soviets had finished squashing the uprising, they would make sure that communist Tito would hand over all these "refugee-hooligans" and repatriate them to their just fate. All hoped that these remained just rumors!

Thus, the mood in the camp was not altogether positive, until a day late in November when Peter had been called, as it was his turn, for a session of interrogation with a Yugoslav intelligence officer.

This was a young, bilingual officer, with a decent demeanor and attitude toward this young Hungarian. On that day he was smiling and pleased with himself as he put the usual questions to Peter for the umpteenth time: how many Russian tanks were on the highway to Yugoslavia, how did the Russian soldiers behave in Baja, did they talked about plans for Yugoslavia, did they see any Russian soldiers in the villages near the border, did the Hungarian revolutionary leaders talk about plans or desires to retake the formerly Hungarian territory that now belonged to Yugoslavia? What did they hear in the radio, what parties were in the making to change the one-party system? On and on with same questions for hours on end.

When he had enough of the obviously negative answers he paused for a moment, offered Peter an unknown brand of extremely pleasant, luxury cigarette and said:

"You are a bunch of lucky bastards. " and seeing, even expecting the puzzled look on Peter's face, he continued" Comrade Tito had decided to let all of you go to the West, wherever you wish, whatever country will take you, America, West Germany whatever. "

Peter just sat there, speechless, and could not understand the enormity of what had just transpired. Why, all the refugees had been certain they would go on to Western nations, who had been taking refugees via Austria for some day now, certainly since the Soviet started their counter-offensive against Budapest on November 4th.

Why did this intelligence officer say what Tito had decided to do? Just now? Why? The officer explained:

"Your Prime Minister, the revolution's Imre Nagy had sought refuge in the Yugoslavian Embassy just after the Soviet offensive on Nov4th. On the 22nd he and his cabinet members were given safe conduct out of the Embassy. Only to be immediately..., arrested and whisked out of the country. despite an agreement and promise of safe conduct ... this is what this new Hungarian government did and Comrade Tito will now let all of you go to the West."

Peter had returned to his room and sat on his bunk, relieved, but stunned by the realization that, apparently when the events had quieted down, they were to be returned to the Hungarian authorities and no doubt severely punished for their escape attempt! And now, Tito would allow them to go on to the West!

Only through the next several months and years did these refugees comprehend the international drama that took place in Budapest on November 22, 1956.

The legitimate prime minister of Hungary, his closest aides and advisors, their families were promised safe conducts to their homes in Budapest from the diplomatic protection of the Yugoslavian Embassy and all of them were arrested as soon as they left the Embassy!

The Hungarian refugees in Melence and by then in many other places in Yugoslavia as their numbers have eventually grown to 16,000, owed their free passage to the West to Marshal Tito, who had been affronted by the unprecedented action of the Soviet and their Hungarian collaborators!

The Hungarian refugee camp in Melence these days had still managed to look after the swelling numbers of the inmates. While the food and shelter were quite adequate, soon other needs became apparent. Most refugees had come without any luggage, so they were lacking any change of clothing. They received one towel each on arrival and they made do with washing and, drying and wearing the same clothing over and over again. It seemed that camp management was not planning for the long term with these refugees, and neither did the “guests” plan to stay!

In the meantime, as became apparent later, tens of thousands of refugees kept on arriving mostly in Austria, but a few thousand in Yugoslavia, too. The camp in Melence became full in no time at all.

Within days all the refugees from camp were put on trains and Peter and his compatriots soon had achieved their first “visit” to a European capitol: Belgrade. Their train had stopped for an hour in the capitol of Yugoslavia, they were not allowed to get off and the rather disheveled group of Hungarians did not raise any curiosity in the station as they were hanging out the train windows. Then the train took off and their guards would only say that they were going to the “mountains”.

GEROVO, DECEMBER 19, 1956.

After several hours they got off the train and were put on trucks covered with crude tarpaulins. Within an hour up ever steeper, serpentine mountain roads the trucks stopped: they were at their destination, near the village of Gerovo. It was already dark when they were ushered in the poorly lit, bleak buildings, surrounded by barbed wire, armed guards and their dogs. Only later they have found out that that their new home was this former prisoner of -the second world - war camp. The barbed wire and the guards made sure that there would be no contact between those that were fleeing the communist dictatorship in Hungary and the local population. Theirs was not the first group to arrive in Gerovo and soon the camp had swelled to more than 500. The men got separate dormitories from the women and small children, on simple hay and blanket surfaces, some 50 to a room. While the corridors contained simple latrines, only a few cold running water taps were available inside and others only outside the buildings. Since these were the first days of December in the high mountains of what is known as Slovenia today, the cold-water wash ups in the outside always took place in a hurry.

They were still lacking a change of clothing, shaving and haircuts were only available on a barter basis with those who had brought some of these items with them as they were fleeing. The common “currency” in camp became the daily portions of cigarettes that each adult received. As Christmas was approaching most people tried to achieve some semblance of cleanliness and hygiene, the clever ones were “operating” their makeshift barbershops.

Groups of Hungarians were arriving daily from other parts of Yugoslavia, too. Since the Western radio broadcasts into Hungary, in Hungarian, were giving an account of the fate of all refuges, both in Austria and Yugoslavia, more or more Hungarians living in nearby border towns tried to flee before the iron curtain would be reinstalled again. The UN had taken an active role for, at least, drumming up interest in the plight of these political refugees and the compensation, for example, to Yugoslavia started to pour in.

There were rumors that so many dollars per day were advanced to the Yugos for their expenses, but none knew for certain. Suffice it to say, that there was a huge difference in terms of the living conditions between Melence and Gerovo.

Meals were just above subsistence, produced in a kitchen staffed by Hungarians, so Hungarian bakers did bake bread on the premises. The refugees under the watchful eyes of Yugoslavian soldiers ran all services. Provisions were guarded and doled out each morning. Kitchen and cleaning help came from the dormitories and were provided extra portions in meals and in the most coveted form of currency of the day: cigarettes. The daily rations were 7 cigarettes per head but those on service duty got 20! Non-smokers had commanded the market, as heavy smokers would swap anything for extra smokes. For most camp inmates the days were spent idling around thus the inevitable card games have sprung up, the currency to win or lose was, of course, cigarettes.

The camp had one common, large meeting hall, where occasionally the refugees could watch some old film. They also held meetings here to discuss camp related issues, whether these originated from the refugees or from the camp command.

On everyone's mind there was but one principal preoccupation, when and where will they eventually end up? By late December of 1956 most everybody had believed that they would be allowed to leave Yugoslavia to the West. But where? And when? For the time being, they could not even leave the machine-gun and barbed wire fortified compound. They had no channels for the news from or about Hungary. Then, sporadically a letter or telegram would arrive and actually be delivered to the addressee from Hungary. Apparently, the Red Cross had managed to facilitate some communications between the refugees and their families back in Hungary. There were also a couple of dozens of Hungarians who could not stand the cold and the unsanitary conditions and asked to be returned to Hungary. They carried messages and news to the families left behind, most of whom had news of their family members who had escaped from Hungary. The news that the escapees were doing relatively well, at least they were alive and hoping to immigrate to the West, were gratefully acknowledged.

Christmas of 1956 found some Hungarian refugees in the former prisoner of war camp, their first Christmas a foreign land, behind barbed wire. Everyone in the camp dreaded the thought of finding themselves in this circumstance and the mood was somber, anxious. A brave young man risked being caught and ventured up the hillside during the night, within the walls of the camp, to cut down a small pine tree. The tree was going to be the only Christmas tree in the compound, but the guards caught the man and locked him up in a cell for several days.

The refugees were left to their own devices to celebrate the holy days. A group of men, who came from a small village and have been performing the scene of Bethlehem on the eve of Jesus ' birth, knew their lines and roles by heart. They got together, made makeshift costumes and decorations, then went from dormitory to dormitory and performed to a teary and grateful audience. The performance was based on folklore taught and maintained song and text, giving an account of that Holy night in the town of Bethlehem.

That Christmas may have been the poorest and darkest for some in their lives, but it was also the most sincere and heartfelt spiritual experience, especially under the circumstances, for many others.

Peter, eighteen years old, continued to keep a diary during those days, too, which was fabricated from bits and pieces of paper and here is an excerpt about Gerovo, around Christmas of 1956:

" ... Barbed wire, guard towers, guards with machine guns and a really antagonistic attitude, we call them the darkness of the Balkan. There are a few decent men among them, like Misha, the captain. But the others are the embodiment of hate and distrust; I don't know why they do not like us? Maybe because there are some among us who behave rather badly? That may be an explanation, but why do they hate all of us? The most hostile is Pero. Soon after our arrival we became enemies. He kept on shouting and threatening and we were silent at first, then we started to talk back and give him a hard time every chance we had. He behaved really badly, he deserved it. He carried on to such an extent that eventually his own commander got rid of him, which we were happy to see! The other unsavory character is the one responsible for the firewood Nicola. He is a miser, a soulless character. We have to deal with him only at the time we have to go for firewood by the side of the building, fortunately, but then it is after long sessions of bargaining and begging when he finally consents to a few pieces of wood. Apparently, the wood belongs to him and is paid for his wood. So, in a nutshell this is our relationship with the Yugoslavs in camp ... and now when I look back on 1956, when I make my yearly evaluation ... it is certain that this year has been the most eventful of my life! After the terrible ice-flood in the spring, I matriculated, attempted two university entrance exams, my first full summer vacation of being home and not working as before, and of course the revolution which was more than all the other events together and resulted in my escape ... and now at Christmas I realize that I have never spent more than 2 months away from home, and never spent a Christmas without my family....

I wonder how difficult is the English language going to be? Provided that I ever get to the United States! I am afraid it's going to take a long time ... since I am planning to earn my money speaking and writing.... I have no big demands, dreams -only to live normally, study and help the family I left behind. That is my only wish! That will all depend on me, people would say. I certainly will try my best. Only would I just be able to begin... My God, how many times will I be disappointed in life, in people until then?

I will try to use my life experience, because I have some. In spite of my young age I have gone through much… here in camp people are so diverse. Have to say without exaggeration that a large part came here without clear regard to their action, seeking adventure, excitement, nevertheless I am hoping.... they will prevail and work hard, where work will be appreciated and compensated and will be really free .... I remember when years ago I was looking at a map and, always looking for America, finding the cities and tried to imagine the "land of opportunities!" Half believed these stories ... and now I will, perhaps, be convinced myself."

A fellow refugee's drawing of Peter while writing his diary, Gerovo, December23,1956

The refugees kept on arriving steadily, many from Baja and vicinity, among them students and teachers also, from Peter's secondary school, acquaintances from all generations. Among the teachers his most recent high school teacher, also his swim and water polo coach, Pigele. These home-towners have helped to ease their homesickness and brought some recent news from some families.

He was happy to recognize a few classmates from his older brothers' class of 1950, who were imprisoned under a "political conspiracy "charge in the early fifties. These were freed in the first, victorious days of the revolution. Meeting these young men brought back the memory of his very first fencing master, the saber fencer and coach, Jozsef Kosztolanyi, who was the chief defendant in that political trial, subsequently hanged by the ruthless Rakosi regime. The character, humanism and professional skills of Kosztolanyi forever set an example to emulate throughout his disciples' life.

Life in Gerovo was becoming full of anxiety, waiting for a bite of nourishment and a chance for some personal hygiene. They left their homes with the clothes on their back. Now, several weeks away from the last bath or haircut time was becoming a cruel toll for existence on the most primitive level. Eventually, around the middle of January of 1957 some warm water showers were installed in one of the buildings, which helped conditions somewhat.

One of the first opportunities presenting for leaving the camp was the visit by the Italian consulate officials who, while inviting refugees, had set a quota for taking a group of Hungarian refugees to Italy. They have emphatically stressed that since Italy is under dire economic conditions due to losses in the war, job opportunities would be few and that once in Italy, the refugees must then stay, traveling to other countries will not be possible. In other words, anyone dreaming of Switzerland, America or Australia should not bother to sign up for Italy, they should keep on waiting in Gerovo.

Peter and some others decided to accept the chance, in spite of the stern warning by the Italians that the refugees will not be able to leave Italy, and that life in Italy was difficult with unemployment being high. All this seemed so unlike the dreams the refugees were nurturing that very few volunteered to accept the "offer" by the Italians. Most would rather stay and bear the hardships than go to a poor country like Italy, with no chance of getting to a richer country later.

Peter and some other “veterans” of Melence and Gerovo had a different opinion. He had been an influence on the group, voicing his conviction that the West is the West, where freedom must prevail, where man’s free will cannot be denied, there cannot exist iron curtains and minefields. They must not miss this opportunity, the only one at the time. While they were dreaming of other opportunities, expecting better offers from the West, only 62 inmates of the camp in Gerovo of now nearly one thousand accepted the Italian invitation. This is how Peter recorded the day for his second trip to a foreign land:

"We have left the "island of our dreams", Gerovo, at 4 A.M. The month and a half I have spent here will not be among my best memories. I cannot say that I have starved here, that I have suffered physically. But it wasn't good. Uncertainty, anxiety, animosity! One does not talk about it anymore, trying to forget - but I cannot bring myself to this. I need time, time spent in civility and normalcy…after all this was my first real test after the “socialist summers” of Sztalinvaros and Kazincbarcika…”

TO THE WEST-FEB.4, 1957, TRIESTE, ITALY

On that wintry day in February an open transport truck carried the 62 refugee-volunteers to the border of Italy and Yugoslavia. The mountain road with its frozen surface seemed treacherous enough, so that it took some time to get on to more stable terrain. Its passengers were still feeling the embraces and well wishes, and a few concerned looks, of their compatriots who remained behind the barbed wired camp in Gerovo**.** Did they make the right decision?

By the time the truck had stopped just meters from the border, the guards had to help them off the high truck as most of them were stiff and frozen from the open journey.

After some formalities, at the guards' encouragement, the group slowly walked towards, first the Yugoslavian barrier that was then raised for them, and then through no-man's land to the Italian barrier which was raised, also, for them to pass through.

Those 25 meters of no man's land between the two countries became the group's most cherished distance ever traveled in their lives!

Every step they took brought them closer to a new life they were soon to begin. The stern warning of the Italian consulate officials that they will have to remain in Italy, the prospect of unemployment did no longer matter to them.

The short road they had to take without their armed guards was the first free steps of these Hungarians since they have arrived in Yugoslavia.

One could imagine the effect of this disheveled, unshaven, pale faced group on the Italian officials waiting for them on the other side! They could still smell the unpleasant fumes of the diesel truck behind them; they could still feel the somber and perhaps envious looks of their guards on their backs as they were crossing over.

But their determined steps attested to their will and desire to accept whatever was to follow, no matter what, there was no returning now.

The emerging light from the fog had shined on a site for the 62 Hungarians that they could not have imagined in the last several weeks. Behind them closely were their former guards and the stark border office that looked more like a fort than an office. But ahead, on the other side stood a long caravan of sedans and ambulances from which white coated doctors and nurses were rushing to meet them, grabbing them by the arms, helping them to the vehicles. Not much was said, but smiles and warmth in their eyes spoke all the more. Soldiers or police were hardly visible, and the few presents were helping them to get in the cars, just like the medical people.

Hot chocolate, oranges and cigarettes were offered in the cars. There were Hungarian interpreters among the Italians, who were changing cars from time to time to benefit all the refugees with their translations.

The translators told them that, naturally, they are being transported to a temporary refugee depot and in a short time they will be going to whatever destination they desire and would be available to them, in the West. The warnings by the Italian consulate lasted only so far!

The shabby refugee group found itself within a short time on an entire floor of a luxury hotel in Trieste. Warm baths, barbers at the ready, used but clean clothing was waiting for them and haircuts and shaves later the group would have looked reasonably acceptable on the streets of Trieste.

But most importantly, paper and pens were available so that their families would finally get their quick and enthusiastic letters, postcards, that they were well, in the free West, in Italy. After so many weeks of incertitude this was the biggest gift they could imagine. These letters, postcards were immediately mailed by Italian Red Cross personnel. It was just early afternoon by the time the group cleaned up and wrote their letters, then met in the lobby of the hotel. They were grateful for this change in their lives and a few had tears in their eyes. The group was escorted to nearby restaurant for their main meal of the day.

They walked to this luxury restaurant in the heart of Trieste, where a whole section was closed off to them. Since not one of them spoke a word of Italian they had let the restaurant serve them at will, and were patiently awaiting their first ever Italian meal, in the free world.

It was only natural that the first course was pasta or a spaghetti in this case. And it was also certain that none of them ever had real spaghetti before, but the exciting aroma and their hunger for tasty food after so many months overcame their suspicions and started as cultured men, with fork and knife to attack the unknown delicacy. Unfortunately, the tiny bits and pieces of spaghetti after their diligent use of the knives and forks had made their task quite difficult, so the first course lasted a very long time. The serving team of the restaurant had been very patient with them and were even attempting to teach a few of the Hungarians the intricate maneuver of eating long pasta with a fork and spoon, of all things, not with knives!

After this abundant meal they were taken by several cars to the Trieste railway station where they boarded a train for Ravenna.

The station was full with crowds of people, most of who came out specifically to greet and glimpse at the Hungarian refugees. They have heard that the group was arriving from Yugoslavia on their way to Ravenna. Trieste was so close to the once, and only, Hungarian seaport Fiume, that many had felt a special kinship with historical Hungary. Fruit baskets and small gifts were handed to all, whose faces were now smiling for the attention and love that surrounded them. Indeed, many felt an overwhelming humility and respect for the Italians of Trieste for this manifestation of their care and concern.

Peter, like the others was in a heightened emotional state since their arrival in this wonderful Italian city. But after so many vicissitudes, the absence of his family, the fate of mother and his younger brother who were left in Baja without a man in the house, who now are facing the harsh winter in the poorly heated, old house, weighed on him still.

All this, in a totally new world. And Trieste, with the cavalcade of Vespas and sedans on the roads, the rich store windows, the elegant men and women with their obvious carefree attitude, how different all this was from the sad, and gray Hungarian small towns, with their somber moods. Especially, the openness and unabashed joy on peoples' faces in Trieste, by contrast, was so striking.

The train was warm and comfortable. Peter leaned out the window and grasped a man's hand as it was extended to him from below. The couple, speaking Hungarian, came out to the station to meet the group, like the others from Trieste.

"Welcome in Italy, God bless you all, we pray for you, all Hungarians…where are you from?"

"I am from the South, a small town…" said Peter

"Yes, but which one…?"

"I am from Baja…" and the man's face lit up…

"My mother is from Baja…we are both from Baja…and mother still lives there, today, in that town…maybe you know her…she lives on Budapest Road….the widow of Poth Gotthard?"

"Mrs.Poth? My God, … dear sir, she is our landlady, we have been renting her house for years…every month I take the rent to her, Mrs.Poth…that cannot be true!"

The train was long into the night and Peter was still thinking about the incredible meeting of the Hungarian couple in the station, before departure for Ravenna. His first hours in the West, his first meeting anyone there with whom he can communicate and they turn out to be the son of Mrs.Poth and his wife, from Baja! As they recounted the story, the son was born in Baja and after the war, in 1946 he had gotten out and settled in Trieste, here he opened a pasticeria, a coffee and cake place.

They were on the train the whole night when finally, they arrived early morning in Ravenna. The local Red Cross was waiting and had them transported to the nearby Marina di Ravenna, by the Adriatic Sea.

The orphans' resort (Colonia) of the Italian Red Cross, Marina did Ravenna, Feb.1957

Of the Hungarian refugees staying at the Colonia, Peter's group was not the first, as more than a hundred were brought here from the overcrowded refugee camps in Austria. The *Colonia*, built under the Mussolini regime, was a simple, gray, stone-based building on the brilliant, sandy beach of the Adriatic Sea. Green, so called Italian maritime, Cyprus was all around the building, crisscrossed by walk and bicycle paths.

The winter of February was mild and pleasant due to the warm currents from the sea, so much so that on Sunday afternoons groups of people from nearby Ravenna waded in knee-deep, rather cool water looking for exotic crustaceans of the sea, which they consumed, with the help of a few drops of lemon, on the spot, much to the total amazement of the formerly landlocked Hungarian onlookers.

The rather forlorn and bewildered group, still carrying the horrors of the Gerovo camp got out of the bus and was touched by the small group of Hungarians welcoming them to their new home at the Adriatic Sea resort. They were moved and grateful for the turn in their fortunes.

The Red Cross nurses on duty were also on hand in their starched uniforms and with their warm smiles, and, it seemed the only policeman of the Colony, Cesare, also.

The nurses of the Red Cross, and their interpreters at the Colony, Feb.1957.

There was the Camp Leadership Committee, a camp physician and a priest, Hungarian cooks and helpers, house-rules. After a short greeting, the new arrivals were informed that while lunch is served at twelve noon, the Leadership Committee had recommended they away from meals until the Red Cross Camp Supervisors met certain "demands". In other words, there was a "hunger strike" going on.

The new group who had survived the harsh conditions of the Yugoslavian refugee's camp, emaciated and practically deprived of even basic sanitation so far, were asked, on their first day at this seaside resort for Italian orphans to forsake their first meal and join the group in a protest strike! The newcomers were incredulous when they have heard the "demands" which were for more free movie tickets at the local cinema, more than the daily 10 free cigarettes, more fresh fruit on the dining tables and some other "urgent" needs.

It seemed, that some of the propaganda humbug of the "class-conscious workers" who always fought for their "rights" were brought with the escapees to the West. Not only have they brought the right to strike with them, a right that no one was ever able to put into practice at home, but they had the chance, in free Italy, to try out.

There were no acceptable reasons to join the strikers, especially for the group just arriving from the Yugoslavian prisoner of war camp. Nobody should have compelled them, on their day of arrival, to behave like sulky children and support the frivolous demands of the other group.

They did not take long to decide. Even if they could not prevent the strike, not one would take part in this ungrateful behavior towards their Italian hosts.

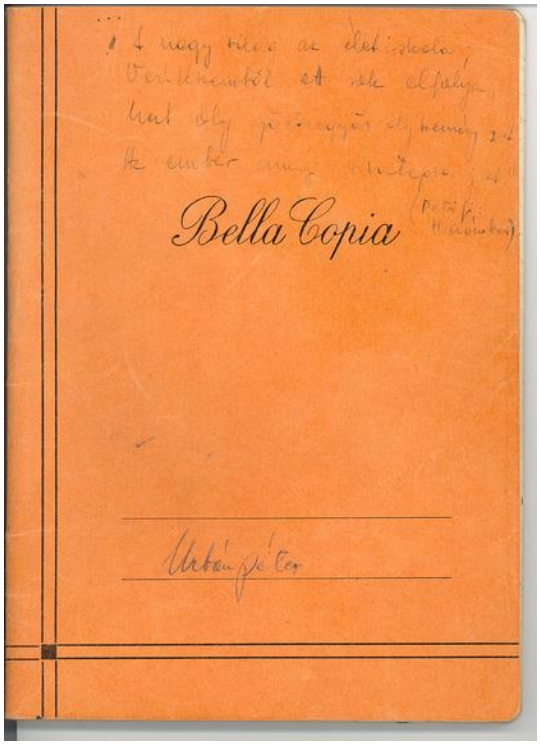
Soon after getting to their dormitories and getting organized, enjoying the luxury of hot showers, they were dressed in their newly acquired Red Cross donated garments and sat with great anticipation in the long dining hall, half empty due to the strike. Like in Gerovo, the cooks were also Hungarian, as well as the serving staff. Not one took part in the strike, as they were getting small rewards for their work which they did not want to lose. These house-chores were always well appreciated as they took care of the daily idleness on the one hand, but also provided a chance to go out to the markets, meeting and befriending Italians.

Peter's thoughts were back in his hometown, where his mother must have been just getting ready to serve the fish soups she had prepared each day in the tavern where she worked, his younger brother would come by later and have some of the leftover if there were any. By the time the two-course lunch was served, Peter had also recalled those abundant and special meals he was invited to by his richer friends' parents in the early fifties, during the greatest trials his family endured. He must write about this in his diary!

This wonderful day, from the arrival in the morning at the Colony, to the walk on the beach in the afternoon did not seem real at all. Why, the day before they were half frozen as they tried to wash up at the cold, outside tap in Gerovo, and were waiting with canteen in hand for the cabbage soup and now they were sitting at the long, white clothed table and enjoyed the two-course meal, accompanied with a glass of wine!

Not even the other group's tasteless invitation for a „hunger strike" could dampen their high spirits. They had gone through too much to worry about whether more than 10 cigarettes were "due" or not for refugees.

After his first ever , unforgettable walk on the seashore Peter had found a quiet corner in the main hall, asked and happily received a splendid notebook and pen, originally deemed for kids in elementary classes. It said on the cover: Bella Copia.



Peter's diary. On the cover, barely legible, some lines from Petofi Sandor, Hungary's patriotic poet:

„The school of life is the world

Where much of my sweat is lost,

Bumpy and oh, so hard your road,

Where man oft on the desert trod.

(Translated by PU)

He felt the compulsion, that then, in this splendid environment and mood he continues the diary he had started on Christmas Eve in Gerovo. Then, only bits and pieces of paper was available.

Already at lunch earlier the memories of the immediate past have rushed him and he felt the weight of the distant past, that seemed rapidly disappearing amidst ever newer life experiences. Here, in Italy, he had realized once and for all that he had left his birthplace, there is no more turning back.

The Yugoslavs have kept their promise, they were free to go on to the West. He had finally arrived in a free land!

He thought of his dad, forbidden to write, to practice his profession for years, because there was no freedom of the press, who had rushed up to Budapest just 2 days before the Soviet invasion had started. He was ecstatic to restart writing and publishing the small-town paper he had been denied since 1948, and now with the revolution being victorious he could write again! He was going to bring the newspaper stock to Baja, but the 4th of November brought the Soviet tanks back to Budapest and dad never made it back to Baja with the paper, hopefully, Peter was praying! For days they could not communicate with the family, and Peter had escaped without ever saying farewell to him.

How bitter his father must be now! He cannot possibly hope that he will ever write again, as a free man, without becoming an agent for the secret police.

Perhaps it was this helplessness of his father not being able to write that pushed Peter to write, to fix his thoughts, to do something, anything, without skill and experience, with a teenager's undisciplined mind, but he had to – write! Maybe in years, these notes will serve some purpose, so he started to write about his father, the gagged journalist.

Based on the notes from the Diary, Feb.5,1957, at Marina di Ravenna:

„My father had moved to Baja, with my mother and older brother, two years before my birth, in 1936. Then 34 years old, this journalist left the Zalai Kozlony in Nagykanizsa and moved to the provincial town of Baja, to try his luck. It was an open secret in the family that he had personal reasons for this sudden move. My birth took place in a rented house and the next 18 years, until I have left the country, I would be passing my life in this rented house.

Father had managed first one and then two weekly papers' publication, where he had done most of the writing, all of the editing and looking after the circulation as well. In spite of the 'owner' and 'publisher' titles he could never make any fortunes with the papers, never owned a home, but secured a reasonably decent existence for his family, at least until 1948.

Father's days were consumed by running after advertisers and the printing process, his only „means" of production was an ancient typewriter and a bicycle that substituted the telephone in those days. The bicycle served as transportation and provided, as well, for his only hobby which was fishing on the Danube.

The nights from my childhood are still vivid in my memory, when dad wrote his articles amid umpteenth cigarettes and several strong espressos, late into the night. This was a family business. Mother prepared and maintained the subscribers' list and the two boys were sent to the railway station twice a week to post the bundled and addressed copies of papers to the neighboring villages.

After the Russian army had occupied the country towards the end of WW2, a fairly democratic system of government was established, with multiparty participation and free elections, for a while. However, the communist party had difficulty asserting itself as the main party by legitimate means, they have resorted to subvert democracy with ever increasing rough, and later deadly tactics. All this of course with the support, if not the instigation, of the Soviet Union. By using the so called „sliced salami" tactics, the multiparty system slowly became a one-party system, where any opposition was simply jailed, or worse.

By 1948 there was only one legitimate and substantial force to stand in the way of the communists: The Roman catholic church, representing more than 85 % of society, led by the staunch defender of his church and flock, Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty, Primate of Hungary, the Vatican's representative.

This was the only rival to the slowly developing, ruthless dictatorship of Matyas Rakosi and his conspirators.

One outstanding, single event and the last one from this era that had signaled the beginning of the darkest period in Hungary's sad history was the Days of the Virgin Mary, held in my birthplace, Baja, in June of 1948. When the communists' and socialists' most famous and drummed up day, the first day of May, celebrated around the world by their ilk, had attracted a couple hundred sympathizers to the main square of Baja, the Days of Virgin Mary, led by Cardinal Mindszenty had hundreds of thousands in days of prayer and devotion in the same small town!

This is what irritated most the only political party in power and government then, this is what initiated the most brutal oppression of church and anyone not bowing to the Soviet puppets in Hungary!

The two weekly journals of Baja in June of 1948, Bajai Hirek and Delvideki Kis Ujsag, which were written and published by my father, had two special editions, in tens of thousands of copies, for these unprecedented celebrations in our hometown. The pilgrims came from every part of Hungary, including sections that were chopped off Hungary, as a result of the infamous Trianon „peace" accord, so that they all could pray together with the Primate Mindszenty against the ever-increasing menace of Red dominance!

Father was there, in every ceremony, reception, religious procession so that he could record these historical events for his two journals. He was able to write up and send to the press his latest notes of the key events, so that the thousands of participants could take home their festive journals of those days in Baja.

I still see him on the main square, on the side of the ceremonial platform taking notes while the solemn ceremonies were taking place, led by Cardinal Mindszenty. By evening a huge crowed filled all the main streets of town, thousands of candles lit the happy and

devout faces. That same night dad wrote and sent to press the special edition that could be on the newsstands next morning.

The day after the special edition was on the newsstands; my father never made it home that evening. As we found out it later, the State Secret Police had arrested him and locked him up in the local headquarters on Toth Kalman street. He was never formally charged with any crime, indeed what could have been the charge? That he had reported the events of those days in his legally published newspapers?


DÉLVIDÉKI
KIS UJSÁG
A Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt lapja
Impozánsak voltak
a bajai Mária-napok ünnepségei
A kalocsai főegyházmegye egész népe hódolt Magyarország boldogasszonya előtt

"IMPOSING WERE THE DAYS OF MARY IN BAJA" said the headline in the Délvidéki Kis Újság.

What was certain, that his bi-weekly, provincial newspapers would never again appear in any news stand. His journalist permit was taken away, his rented printing shop was closed forthwith, and never again could he publish a word until his death in 1989.

In the following weeks he suddenly became an aged and tormented man, disappearing for 24-48 hours from time to time. His children, my brothers and I, knew nothing of these days and nights not spent at home. Only much later mother had told us that dad was on frequent "questioning" sessions at the station of the secret police and was being "persuaded", often with night sticks, too, to accept the "offer", that of becoming a reporter at one of the national, daily newspapers in Budapest, the Magyar Nemzet. In exchange they only wanted "information" about the other employees' possible "anti-state" behavior.

It is not known when, how soon would have Gyula Urban be broken during or after these "persuasion" sessions, his family being starved and emotionally tortured daily, and accepted like many others in those days, the vileness into which they were forced.

Within a few weeks five prominent physicians of the small town had certified and declared that Gyula Urban, former journalist, is suffering from a serious mental condition and was immediately locked up in the hospital's most secure mental ward. This is how my father escaped from the hands of the State Secret Police in late 1948, just before the most

shameful court proceedings started against Cardinal Mindszenty, subsequently sentencing the Cardinal to prison for life on totally false charges of espionage!

It was those five courageous physicians who collaborated and saved my father from the vileness that he, like many others, most probably, eventually would have succumbed to, but it meant 18 months of total isolation from the outside world, even shut up from his family, until the Secret Police had given him up. After his mental ward imprisonment, he could no longer find a job in Baja, so the inevitable breakup of our family started then, in 1951, when he had to travel to the newly built "socialist" cities, where practically anyone could find employment. He lived in workers' hostels; saw his family infrequently, for days only, while our family had gone through hardships and worry. For a while even our house was being watched, especially in the evenings until one day my mother could not stand it any longer and verbally attacked the surprised character lurking in the shadow. He disappeared in minutes and from then on, we were of no interest to them.

My mother who had raised three children had to find employment for the first time since married my dad, first was a cleaning woman then a cook in a local tavern.

These were my family's difficult years, which for many other families could be many times more dramatic and serious between 1948 and 1956. Those preoccupied with the search for the triggers of the 1956 Hungarian Freedom Fight and Revolution should only examine the lives of these families in the last 8-10 years."

The advertised hunger strike had quickly faded due to the new group's obstinacy, when the "Yugo" group appeared for every meal with great anticipation and appetite. Soon they were given their first Western identity document, issued by the Italian Red Cross, stating that bearer is a Hungarian refugee.

Nº 570

CENTRO DI OSPITALITÀ DI
Marina di Ravenna

FIRMA DEL TITOLARE
Urbanpeter

Connotati: statura m.1.88
Capelli bruno
Occhi castani
Colorito roseo
Segni particolari //

Cognome Urban
Nome Peter
Paternità Gyula
Maternità Wilhelm Margit
Data di nascita 24.2.1938.
Luogo di nascita Baja
Professione o mestiere impiegata

Data

IL DIRETTORE DEL CENTRO

Life of the camp on the Adriatic had become routine, but the inhabitants' thoughts were universally preoccupied with their future. They have already heard in Trieste, which was later confirmed in the Colony as well, that every refugee could settle in any country which would take him or her. All this was happening in the spring of 1957 when in Austria nearly 200,000 Hungarians have been arriving and gaining entry in dozens of Western nations. These countries established certain maximum quotas and these are quickly filled from the Austrian camps. In the meantime, the camps in Italy and Yugoslavia were still full of refugees and there remained but two large countries that still had available quotas: Canada and Australia.

Finally, correspondence with the families at home began in earnest, but this proved expensive, as the Red Cross could not finance all the postage. Peter's father tried desperately with all his friends abroad to help his son an entry into a European country or else get some money for correspondence. It proved to be difficult, except for one willing friend, Gyorgy Urban. He was only a namesake for father and an old friend from before WW2, who had settled in London, eventually finding a job with the BBC. He was answering Peter's letters and when found out that Peter had expressed eagerness to get to England, perhaps via the BBC in some capacity, he was glad to help.

Gyorgy Urban had arranged for Peter to take an announcer's voice test and a short entry exam at one of the radio stations in Bologna, possibly leading to a job with the BBC.

Peter was feverishly getting ready for the big day when he could board a train from Ravenna to Bologna, and face his short Western life's biggest opportunity so far.

At the station in Bologna a very pleasant, young journalist was expecting Peter and drove him immediately to the Bologna radio station. There, after short instructions a Hungarian text was put in his hands and they would record his voice test-presentation that went rather well.

Since the entry exam also called for rudimentary English proficiency, a short English news item was given to Peter to translate into Hungarian, after all the interview and test was for a possible position with the BBC in England.

The sympathetic journalist sat next to Peter and had encouraged him to start the translation, he would help. The first two words to be translated from the English text will be remembered by Peter until his last day on earth. The text had begun: "The government…"

But there, in the Italian radio-studio, the 19-year-old Hungarian refugee did not know a single word of English! His Italian benefactor tried everything, in Italian, in French to explain, to make Peter understand the meaning of those two first words, perhaps Peter would suddenly understand and write down in Hungarian the meaning…all in vain! And these were only the first two words of the two-page translation requirement!

Peter had finally made them understand that it is useless; he does not speak a single word of English. The entry test had to be stopped there.

The empathetic Italian journalist had taken Peter by the arm, sat him in his little Fiat Toppolino and took him home for dinner. There were a number of well-dressed gentlemen sitting at the elegant dinner table, and a three-course dinner was served by a pleasant woman, who was probably their landlady. The dinner companions were all very polite and have tried to make the guest welcome, but of course Peter's Italian was only marginally better than his non-existent English, woefully insufficient for any conversation.

In the end, they parted at the railway station and Peter sat in the train with dark and somber thoughts. His mood now reminded him of another "entry test" that took place in Budapest less than year before. In May of 1956 he had tried to realize a long-held dream when he had been up for a test at the Film and Theater Arts College.

The famous film and theater star of the day, Maria Sulyok had the task of screening some of the hundreds of applicants for a few available places at the school. As with those two English words at the radio station, the minute details of the test in Budapest would never be forgotten:

They called him in from the corridor and Peter entered a simple, little room where sat the star on one chair and a secretary on the other. A small podium in front of them.

"You were supposed to be here yesterday, why didn't you come then ?"- asked the film star.

"Yes, but I have sent a wire a week ago, that I was in my graduation ceremony yesterday …and I got permission to come today…"

"Graduation ceremony? In what?" –sounded the rather complex question.

Peter's brain was lightening quick in assessing all the possible answers, including asking for clarification to the "In what"? question. But then he remembered the advice given by professional actors from Kecskemet, with whom he had shared the stage as an extra during their guest appearances in his hometown, that at the entry test one must exhibit spontaneity and quick humor, that attests to great fantasy and wit, prerequisites for the performing arts! So, with a great deal of bravado and self-confidence, he answered:

"In a dark-blue suit" and was anticipating a rewarding smile.

A numbing silence had fallen. The secretary looked up from her files, and then looked at the star with obvious fright, unable even to guess what the star's response will be to this obviously impertinent answer!

"In what school you had the graduation ceremony, that is what I wanted…go on, recite something…" snarled the obviously upset prima donna at the scared candidate.

The yearlong preparation consisted of excerpts from the drama Bank Ban and a poem from Arpad Toth, that he practiced with his literature teacher, even recited to his father several times. There were occasions when he could recite the material to his classmates and on the day of the graduation ceremony, just before this entrance test the recital was done in front of all the graduating classes. All that work and preparation gave him self-confidence, as the delivery was being polished and refined while getting plenty of critical feedback and advice. However, on the critical day, the yearlong preparation was reduced to but a few lines from each work as the slighted diva interrupted him twice, rather abruptly, and said without even looking at Peter, coldly: "We'll notify you…"It was not necessary.

The same feelings came back to him in the train to Ravenna, as a year before when Maria Sulyok sent him on his way, and he walked out to the banks of the river Danube.

There, sitting on the stones, in the splendid May afternoon, he was waiting for his evening train back to Baja. All his dreams seemed to have been lost then, as now on the train for Ravenna, everything hopeless. Too many young people at the start of life, do not realize that every experience, every emotion, good or bad, joy, pain, achievement or failure, shame, success come and go on, because that is life. And real unhappiness is when one fights such unavoidable fluctuations in life…

Indeed, the disappointment about the BBC test in Bologna really lasted only a few days, as the young men of the Colony were now excited about new hopes. The news came that US Army recruiters would be passing through camp in a few days, and any young volunteer, by signing up for 5 years, would be immediately transported to the USA. There would be language school while getting the army training, then American citizenship, even opportunities for attending university afterward with generous bursaries.

Almost all young people, then, were dreaming of immigrating to America and this new chance to get there was hope for some. The recruiters arrived promptly in their enormous station wagon, a kind of vehicle not seen before by most refugees. Questionnaires had to be filled out, interviews started with the help of interpreters, followed by medical exams conducted by medical officers. These exams were not particularly detailed, they wanted to visibly check the applicants' physical shape. When Peter's turn came he had been casually asked about the long scar on his right side which was obviously the result of a surgical operation.

„I had an operation in March of 1955, when I was seventeen, they took my right kidney out. The kidney had tuberculosis, it had to be removed, but I have been healthy since!" translated the interpreter Peter's explanation.

The army doctor waited until Peter had dressed and then sat down next to him on the bench. His expression seemed sincere and a bit sad, too, when he had told him that unfortunately Peter cannot join the US Army with one kidney.

Not every young Hungarian volunteered for the US Army. Some were afraid that a war such as the Korean one, can happen again, so the idea did not seem, all of a sudden, so attractive. They had tried consoling Peter in this manner. Then, in a couple of days, after an emotional farewell, several young men were on their way by air to the USA, apparently to San Francisco.

Celebration of March 15, a Hungarian National holiday, in the Colony.

The first Hungarian national festive day in the Colony was March 15. and was celebrated by the compatriots with the National Anthem and flag, their mind on the their loved ones at home.

As a fourth-grade student, in 1948, at the time of the 100.anniversary of the 1848 Freedom Fight, Peter remembered well the occasion. That celebration took place in his hometown's Teachers' College. The practice elementary classes for teacher-students were also present when the national flag was raised, right in front of the senior choir, led by Professor Arato. These student-teachers taught them to read and write, as well as to behave in class, protecting, guiding them through the 4 years of elementary school.

Peter remembered the sudden spring that exploded from the normally short winter, even promising the prospect of summer in the not too distant future. He remembered the

little dispute with his mother, when he wanted to dress in shorts while she insisted on the long pants of the winter, still. But the tears in the eyes of the 10-year-old did not last long when he saw the other kids, all in their winter garb. And all of them had the proud, three-colored rosette in their buttonholes, and all knew by heart the most famous Petofi poem written for the occasion of March 15, 1848. They could not really comprehend the day's significance, the 100 years that had passed since, and the two world wars, one of which had been affecting their young lives as well. These barely teenaged children could only feel the pride of being a Hungarian, that the National Anthem on that day is more festive than on other days, that the message of the most famous poems of Petofi had a more urgent tone that was valid for all ages and eras.

The inhabitants of the Colony must have all had similar thoughts when only after 8 years of the 100th. anniversary of the 1848 Freedom Fight, were recalling the painful days of the 1956 Freedom Fight and Revolution.

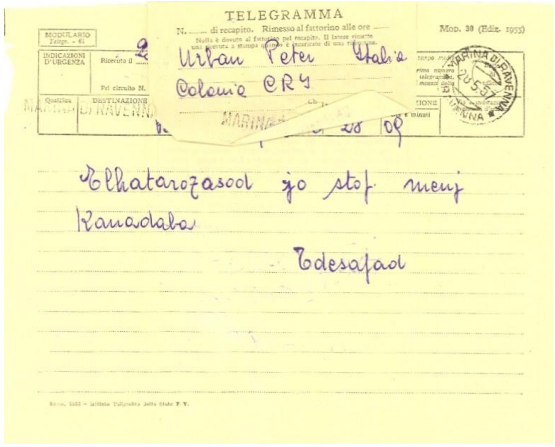
The waiting for some news continued, while some in the Colony had tried to find an occasional job in the local community. Peter and his new friend, Mike, had found in the nearby fishing village a small family store whose front sign must have survived many tens of years. With their rudimentary Italian they have convinced the proprietor to have the store sign repainted. The owner was the most surprised when he went out to the street with them to examine the rather beat up sign and consider the necessity of the offer. So, they have begun their task for which they had no knowledge or experience whatsoever. The job which had lasted 3 days did not seem at all long, when compared to the speed of the other work projects in the village. The two fresh paint artists had walked the daily 4 km's, there and back, always passing by a couple of seaside villas being constructed by Italian workers. Somehow it always looked as if these workers were on their lunch break, coffee break or afternoon siestas. But even if they were actually working, they always waved to Peter and his friend and implored them to „Piano, piano..." take it easy, don't rush, the job will wait for you. In other words, the foreign painters had taken on the local work moral, so that the painting of the store sign, consisting of two words „Pescheria Nonni", lasted 3 whole days!

Their wage was 5,000 lire for each, which then was the equivalent of 9 dollars. However, the money from the Nonni family had assumed historical perspectives in the lives of the two Hungarians ,then, as this was their first, ever, money earned in the free West!.

The weeks became months from the time passed at the orphans' resort when a larger group, being offered to settle in Australia accepted and finally left the Colony. In a few weeks the first letters and postcards had arrived from this group, relating their trip that took them more 5 days by several air flights to reach their new home! The ones still in the Colony had chosen Canada, as that was by then the only country willing to have them. Peter made his choice based on the not very scientific criterion by looking at the map and compared the relative distances of the two continents - from Budapest!

Canada was closer.

From his childhood readings he had recalled the red uniformed Canadian Mountain Police, the huge spread of the land across the North American continent, the terrible winters that were worse even those of Sweden. There was one last letter from his benefactor at the BBC, encouraging him, congratulating him on choosing Canada, because „for a young man that is the best choice in 1957. Old Europe is a much more difficult place, we have unemployment in Britain, just go on to Canada." He managed to notify his parents back home of his decision to emigrate to Canada and his dad sent back a telegram agreeing.


TELEGRAMMA

Urban Peter Italia
Colonie CR4

Elhatarozasod jo stop menj
Kanadaba

Udesapad

Dad's telegram before departing for Canada: "your decision is good."

The last farewell, May 1957. The 19. room inhabitants in the Colony, from left to right, top line: Endre Tompos, Gyula Ujvari, Endre Besznyak, Peter Urban, Mihaly Gergely, bottom line: Janos Balint, Istvan Repasi, Jozsef Toth, Janos Losich (Pixi)

ARRIVAL IN THE NEW WORLD

Quebec City, Canada, June 30,1957

The long train was full of Hungarian refugees, coming from several camps in Italy, transporting them to Le Havre, France, where a bit aged, but newly painted ocean liner was waiting for them.

While everyone was excited that finally they are on their way to the new homeland, leaving the continent proved to be very emotional to most, as they had tears in their eyes, realizing that, now, their lives are definitely and drastically changing.

The Italian registered ASCANIA made just one more stop as they have left Le Havre, before charging the open Atlantic, briefly mooring in Southampton and taking on British emigrants, bound for Canada. Peter was standing near the main bridge in the early morning darkness, when had heard the first really British English, which was so very different from the English that was attempted to be taught by a couple of Italian language teachers, just before they were leaving for Canada (with very poor results). Shortly they were on their way.

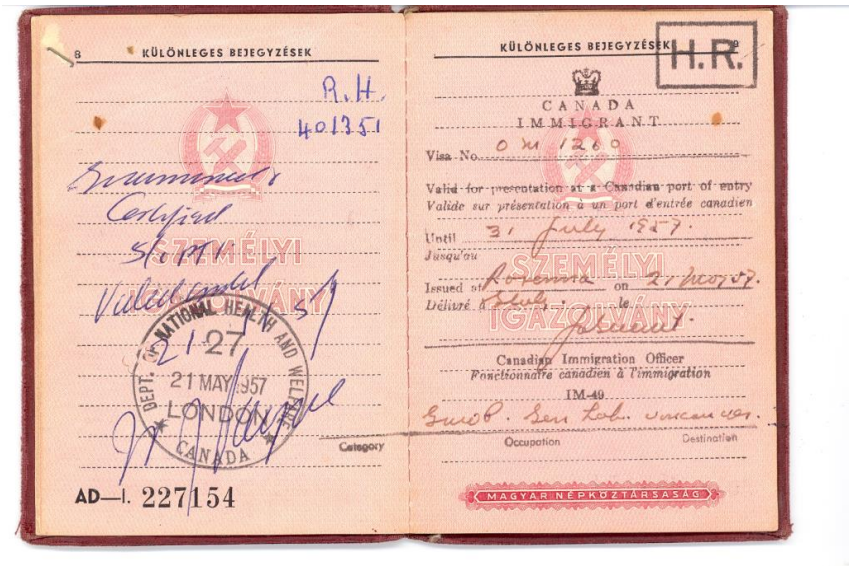
Most passengers were present for breakfast that morning in the main dining hall, but as they were heading out to the open sea and the waves were becoming increasingly huge, for most, the voyage had become a new experience that they just as soon not have had! By lunch-time less than half of the passengers were present for the meal and by dinnertime, only a handful of the nearly 400 on board were brave enough to even think about eating. Peter had taken a few oranges to his seriously ill friend, with whom he had become friends since Melence, but the poor soul was just lying on his bunk bed with the greenest of faces, and wanted to die.The next few days were pure hell for most of the passengers.

They could not eat, became weak, and the waves of the ocean were not getting calmer. It was taking the better part of 6 or 7 days by the time when most passengers have

somehow acclimatized themselves to the ever-present swaying and dared to show up on deck. Then on the ninth day they caught glimpses of the rather big chunks of ice formations as they were floating by in the mouth of the St.Lawrence where their ship was now steaming to its destination. While it was towards the end of June, the passengers, seeing the ice floats, were expecting the worst as they were getting ready for the June 30th arrival. Every conceivable warm clothing they could find in their meager luggage they put on, including heavy winter socks to brave the docking in Quebec City, it seemed they would be landing on the North Pole!

By the time they have arrived in the early morning hours, the thermometers of the Port signaled near 85 F!. Added to this was a humidity index that made the 85 much worse in terms of comfort.

The arrival formalities were conducted still on the ship, they were given temporary id cards, documents. The Hungarian refugees were sorted out according to profession and need for labor in the various parts of the country, and then train tickets were handed out and finally everybody received 5 dollars.



Peter's Entry Visa and destination in Canada. (in his Hungarian ID booklet)

Peter was directed to Vancouver, given train and meal tickets that were valid for several days and in his i.d. card they wrote „General labor". He thanked them and asked the immigration officer where this Vancouver actually was in Canada. The obliging Canadian led him to a huge wall map and showed him the city on the foremost Western part of Canada. In answer to his question they have explained that, by and large, Vancouver is as far away from Quebec City, as Quebec City is from... Budapest!

The very moment within which he had decided that he will not go „that far", that is „farther" even from Budapest than Quebec, came back to haunt him for many, many years. Every time he realized that he made a hasty and unwise decision in such a fateful situation. If he knew what were to become the result of this quick decision, surely then he would have accepted it. However, he had declared, almost heroically, that he would rather not go to Vancouver. They accepted, without a word his decision, received his 5 dollars, and informed him that he was to stay in Quebec, there is no other alternative. They offered him temporary shelter in the sailors' dormitory at the Port until he found a job and living quarters.

He had a quick farewell with his new friends from the various camps in Europe, who were sent to various cities of Canada and looked for his new living quarters in the Port. He was quickly assigned a top bunk in the dormitory and within minutes he was climbing the steep road to the old center of the city which was just above the port, high up a hill.

This was the summer's busiest long weekend, both from the Canadian and American side, and the French-Canadian city was one of the most popular on the continent. Huge luxury cars were sparkling in the summer heat, throngs of people everywhere, shops, parks, streets. There was noticeable joy and happiness on the people's faces, music blared from the cars, rock and roll was just coming into vogue that summer of 1957.

Peter had no destination point, but had already made some specific short-range plans back on the ship before disembarking. It was not difficult to assess the possible skills and talents that he had to offer, but even if he had any marketable skill the lack of language would have rendered these unmarketable. Lack of both English and French meant the pursuit of an occupation which required no speaking or writing.

His only consolation was remembering the famous stories of (mostly American) millionaires who had started with nothing and through perseverance and a little bit of luck made it to the top, often becoming fabulously wealthy. If on this first day of his new country, a hot and humid day, he was not dreaming of millions, an inner force was pushing him towards the most elegant part of town, until he found himself in front of the famous Chateau Frontenac. One quick look at the hotel and the doorman, who looked like a colonel in full army gear, was enough to discourage him of trying his luck there. But opposite the hotel, on the other side of the corner of the square stood a very elegant restaurant, called the Old Homestead.

The Old Homestead restaurant, side street staff entrance, visited in 2005, after 48 years.

Awkwardly, but with some gusto he had entered through the main entrance and a well-dressed, bearded, smiling man rushed towards him, with what looked like a bunch of files in his hand, and said something which did not sound English or Italian. Peter tried to muster at least some of the English words he had learned.

„Hallo, I...me...want job, I make...good work."

The Greek owner, who spoke only Greek and French, took a good look at the entrepreneur and without any ceremony he had nodded to follow him. They went directly to the kitchen at the back through the happily chatting and eating crowd of people. The man put a large apron on Peter, led him to a huge sink full of dirty pots and pans.

„OK, you start now." said the Greek.

He never even asked his name. The three young chefs were also so busy that they could not devote any time to the newcomer. The task seemed simple enough. When he had finished washing the big pots, the waitresses were already showing him how to sort out the used dishes brought in from the dining hall, how to feed them into the monstrous washing

machine at one end, how to rack them up when the freshly washed and steaming plates and glasses came out the other end. Within hours a certain routine established itself, much like in some wholesale factory. Peter had to smile when he thought of his dad, often admonishing him because he was reluctant to help his mother at home washing-up the few plates after their meal! Well, there was some washing-up to do now!

Was this 19-year-old, on a new continent, without language or skill, able to create and sustain an existence?

Fresh off the boat, the young immigrant, in spite of his youth was not unfamiliar with physical work. The fifties in Hungary did not allow too many young people to escape hard work. His mother's wages were enough only for the basic necessities. What his father could send home from his various jobs in the country was also too little to clothe and school the kids at home. It was evident that if he wanted to go to school in the fall in decent clothes and shoes, he had to earn this during the summer. This is how he got a job far away from home, in the newly built „socialist" city of Sztalinvaros.

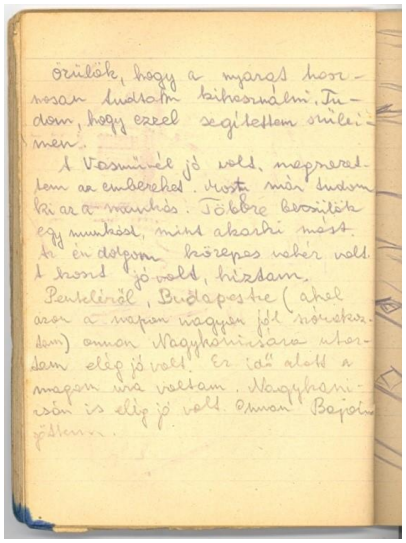
The communist leaders had planned to change the country from a predominantly agricultural land to an industrial power. The economic base for this scheme was to be able to „purchase" (at high prices) from the Soviet Union raw materials, then turning these into finished products „selling" them back(cheaply) to the Soviets. Buying dearly and selling cheaply was the most blatant exploitation of all the Eastern European countries in the fifties.

The reigning government was ready for any sacrifice to make this insane idea successful. People came from every part of the country to the town named after Stalin, because there was work and the pay was better than anywhere else. So Peter had signed up and became water boy for a team of transporters. The team worked hard, 12 hours a day, with very few days off. They emptied freight ships on the Danube, railway cars, transported cement and bricks and so on.

The boy, still in his puberty, had started learning from the school of life, perhaps somewhat too early in his life, how men had lived off manual labor. He had learned to smoke as the others did in the brigade, heard the first curse words and vulgarisms and saw up close how men, far from their families had behaved, often unfaithful to their wives. He was growing up quickly, indeed.

The weekly good-times had started often even before the week was over, at times his water container would be filled with beer or wine from taverns on the way.

This was how he spent the summer of 1951, from the first day of the school recess to the last days of the summer vacation.



Page from his diary in 1951:" …I got to love people. Now I know what it means to be a worker. I appreciate them more than any other…"

The following summer he had arrived as an experienced „worker" in Sztalinvaros and secured a job as surveyors' helper, carrying measuring sticks and equipment for engineers. This was a real promotion, but alas less money although he was now a year older.

In the following year, 1953, a new „socialist dream city" was emerging in the North, Kazincbarcika. So, the summer school vacation was now in a new venue, even much farther from his home. Here, too, engineers' helper was the job, now with hands on experience. He lived in workers' barracks, his window opened up to the courtyard of the adjacent forced labor camp, housing political prisoners, building the „socialist dream". Every dawn began with the guards' deafening shouting as they were organizing the ranks of the prisoners, getting them ready for the day's work. Among these abused souls were priests, university professors, merchants, former army officers, judges, the so-called undesirables, class enemies who supposedly threatened the dictatorship of the proletariat!

This is how he spent three summer vacations. But during school year there were some chances to earn some pocket money, too, thus helping the family to cope. The neighbors all relied on him to carry in the wood, coal in the fall that was just dumped in the front of their homes. He had an ongoing job at the house of one his well-off friends, too, pumping full with water, once a week, the water tank of their bathroom. The weekly 4 hours of pumping by hand assured him that he could continue his favored sport: swimming and water polo. Since his hometown had no indoor pool for the winter, their practice took them on Sundays, by train, to Pecs, some 100 km's from Baja to the university's swimming pool.

The junior water polo team, Bajai Honved, 1954-front row: +Csere Robi, +Bánhidy Tilu, Galántai „Guszti", back: Urbán Péter, Szepessy Kálmán, Krikovszki Józsi, Szepessy Laci.

These all-day trips came free with train tickets, but food was the responsibility of each participant. The simple, one dish, home cooked meals could not be brought on trips like these, and cold provisions were too expensive for his mother to buy. But with the pumping job he earned enough each week that allowed the purchase of cold cuts and bread for these trips.

In spite of the many months of idleness in the various refugee camps and the hard choice that had to be made on disembarking the boat, it seemed incredible the ease, or perhaps the sheer luck with which, on his first day, at the first chance he could find work! There was no time to be afraid, to be lamenting the difficulties of a new world, strange language, the frustrations that should have surely followed within a short time. If there ever was the first step toward the BIG DREAM, toward life here on the new continent, then right there, in the old town-center of Quebec, in that restaurant, it was taken.

Within a couple of hours, when the chefs found a little break, they checked out the tall, skinny guy from some strange land. With various sign language, and some words they could share they found out where the new dishwasher came from. Once they knew he has from Hungary, he immediately became a hero! The most famous Hungarian soccer team of all time, in 1954, had carved into the hearts of ardent fans admiration everywhere in their world by coming second of all nations, barely losing to Germany in the World Cup final.

Peter was celebrated as if he were a member of that famous team. And the 1956 Freedom Fight and Revolution had substantially increased people's admiration for the tiny country and her people.

The chefs had immediately begun work and within minutes they had Peter sit in front of a long table laden with every imaginable food, most of which was totally strange to the newcomer. After the so-called fruits of the sea appetizer, boiled lobster claws, and what looked like raw, bloody slices of beef was served. Peter was able to eat some of these strange delicacies, but others he had to leave due to their bizarre consistencies, not well known to a Hungarian lad on his first day in North America.

But the friendship was instant and warm, which made these first hours on the job very pleasant. The hours were flying by, as more new customers came in for supper and everybody was busy with their tasks. When the last guest was gone, Peter still had the big pots to do, and towards one a.m. in the morning the owner showed him how to sweep and wash up the main dining room while he was busy with the cash register.

By 2 a.m. the newcomer had everything ready, but the owner insisted that he stay the night. They went behind the kitchen, to the storage room where from potato sacks and blankets a makeshift bed was made, being in July the cool room was a welcome change from the hot and steamy kitchen.

There was just one more “new” discovery left on this, for him, historical, day: in the storage room there were boxes and boxes of Coca Cola! The communist government and party in Hungary in the fifties had tried with every means of propaganda to depict the “imperialist West” as the devil. It meant to throw at it the worst possible criticism, whether in politics or culture. Thus, the capitalists had used Coca Cola to drug and stupefy the poor working people. Well, Peter had found himself, alone, with boxes of Coca Cola, of which he had heard only bad things, that is, from a teenager’s point of view, exciting things, but never ever tried! He could not resist the temptation and opened a bottle, but after just one gulp from the strange tasting, lukewarm liquid he had enough. Poor imperialists of the West, he thought, you will never succeed with such a dismal tasting “drug”.

In less than 24 hours, the European, “landed immigrant”, said his document, had found, according to his qualifications, employment, friendly co-workers and even without knowing the amount, a salary, he apparently had room and board: what more could an East European guy have hope for in the New World in 1957?

He had tried in the next few weeks to get in to several Canadian Universities via the Immigration Office in Quebec via interpreters, but there were no answers, not at least until he was in Quebec City. Universities and colleges in Quebec had declined to take him on, with full room and board, without tuition fees. They had advised him to try other provinces.

In the meantime, days were spent at the Old Homestead restaurant in the French-Canadian capitol, from 3 pm until closing, for $25 weekly, plus all the delicious food he could eat and even a place to sleep if and when he wanted.

On his days off, Mondays, he was off to see the few English language films which were showing in the original, with subtitles for the French.

During his short stay in Quebec City only one embarrassing incident happened that remained in memory for a long time. On the second Sunday, before his afternoon shift at the restaurant, he went to mass in one of most beautiful churches. The huge church was full of worshippers, a magnificent organ led a truly amazing choir. He could only find standing room at the back. After the sermon, all of a sudden, he had found in front of him a collecting box with a tiny bell attached to it, held by a straight backed and serious looking gentleman. The little bell that rang was sudden, but he had realized instantly that he should now produce some coins and place them in the box. However, only some banknotes were in his pocket that represented to the immigrant a rather big value, his stipend from the work in the restaurant, without any coins.

He could not do this, could not permit himself to take any of those dollar bills and donate them to the church! The man with the collecting box had now stepped closer to him and the little bell had signaled that he should give some money. Embarrassed, but he shook his head. The determined collector was not deterred and shook the little bell once more. With a red face, Peter did not react and the man passed on with a scornful face.

He felt ashamed and did not dare to go to church again in that city.

After some weeks he had said good bye to the Greek immigrants' restaurant. There was an emotional farewell from his co-workers, who had retained rather bizarre memories of him. They smiled at his method of learning English during working hours by attaching a new list of words to his long dishwashing machine and reciting these words, loudly, each day. They have tried to understand his country's political history and the recent events in 1956 during their coffee breaks, which he had presented with a mixture of English and Italian words. They understood his reason for moving on so that he could be exposed to a totally English-speaking environment, it was his choice. Ottawa, however, did not seem right to them, but they did not mention this to him.

There was one important visit he had to make before getting on his train to Ottawa, in the city of his Canadian arrival. As in many other days, he sought out the most open space in the Port, where the huge ocean liners were docking, and sat on the most comfortable piles of ships' rope. His eyes were searching, in vain, for the continent he had left behind, so long ago it seemed, in the far distance. Searching for the country which was once again surrounded by barbed wire and minefields, shot away from the world and the revolution's victorious two weeks. These were painful and homesick hours, the acknowledgement of stark reality, that he was thousands of miles away from his family, friends, from all that gave him his identity so far. To bid good bye to Quebec City, which was his first home on the new continent, in Canada, seemed now almost as bitter as walking out of his hometown on that rainy November day.

He recalled his walks here among the big ships during the mornings, before he went off to work, how often he was seriously considering sneaking up on a Europe bound ship and hiding as a stow away! The loneliness, the strange environment, the daily frustration with the language, and that which was the most difficult to fight, the homesickness that all immigrants feel in the beginning, that had caused many to despair. Those without families and friends had a tougher time in the initial stages of a strange country.

Maybe Ottawa would help to get out of this dark mood!

Ottawa City.

At the railway station he confidently asked for a ticket to „Ottawa", but it was a struggle for the proper pronunciation of the word. „AA- TOVA" repeated the unfriendly French-Canadian cashier, which was not even close to the Hungarian, that is, phonetically pronounced, word.

The new language, particularly its pronunciation had caused great difficulty for most immigrants. The more sensitive souls were maybe embarrassed, or slightly peeved, but many had reacted aggressively in delicate situations, and for them melding into society had become quite difficult. Their language frustrations have exaggerated the many cultural differences between Europeans and North Americans. Some have rebelled against making advances in their language skills over the direst necessities. Refused to change their lifestyles, were reluctant to even try new dishes. In the extreme cases some looked down on anything that was not somehow „European" in style, taste or presentation.

From salted butter to the huge, but very weak coffee everything seemed second rate and unacceptable. The accumulated frustrations and the refusal to accept local customs and forms like slowly administered poison was affecting some immigrants. The worst conflicts were between the so called „old Canadians", immigrants who had already spent some years in the new country and the „new Canadians", folks who had just arrived.

Like most immigrants in Canada or the USA, in a relatively short time, every diligent and ambitious newcomer had achieved a fairly high standard of living. Thus the „old Canadians", who had most of the initial difficulties behind them, were justly criticizing the grumbling and impatience of the newcomers about accepting life in society. The misplaced refugees of the second world war who made up the largest part of „old Canadians", unlike the refugees of the 1956 Revolution, often spent long years in camps until they could get visas and fares paid for by some charitable organization.

However, during the splendid train ride from Quebec to Ottawa, problems of assimilation into Canadian society did not cause any mental anguish to the 19-year-old. In a few short weeks, this was his second ambitious undertaking in his new homeland, moving to Ottawa, to be with English speaking natives! He had gotten off the train with high expectations. Since the station was in the heart of the city, he had a great chance to do his first sightseeing having but a small bag all his luggage.

Other than the majestic Parliament buildings, the center was quite a disappointment, it resembled more of a small, but up and coming provincial town than the capitol of an immense country. While passing through Rideau Street there were a few dozen or so people in, what seemed, a large empty store, listening to an intense looking gentleman, with an impressive baritone, obviously making some sort of political pitch. Peter could not have understood a single word but the speech seemed convincing and emphatic that was delivered by the gaunt and straight-backed orator.

This was his first, if passive, participation in a free, public and democratic opinion expression. Peter happened to be witnessing a campaign speech preceding the 1957 fall elections, where he had experienced, with awe, the participants' various and amazing reactions to the statements of John Diefenbaker. There were catcalls, too, amid the enthusiastic applauders, cynical remarks and laughter, people in pairs arguing with each other while the speech was being delivered. All kinds of behavior! Only one thing was missing, not a policeman or secret service man to be seen anywhere.

Not the center of the capitol, not the splendid stores on Rideau Street, not the elegant hotels that grabbed Peter's attention in these first hours of his arrival in Ottawa.

The unfolding, live democracy, people's open expression of their likes or dislikes as they have reacted to the politician's words was what seemed so utterly wonderful!

This is, then, a free country!

He could not have known at that time, that the sympathetic orator was to become Canada's prime minister that fall, and that several years later he would have two personal meetings with Mr. Diefenbaker. One of those meetings happened in a hotel in Saskatoon, as he was having an early morning breakfast. John Diefenbaker called over from his table, asking to join him if he was alone. The eventual winner of several elections and having been prime minister more than once, was just sitting there without any bodyguards, inviting a total stranger to his table! Then and there he had to tell John Diefenbaker the event from Ottawa in the first hours of his arrival, which deeply touched the former prime minister and warmly shook the „new Canadian's" hand.

A rooming house, full of Hungarians, was run by the „old Canadian", Mrs. Mitro, was his new home. The Mitro family had immigrated to Canada even before the war, the

children were all born in the new country, but to the family's merit, they all spoke Hungarian. This was even more appreciated by Peter and his friends when subsequently met other Hungarian families whose Canadian born children often did not speak a word, or very little, of their elder's native language.

So the parents who managed to teach their Canadian born children their ancestors' tongue were held in great esteem as it was a very difficult and frustrating task.

The Mitro house gave home to mostly single, young men and it was easier here to wrestle with problems of loneliness and the strange, new ways of society. On the other hand, it was to everyone's disadvantage to be with Hungarians when the English language demanded daily practice. While in their simple work places like cleaning, dishwashing, construction there was some limited chance to practice English, their free times should have been passed with English speakers. Fortunately, the Hungarian rooming house was only a short stop as he had found new employment immediately, in the Royal Ottawa Sanatorium, quite far from the Mitro house. As an „experienced" dishwasher and general kitchen helper he had started to work in the wing of the ambulatory patients, those recovering from tuberculosis.

The Royal Ottawa Sanatorium, August 1957

He had asked for and received temporary quarters, a room near the power plant of the hospital, which he shared with an older Ukrainian immigrant working in the plant. The man spoke almost zero English, but insisted telling Peter his life story every night, in Ukrainian, when he had found out that Peter knew some Russian from his school back in Hungary.

Fortunately, they only met at night, when under the excuse of fatigue he could escape most of the Ukrainian's endless monologues.

His work had become much more interesting. The ambulatory patients came to have their meals in the large dining hall, all dressed up, which was portioned out by two immigrant women and served by Peter. The meals had arrived from the main kitchen on steam containers on wheels.

Within days a rather pleasant and enjoyable relationship developed between him and most patients, who appreciated the young man's effort and enthusiasm. This work had the human touch, encouraged the development of relationships with people, particularly with people on the mend from illness.

He learned, and was encouraged, much to his surprise, to call most of the patients by their first names, regardless of age or sex. It was already difficult to do away with the polite form, an essential element of most languages, and now on top of that he was to call these ladies and gentlemen by their first names like "Jim" or "Mary". He had kept on trying for a while with the Mr. Jim's and the Miss Mary's, but the patients have insisted, with a few exceptions, that he is to call them by their first names, that soon enough he was used to this straight forward, natural form of communication, not well practiced anywhere in Europe.

Back in the camp in Melence he met and befriended a young man from the nearby village to Baja, eventually becoming chess partners. Mike had been sent straight to Ottawa, after landing in Quebec. He had worked at construction awhile, but the extremely cold Ottawa winter had chased him to the much less profitable, but warm work environment, the Sanatorium. That made it possible for the pair to seek and find their own flat, close to their workplace.

They have rented the half basement of a simple Canadian house, right next to the washing machine and not far from the furnace. The "flat" consisted of a large bed, a wooden dresser, and they paid 3 dollars weekly, each. But the rented place was close enough for getting to work on foot and it was spartan but warm. There was entertainment, too, besides work and that was provided by Mrs. Sutherland's weekly language class, in a classroom of the local secondary school. The workplace and self-study brought some progress in this field, but the difficult English pronunciation made real conversation still difficult. Daily language frustrations were plentiful. When they were convinced that they have made some progress, some incident would happen to take their self-confidence away in the field of the mysteries of English pronunciation.

Like it happened one Sunday afternoon, when Peter caught some little kids of the neighbors peeking through their basement window. Forever ready for any practice opportunity for the use of English and always very grateful when native Canadians were to be engaged in conversation, especially kids who are always sincere and well meaning! With great courage he had walked up to the little window, mustering all his language skills and with a broad, encouraging smile he said something like:

“Halo, kiidsz, verr iiiz juur fadderr?” to which the kids answered in unison,

“Ejjjh???”

Peter’s lips and tongue now in their most coordinated position possible, very slowly, carefully formatting the treacherous and foreigners gravest sound enemy, the “r”s, softening their rough edges, he had repeated the question.

The little kids looked at each other, then the oldest and wisest said:

“We don’t speak French!”

Unavoidably, situations much more humiliating happened due to lack of language skills. On one occasion, when Mike and Peter were traveling on a local bus, they observed that those passengers wanting to be let off at their stops have signaled to the driver by pushing a little button near the door. They also saw that getting off was from the rear. Confident in these important bits of familiarity, the new Canadian passengers coming from the rural areas of Hungary not really having been on any public transportation in the fifties, now felt confident and signaled to the driver that they would like get off the bus at the next stop. The bus stopped and they have patiently waited for the door to open. Since it did not, Peter had pressed, once more, now longer and firmer the little button for the driver. The driver looked up in the rear-view mirror and with just a bit raised voice he had said something to them. The door still would not open.

By then the driver was gesticulating with both hands, what’s more now a passenger or two also got into shouting, but the boys still could not figure out the puzzle of opening the door.

The driver then, after pulling roughly on his hand brake, had rushed towards the rear with aggressive steps, and then stepped onto the last step of the door and as if by magic, the door opened. The driver’s less than complimentary remarks were still audible as they were rushing away into darkness.

There was no other solution; they had to start a formal language training course, designed specifically for new immigrants. The evening course led by the very kind Mrs. Sutherland was populated by a rather motley group of new immigrants. From the 50 years old German engineer to the almost illiterate, young shepherd boy from Sicily, there were immigrants from every conceivable nation and age.

This multicultural group was to be thought by the ever smiling, patient and brilliant literature teacher, Mrs. Sutherland. This mixed background and nationality was the best asset of the class, as the pupils had no other choice but to communicate with each other in one language only, English. Here, nobody was afraid of making a mistake in pronunciation, or committing a grave grammatical error, everybody was in his or her natural awkwardness for the ordeal of communicating in English. And Mrs. Sutherland achieved results, because most of her charges had enriched themselves to the tune of their own language aptitudes and openness.

The fall season came and that also meant for all Hungarians at home and in foreign lands, that one year passed since the proudest and also the most tragic autumn, the one in 1956.

The Hungarian newspapers, written and printed in Canada, were also available in Ottawa and after Sunday mass they would buy them at the Hungarian church. These became their sources of information from home and the world. Soon the papers were calling all Hungarians in the West to get ready for big protest demonstrations on October 23, the anniversary of the Revolution, in front the various Soviet Embassies. Every able Hungarian was there, with candles in hand at the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa. Peter and his friends came with several bottles of red ink, which were tossed at the building's walls. There was some mild police interference, but not before the building was full of the ugly red marks, reminding the world of the brutal and murderous assault by the Red Army on Budapest a year before.

These demonstrations took place in every major Western city, with exactly the same results, bringing the world's attention back to the events a year before.

The work in the sanatorium's serving kitchen was pleasant, particularly due the patients' kind and appreciative disposition; however, it has been a nagging concern for Peter that after all he worked in the ward of patients suffering from tuberculosis. He would not even dare write to his parents about it, since his right kidney was removed in Budapest just 2 years prior, due to an infection with TBC. One can live with one kidney for many years, counseled the famous surgeon, Professor Babits, who during the revolution became the Minister of Health of the short-lived revolutionary government. But without any kidney, in the fifties, meant death. The salary in the sanatorium was also lower than out there in the open "market", so he had decided to seek a new job.

By the time their first, really cold winter had arrived around the beginning of December Peter was already working in the newly built Westgate Shopping center on the edge of town.

The Simpson Sears department store had a large cafeteria which shoppers and staff frequented, and the “experienced” young man was hired in the kitchen of this cafeteria, ran by the huge local bakery, Morrison Lamothe. In addition to dishwashing he had been given extra duties, the daily collection of all the garbage bins throughout the store, daily, before the night cleaning brigade had arrived.

The kitchen chef was German, his assistant Portuguese, the waitresses mostly French-Canadian women. The unofficial, but well known “second class” citizens and immigrants made up then, and even today, the serving-cleaning needs of Canadian society. And among these the poorly spoken newcomer Hungarian became the “last” man of the department store. However, it seemed like a promotion, that unlike in the previous job, here he was given every morning a freshly washed and starched white shirt, with not so stylish, but useful striped pants. These little perks counted a lot in the life of immigrants. However, those dirty nails on his hands were hopeless, full of tiny bits of food particles that seemed so difficult to clean, causing great vexation.

The staff of the cafeteria was friendly. They would have their morning coffees together, just before opening and it was impressive for Europeans to experience a uniform acceptance of everybody at the tables. No privileges or exceptions in terms of rank or position, everybody sat with anybody, everybody calling the others by their first names! At least at work, society was without pretenses and formalities.

Around Christmas of 1957, the season’s songs were being played non-stop during opening hours, among them many rock inspired Christmas songs. All that seemed so new and interesting, every experience, every new English word, every new custom, behavior, rock number had continually and incessantly evened the road toward assimilation into society. The initial difficulties and uncertainties, the real and imagined hurts had slowly, very slowly been softened, exchanged for the satisfaction of salaries earned from daily labor, the momentary joys of a successful English dialogue with someone. Just before Christmas the company running the cafeteria had organized a party for the employees. This was his first experience being a guest in a better Ottawa restaurant, served a splendid dinner by - other immigrants. Even Christmas gifts were given to each employee, a British Columbia commemorative silver dollar, the province where he was originally to be sent from the boat!

The first winter was approaching its end and Peter and his friends, young men in their most virile youth, when they had dared to entertain thoughts of making new friends, which really meant “going out” with girls.

He had a steady job, with a paycheck every two weeks that allowed him to purchase, on a 12-month credit arrangement, a brand new dark blue suit, white shirt and tie. He was happy to take home the new treasures, his first significant purchases in the new world. The new immigrants' grapevine had suggested that the best place to meet girls is the Saturday nights dances at the local YMCA. The last dance he could recall was in his high school, oh so long ago, on another continent, in a faraway land, and even farther epoch. Then the youth was going to these dances in a rather old-fashioned way, according to old traditions, both in clothing and behavior. The boys in festive, dark suits, shirt and tie, and cute little dress the girls. Hungary and the other Eastern European countries were carefully shielded from the influences of the "evil" capitalist states in the West, including individual expression and style.

While in the Ottawa YMCA the young guys were comfortably rocking in their jeans and shirts, at home boys of the same age were sweating in their heavy suits and ties.

Peter and his friends were just amazed when a guy would just sidle up to a girl and casually take her by the hand and within seconds they would be furiously jiving away, a form of dance totally unknown to these immigrant boys. However, they recalled the English Dictionaries and language books, written decades before, how these were emphatically teaching the task to be performed:

"We approach the chosen lady, and with slight bow and polite demeanor, we "ask her for a dance "in a clear voice and appropriate manner, thusly: May I please?"- repeated to himself Peter, at least for the tenth time, being very careful of his accent and pronunciation, being very grateful that the verbal plea did not have a single "r" in it, which had been the downfall of so many foreigners, the sure give-away that the speaker is from "some other country". In the best of cases one was to be a French Canadian, in the worst the foreigner was from some unknown land who was displaced due to the war: a DP!!

The friends were already nervous on this first daredevil move towards "fitting" into society, that is the company of young men and women, due to their accented English, the lack of their dance repertoire caused even more worry. An even more obvious and ominous problem was, that did not even occur to them at first, their clothing was totally out of place and painfully unique in a 1958 YMCA dance hall.

One can imagine what made-for-the-stage appearance was created by the three young immigrants, on the very peak of rock and roll, in their dark blue suits and ties, stiff and obviously awkward, when they entered at opening time, just after 8 PM in the dancehall.

Other than a couple of dozen young ladies and a few *chaperons* there were no others in the hall, as it turned out the local boys had started wondering in, nonchalantly little later. This time period gave an excellent chance to the girls and their mothers to observe and scrutinize the three funeral directors, standing in a corner and talking with each other. Even though they have felt uneasy at the beginning, over time they have ceased to remain the object of curiosity, while the dancing was starting to liven up. It was entirely certain to all the ladies present that none of them could possibly become the victim of any attempted terror action, emanating from either one of the other strange looking characters.

Finally, it was Peter that was able to overcome the inertia they all felt, spiced up by his ever-present compulsion to prove himself. He felt confident enough, so he thought, that after a thorough summing up the situation, he had ascertained by quick looks over and over that the chosen lady had absolutely no chance of being asked for a dance by any self-respecting young man that evening, our hero had confidently stridden up to the lonely wallflower and said:

“May I please?” sounded the expression, mainly to be found in the vocabularies of those studying British literature, but not anywhere in Canada in 1958, in the Northern region of the New World.

Perhaps it was his determined steps, the resolute expression on his face, maybe the lips that were so stubbornly resistant to full opening, that would allow the oft repeated expression to come out properly, but if not any of these then the unimaginable fact, that one of these Mars inhabitants had zeroed in on her of all people, who had not even danced once that evening, and as a result of this impertinence may not dance at all, that was more than bearable!

Since she did not believe her ears, or she did not understand the antiquated expression, struggling between anger and incredulity, she could only hiss through her teeth:

“What?”

Even though Peter had guessed that there was not much chance for the desired dance, in his last desperate moment he had to attempt just once more the well-practiced phrase. Failing to give it one more tries, when his two friends have not even made their first move with which to take the first steps to fit into Canadian society, who were so attentively watching their heroic friend and those sitting around the chosen lady watching the unfolding drama, it was simply not possible.

The chance of failing, again, had flashed in his mind for a moment, but the hopes and investments that they have made to get that far, the plans made in the basement flat, the clothing they have bought were stronger. Now going for broke just then, so that the lonely nights and weekends, the movies houses with the 3 films in one show they have frequented, would again fill their free time?

Bowing just ever so deeper than before, and with a shade less volume in his voice, and a little more humility in his eye, Peter had repeated the plea:

"May I please?" and now he had nodded pointedly towards the dance floor, so that the plea would be well understood by this beauty.

It seemed like eternity until this insulted lady had found her faculties and with the look of the coldest Canadian winter, the indifference of the Canadian tundra, and the Brit colonials' politeness, she uttered only:

"No, thanks!"

By then the sweat beads had pearled up on his face as he was creeping back to the safe sanctuary of his friends. They all knew that much more had transpired here than simply a gal's refusal to dance on a particular evening. All reverie had become insignificant behind the more than one year that was spent away from their homes, and all things familiar. While up to now the effort was to establish a modicum of existence, this mostly restrained the testing of the boys' feelings. Now they had to admit that the much-desired melting into Canadian society and the potential rewards that this would bring will not happen for some time. The oddly dressed and accented strangers, without their own "cars", will not easily gain the graces of young, local women.

On the tobacco farm, 1958 August

By the summer, the news spread in the immigrant community that in the south part of Ontario there are huge tobacco fields, whose harvest in late summer could present a major new source of income. The terribly hard job of tobacco picking lasts for 4-6 weeks but the pay is exceptional, too.

The tobacco farmers were, for the most part, former Hungarian land cultivators, peasants who came around the turn of the century and were particularly successful growing tobacco in Canada, mostly situated in the area of Tillsonburg and Delhi, Ontario.

The three friends had given up their secure but poor paying, bleak prospect jobs and traveled to the tobacco farms area. Here, in one of the small town's main square an informal "recruiting" center was set up on a given Saturday morning. It was a real market place for human beings! The local farmers had kept on coming and after an intensive scrutiny, where the judgment had to be made at what the naked eye saw from a physical point of view and after a brief bargaining, which was easy as almost everyone spoke Hungarian, for the daily stipend, the hiring was done.

The farmer wanted only their first names and within minutes they were on the back of a pickup truck speeding to one of the many farms in the area.

Their quarters were prepared in a part of the huge barn, furnished with simple wooden furniture and hay filled mattresses on iron beds. Shortly they were called to dinner which was served on long, covered tables, under huge chestnut trees in the farmer's courtyard. The "gang" as they were now called consisted of 6 young men. During their short Canadian stay, they have never experienced such a generous feast, vying with such a wedding feast that they had occasionally seen in the old country. Any delicacy that could be found and prepared by a well to do farmer in rural Canada with several experienced women chefs and that was steaming on the long table. The gang that to this point hadn't worked a single hour made a valiant effort to be up to snuff and had achieved an appreciable success putting away most of the food. Tastes and aromas, reminiscent of Hungary came to be savored, almost to the point of shedding a tear or two, after long months in refugees' camps and since over a year, in simple circumstances. The son of the farmer had sat with them, too, towards the end of the feast. Michael had a thick accent speaking Hungarian, he was Canadian born, but still managed to detail what was expected of the fresh farm hands.

The start of the tobacco picking season is always determined by the ripening of the so-called sandy leaves, near the ground. That year the start happened to be on a Sunday. Only the sandy leaves near the ground can be picked off the plant. As the higher leaves continue ripening, the pickers move slowly higher. During the harvest there are only workdays, without any breaks, except for steady rain. So next day the wake up will be at 5 am, breakfast starts at half past five, so they are on the fields some kilometers away by 7am.

"But in a few days the picked tobacco will be tied in bunches and placed on long sticks by the women, then wake up will be at 3 am so the tobacco laden sticks can be placed in the huge kiln-houses, for drying" continued Michael.

They didn't really understand all that, but after the sumptuous dinner and the brief outline as to what will follow in the next few days, they knew that there would be a great need for very rich and nourishing food to cope with work demands.

Their first night on the tobacco farm, near the peaceful, ruminating farm animals, with billions of shiny stars in the August sky could not be spoiled even by the prospect of the early morning call. So close to nature, in such a quiet and peaceful place was such a change for these young men, after months of rather crowded refugee camps and then very Spartan basic city life after their arrival in Canada.

Following the generous dinner, the night before, their breakfast was equally fitting and several farm matrons were asking them, one by one, whether they would like omelets from 4 or 6 eggs, with bacon, ham and cheese. By then the gang was getting just a little suspicious of all this attention and generosity! Shortly after breakfast they hopped up on the cart, pulled by a massive tractor and soon they arrived on the tobacco field. Each green tobacco line spread for up to a kilometer in length, as far as the eye could see.

Tobacco field, Tillsonburg, Ontario, Canada 1958

Michael had immediately occupied the first row in the field, bent to the ground and with a half circle of his right arm, he tore off the leaves of the tobacco plant. Then, still bent over, he stepped up to the next plant. Then the next and the next…

"You see, only the sandy leaves, the lowest ones you are allowed tear off…" he said looking at their faces for understanding, "…then as they ripen, we keep on moving up on the plant. By the end of the season, it will be much less demanding on your backs…" he promised. It seemed simple and logical for these young men, reared in the city.

The six tobacco pickers had occupied their rows and began to work. Behind them, a docile and "experienced" horse was pulling a wooden sled between the rows into which the collected, "sandy", tobacco leaves from under their left armpits were carefully placed.

"Don't break the leaves!" cautioned Michael.

They did not have to advance more than the picked sandy leaves of 10 tobacco plants, so that it can be stated that: they mastered tobacco picking. However, the continually bent backs had started to complain at each next plant, with each step they took towards these plants. After only a half an hour, while continually bending almost to the ground, the pickers believed they could not go on. But Michael was there and by example he was jumping into one or another's row, helping out, until somehow, miraculously they reached the end of their first row! At that point the six boys had just fallen to the ground, could only moan from the excruciating pain coming from their backs. Fresh water was brought by Michael and after a short rest they have started a new row.

Every step from now on was a painful maneuver, but goading each other on, the young and tenacious bodies, somehow, with many rests stops they lasted until noon, when Michael, literally picked them up one by one, and brought them back to the farmhouse. Again, a rich table was set up for them under the chestnut trees, but other than a few Spoonfuls of soup, they preferred just to lie in the shade. After an hour's rest, back to the cart and out to the fields. This struggle just to survive the day went on until 5 PM on their first day.

By the time they were back at the farm, they only had strength to wash up from the dust, sweat and the sticky sap from the broken tobacco stems, which dried and matted on their hairy arms, so much so that it simply could not be washed off by soap and water. Frankly, they could not care less about it.

Every part of their body was aching, especially their thighs and backs, so much, that none of them showed up for the evening meal. Within a short time, the whole gang was in deep slumber, awaking only for the pain caused by turning in their sleep.

If the unusual work seemed difficult and caused them pain on the first day, then the stiffness on awakening the following morning surpassed any such experience in their lives. One of the six had politely taken his leave that very morning, and the owner paid him fairly for his one day of work. The other five, overcoming the terrible pain, stubbornly began their second day of tobacco picking. They were still at the "sandy leaves" or sand lugs, as they were called by the farmer and they were still having the greatest pains with each step forward.

They were encouraging each other, singing even, and also cursing all those who smoked, blaming them for this inhuman, bestial work! Where did the effort come from after each step taken forward with a back bent almost to the level of the ground, row after tobacco row? They could not explain even today perhaps.

They had overcome the greatest physical challenge of their lives then, in the first days of the tobacco leaves' harvest. After the second Hungarian had given up and left on the third day, the rest had now stayed just out of spite and sheer bravado. In the meantime Michael had found three new pickers in the nearby town who were experienced, veteran farm hands who joined them and did their job without a word of complaint.

And as the bodies of the newly graduated farmhands adjusted to the physical demands, the muscle cramps abated and the task seemed easier. The veterans educated them on how they should shave their arms so that the sticky, gummy sap of the tobacco plant would not mat the hair on their arms.

Within days the muscles had adjusted, the body accepted and bore the daily punishment, the appetite returned. But by then the women had tied all the picked leaves on long, wooden stick which had to be racked in long, even lines in special places, called kiln-houses to dry. This was done on most mornings when they got up at 3am and emptied and refilled these kiln houses.

Tobacco drying kiln-houses, Tillsonburg, Ont. 1958

These simple, wooden, under-roof drying places, with heating inside, were constructed inside of vertical and horizontal beams, resembled more monkey cages than anything else. They had no stairs, ladders inside, while two stories high, the lads, balancing on the horizontal beams, like monkeys handed each other the tobacco laden stick which were placed 3-4 feet apart on the beams, right up to the roof. Only the bravest dared to climb up to the top, one bad move could have resulted in serious injury. On most days the morning program from 3am to 6am was this acrobatic exercise, followed by a generous breakfast and out to the fields. If there was no rain, they worked 7 days a week. Their wage was 25 dollars a day, with room and board included, as much as Peter's first *weekly* stipend in Quebec City!

As the tobacco was ripening, so did "ease" their daily effort, since the top leaves could now be picked without bending over. It was life's irony that the most difficult days of tobacco picking happened to be the very first days on the job.

Peter and the gang after several weeks in the country of the August summer in South Ontario were the color of chocolate, muscular and in top physical shape, had graduated possibly from the greatest physical challenge of their lives.

After a "tobacco picking" session…

At the end of the harvest the Hungarian tobacco grower was satisfied with the boys' work and paid them all in cash. Those who had survived the first days on the job had to be justifiably happy; their wage seemed like a small fortune. They had heard the stories about those who after many weeks of hard toil wagered all the money in horse races within hours, maybe the very day they were paid. But they had spent days deciding what to do with the money. It seemed they could always find work to look after their daily existence, but the one thing they thought was missing in their lives was the almighty automobile, which stood between happiness (girls) and frustration. Since they could not buy a reasonable car individually, even with the small "fortune" they owned, a few hundred dollars, pulling their money would get them a good used car.

On returning to Ottawa they found a car dealer who would sell them a 1954 Ford Meteor auto. The 4-year-old car was in good shape and they believed the dealer that this exceptional automobile was owned by a retired lady school teacher. Since only one had a driver's license, he taught the other two to drive.

The real purpose of the car purchase was their firm belief that the way to meet local girls was via the ownership of 4 wheels. Of course, the three-way ownership resulted in alternating the days or evenings for usage. Of course, the logistics never worked out and the boys remained, for the most part, without significant relationships.

The object of their desire and the owners in their "Sunday" best

Among the immigrants were many gloomy people who did not know, or realized perhaps only after many years, the opportunities of their new country. Which host country could have made it possible for immigrants capable only of manual labor, without language or professional skills, within a year of their arrival, to have an acceptable standard of living, that a working family could even afford the ultimate status symbol in the fifties, the purchase of a reasonable car?

The wealth from tobacco picking was not all invested in the car purchase, so Peter could realize his long-held dream of owning a set of drums. His friend, Andy played on both the piano and saxophone, so their plan was to form a small band, maybe with a third countryman of theirs. However, the "drummer" was only an enthusiastic dreamer since he had no musical training whatsoever. He had practiced diligently in the basement of their flat, especially when the landlady was not at home, since she had many misgivings about the drums when they have arrived, with reason.

The student-drummer, in the basement, Ottawa, 1958

Towards the end of the fifties, when rock and roll was on its peak, light jazz music was not really a desired product. The small and intimate piano bars they had known back in Hungary were not really in vogue in those days. All they could achieve on the field of light music was the occasional Sunday afternoon entertaining the patients in old age homes, gratis

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Perley Hospital, (senior citizens' home) Ottawa, 1958

ONWARD AND UPWARD, TORONTO, 1959

They realized gradually, from the Hungarian newspapers printed in Toronto, that while Ottawa was the capitol, Montreal and Toronto were the really significant, important cities which were developing and progressing much faster than small, provincial Ottawa. The three friends moved on to Toronto, in fact Andy had gone even further south, as he had reconnected with a childhood sweetheart in the US and married her. The jointly owned car had been sold and this was the first time they had realized that cars are not good investments in North America.

Peter had started to seriously think about going back to school, starting university. He had written to many schools, inquiring about bursaries and help but none was available in 1959, at least none that would allow him full time study. So self-financing was the answer, and finding a job that would allow somehow full-time schooling.

While this was complicated, finally the chance came when he had found a job in Toronto's St. Michael's Hospital, as an orderly. The personnel manager who was a Polish immigrant himself, was a bit skeptical about Peter's request for permanent night-shift duty, so that he could attend regular daytime courses at the University of Toronto. It seemed as if the middle-aged manager exhibited some jealousy, mixed with a degree of superiority when he questioned, probed Peter. Why on earth was any European immigrant trying to get a university degree, when he, himself, he had already graduated from the University of Warsaw, and look, all that he could "attain" was this miserable little job, with a basement office, in a nun' hospital? Not much sense in studying for any degree because the "big" jobs will never be given to immigrants in this country, if they are not of Anglo-Saxon background!

In the end, he obliged and gave Peter a permanent night shift, that is from September on, should Peter get accepted at the University of Toronto. But this was still at the beginning of summer in 1959, so Peter was given his training on the afternoon shift, supervised by a fellow orderly, from the south of Italy, called Vito. Poor Vito had immigrated to Canada in the late thirties, and, according to many, Vito had a tough assignment speaking English, while he himself was convinced of speaking fluently! Indeed, within a few hours, Vito could convince one that he mastered English, if all gesticulations, with hands and all were allowed. So formal training did not exist, and Peter had started on the 1-A surgical ward, with Vito, learning as he went along.

The colossal hospital was run by catholic nuns, but all the personnel from doctors to nurses came from the secular part of society. Every ward was run with military precision and the greatest of conscience by a Sister Angelica or a Sister Agatha or some such.

On the 1-A ward were the most needy or uninsured patients, in multi-bed rooms. People from accidents, unconscious and of no fixed address, from barroom brawls and the like usually ended up here. But there were also patients with advanced cancer and other serious ailments, too. The daily chores were excellent for language training. Patients, nurses and student nurses, the hospital had attached to it a nurses' college, too, with many young trainees on the job, getting experience, they all spoke English.

Student nurses, St. Michael Hospital,1959

In addition to the regular duties, he had a chance to spend time getting to know the odd patient as well. Some had no family or friends to visit them; for them the hospital personnel became occasional "family" or friend with whom they met daily, received some help and sympathy, often the only source of human contact.

A young boy suffering from inoperable cancer became Peter's favored patient. They would play a few games of chess on quiet evenings. He recalled his younger brother whom he had left back in Hungary, how he had taught him, just before the revolution, to play chess. This sick boy in the hospital was also very grateful for the attention, but it was even more meaningful that at least he could make this boy happy even while missing his brother.

Aside from homesickness, many Hungarian immigrants, especially those who had left families behind, felt strong pangs of conscience, too, for each richer moment, for anything that may have seemed on the level of luxury for the folks back in Hungary. Each better mouthful, each piece of clothing, the freer and worriless life caused inevitable mental anguish. Many tried to help those back in the old country, according to their means available. There was already a travel agency that dealt primarily with Hungarians located in the Bloor and Spadina streets' vicinity which then was known as the Hungarian quarter. Peter had heard that 100-forint Hungarian bank notes could be purchased there, for about $5, and smuggled in plain letters sent home to his mother and little brother.

Later on, the immigrants could send so called IKKA parcels home, legally, with the cynical acquiescence of the Hungarian government, as they took a substantial percentage from these dollar transactions. They needed that hard currency. Many helped their families, parents with such means.

Thanks to Vito, the newcomer soon learnt the trade and even got new responsibilities. The nuns asked him to go upstairs one day, to the women patients' ward, as his help was needed. A dead patient had to be placed on a gurney and the nurses could not manage the weight. After helping with the task, the chief nun had entrusted Peter with being responsible for the morgue, also, while he was on his shift. That consisted of opening the morgue and handing out the corpses to the funeral home people, or taking cadavers up to the autopsy rooms. At the beginning he had a rather tough time getting used to the responsibility, but then this proved to be a simple and ordinary job. Many patients had given the staff much more grief at times than those who had passed away.

Orderly, St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto, 1959

Then again, the cooled morgue was always so much more pleasant in the terrible, damp heat of the Toronto summer than the 1A ward with stuffy and hot rooms. He would not dare to tell anyone that often he would hide watermelons in the empty, refrigerated boxes that were nicely cooled during his shift.

The job in the hospital presented excellent chances for meeting various kinds of extremely interesting people. For example, one of the patients' elevators attendants was a well read, intelligent gentleman. He read anything and everything about philosophy. He was in contrast with most of the other workers who were invariably newcomers, non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, while this man was born in Canada, spoke fluently both languages of the country, but other than that no one knew anything else about him. And particularly why on earth did he work in this simple job with his intelligence and wisdom? Peter was struck by this intriguing man's reading habits, as he never saw him without a book, whether in his elevator, or in the hospital's cafeteria. If they started a conversation, he had many questions about the other person but would never allow any detail about his life. He would cite long monologues from one or another of his well-researched philosophers, but declined to answer specific questions about himself. He had lent Peter many obviously well read and annotated books, and while most of these had been over his head in terms of text and thought, he had started to know something about Thomas Merton, St. Thomas Acquinas, Kahlil Gibran, Cyrill Connolly.

What could have been this man's life story? He never found out. He would only smile when questioned about his present or past life. But this smile suggested superhuman inner strength and self-confidence, exerting great positive impression on those he was engaging in conversation.

Within a couple of months Peter was invited to train the next new orderly on the afternoon shift who happened to be a sympathetic young Hungarian. Miklos was an actor who had also escaped after the 1956 Revolution was crushed, who struggled with maintaining an existence and learning English. His wife was a well-known actress who now worked as a waitress.

The Hungarian duo at St. Michael's Hospital became somewhat well known for their exceptional height and humor in many situations. They worked well together and soon shared the responsibility of the morgues as well.

Peter, who came from the country, appreciated the young actor's savvy from Budapest, particularly the many stories about the theater which still held magic for him. Neither knew at that time that they would soon be sharing the stage of the immigrant Hungarian theater in Toronto, which was to open a year or two.

The time drew near when the forms had to be filled out for university entrance. Since Peter's high school diploma was from abroad, he had to pass the so-called English proficiency exam and his diploma had to be translated into English. After two years in Canada, this did not seem insurmountable, but was nevertheless difficult. Finally, he passed the test and was admitted.

University of Toronto, St. Michael's College

The University of Toronto had several Colleges; the students chose one depending on religious or secular convictions, or for some other reason. Peter working in St. Michael's Hospital, being a roman catholic chose St. Michael's College. He had also hoped that the college, led by teaching priests, would extend some material help to the Hungarian immigrant student. On his first personal visit with the jovial priest-registrar, he was told that unfortunately there were no available scholarships or bursaries, so the first half yearly tuition fees had to be paid well before courses would start.

The new student who barely made his living from a salaried job did not hesitate for a second, had put up an ad and a within short space of time, he had sold not only his drum set, but all his dreams of ever becoming a professional drummer. This was just about as much money as was needed for the first half of the year's tuition and the books he needed for his courses. By the time the courses had started in early September, Peter got the promised permanent night shift at the hospital. Not only the night shift but also a new ward, up on the second floor, with some semi private rooms and patients better off than in the previous ward. Within a few days, he had to get used to permanent night work and daytime rest. He had reached a significant turning point when the university lectures had started.

ST.MICHAEL'S COLLEGE.

THE FIRST YEAR, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

1959

The poor prospects of life in Hungary in the fifties had concerned both ambitious students and their parents. Continuing studies after high school depended not only on exam results; on the contrary, especially not on those but on the so called "class origins" of the aspirant. It was critically important what kind of family background, from what "class" did the student come from. The reigning communist government decided who could make it to the universities, colleges. They were trying to educate those who were politically acceptable, so that their future would be assured. While in the West, academic achievements and financial means determined one's continued education, continuing on to higher education never seemed like a life or death struggle as in the East. The young refugees of 1956 believed exactly this in order to lay the foundation of their new lives. The time spent waiting for admission in refugee camps, the time needed to learn the languages of their adopted countries stole years from their lives.

As back home, the freshmen in Canada were excited starting their academic studies. The seniors, according to tradition, were busy with the initiation rites. The various sport competitions were under way, particularly among the rival schools, as everywhere in the world.

After finding his course schedules, Peter had to find the various lecture halls, spread out in a wide area of the university. Getting to and from lecture halls in the 10-minute breaks they had between lectures was not much, so he had to choose course with an eye on schedule conflicts, as well as being interested in the topics.

Appropriate text books for the chosen course were available in the university book store, at fairly steep prices when comparing these to the salary of a hospital orderly. There must have been cheaper ways of finding text books, but the excitement, a definite feeling of elation, and a good degree of anxiety about the immediate future deprived him of getting the best information. His English was still hesitant and full of errors, and he knew it. And there were so many new expressions, concepts that the new students had to grapple with. Anything that had to do with schooling was virtually a new concept. From the grading system to the special student "lingo", there was little that he understood at first. He took time to learn the system of higher education, and a system in another continent, exercised in a strange language, until he had found the resources that could help with his studies.

Both the anxiety and the elation he felt of just being there, had its reasons. A manual laborer, one arriving in just over 2 years before, who hardly speaks and reads the language of the land, who from one drab and unassuming day to the next intellectually demanding one, in spite of every difficulty felt happy and satisfied. These momentary joys were, however, short lived, as soon as he had rationally looked at his prospects. He felt as if he were an impostor as he was contemplating one of the other courses offered in front of the long wall listing the course, schedules, names of lecturers and requirements for each, having great doubts about his chances for some of those courses. He had absolutely zero Canadian high school background, never set foot in any of those schools.

The students milling about him were at the height of their excitement as they were selecting one or another of the numerous English literature courses, all promising rewarding learning experience, and most requiring prerequisite studies. In their cases, there could not be any question about their readiness for advanced English literature, indeed 80 % would choose one or two of the several offered this leading to an Arts degree. But how could Peter or somebody in his shoes with similar disadvantage dream about advanced studies of Shakespeare or Chaucer?

Fortunately, all English literature courses were “strongly” recommended and not compulsory. But the other course groups caused just as big of a dilemma. One foreign language course was compulsory for all Arts students, and this being officially a bilingual country it was rather easy for the English speakers, they chose French, and it is assumed, those living in French Canada, they chose English, it they were smart.

But what could a foreign student choose, who had not learned, ever a formal course in either language? Besides, at the University of Toronto, students could not choose English as a “foreign” language, it being the native tongue.

So English was not being thought as a language, were it but true! And taking French, as most chose in Toronto, required years of high school French, thus unavailable for Peter.

Once more he had checked through the language courses offered and the prerequisites and felt that he would have problems here, when his eyes caught the most improbable item, he would have ever imagined among the languages listed!

In 1959, at the University of Toronto, first year students could choose to learn, from scratch, Russian language and literature!

Nearly 3 years after the 1956 Revolution and Freedom Fight in Hungary, in spite of the accumulated hatred and contempt against the Soviet dictatorship, and the much-hated compulsory Russian language in all schools and all levels of learning, now had to be accepted, even cherished in order to reach his goal and graduate from this university! It was not easy to befriend the thought of voluntarily learning Russian, again and really learning it, not like back home when most everybody out of sheer hate had sabotaged this task at every step. Now Peter, through free choice, (how on earth will he explain to the folks back in Hungary?) had to accept Russian, as an everyday preoccupation, along with the other "foreign" language, English. This very thought had caused the immigrant days of grief in addition to the many new concepts and changes in his life those days.

Never could he have imagined that after escaping to the West, from the Soviet imposed totalitarian regime with its obligatory Russian language rammed down the throat of all students, that he would once again cultivate Russian and especially doing it with diligence and earnestness! But there was a good side to this. The language was being offered for total beginners, which meant that Peter who had been exposed to it for many years, never mind that his level of knowledge was fairly low, was still familiar with the basics, including the totally different Cyrillic alphabet. That meant one less subject that he had to worry about.

Psychology, economics and political science, these were, curiously separate in a "capitalist" country, philosophy, zoology and mathematics made up his course palette, in addition to Russian. He found out only a little later that one of those courses had to be his "major". So, logic suggested making that Russian, to which then Russian and Slavic literature was added for good measure. This latter was, fortunately, lectured in English, with most of the works being read in translation, English. He had welcomed, actually, classical Russian literature, as many of those great writers were among his favorites, and happily such modern greats as Pasternak, Babel, Solzhenitsyn and others were also listed in his course outline. He was eagerly looking forward to the promised discussions on the post 1917 Bolshevik revolution's effort to popularize "socialist realism" in literature, as an essential tool to achieve socialist goals.

A dictate, indeed, which was imposed on any creativity by force. The frank and open discussions of these trends in a free society promised to be a real treat to someone coming from the other side of the political divide.

The weight of the humanities courses he chose to study, beside Russian, threatened mostly his faulty and weak language capability. This became evident right on the first day when he took home the textbook of political science, 1 A.

The textbook for the study of the Canadian government, with its rich historical development in Canada's not quite 100 years of existence, spread over several hundred pages. Its heavy legalistic text and seldom used everyday expressions, made it difficult reading. Forever remained in his memory that afternoon, when on his day off from the

hospital, he had to write a précis for the next day on this first chapter of that book, spread over 17 pages. With his English-Hungarian dictionary, it took him more than one hour to translate and understand the first page!

And so, it went on for the next several pages. From all this effort, he had to summarize the essence of the chapter in a written assignment of not more than 2 pages!

He remembered, as dawn was slowly breaking in the early September morning and falling asleep, that after a few hours of sleep he would start again, the work which had really amounted to no more than a translation assignment, given to a dilettante.

Practically all his courses gave him similar grief, understanding, retaining and showing proof of accomplishment, as was demanded. In spite of the everyday language frustrations he felt encouraged by the progress he was making, that within short he would be speaking and writing on the level of university students.

However, the 40-hour night shift at the hospital, from midnight to 8 am, took away precious time from studying or from resting. The nurses working on the ward had been watching him with great empathy, when the young orderly reported for duty for the graveyard shift, loaded with books. In general, the nights were not very busy, although all staff had certain routine work every night. At times he could study for hours, or if he was particularly well liked by one or another nurse, they would even let him sleep some on one empty stretchers on wheels. In these instances, he could, after a warm shower in the hospital, turn into a regular university student and appear in classes in reasonable shape on the following morning.

But there were chaotic nights also at the hospital when several crisis situations could develop with one or more patients at the same time, when every doctor, nurse and orderly on duty were rushing from room to room, when neither studying nor sleeping was possible the whole night. While on mornings like these he was capable getting ready physically and getting to classes, but often he had slept through lectures with half open eyes, when he would not understand the lecture even if had it been presented in his native tongue, let alone in English.

It had occurred to him once or twice that his fellow students may be even jealous of him thinking that he perhaps had a wild night when he was caught dozing in the classroom. The fact was he never once discussed with anyone in the university environment, student or teacher, that he lived a double life, working at night and trying to study during the day, never discussed his private life. He could not explain it then and it is till mystery today, whether it was a sense of shame or a notion of pride the reason why he had never spoken of his private life in school. In fact, there were very few students whom he may have befriended, and occasional words with these were for school work almost exclusively.

Perhaps his heavy accent and the perceived stigma of an immigrant, or the loss of precious time that would have been sacrificed, it is difficult to say which held him back from any socializing. The fact remained that in this first year at U of T he was persona incognito. He was seen in the libraries or the student cafeterias to the tune of a head-nod, but friendship and mainly friendship of girls was missing in his life.

As the neighbor to the South, Canada, too, became the land of immigrants. However, the arrival of the masses went on through hundreds of years, so there were always the early arrivals, even first, second and third generations of these immigrants, and their successors. There was a definite distinction between early and new comers, especially if they opened their mouths, and declared when they may have arrived in the "new" country. In addition to the "arrival" time, there were other sociological differences between the English speakers in the English-speaking provinces, or the French speakers in the French speaking province, and the "other" tongued immigrants. While the English, Irish or Scott immigrants, even with little schooling got fairly good jobs on account of their language skills, a well-educated non-Anglo European professor could go to clean houses in his first years.

However, the "other" language immigrants had usually less schooling, coming from the poorest countries – or the most prosecuted- in Europe and emigrated for reasons of survival. This group of immigrants was always the bigger, so anyone with a heavy accent was considered to be less educated, cultured. This was that certain stigma that every non-English speaking immigrant was confronting every day.

The university, college years, in every society, played a great role in the lives of students as they developed into adults. While they are studying their chosen profession, they are spending their best 4 or 5 years in each other's friendly company. They usually had opportunities to develop in other fields than the chosen professions, in the fields of culture, arts and many sports. Those who had to earn their living while studying had little time left for these rewarding and exceptional opportunities. So, Peter was very limited outside his daily hospital routine and language handicap to engage in most of these enriching activities.

Right away, in the first days of the school year, the somewhat older student had caused a small stir as he appeared in jacket and tie. Nobody had any doubt that he was a foreigner in 1959, when there were few foreigners and minority students at U of T.

The majority of the students were of white, Anglo-Saxon background, or white immigrants' children born in Canada. The first years Arts students had formed massive classes. For example, the economics class had more than 200 students, and was held in the biggest lecture hall of the university. Asking questions, clarifications during lecture was next to impossible. The lecturers communicated via postings on the walls in the corridor. This was education in its most impersonal way. Anyone could come, or come late, or not all, attendance lists were not kept. Because of its impersonal, mechanical style this had become Peter's most neglected, least interesting subject. He had mostly nodded off during the lectures that started at 9 am. The presented material seemed dry and boring.

His most successful course became the one that was forced on him and everyone else in the old country, the one that had to be also chosen due to the “foreign” language requirement, Russian language and literature. There were 10 or 12 lecturers on the newly formed Faculty of Slavic Studies; mostly Polish and Ukrainian post war immigrants to Canada. There was not one ethnic Russian speaker among them. Almost all were seeking historical authenticity and understanding vis a vis the Russian language and the political reality of the Soviet Union. So, it happened, that Peter’s Russian teacher was an Englishman, graduating from Oxford, who for a mysterious reason had fallen in love with the language and got a job in this Canadian university. His real public-school education and particularly his superior British accent did not disturb him at all in developing an excellent grasp of classical Russian. He thought it well, too. But the most favored of all these teachers was the lady professor from Poland who was a graduate of the famous, prewar Krakow University and now was teaching Russian literature.

Accordingly, all the lecturers on the Faculty spoke with some kind of an accent, which felt so comforting to self-conscious Peter. At least here he did not have to be embarrassed because of his linguistic shortcomings. His fellow students on this course were all Canadian born, but mostly from Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak immigrants so they have grown up with accented English in their houses. Their parents’ tongues were close to Russian, were brought up partially in these languages, but they did not know the Cyrillic ABC, so they had to start with the basics. There were practically no students with a Russian background in the fifties in Canada.

Peter had a great advantage with the language, however inadequate, that was forced on him in Hungary, but still knew more than the basics. While the other students were learning reading and writing in Russian, he could be spending time with other courses. They were learning proficiency in the Russian; Peter was trying to learn English so that he could understand the philosophy, psychology and the other subjects.

The first-year students taking Russian were no more than 14 of the 40,000. He had managed to get closer to some of these in the first few months, but they also knew little about the mysterious Hungarian quickly disappearing after lectures. He was always absent from the frequent weekend dances, concerts and guest performances, and nobody missed him. They had most probably believed that he was not interested, and perhaps felt above these events, that he was a snob.

Within a few weeks there was already some degree of accounting for the learning material presented in all courses. Other than the Russian language material which was going well, the literature part afforded opportunities to excel in class, even if some of his written material had plenty of errors. The lady professor was particularly accommodating with regard to spelling mistakes in his assignments. During her lectures she had often initiated discussions in class by calling on Peter first for a point of view or comment that set the stage for a debate with the others.

Probably that was the only area in his studies where he could claim some degree of competence compared to his fellow students at the university in 1959. This knowledge, literary background and political maturity that would have prompted the professor to call

Peter into her office one day, acknowledging his contributions in class and encouraging his work because she thought he had signs of talent and ability in the field of Russian-Soviet literature. This good work could further be helped, eventually, with a Rhodes scholarship, and if Peter may have such ambitions, she could find support for this in the Department of Slavic Studies.

The first-year student was in seventh heaven for this early sign of encouragement. How strange is the way God works, he begins to study Russian reluctantly and out of sheer necessity and a gleam of hope for his future flashes before him! This was so welcome, yet he knew that he will have to excel in all the other courses as well. Indeed, there were ominous warnings from the lecturers of the other subjects. One of his early précises in political science was signed with this cautioning: "I will let this go through now, but your English will simply have to improve if you want to pass this course by year's end…" These kinds of remarks did not help at all for the student struggling with work, sleeplessness and language frustrations daily. On the contrary, they had embittered him. Then there was the impatient lecturer who had returned one of his papers because "he could not read his funny handwriting." It was a fact that those in grade one in 1944, amid the worst part of the war, had received a haphazard and inadequate first year of reading and writing instructions, with all the daily changes in routine, teachers and aerial alerts. Their teachers may have changed weekly, and so did the methods of teaching to write. Peter's handwriting belonged to the worst in class, and he recognized early this liability. He was envious of some of his classmates who had handed in carefully prepared, even typed documents as their assignments, fetching of course much better grades.

It was interesting how much impression the course in philosophy had on the new student. He had little knowledge of the *scientific* study of wisdom before, and was eager to know all that Professor Schoenleber had to teach them. He read and tried to understand most of what the prescribed books had to say. He noted the Aristotelian thesis that one must philosophize, and if someone states that this is not necessary, then that has to be philosophized, that is discussed, so in any case philosophy is essential. Once so understood, then the Descartian notion that cogito ergo sum was more comprehensible.

This new, discovering phase of Peter's life, his first steps in the field of human inquiry and study seemed noble and uplifting compared to the near past and the bleak presence of his present daily life. Every nuance of his body desired new knowledge, authors and their work. The library of his college with its thousands of volumes, the small writing-reading desks, the winding labyrinths in the stacks which provided all necessary conditions for reading, contemplative study, were happily discovered. How happy he was here! How much more time he would have liked to spend here, than was his.

He could forget here the frustrations of the past, the disappointments. He was informing his family back home about this far away university, its structure, culture and the possibilities in the far future…that was surely to come his way. Who knows, he could even become a teacher of Russian someday, although all this seemed pretty remote just then, a few weeks into the first half of his first year.

The weeks turned into months and then the registrar's office of St. Michael's College notified him in a letter that the second half's tuition was due shortly. Since he didn't even half of this sum, he asked for and received a few weeks of reprieve. It was closer to spring when Father Mallon had asked him to stop by his office in the college.

The pleasant mannered, rather sizeable man had him sit down and told him, with great empathy, that his time of delayed payment had expired, the final exams were approaching and Peter must absolutely pay his dues before he'd be allowed to sit for these exams. Peter called on all his faculties to outline, as sincerely as he could, his predicament to this important official of the catholic college. He even tried to tell Father Mallon, much to his regret later, his dad's heroic battle with the secret police back in 1949, his very last article that he ever wrote about Cardinal Mindszenty's visit in his hometown, the subsequent escape from Hungary and now being alone in Canada, working at night and…trying to study. Maybe this would move the registrar priest to find some alternative solution for the pending tuition fees, some understanding for his situation and…?

The good reverend had patiently, even intently listened to him. Then he had launched into the wonderful possibilities of bursaries and scholarships that existed in this catholic college of the university, because, as he said they have many well to do, generous supporters in the community who are ready to help students exactly like Peter. At this point, he looked at the file in front of him, as if looking for some detail, then took his glasses off and a bit reproachfully looked at Peter:

"Scholarships are given to needy, but well performing students. According to your grades in the first half, you are on the verge of failing in a few subjects…we don't give scholarship for poor performers."

He had no more observations or questions and stood up, signaling that the session was over. As he was seeing him to the door, he once more warned him that without paying the fees, he cannot sit for his final exams**.**

The mood of the previous disappointments in his life had crept over him. The unsuccessful attempt to get in the Film and Theater Arts School, the failed English test at the

radio station in Bologna for the BBC job, the rejection by the US Army. But his mood of disappointment now had taken on a new feeling; he felt a quiet anger building up in him. The unfairness of the catholic college in coldly rejecting financial help or delay for someone who had worked at an all-night job, making very little money, trying to study to better his future. He would have repaid every advance, with interests even! Would he have deserved no better understanding from the institution led by catholic priests?

Years after this bitter event, he often thought how much more sensible it would have been not to pay at all the second half year's fees …But then, he had still believed that with very hard work in the weeks before the tests, taking his two weeks' vacation from the hospital for full time, day and night study, he would pass!

So, he had to get the money!

He also had thoughts that filled him with shame. Here he was, in a free and wonderful, rich country, if under modest circumstances at the present, studying at one of the biggest universities in Canada, self-sufficient, able to maintain an existence. How many, who had taken part in the revolution and stayed behind, perhaps wounded, jailed university students would gladly change with him now? And those who fell in the fights…? But even the survivors, who had managed to get to back to those universities, the mass dormitories, the infamous student cafeterias with inedible food, that was just enough to survive on, and that which was the most detestable aspect of "higher" learning, the obligatory Marxist propaganda courses and the incessant glorification of anything the Soviet Union did, all the repression that surely followed the revolution of October 23, 1956?

Any kind of self-pity was shameful, a solution must be found and that was all there was to it!

The man who had interviewed him at the offices of Household Finance in Toronto was stern but efficient. Once it was ascertained that he had a net monthly income of $164 from the hospital, he didn't care whether the money was needed for a new car or university tuition fees. He informed Peter that he would be lent the $200. Monthly payments were to be about $20 and with good luck; he could repay within 18 months, paying some 19% interest on that loan. After the usual checks on his employment and income, in a day or two he may come by the office for the money.

The year's tuition now all paid up, the wonderful warm spring of 1960 seemed to have burst onto the scene from one day to the next. The enthusiastic, first year student left behind a fast and rather tiring winter. After nearly 3 years of Canadian life behind him, he would face a so far unfamiliar, free time before the final exams would start. With his 2 weeks' vacation taken from the hospital he had counted himself among the other everyday folks, going about their daily routine of work or study. Like others he could sleep at nights and study all day, all evening in the wonderful library of St. Michael's College.

Verbal test he had to pass only in Russian language, which he did with flying colors. There was really no merit doing that, since most of that knowledge he brought with him from Hungary. The other courses were to be evaluated with all the work done during the year, in addition to the final exam's value. He knew that he had to do exceptionally well with the finals in order to improve the many poor marks he had collected during the two semesters.

But not even the worries and concerns of the immediate future could spoil the uplifting feeling of these few weeks! The morning walk through the greens of Queens Park, after a good night's sleep, up to the library, among the hurried students or people going to work, had solidified a certain belonging to this society, gave him a sense of identity. *He had felt at home, perhaps for the first time, in his adopted country!* He had a clear objective, reaching that consumed his days now, cramming in the library, when everybody was preoccupied with the same goal. He would have given anything to stop time here. After the last few, hard and uncertain years, with the challenges and frustrations, he felt really happy and in the right place. If he survived this first, difficult year and passed his exams, then the constant searching of what followed in the last three years may come to rest. It all would become easier...maybe.

He would not even dare to think of what Fr.Madden had so clearly emphasized , that there are plenty of scholarships, bursaries –for the successful students. But if he passed the year, even with just less than good marks, even without outside financial help he would scrape it together somehow. Why, he had been working at two shifts already, one in the hospital and one in school. So, for the summer vacation he'd be able to tack on to the hospital night shift a daytime job, for more money and savings.

His days and evenings at the library were filling him with confidence. The worries were still there for the poor marks he accumulated during the year and the omissions in material that came to light in his preparation for the exams. These days allowed to make up for missing material, to review badly understood concepts, to make corrections.

Time seemed to have sped up to a dizzying pace.

The university final exams were held in the basketball arena. The candidates were given two hours for their written tests. There were choices of 3 or 4 topics from several given. The sheer understanding of the offered topics could have qualified for an exam itself! At least for those whose English may have been poor. Fortunately, pocket dictionaries were allowed to be used, so that the questions, topics would be well understood. However, way too much time was taken to understand and then choosing the appropriate exam topic.

Aside from Russian literature, whose offered topics all seemed familiar and presented no problems, all other subjects would have required much more time to review and complete the answers than was allowed in the 2 hours. On some occasions, he was half way through completing the chosen topic due to the painstaking effort of composing an English text, when time was up and the paper had to be handed in.

Of five courses he faced the same fiasco, didn't have time to compose and complete the appropriate answers to the topics chosen, and some topics he could not even begin to write as time had expired. The only course where he had confidence handing in his paper was Russian literature.

As he found out later, in such huge Arts classes, the papers were corrected by assistants of the lecturers, who had not known the European immigrant and his language problems, thus any degree of empathy that may have ameliorated from the situation was probably missing.

Results were not expected for several days, but Peter had no illusions whether he had passed the exams at the end of his first year at the University of Toronto. He felt that only a little extra time in the final exam hall, coping with the language and studying harder during the year, would have resulted in a passing mark. So, he was prepared for the worst and waited for the news that would come in the mail. On that fateful day, he had put the envelope, unopened, in his pocket and tried to make a solemn promised to himself.

The scene was the chapel of St. Michael's College, not far from the registrar's office and his home for the last few weeks, the library: no matter what the official result was about his year, he would not give up his quest!

In his first year of 1959-1960, he had passed two courses with good marks and failed in the other five. In such a case, when one fails in more than two subjects the year must be repeated, supplemental exams were not allowed.

As a memento, he had the monthly loan repayment obligation to the financial institution.

EPILOGUE.

Immigrants everywhere had more or less the same initial difficulties in their new country. Among the Hungarian refugees of 1956 there were young couples with small babies, and others who had elderly parents as they were starting out in their new lives. Some had to give up their occupation due to lack of language skills, and others who had learned new skills within a short time, found new professions. Some had felt at home only after many years of struggle and others were at home and content within months of their arrival. A few could not overcome the difficulties, the homesickness, could not accept their new environment and given up.

The unavoidable struggle of those first few years, the small and consistent accomplishments had solidified most immigrants' future. The Hungarian refugees of '56 in Canada, America or any other free and welcoming nation had to plan for years, tens of years when they were considering their future, as there was no hope whatsoever that any real change would happen in Eastern Europe, which would have allowed returning home. The West was not willing to take any concrete steps for the liberation of the oppressed East European countries.

Still, they had opened their borders and hearts for those fortunate refugees getting out, who had to be, at least for that, grateful. And those who had reached the West through Yugoslavia had to be especially appreciative that Tito let them do so, at all!

Peter had finally graduated in 1965 from the University of Toronto. By then married to one of the nurses at St. Michael's Hospital, who was largely responsible for his full-time study and successful graduation. In his second attempt at university he could even continue the sport of fencing he began in is his childhood, which allowed him to represent Canada in the 1976 Montreal Olympic Games. After losing one kidney 21 years prior, he was to stop any serious sport activity, yet he was the oldest fencer at the age of 38 at these Games.

The following year, just before that sad 10th Anniversary of the 1956 Revolution and Freedom Fight on the shore of Lake Ontario he was able to visit his family for the first time in ten years, now a Canadian citizen.

That same year he gained employment with a large US corporation where he had spent the next 34 years that saw him gaining ever increasing managerial positions, across the globe, reaching several countries, and ...learning more and more languages! Ironically, his career development was largely due to his language skills, lack of which during his early immigrant years seemed such an insurmountable obstacle.

After 1989 the minefields and the iron curtain surrounding the Eastern European countries melted away, as did the Berlin wall, with the least amount violence conceivable.

Many factors leading up to this historical changeover were involved, but ultimately it was the long-awaited demise of the Soviet form of totalitarian government and one-party system and her misguided economy that could not compete with the US and Western European nations that defeated the superpower.

Economic and political freedom won in the end.

In 1991, Peter's last international assignment with his longstanding employer, 35 years after he escaped from Hungary, was to establish a Hungarian subsidiary in his birthplace. For the next 9 years, before retiring in 2000, he was managing a full subsidiary of his company, with more than 100 talented Hungarian employees.

This story was the first 10 years of Peter's "school of life", which begun in his hometown in the early fifties and finished on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. These years have laid the groundwork for the struggles and results of the following decades.

Budapest, October 23,2006. The 50th. anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

"…wait, with the patience of an angel or saint, until people and ideals which belong to you, reach you finally...wait, with all your power, intently, all your life."

(Sandor Marai.)

The End