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For Me The Revolution Started in 1955...

Precursor to history

For me the Revolution started in 1955, when the members of the choir and the orchestra of the Liszt Academy of Music wanted to perform for the first time Zrinyi's "Szózat" on the birthday of its composer, Zoltán Kodály. Mr. Révai, the Minister of Culture, did not permit it at first, but at the end of the year permission was granted. Although the tickets were expensive and hard to get, as everybody wanted to hear the concert, Sándor managed to get two tickets from the Agricultural University in Gödöllő, where Imre Nagy was teaching after being expelled from the party.

When we took our seats, we saw Imre Nagy and his son-in-law, Ferenc Jánosi, sitting in front of us. That night the Zrinyi "Szózat" was so incredibly moving. The choir singing "Don't hurt the Hungarian!" was shocking! We saw Révai sitting above us in the right balcony, nervously turning the pages of the program. After the dramatic effect, the audience gave a standing ovation to Kodály who was sitting above us in the center balcony. I was deeply touched to see Imre Nagy look up to Kodály with tears in his eyes. Naturally, none of the men gave any sign of knowing each other. But when we were leaving, Jánosi got near Sándor and without looking at him, asked how Sándor was doing. Then, at the end of the concert someone started singing the banned Hungarian National Anthem. When I was talking to Sándor's friends outside and heard someone say, "Yes, only Kodály could do this," I immediately said: "YES, AND HE WAS BRAVE ENOUGH TO DO IT!" And I felt like kneeling down in front of him and thanking him for that. To me, that night was already the beginning of the Revolution.

My life in a police state

I was working for the No.1 Structural Engineering Company. We worked with secret war factories, underground construction, Rákosi's basement, etc. I got there in April, 1952, because Sándor, who was an electrician trainee at the time, became drowsy, and fainted a number of times. He was taken to the hospital in Rosa Square. When his illness was diagnosed as general tuberculosis with only two months left to live, I decided I had to get a job. I was a good shorthand typist, and believed I could get a job somewhere. Through a friend I found out the No. 1 Structural Engineering Company was looking for a shorthand typist. I went there, and filled out an application that asked for the usual information. And then came the question: Have any of your relatives been arrested for conspiracy? I had still not recovered fully from my second delivery, and had difficulty walking. I had two young children – what could I have done? If I had written 'yes', then they would not have employed me. If I had written 'no', and they found out the truth about my husband and brother, it would have been over for me. This was an example of how all facets of life, including employment, was controlled by the ÁVO. So, I simply crossed out the question. They accepted it and said they would test my typing and shorthand skills.

Two nice colleagues dictated to me and asked me about my husband's job. I told them he was an electrician. "Oh, then he must be earning a nice sum..." And I was so silly to tell them 'no', because he was a re-trainee. Then they asked: "What was his job before?" In complete despair, I told them that I could not tell them. And I knew I would not be employed. But there were two colleagues, a nice old Jewish man, a party leader whose large apartment house had been nationalized, and the other one, a lawyer who was kept in a low position because of his past. They both went to the head of the Personnel Department and said that there was no one as gifted as I as a shorthand typist at the company, and therefore, I should be employed.

Several days after I started working there, I had to go to a Trade Union Seminar. And we had to learn the

following lesson from our book: "Sándor Kiss, a 'narodnik,' was endangering the workers' power and the Soviet Union." Well, I was worried for quite a long time whether they would find out who my husband was. But they did not, and I was working there till I emigrated.

In the meanwhile, after long examinations Sándor was found to have an inflamed liver, probably the result of an infection from his days in prison. There was only one very expensive intravenous Swiss medication for his illness, which the doctor gave him on condition Sándor would replace it for him. A close friend of Sándor, the famous mathematician from Debrecen, Tibor Szele, was able to obtain it from his Swiss mathematician friends. But I stayed on in my job.

October 1956

From our office we had to give explosives to several companies, but a month before October 23 the explosives were restricted. Péter Halász, a good friend of the engineer who was sitting next to me, had already written in the paper that it was easier for Hungarians to go to the moon than to Vienna, a hundred kilometers away. The journalists were becoming braver day by day.

On Sunday night, October 22, we went to a club in Buda with Árpád Göncz and his wife Zsuzsa. (He later became the President of Hungary from 1990-2000). The Budapest Madrigal Choir was giving a concert in honor of the composer Bárdos. It was magnificent! As the four of us were walking home on the riverbank of the Danube, at Margit Bridge a news vendor appeared with the evening papers. The people swamped him. Sándor bought the paper there, and we were so happy to read the courageously outspoken articles in the light of the street lamps!

The next day, István Szabó (Paramus) came to see us, brought us some lemons, and told us that the students had a meeting in Szeged (Sándor had graduated from there), and they formulated their demands in points. (I immediately sent the lemon to one of Sándor's relatives who asked for it for his son who was very ill that time. Lemons were extremely scarce in the 1950's Hungary).

October 23rd

The next day at work my colleague, Vendel Borhi, told me excitedly that as an evening student, the previous evening he was there at the Technical University when the 16 points were formulated. And he brought the text of the points.

Immediately I typed it, and we hung it on the wall across from the door of our director who was a colonel in the ÁVÓ. I was really getting very excited! Our office was at 19 Lenin Boulevard, and through the open windows we heard the shouting from the young people on trucks, "We want free elections!" And they were waving their flags. My colleague, Aurél Papp, went into the director's office, and asked: "Comrade Maczinger, what do you think of this?" In his typical style, he stood up and closed the windows.

In the afternoon we were told that the new party secretary, a nice person, would allow everybody, who asked to go to the demonstration at the Bem statue. Márta Füzési phoned and told me to tell Sándor about it. I called Sándor and told him, but I certainly did not want or dare ask any favors from the communist party secretary. As we finished work at 4 p.m., we left together with a colleague, Pali Stasznyi, At the Kossuth Bridge we met Zoltán Nyeste, Piros and another Jewish friend from Recsk (who later became the editor of the Menora magazine in Canada), and we marched together arm in arm. I, who had never taken any man's arm apart from Sándor's, was happily walking with the three former prisoners whom I hardly knew, because we all felt like brothers! Once we arrived in Buda, we met the members of the Folk Dance Group who were coming from the Bem statue. One of them, Kata Rábay, who used to be my elder sister's classmate, knew me and shouted for us to go to the Parliament. We turned around and went back to the Kossuth Square. There we saw a student climbing up high and cutting the hammer and sickle from the middle of the huge Flag to great cheers! But it was getting dark, and they turned off the lights. Now the crowd started folding the newspapers like torches, lit them and held them up. It was an unforgettable scene! Zoli Nyeste lifted me up so I could see that wonderful scene above the tall people in front!

But then I felt remorse: What's happening at home? What are Sándor and the children doing? True, my parents were there with the children, but I knew if I went home late, my Mother would be angry. I wondered what they are going to say now. I rang the doorbell trembling like a child. But the Revolution had reached our family as

well! My Mother gave me a slice of buttered bread on a plate to eat and a mug of coffee, and then told me to go back out with my husband. And so we went: Sándor, my older sister Kata, my elder brother Gyuszi, and Sándor's nephew Bandi Juhász who always ate with us, and learned electrician's skills from my brother.

Kossuth Square

On the way to the Parliament we passed in front of the central building of ÁVÓ to Kossuth Square where a big crowd had already gathered. They were shouting in unison: "Rákosi into the Danube!" Bandi added: "With a big stone around his neck!" The crowd took it over and started shouting it. Then we all yelled out, "We want Imre Nagy!" Then Imre Nagy appeared. Of course, we did not know and could not see that a Russian soldier was standing behind him. Imre Nagy told everybody to go home. And they turned the lights off on the square.

Next someone shouted that we should all go to the printing press to have the students' demands printed so they could be taken by trucks to the countryside. In close formation we marched to Szikra, the communist party's printing press. A delegation of young people went in to negotiate. We absolutely felt then that we were witnessing history! Suddenly the delegation came out, and said that everything is all right, and the demands will be printed. That caused great happiness, until my elder sister Kata, who was closest to the road, spotted a motorcyclist who yelled out that students were being shot at in front of the radio!

Hearing this, the whole crowd lined up and marched all the way along the present-day Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street towards the radio. At this time we were shouting, "Whoever is a Hungarian will come with us!" and "The ÁVÓ are murderers, down with them!" Windows were opened in the houses we passed. We just kept going, and all the time, there were more and more of us. When we arrived to the radio, my brother Gyuszi went forward. I am not sure if he had a role in not letting an ambulance get near the radio, since Gyuszi might have remembered that when I had been arrested with two others, we were taken in an ambulance from Debrecen to Buda. The ambulance at the radio was searched and it turned out to be full of weapons. Obviously, it was an attempt to re-supply the ÁVO inside. They set the car on fire. Meanwhile, we heard the news about how many students were injured, and where they were taken for treatment. But the numbers of injured varied with each telling. And all we could feel was that they were young, unarmed students who lived for their country, and we were waiting anxiously to see what would happen next.

Suddenly, an army bus or truck came bringing the students from the military academy to suppress the demonstration. But a worker stood up on top of a truck and recited Zseni Várnai's poem: 'Don't shoot my son, because I'll be there too.' When the military students jumped down and handed over their guns, they turned out to be unloaded. There were some young workers from Csepel, who said they would get bullets, and they left immediately, perhaps to Csepel. When they came back, they started handing out the guns. I admit that I was in such a state of excitement that I told Sándor I wanted to go and get a gun! But Sándor was very sensible and said we cannot do that because if we were caught, they would say that the "old conspirators" incited the young to rebel. So we mustn't get guns! And as it turned out, there were not enough guns for everybody.

Meanwhile we heard that a café on Kossuth Lajos Street was serving free coffee. As it was late, we went there and the hot coffee was delicious, and then we returned to the radio. And we heard the shots. We were waiting to see if they would let the students in. What was going to happen? Suddenly we heard the frightening sound of the Russian tanks approaching. It was already dawn by then, and we left for home. On our way we had to jump inside the large front gates of the houses we passed so as not to get shot when the tanks were approaching.

The following days

It was a long walk from the Radio building to Óbuda where we lived, but we were so excited, we did not feel it. At home we told the family all that had happened at the Radio.

The next day Sándor and Gyuszi went out to look around. We only heard the shots in the distance, and spent all day listening to the radio. It reported that "fascists" had attacked our public buildings and armed forces, and that all public assemblage was banned.

Meanwhile, László Kardos, a friend from Eötvös Loránd University who was a communist, but who had been with Sándor in the resistance against the Germans, sent two armed students for Sándor. As he said, he was not asking for help because they did not deserve that, but wanted some advice. Sándor was deeply affected by him, and at the meeting there was also a party secretary present, who joined the revolutionaries wholeheartedly. Sándor was genuinely touched by the bravery of the party secretary.

On Thursday the radio announced that everybody should go to work, and everything was all right. So I started out on foot to the office. At the Pest side of Margit Bridge I saw the first dead body of a young man covered with a flag. It was shocking! At the same time I was moved to see the boxes placed for collections for the relatives of the dead, in jewelry shops with broken windows, but none of the jewels were taken. After checking in at the office, I went to see the city with Vendel Borhi. (Later Vendel was imprisoned in the same cell with my brother.) I can still see the scene of the dead body of another young man covered with a flag in Rákóczi Street. We went on in tears. Vendel was walking in front. At the Ministry of Interior we noticed that in every window there stood a soldier or a policeman with his gun turned to the street.

As we were approaching Kossuth Square, which was closed off by navy soldiers, there was an elegant man in front of us who did not stop when the soldiers told him that he could not go on to the square. And then one of the soldiers shot at his leg. The man's clothing looked very western; he asked us not to take him to an ambulance because he was afraid of them, but rather somewhere to a doctor. So we looked at the other side of the street, and noticed there was the name of a doctor. Vendel helped the man up to the doctor.

Then we tried to approach Kossuth Square through another way. This was when women dressed in black were demonstrating there, and from the other side, maybe from the top of the building of the Ministry of Agriculture, ÁVÓ soldiers were shooting at them. And we saw from far away how the wounded or dead were put on trucks.

After all this, we went to the American Embassy where a crowd was gathering. And finally, the spokesman – as there was no U.S. ambassador there at that time – came out and much to our surprise, he talked as if he were from the Moon and knew nothing about what was happening in the city. He really saddened us. It was all for nothing: the women's demonstration, the crowd shouting, it all fell on deaf ears. From there I went back home.

The shooting continued the following day. Meanwhile, János Horváth came to see us, who worked nearby as a stoker after his imprisonment, but as he spoke English, he transmitted radio messages to the West during the Revolution. He asked me to take down in shorthand the U.N. law transmitted by Radio Free Europe, so he could use the language of the law to protest on the radio. Later in the evening we all prayed aloud together with 9-year-old Bori and 6-year-old Ági for Anna Kéthly to be let into America to represent Hungary at the UN, instead of the "Hungarian ambassador," who was actually a Soviet citizen.

Meanwhile, I went to get some food somewhere at Rózsadomb. We were standing in line when a young student wearing a raincoat appeared, and it was so natural that he should go to the front of the line since he was fighting for our freedom. Someone in the line started to say something about "the Jews," but the entire crowd shouted at him to stop. The people were so obviously mature and wise.

As we had little food, my Mother said she would cook for everybody and that way we needed fewer ingredients. We were constantly listening to the radio. When Imre Nagy was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers, we were very happy; however, Gerő was strengthened in his position as Secretary General of the party, and that added fuel to the fire. Martial law was announced, and the freedom fighters were called "counter-revolutionary gangs," and were told if they put down their arms by a certain hour, then they would not have to face martial law. But the deadline kept being extended because the young people kept on fighting. These repeated postponements indicated the communists' weakness, which made us very glad. At the same time, we were asked to put the radios in the windows so the freedom fighters on the street could also hear the reports.

The next day Gerő was replaced and Kádár became the Secretary General of the party. We thought that this was good news because Kádár had suffered a lot in Rákosi's prison, his teeth were broken there, and we hoped that he could only be better than Gerő.

And when the tone of the radio started to change, when they asked for the national flag, when they played the National Anthem, our hearts were exulting. But we could still hear shots constantly. There was a part of Óbuda, for example, where the young people kept the front line.

Daily life

I went to my workplace. Sándor asked me to go to his office, located across the street from mine, to pick up his salary as well. An employee from his workplace, the Soil-Improvement Company, asked me who Sándor

was, because Zoltán Tildy had asked for him by phone. And I got his salary. Then I went to our office that had received a number of shots. The Workers' Council was established in our company. The former personnel manager who dared to employ a lot of "class-aliens" was kept as an expert tinker. (Even the younger sister of the widow of István Horthy received a job in the warehouse there). The engineers with the most integrity became the members of the Workers' Council. I got a kilo of rice from one of my colleagues, which I happily took home, because it was a great treasure. Our cafeteria was opposite our workplace. When we went to have lunch there, sitting next to me was someone from the personnel department, who called the young people counter-revolutionaries, and, of course, I immediately defended them. We found out later that the woman's son was a member of the ÁVÓ. That is also why it was good that I left that place.

At some point Sándor took me to work at the Smallholder Party headquarters on Semmelweis Street. He went off to work early each day and returned very late. I issued lots of letters of appointment for the Smallholder Party leaders coming from the country to start organizing the local party. Once, when János Horváth came, the student guards did not want to let him in, and I stood there shouting that he had been imprisoned for years because of the party, and how dare they not let him in! (I found out later that the leader of the armed student guard was Pál Tar, who in the 1990's became Hungarian Ambassador, first to the United States, and then, to Vatican City.)

Jóska Adorján, a nice old MP from the Smallholder party, a wine trader from Eger, made me sad when he said that the headquarters of the Communist party should be taken over. I felt that we have to be careful not to practice party politics, because many people who stood by the Revolution might get scared off. I really felt that we have to unite with all those who are willing to fight against the Russians.

Meanwhile, armed students came to see one of our neighbors who was the chief engineer of the underground metro, asking him to see whether there was an underground cellar under the party headquarters, because some people said there were prisoners kept there. But we did not hear anything more about it, so probably there was no prison there at all.

Sándor was often among the freedom fighters in the Parliament, talking with Imre Nagy and Tildy as well, but I did not always know where he was exactly. I went with him in the morning and worked diligently in the headquarters of the Smallholder party. When the banned Peasants' Association, an interest group, was reorganized and received a building as headquarters, I worked there representing Sándor, as he was its national director until he was arrested. In the evening we walked home together. Once we were stopped by armed student guards, and when Sándor said he was the director of the Peasants' Association, the students thought he belonged to the Peasant party, which in the eye of the students was just like the communist party. Only when Sándor explained to them what the Peasants' Association was, and how it was banned in 1947, did they let us go, apologizing for their mistake. As we walked, Sándor always had some chalk in his pockets, and wrote on the trams and other places "Russians Go Home!" and other similar messages. He regarded this as necessary.

End of October

On the morning of October 27th I told my husband that it was our 10th wedding anniversary, and originally, I had planned to give a dinner for our friends. Then Sándor said something I also certainly felt, that if he had to die at that moment, he would feel his life was worth living, because he lived through the days of this Revolution. It was the greatest possible gift for our wedding anniversary! Often, when my oldest sister and my sister-in-law were hiding in the cellar, I calmly walked among the Russian tanks on the Boulevard, and carried out my tasks. And I was full of happiness! Once János Horváth asked me and Sándor to go to see his wife Erzsike, because she did not want János to become involved in politics again. We were to persuade her to let him do that because János was full of desire to work for the Revolution. I think we managed to persuade her.

Many friends kept coming to visit Sándor, but the days flow together in my memory. Yet, I clearly remember when Géza Bodolay came and brought the detailed plan of the renewal of the Scout Association. I also remember very well when Sándor told me how he met the writer, Péter Veres, in the headquarters of the Peasant party, and Péter Veres admitted to Sándor that his peasant policy was the right one, and that in the future he would work with him. It must have been difficult for him to acknowledge and admit this.

My husband's radio speech

Wednesday, October 31st, was a very memorable day for me. Sándor gave a speech in the radio at 10:25

a.m. The title of the program was “Let me speak into the free microphone,” and as the director of the Peasants’ Association, Sándor announced the reestablishment of the Association with their impeccable flag.

The studio was in the Parliament. Sándor led me in, and while he gave his marvelous speech, he left me in President Tildy’s office. There was quite a crowd in the big hall, with many familiar faces, and also some who were unknown to me. I took a seat next to József Kóvágó, who was Budapest’s mayor in the 40’s, and we started to talk. To my greatest astonishment, he was still saying that this was about the inner conflict of the communist party. This really saddened me. Then two soldiers entered the hall. All the people went and shook hands with them. One of them was a handsome, tall officer. When I introduced myself, he shook hands with me. My hand became sore because he squeezed it so hard. I can still see his light, piercing blue eyes with an intense look. It was Pál Maléter and his deputy. I suppose, as Sándor told me before, that they were just going to the Russian military headquarters to plan how the Russian troops would be flown home from Hungary.

Just then Sándor came back, and we started leaving through the corridor. Zoltán Tildy came towards us, and upon reaching us gave us a big hug and said, “My children, how I remember your wedding!” (The wedding was ten years before, on the 27th of October on Pozsonyi Road in the Thanksgiving Reformed Church, which he attended together with his bodyguard. The bodyguard, Pál Maléter, had announced him then. Perhaps he squeezed my hand so hard because he remembered that?) Then Zoltán Tildy explained that he was just returning from meeting Mikoyan, who had told Tildy, pointing to his watch, that after 4 o’clock there would be no Russian soldiers in Budapest.

Tito, Khrushchev, and Eisenhower

Since then I have read two books: Daniel Schorr’s book, and also the memoir of the Yugoslav ambassador to Moscow. I presume that it must have been at this time when Eisenhower sent Tito the telegram to notify him that he regarded the Hungarian issue as a domestic affair. With this telegram, Tito, who was afraid that the Hungarian Revolution might extend to his country, called Khrushchev immediately to discuss the future of Hungary. Kádár was Tito’s choice. After Stalin’s death in 1953, Khrushchev made certain gestures of reform, such as releasing one million political prisoners from Siberia, and created an atmosphere like Imre Nagy did in 1953, when he abolished the political prisoners’ camp in Recsk.

However, in 1956, there were two opposing factions in the Kremlin: that of the hard-line Stalinists, and those who followed Khrushchev, who after Stalin’s death had dared deliver his famous speech in which he enumerated Stalin’s crimes. Unfortunately, Eisenhower’s telegram reinforced the Stalinist leadership. (After Stalin’s death, we in Hungary received Khrushchev’s speech on leaflets printed on Bible paper, dropped from balloons, which caused us great pleasure. Later, in the U.S. I learned that this fantastic idea of dropping leaflets from balloons had come from István Deák, a professor at New York City’s Columbia University).

Revolutionary days

For me it was really touching to see the former members of the Peasants’ Association come to visit the new headquarters. For example, Lajos Bokros’s Mother came, whose wedding dinner was held in 1946 in that very place. All of them definitely had a lot of trouble and much suffering after the dissolution of the Association in January, 1947.

My brother took over the garages that belonged to members of the ÁVÓ and provided the leaders with cars. One time, a request came in from István Füzési, who needed to be driven home from Albania. A driver had already offered to get him, but he needed an official letter that only Sándor could have granted, but no one had the slightest idea where Sándor was at that moment. So, for the one and only time in my life, I forged Sándor’s signature to allow the car to go to pick up Füzési. Later I learned that he might not have come with this car after all.

Of course, I also spent time with our children. Bori was informed by her Grandfather about what was happening. There was a sermon broadcast on Radio Free Europe that had been written much earlier. It turned out to be harmful, because it encouraged people to fight. Although the priest only spoke of the battle against Satan, at that time it disturbed us, because it appeared to be incitement.

Uneasiness

When Cardinal Mindszenty was set free, we listened to his speech, and together with Árpád Göncz, we had the feeling that he was not wise, since instead of speaking of the need for unity against the Russians, he was

already speaking of punishing the leaders of the past. We felt that only the ÁVÓ and the Russians were our enemies. With those who changed sides and sided with the Revolution, we felt we needed to work together. There were even Russian soldiers who came over to our side and hung the Hungarian national flag on their tanks. Therefore, mentioning punishment then was very much out of place.

When Imre Nagy asked on the radio that Hungary's declared neutrality be recognized, we felt great joy and happiness. This is what we wanted also. His speech was so wise; it expressed fully the desire of the whole Hungarian nation! However, when Imre Nagy asked for neutrality – as we later learned – Sándor Taraszovics had already informed him that the Russian troops had turned back and were again heading into our country. This is the way that Imre Nagy tried to prevent what happened on the 4th of November. At the same time, Imre Nagy sent a telegram to the U.N. asking for recognition of Hungary as a neutral state. We also learned later, that Imre Nagy's telegram had not even been read by the Swedish U.N. Secretary General, Hammarskjöld, because Nagy lacked the necessary "credentials!" We received this information from László Varga's first wife, Nike, who had very good contacts at the U.N. Perhaps, this too, contributed to her subsequent suicide.

By that time I was working every day, full of hope. It was only the possible return of the Soviet troops that made us feel uneasy. We were waiting to see what the Western world will do. We believed that they would intervene, and we were desperately looking forward to the U.N. taking up the issue of Hungary. Hammarskjöld behaved deplorably! At the discussion of the Hungarian question, it was a Soviet citizen, who was allowed to speak on behalf of Hungary! (Thus, I shed no tears for Hammarskjöld when I heard that he was killed in an airplane accident).

I lived in such a state of excitement during the days of the Revolution, and felt so devastated afterwards, that I was not able to write of daily events. All I remember particularly clearly is that Sándor came home on Saturday, on November 3rd around 10 o'clock, and told us sadly that he feared a betrayal. The Hungarian military leaders were negotiating in the Russian military headquarters allegedly about evacuation of the Russian troops. Thus, if something happened in the next few hours, no Hungarian military leader would be available to react. We went to bed full of the worst fears. And at dawn we woke to tanks rumbling under our windows. Soviet tanks! And Imre Nagy's dramatic cry for help on the radio, the Hungarian writers' plea ... We were all sobbing! My Father was listening to the sounds from outside, and kept on saying and crying for the West: "Go on, shoot! Shoot!" Even then, we were still hoping that help would arrive if we just held out. And we just sat by the radio and kept praying! Oh God, how we were praying!

The ending

Nearby we heard shots fired from Óbuda. And all we could do was wait. I cannot remember the days that followed; all I know is that I went back to work. Two students came by the office to tell me that Sándor was already being sought by the ÁVÓ; he should disappear right away. He spent the last night at Árpád Göncz's place, and the next day he left for the West with my brother Gyuszi, János Horváth, Erzsike, their daughter, Erzsike, and Lajos Nagy. I was also to go with the two children. But in the foyer I overheard my sister-in law telling Gyuszi, 'No problem, Gyuszi, you just go. I know for sure that you are going to leave me just as Bandi Hamza left his wife Ica.' In that moment I made the decision that I would not go either. I could not let Gyuszi say that my sister came along, but my wife had to stay behind. And Gyuszi promised to come back for us in a car. My sister Kata also promised that she would help us both leave the country with our children to join our husbands. Deep in my heart I was hoping that Sándor would fight for me, just like János did, saying he was not going to leave unless Erzsike and the family went with him as well. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Sándor acknowledged the decision, opened a Bible, read from it, said his prayers and left.

Afterwards Bálint Arany called me on the phone, and he was glad to hear that Sándor had already left. Then Márta Füzesi came along with her children, and as soon as she entered and heard that Sándor had left the country, she hurried out. My Mother and the family said afterwards, "Look at your friend, she was interested only in Sándor." That was painful for me.

Since our office in Pest had been damaged by bombing, we received other office space in Buda. When the leaders of the workers council were arrested, and the workers still declared a strike, the chief engineer asked me to prepare our room for them, but I answered I would not be a strikebreaker! I stood by the Revolution even on my own. At that time, the "Úttörő Áruház" (Pioneers' Department Store) opened up, and I had to buy the children some shoes and clothes. There were long lines.

Decision to leave

I started to become really worried and sad, and felt that my children needed to have their Father. And I already knew that I might get in trouble if I stayed at home. As my sister-in-law's Father heard Sándor and his friends' message on the radio, we knew that they had arrived in Vienna safely. I decided that I would go alone with my two children. I went to my office on the last day. I spoke with my colleague, Sztrapkovics, a building engineer and a devout Catholic, and told him I was going to try to defect. I asked him, though, to tell the others for two days that I had left for the countryside to buy food. And he was to tell only on the third day that I was trying to defect to the West.

I felt that I needed to keep my job in case of any trouble. I met Sándor Kelemen, the head of a department of the Peasants' Association, who told me the president of the Writers Association, Áron Tamási's message, that Sándor should go to the U.N. and be the spokesperson for the Revolution.

I planned to leave on Sunday morning. But then the radio announced that there would be no food transport on Sunday. As I lived by the Bécsi Road, my plan was to stand there with my two children, and some truck driver would take pity on us for sure and pick us up. On Sunday I went to church. The minister was preaching that everybody should stay at home in Hungary. While it was difficult to hear this, I also met a friend of Sándor's in the church who gave me a false official certificate that my apartment had been bombed and I was going to live with relatives in the countryside.

In the evening Árpád Göncz brought me his cousin's address in Vienna to whom we could go once we arrived there. He left around 8 pm, and afterwards someone rang the door-bell. I thought it must be Árpád coming back, but it was a railwayman coming back from Vienna. He brought a letter from Sándor. He wrote that though Gyuszi had left by car to come back for us, he suggested we go this other way. The railwayman spent the night at my Mother's, and we left the next day. My Mother refused to say good-bye to me, because she said I was going to kill my children. Sándor asked me to bring the children's schoolbooks, so I packed them together with a fresh set of underwear in the knapsack. My Father, my sister Kata, and the three of us left from Óbuda to the Kelenföldi Railway Station. Bori was 9 years old, and Ági was 6, but small for her age. We were the railwayman's family on the train. When Bori loudly said that this was not our usual way to go to Grandmother's I told her in despair not to talk or ask anything. A representative of the Smallholder party put us up in Győr for one night. Later he was imprisoned for many years.

Crossing the border

There we went to the railway station where my railwayman brought a taxi, since I had enough money to pay. We went by taxi, and I asked about the towns' names before entering each town "to know where my relative was, where I am fleeing." We arrived to a cornfield. There my taxi driver showed me three trees in front of us, saying they were already in Austria. So I told my two daughters that we were on the border and we were going to Vienna, to see their Father. No complaints, we are on an excursion, and it depends on them whether we would meet their Father. Bori was trembling, she understood what it meant. Just as we started, another taxi stopped with an elderly couple who were also going with us. I do not know who they were. And we went toward those three trees. But there was no sign of the border. We walked on in despair, and saw a farmer. We asked him to take us to the border, and offered to pay him. And off we went together. My daughter, Ági, was complaining how tired she was and wanted to sit down. But I told my poor darling that we cannot rest now, we had to go on. The dry corn husks also hurt her little hand. And then suddenly two border guards from ÁVO stood in front of us. Bori also heard a shot, and I was so frightened, all I could do was to pray. The soldiers told us that the Russians could see us, so they would have to take us to them. When I am in danger, and I pray desperately, I hear an inner voice telling me what to do. And that's how it was then. I heard from above, "be strong and shout!" So I started shouting: "What kind of Hungarians are you? What would you say if your wife and children were given over to the Russians by another Hungarian? The Father of these two children is in Vienna. It depends on you whether they will have a Father!" Then one of them said: "We are Hungarians as well!" And they took my two daughters by the hand, and the three of us and the older couple walked on together. And my soldiers told us not to kneel down at the border, because the Russians can shoot over the border. Just run up to the first Austrian farmer, and tell him that the soldiers might also have to come over later.

In a distance we saw a tractor with wooden seats. We sat on it, and went this way to Andau, I think. There they wanted to take us immediately to a camp, but I had an address and phone number from Győr, and I

knew German. Thus I could speak with the mayor, and he called the guesthouse where Sándor, János Horváth and the others stayed, together with a former member of Parliament of the Smallholder Party who had been in the West for a long while, waiting for his wife and two children from Hungary. Erzsike Horváth answered the phone and told me that Sándor was coming to get us.

He arrived that night with Aurél Ábrányi who brought him in a car. His joy was so great, and he could not believe I was there. We woke up the two children who were sleeping on straw bags in a classroom, and left for Vienna. Compared to the dark city of Budapest, Vienna seemed like a beautiful dream to all of us. When we got to the guesthouse where Sándor and the Horváths were staying, the owner came to the door and said that children were not allowed. Somehow the Virgin Mary came to my mind who could not find a place for the birth of Jesus. It was very painful to me to see my poor tired children who had been walking for so long. Then one of the MP-s started calling the hotels, and eventually we received a room in the elegant Hotel Regina. I cannot describe how the children enjoyed their bath and bed. And in the morning we had breakfast at the table spread with silver cutlery, but later, of course, we moved to a cheap hotel.

Austria

Years later, we received the painful news of what happened to Aurél Ábrányi, the lawyer son of the poet Emil Ábrányi, who drove us that night to Vienna. He worked as a lawyer for the Shell Oil Company, and was abducted by unknown people from a meeting he was called to attend. His wife, an Austrian woman, first called the police, and then went with someone to the site of the meeting to try to find out what happened. They found signs of scuffling and blood stains, and learned from a neighbor he had seen people carrying "something" rolled up in a carpet. The police informed all the border crossings right away, but the car had already crossed into Czechoslovakia. The case became a huge scandal in the Austrian Parliament. I have not learned anything more about Aurél Ábrányi since then. All I can do is remember him as one victim of the Revolution.

And this is how our life as immigrants started.

Ilona Éva Ibrányi Kiss

I was born in 1927, and after spending my early years in Tiszacsege, I lived mainly in Budapest until 1956. In 1946, after starting my university studies, I got married to Dr. Sándor Kiss. My husband was imprisoned by the communists for almost three years. My first daughter Borbála, was born on August 29th, 1947, on the day of Sándor's sentencing. I lived with my parents in Hajdunánás, because as a wife of a political prisoner I was unable to work. I was also imprisoned from October 28th, 1948, by the Ministry of War and by the ÁVO in their cellars.

My husband was released from prison on October 15th, 1949, and my second daughter, Ágnes, was born nine months later on July 15th, 1950. During the communist years, from 1952 till my emigration I worked in Budapest at the No. 1 Structural Engineering Company. In the U.S. I worked for the Swiss Bank Corporation and the Hungarian Department of Columbia University in New York. Later, in Washington, D.C., I was employed at the American Hungarian Reformed Federation. My third daughter, Erzsébet, was born on July 12th, 1961, in New York City. I was widowed in September, 1982.

Dr. Sándor Kiss

My husband was born in 1918 in Vásárosnamény. He graduated from Sárospatak and the University of Szeged. He taught at the Oszkár Feri Teachers College and did research at the Geographic and Ethnographic Research Institute.

Because of his leadership in the underground, he was sentenced to death by the Gestapo, but was able to escape miraculously.

From 1945 he was elected the national president of MADISZ and a member of the Parliament from the Smallholder party. Afterwards he reorganized the banned Peasants' Association and became its national director. From 1947 to 1949 he was imprisoned by the communists. After his release, he could only work as a hard laborer and later as an electrician trainee.

He played a key role in the events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. After arriving as an immigrant to the U.S. on December 13, 1956, he became a member of The Hungarian Committee, and the Hungarian editor of the "East Europe Journal," published by the Free Europe Committee in New York City. When the journal ceased publication, he worked at the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. from February, 1971, until his death in September, 1982.