László G. Fülöp

Magnificent Events Begin on Ordinary Days

October 23, 1956, started out like any other day. Andy left for work from the Bukkos Creek of Szentendre in the sleepy hours of pre-dawn dark and arrived to the White Road tram station, another Budapest suburb, about two hours later. Standing on the steps he couldn't wait for the tram to come to a halt and peeled off the crowded car, along with hundreds of workers as it was slowing to a halt. When the train pulled out of the station, they jumped the tracks, and hurried to the factory a few blocks away. The workday started at seven.

Daybreak was slowly easing in. Dark green weeds lining the blue-gray, crushed-cinder walk, shivering under delicate, light frost, numbly waited for the warmth of the morning sun. But the sun, like an aging, fading, fat recluse, had not yet shown himself. Perhaps, loathing the morning cold, or reluctant to send his rays to pick a fight with the smog so early, he delayed his sluggish rise every day a little longer. Yet, in the steadily lightening sky, Andy could already distinguish columns of gray smoke surging upward from factory chimneys and concealed as harmless, dissipating into the rare transparency of the crisp, morning air. As if gloomy thoughts of uniformed workers were making their escapes from confined work places. Budapest's factories were operating, and Andy was hurrying into one of those uniform-clad, over-regulated thought-prisons without much enthusiasm. He glanced at the workers mechanically walking at his side.

Walking into a brave new world – he grumbled. Then he looked up: not a cloud on the sky. It'll be one of those delightful, warm fall days that would be so nice to spend outdoors.

"On Stone Mountain" – his thoughts flew to the hills around Szentendre, and he could see the sunny rocks at the south end of the mountain. "Andy, you're plain unhinged," he put himself back in place with the words of his former Russian language teacher. And while his feet were crunching the noisy cinder, his mood was lifted by the memory of the merry teacher. But, wouldn't it be great if some fluke sent him somewhere in the city, anyway... Yet, he knew there was practically no chance for that. Students of precision mechanics were seldom sent on missions into the city.

The silhouette of the factory grew gradually larger. The tall brick wall that surrounded the factory rose higher out of the background with each step. Behind the wall, buildings blinked their reddish window-eyes at the morning that gradually displaced the darkness. There they stood, stiffened shapes surrounded and captured by the tall, brick wall with barbed wire on top. The entrances and the corners of the wall enclosure gained special significance framed by the brick guard-towers. The towers were studded by guards, the guards "embellished" by machine guns, a visible "décor" of the towers. Every time he entered, Andy felt pressure in his stomach. Not because of the work, or his co-workers, but his body registered the strain of confinement he was walking into.

In the factory

Worker after worker filed through the narrow pedestrian gate. As they entered, many were frisked in the guardhouse. The frisking irritated Andy: "What the hell were they hoping to find? Something harmful? Something dangerous?" He didn't recall ever being told what was not allowed. Whatever, the guards inspected them coming and going; security was quite high. Maybe because one of the products of the factory was radar. Supposedly, quite a powerful radar. The radar assembly portion of the factory was surrounded by a high wire fence, and employees could enter that part of the factory only with a special permit, signed and stamped.

Inside the walls the factory did not look as forbidding. Textured concrete walks edged by loose shrubs connected the 3-4-story pavilions. The administration building clearly dominated the production buildings that

surrounded it. They had to pass by it on the way to work and again going to the gate. Andy did not like this building and avoided it if possible. The personnel department was in there, the factory's party cell, the bosses, the accountants – who occasionally sent written, unalterable edicts to the working "brigades." All those puppeteers, he thought, could control his life from the distance.

The building where Andy worked was a rather efficient box, characterized by the prominence of a dull gray color. The stairs were gray concrete, the floors were concrete painted gray, the locker room was painted gray and ambiguous white and they worked on gray metal. The corridors' lighting was bad-to-mediocre in that everything and everyone seemed gray. The wallboards in the corridor had the only color loudly blaring at them: red. The boards had all kinds of red paper mounting, flat and curled, or hanging loose, surrounding the pictures of "our beloved, ideological leaders." Everybody's stomach turned at the sight of the pictures of "our leaders" and gradually began hating the beautiful red colors. In time they got immunized and just looked through them. But that meant they could no longer enjoy the colors.

It was a visual relief to get into the shop. The room was just as puritan as the rest of the building, but it was spacious, with large windows and lots of light. Everyone had a place at a workbench, or table. Those who assembled the electrical motors, or mechanical parts sat at long tables. Andy enjoyed their company the most, because they often discussed interesting issues while working. His Father had once said the electrical and precision mechanics belonged to the rational elite of the working class. He certainly was right about this group. They were bright and interested. At breaks someone pulled out a newspaper called *Monday News* or a Literary Gazette, the paper of the Hungarian Writers Association and they read and discussed its latest articles aloud. These men could enjoy a fitting metaphor, see through the politics of the Party, and read between the phraseology of the politicians.

The master

Andy's master, Szabó, was especially smart. He seemed to command a special stature among the workers. Though he seldom made commands and was considerate, he said and did things in a deliberate manner. The others took what he said seriously. Of course, he was already an older and experienced man, perhaps the oldest in the brigade. He could even be... well... over forty. His eyes noticed the slightest deviation in the piece fabricated, even if it was on the other side of the piece. The scrutiny of his piercing green eyes under bushy red eyebrows seemed to see through the apprentices as well. Andy thought Szabó was especially hard on him during his initial period in the shop. While he allowed not much break in an eight-hour workday, he demanded accuracy. He sent Andy back to the workbench and had him work things over and over again until they were done right. The others laughed at Andy and even he smiled occasionally. But one day, seeing how embarrassed the boy was about being sent back to redo his work, he called after Andy:

"Hey, kid, relax. You're doin' all right. None of us were any better when we began." This consoled Andy, but by that point he was certain he had been been "blessed" with all thumbs. "I don't think you are going to do this for the rest of your life, but I'll teach you everything you need to know about precision mechanics" he said another day. He helped others in the shop, too, by giving them advice. And when other workers picked on Andy, the newcomer, he stopped them dead in their tracks just by a flash in his eye. He did it without any anger, but very deliberately. Slowly that initial period passed, and Andy began to fit into the brigade.

Even the foreman, who was aloof and distant, asked Szabó for advice in technical matters. In political matters the foreman was the most authoritative voice. He was a pupil of Stalin and Rákosi, or so he declared several times a week. The official propaganda usually referred to these arch-communists as our "great teachers," but they were so distant from the people of the street that no one took the foreman's claim too seriously. Everybody chuckled behind his back, but looked him in the eye with pious admiration.

"Was he really?" Andy asked the master.

"I don't think so, but you never know what connections he has. I think he is a poor, scared man. He came back from a Nazi concentration camp and probably wants to make sure he does not wind up in a place like that again. But be careful around him," he warned.

During the year, the country witnessed unusual events. Just previously, László Rajk, the former communist Minister of Internal Affairs, who had been tried and executed eight years earlier, was rehabilitated. The "trai-

tor to socialism," as he had been branded, was reburied in the distinguished Kerepes Cemetery. During the ceremony his widow even called for the punishment of those who had murdered him. Wow! What d'you know! That also included Rákosi, "the great teacher" of the foreman.

"The 'pupil' might get into trouble for what he's learned all these years," said someone, sneering, when the foreman was not around. But, although the topic was unusual and exciting, by and large Rajk did not receive much sympathy in the shop.

"One communist big cheese killed by the others. I bet the SOB arranged for the murder of plenty while he was there. He just got what was coming to him," someone said and shrugged.

"He organized the Secret Police. Didn't he?" another asked.

"If he was sentenced back then, based on "unerring evidence" and now found innocent – what does that mean? Does this mean that the "infallible leaders" are not entirely infallible?" somebody cautiously voiced the question that lurked in everyone's mind.

"He even confessed," added another. "The same bastards probably beat his 'confessions' out of him that he'd recruited into the clan of the Interior Ministry." Veiled in this conversation was the inarticulate anger caused by the anxiety that anybody could have been in his place. If they had been tortured, would they have confessed to contrived accusations, as so many others they'd only heard about?

Nevertheless, even the journeyman mechanic went to the Rajk burial to see and report back. Would any of our "great leaders" exercise open "self-criticism" as was customary in those days? And how, without grossly implicating themselves? Everyone in the shop would have loved to see them squirming. But the master got a pass only for one, since the burial was in the early afternoon and there was work to do. No one could leave the factory before the end of the workday without a special permit, as Szabó's work-standards were high.

A day unlike any other

But today was just another regular day. Nothing happened that was not work related. Nothing, that is, until after lunch. Andy was in the midst of fiddling with a small electric motor when the journeyman-mechanic burst into the shop.

"I just came back from the administration building..." He was still panting, because he'd run. Flush with excitement he looked around. The foreman was not in the room, but he still lowered his voice when he told them about the university students demonstrating their solidarity with the Polish workers of Poznan.

"And?" Someone shrugged, turning back to his work. "So what?"

They all knew that demonstrations were a public lie, set up for consumption of the naive. The communists cynically organized them to feed the "socialist public opinion" to convince the liberal bourgeois in the West. All of them knew that and were sick of it, but no one could refuse to attend them.

No! This was not a demonstration organized by state officials, the mechanic argued, seeing the skepticism written on the faces, this was a demonstration by the university students that came about spontaneously.

"Yeah?" The interest began to pick up, then deflated again. "So what? The Poles are a gutsy bunch, but what the hell could we do, anyway? They'd never even hear that we demonstrated for them." Remarks were flying around.

"But that's not all," the mechanic continued "somebody pinned a new 'Twelve Points' on the bulletin walls of the Administration building. And the first point demands the Russian army to go home!"

The men all straightened up and looked at him incredulously.

"You are cr-r-razy, or had a liquid lunch!" "Has he gone mad?" Now, all of a sudden, like bees from a disturbed hive, questions and remarks launched into the air. Work stopped, the room buzzed. Everybody talked all at once.

"They must be giving away booze at administration rather than directives. Somebody go and get some for us, too. Hurry!" a smart aleck commanded, grinning.

But by now every eye in the shop was on him. If the mechanic did go mad, he went so joyously, for his face was radiant, his eyes shined, and he looked happy.

"I'm tellin' you: I saw the argument between the factory's party secretary and a department head. The chief wanted the paper removed that a man from personnel had placed there. And, listen to this! The party secretary okayed it! The chief yelled that he'd go over the secretary's head. While they argued with each other, I stepped up to read the paper. I swear it says 'the Russians should go home' and more! Things like: 'we must be truly independent, and we must be equal among nations, and it demanded to know what the Russians were doing with Hungarian uranium'... etc."

There was little doubt left he was telling the truth. If not, he would get a grand prize at the Cannes Film Festival for acting. And why would he have brought up the Twelve Points? That declaration by the revolutionary youth of 1848 by now belonged to sacred traditions. They wanted freedom, equality, fraternity and human rights. This would never have been a joke that fit into silly banter at the shop. And now, what to do? The events of the last months drew the shop into the country's affairs deeper than perhaps ever before. No one understood why the party secretary would go along with something like that. Did he misunderstand? Did the journeyman misunderstand? There must be a huge, scary misunderstanding here. Before, people disappeared for saying things like that… No, this could not be a mistake – after all the students were marching "out there!"

An aura of excitement rippled through the room, as if a cool, fresh breeze pushed its way in the stale corridors of the building, as if it rattled the red ribbons and invaded the shop through the open doors. Now, they all wanted to know what was going on. The news made Andy shiver, for now he could sense there was something extraordinary happening "out there." He was not going to be stewing in here while the world was taking unusual turns. He turned to the master:

"Please let me go and see what's going on in the city." The master had to OK a pass so Andy could leave the factory. "I just have to go," Andy begged, shifting his weight from one leg to the other, then back again, repeating the request when he saw the master hesitating.

Szabó gave Andy a long look.

"All right," the master finally consented, "but promise to bring back the news accurately, or next time someone else goes. Understand?" Andy was getting his jacket on while the master was giving him instructions where he was purportedly sending Andy and why. Andy could hardly wait for the end of his lecture.

"And don't get into trouble. No marching! You hear?" he called after Andy.

"Yeah, yeah," Andy yelled back to signal compliance with the master's instructions as he was flying to his locker. He was a bit worried that, bursting with excitement, he'd left the master there so unceremoniously. After all, the master was one of those "older guys;" his age alone would have deserved more respect. But he figured he would explain tomorrow.

To the city

Outside, Andy could hardly walk as nonchalantly as someone would who had been sent to the city on an ordinary chore. A tall, lean, young man, another apprentice, walked out of another building, into the faint sunshine. Andy knew him from the vocational school.

"Hi, Imre. Where to?" Andy asked when he got near him.

"Downtown."

"What for?"

"Didn't you hear?" The tall boy leaned closer: "Demonstrations are going on in the city. I wanna see..."

"Me too. Let's go together. But let's separate and meet outside, so they would not suspect anything at the gate. Got a pass?"

Imre smiled, winked and let Andy go ahead.

Outside, Andy started jogging, but at a safe distance from the gate he waited for the tall boy. From there they both sprinted to the station.

The next train, barely after 2 p.m., was mobbed with people. In fact, people were hanging from the doors and standing on the stairs so close to each other they looked like bunches of grapes. This was an unusual phenomenon in the middle of a workday. Somehow, the boys managed to find a place on the stairs, and became part of this curious crowd. Andy could find place only for one foot on the steps, held onto a vertical grab bar with one hand and to the shoulder of an unknown person with the other. They traveled like this to the end of the tramline, near the Eastern Railroad Station, or the "Keleti," as everyone referred to it. On the square, people were everywhere, talking in small groups, mostly about the students.

"Where are the students?"

"No idea. Supposedly, some groups are downtown, others marched to the Polish Embassy," said those who'd already heard something.

"Where's the Polish Embassy?"

"God only knows." They got other directions, too, referring the boys' questions to the devil for an answer, but no information of value. Up to now, nobody cared where the embassies were.

"Perhaps on Andrássy Boulevard? You know... the Boulevard of the People's Army?" Head shaking only.

Streetcars heading downtown on Rákóczi Avenue were either standing still on their tracks, or barely moved at walking speed. "Then let's take a trolley." They changed direction to catch public transportation on one of the side streets. There was no more space on the trolley either, but they found a place to stand on its rear bumper while hanging on for dear life to window mouldings. They were lucky that it moved slowly, but at least it moved and toward downtown.

At the first square they saw about a hundred people standing in a semi-circle, apparently listening to someone in the center. They jumped off the trolley and joined the crowd. Someone in the middle of the crowd read the new "Twelve Points" aloud. That was the first time Andy heard these long-repressed wishes articulated. As sweet music the man's voice crept into Andy's ears, and his heart began to beat an excited, loud rhythm hearing those "points." They were so simple, he could have written them himself. But there were others in the group who felt the same for Andy heard "yeah," and "that's it" or "that's right" at first only in low voices, then louder... It was not hard to read Imre's feelings on his face.

With the students

The boys left the square and continued their journey toward downtown again. Excitement drove them. They could not just walk, they had to run. At first they chose a less-crowded side street, but at the Körút, the major ring road, they switched back to Rákóczi Avenue and jumped onto the steps of another slowly moving streetcar. The sidewalks were filled with throngs of people, most walking toward downtown. "What's the matter, nobody's working today?" Instead of an answer Imre smiled at Andy like an older brother at his excited sibling. Then a couple of open trucks stacked with youth drove by the slowly gliding streetcar. The trucks had large "DISZ" signs painted on their side. Communist Youth Organization, the new communist generation. Andy's face twisted into a grimace: "who needs them?" He'd joined the "DISZ," too, in the last year of high school, for not being a member could stand in his way of getting into the university. But Andy was ejected a few days after the police came for his Father in a late night raid. His Father's arrest was not publicized in Szentendre, yet the "DISZ" group leader somehow knew. But these youth on the trucks cheered and tossed paper leaflets on the street and even the boys – traveling on the steps – were showered with them.

"What do they want?" Andy asked suspiciously. But changed his tone after reading the leaflet. "We support the university students! We express complete solidarity with them," the sentences blared in boldly printed letters.

"Hey! They're OK. They're with us! This world is turning upside-down. But I like it!"

The edge of downtown begins at the old Astoria, where Rákóczi Avenue changes into Kossuth Lajos Street. There the boys could take the slow streetcar no longer. They began to run again, skipping from the sidewalk onto the street and back again as space opened up; the sidewalks were just jammed with people. And the

swell of humanity grew. More people moved onto the roadway the closer they got to the Danube. Just a couple blocks from the Danube were the universities of languages and humanities. The students had to be demonstrating somewhere around there.

“They went to the Petöfi Square earlier,” said someone when the boys asked. So they were on the right track. The Petöfi Square was between the University and the drive on the east bank of the Danube, just a couple blocks distance ahead of them.

Finally, panting, they arrived to the Petöfi Square. Again people, people, and more people.

The boys weaved forward through the loose crowd. Most people stopped in the park, or on the sidewalk; the boys were among the very few who stepped out on the road. There they stopped and looked back at the Petöfi statue. There he stood, the lofty champion of liberty, with outstretched arm, pointing forward and toward the Danube, he seemed to be on the verge of speaking to them. But hearing no lofty speeches, they turned their attention back to the road.

Then they heard a song faintly… then the sounds came closer…

An old recruiting song originated sometime during the 1848-49 freedom fight. The song grew louder and was recognizable as the group marched closer. There they were: the students, leaders again in ‘56, marching toward them, singing as loudly as they could, from the depth of their hearts:

“Louis Kossuth, message he sends, running out of regiments. If he sends his message again, all of us must fight yet again! Long live freedom in Hungary! Long live our country!”

The students came marching on the drive that stretched along the Danube, about 200 strong, in controlled rows of eight-ten abreast, singing like the rotation of the world depended on it. As they were going by, Andy turned to Imre, filled with emotion:

“Let’s join them.”

“Are you nuts? We are not university students.”

“But we feel the same way they do. Let’s go.” Andy stepped off the curb. Imre hesitated, Andy pulled on his arm.

A couple of students from the last row extended their arms, as if welcoming the boys’ half-hearted move. Then almost like an answer to their doubts the song stopped and the students started shouting their call:

“Aki magyar velünk tart! Hungarians march with us! Hungarians march with us!”

The boys were the first two who lined up behind them and received joyous hugs from a couple marchers in the last row. Then, as if the crowd got unshackled, everybody stepped off the crowded sidewalks to join the marching group. Interestingly, the crowd, without much prompting from the students took up the same formation the students used and followed them marching in a very disciplined fashion. The students’ song rose above the crowd and floated in all directions in the sunny afternoon:

“If he sends his message again, all of us must fight yet again, long live freedom in Hungary, long live our country!”

The sea swells

Imre’s face was transformed and radiant as he shouted over the song: “Hey! This is the time! This is his call!” and pointed to the Petőfi statue. Elated they joined in to repeat the refrain.

Up they marched along the Danube, singing songs about freedom and shouting slogans about equality, fraternity that encouraged human movements for centuries. The crowd proceeded haltingly. At one of these stops Andy asked Imre, who was taller than Andy, to lift him up, so he could see how many people joined the marchers. Imre grabbed Andy’s knees and lifted him high, but walked on. Andy looked back and could not see the end of the line.

Wow! What a sight! And these people were all there to express their dissatisfaction, were all there to participate in this open defiance against oppression, just like the boys. Heat flashed through Andy. Imre and the

people around them were delighted when Andy told them that he saw no end from the "lookout." After all, they all felt safer in a large crowd.

A few blocks later, at one of the stops, dissonant voices crept into the crowd's enthusiasm. Several rows behind them Andy heard a couple men shouting: "Let's hang Rákosi! Let's hang Rákosi!" Andy was jolted. The Security Police, whose wily agents were always everywhere and must be in the crowd, too, would arrest this overzealous idiot immediately. And that will be his end. But no one took anybody anywhere. The shouting man, seeing the astonished faces around him, turned toward the boys and yelled:

"What are you staring at? Join me! Shout it!"

In all his young life Andy was against capital punishment, but he had to admit in case of these bloodthirsty beasts, Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő and Mihály Farkas, he would have compromised his principles within minutes. Yet he could not bring himself to put a stain on the pure expressions of the people's desires for freedom and justice with the calls for vengeance. Andy slowly shook his head and looked at Imre. Imre did not shout either; he grimaced quietly and also shook his head.

"This demonstration is not about them, it's about us. It's not worth wasting our time on them today," Andy replied. Others did not take the proposed slogan either and the shouting subsided.

Nearing a Danube bridge they saw another huge crowd crossing the bridge. A student yelled:

"They're coming from the Bem statue."

The Polish general Bem fought bravely on the side of the Hungarians in the 1848-49 fight for independence. In fact he became one of the military leaders in the freedom fight. His statue had been standing on the Buda side. By now Imre was quite used to lifting Andy above the crowd from where he could see and report on the great vistas of human movement, so he lifted Andy again. The mass of people filled the entire bridge and the end of the rows disappeared into the narrow, medieval streets of Buda. The closer they came the stronger the shouts of greetings grew, until finally it was one great roar of joy, a shuddering boom of solidarity. The front rows hugged and shook hands as the two seas of humanity began to merge. The crowd from the Bem statue took over the lead and they filed in row by row.

The sun gave them a long look just as it was getting ready to disappear on the horizon. It hadn't seen anything like it recently and was probably sorry that in terms of the heavenly order it had to depart and could not witness what people were about to do to make adjustments in the earthly order. All those in the crowd turned slowly and noisily into the narrow downtown streets. But, though the distance was relatively short, it took them hours to eventually arrive to the Parliament. The crowd halted for no known reason in the middle of narrow streets whose name Andy did not even know. But now he did not much care. The slogans and songs filled the streets.

Meanwhile it turned dark

It was here on these streets that Andy first saw the flag of the Revolution. Their flag.

People waved at them from apartments' balconies, from all windows and doorways. Waved their hands, arms, handkerchiefs and even flags. Suddenly, a woman, part of a group that waved a flag from a balcony, took a pair of scissors and cut the despised Soviet-inspired emblem out of the flag, forced by the Soviet-serving government. There they saw the tricolor, purified, flying high, soaring like their souls. The crowd, seeing the courageous gesture, roared its approval. The despised emblem floated onto the street and the crowd trampled on it.

At other stops Andy could see into first floor apartments, where the spectators ran to put on overcoats, to come out and join the demonstration. With the sun gone and the darkness descending, the air was getting chilly, but no one closed doors or windows.

At the Parliament

Slowly and surely they arrived to Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament.

People already filled the square, but the newly arriving column was unstoppable. It was moving forward in a diagonal direction toward the main gates of the Parliament. The boys, pushed from behind, made way in the

crowd, until they were no farther than 100 feet from the main entrance. There, the pressure abated, the standing crowd resisted, and everybody came to a halt. Some of the student leaders went all the way to the Parliament's entrance, but Andy could not see what went on. The crowd filled up the entire square, chanted slogans, sang songs, sat on bases of statues, on top of streetcars, which stood with the electric current collectors lowered on the perimeters of the square. The chants were as varied as their originators, ranging from demands to put out the lights of the large red star on the Parliament's steeple: "Put out the star on the Parliament! It wastes our electric current!" ("Oltsák el a csillagot! Fogyasztja az áramot!"), to sending the Soviet troops home: "Russians go home!" ("Ruszkik haza!") But soon it became unified in: "We want Imre Nagy! We want Imre Nagy!"

After settling down, they made friends with the people closest to them. Andy checked: Imre was still with him; they felt a warm friendship toward each other by now. Next to him stood a young army captain, a good-looking girl, some high school students and other civilians, young and middle aged, all mixed. All were flush with excitement. They talked to each other as if they had known each other forever. The captain took out his cigarettes and in a friendly gesture offered them to anyone interested. University students came and distributed pieces of the Hungarian tricolor ribbons they had just cut off a roll. One with a broad smile turned to a lanky, young brunette, who'd probably just begun high school, "You haven't even gotten a ribbon," he said, and he pinned one on her overcoat. Her face got flushed with joy and maybe a little from the student's warm voice. Imre lifted Andy up again and he reported that the entire square was a sea of people, among them some distinguishable groups, some even in uniforms.

Now Andy was glad they were pushed that far to the front.

They could see everything that went on, could hear and understand the speeches, the poem recitals from the balcony of the Parliament. One of the highlights came when a young talented actor, Imre Sinkovits, stepped out on the balcony. (Was everybody Imre today?) He began reciting Petöfi's stirring poem "Rise Magyar!" The poem was written for March 15th of 1848, which became the beginning of the Hungarian Revolution. On that day, filled with feelings of destiny Petöfi recited this poem several times. Once, in front of 30,000 people, from the steps of the National Museum. After a while the 30,000 recited the refrain with him, swearing to the pledge that they would rise and cast off the long-hated chains of victims. This poem had special meaning tonight. And Sinkovits spread his rich tone on powerful wings and floated the words of rousing diction toward the four corners of the immense square. The crowd, more than ten times the one 107 years earlier, again solemnly swore with the refrain:

"...By the God of the Magyar We do swear, We do swear, Chains no longer Will we wear!"

The Square shook as the old buildings reflected the thundering pledges, the refrain of each stanza. Andy wondered what they would have to do to shed the chains that had been gradually loaded onto them, and were so tightly secured, that in order to shake them they had to turn to mass demonstrations. But whatever it would take, they were ready to do it. Andy knew he was. There was no way to disperse the crowd now, at least not without bloodshed. They were not leaving from here as the Soviets' slaves, not without some significant concessions. Even the communist leaders had to see this was the will of the people. This was not the bourgeoisie; it was the people who came here. But where were the country's leaders now?

Not all speeches were greeted with uniform enthusiasm. When one of the officially sanctioned writers, Péter Veres, (whose last name means: "red") tried to speak the booing was followed by a rhythmic "We don't want red! We don't want red," ("Nem kell veres!") chanting which was a pun on the writer's name and the color of the communist movement. By some reports, the basically well-intentioned man, who collaborated at least for a while with the Rákosi clique in the hope of attaining justice, was staggered by this reception and buried his head in his hands, he kept repeating: "What did I do to the Hungarian people?" Perhaps he realized he had befriended some in the wrong crowd.

The people's attention to speeches was disrupted by various events. Soon it became obvious, the authorities were still lurking in the background. Suddenly, in an attempt to disperse the crowd, all the lights on the square were shut off. But the stunning darkness lasted only for a few minutes. People made torches out of newspapers and other papers. A high school student, who probably joined the demonstrations right out of school, shouted:

"Use the Russian books to light up the square!"

"Would you venture to say that in school our friend was not a glaring example of Russian language scholars?" someone asked mockingly.

The square lit by thousands of paper-torches took on a romantic mood. But everyone knew the "lights" could not last forever. Andy already worried what the crowd's reaction to a longer period of darkness would be. He hoped people would not leave without some signs of concession on the part of the authorities. Some recognition that they – all these people – want something else. They wanted something different. That... the exploiting and tormenting of this nation had to end. They wouldn't take it any longer.

Andy started worrying that he would have to go back to work tomorrow and give a report of a magnificent demonstration that fizzled; emotions that geysered high into the air just to splash on the ground and dissipate into the cracks of paved reality. That the unyielding authorities won. Back to the same factory, the same life, the meek patience and not dare to differ with the political authority of the foreman. Damn it! He was not going to go! And he resolved to try to dissuade others from leaving, if it came to that. Step-by-step he was abandoning his cocoon of timidity. Andy was getting belligerent.

Soon, however, his worries were alleviated.

Large army trucks arrived. At first his heart thumped loudly, and Andy thought this might have to be the first hard test of their resolve. Like others he thought the army came to disperse them. This would be the first confrontation. But the soldiers drove very slowly and carefully, so they would not hurt anyone and drove to places where they could connect their electric generators to the lights of the square. And soon the lights went on. Almost immediately the crowd responded with the chant:

"The Army is with us! The Army is with us!" ("Velünk van a hadsereg!")

People were filled with gratitude toward the soldiers, who risked a great deal more than reprimand for their daring participation. Andy would have liked to hug the genius who invented the chant. The catchphrase gave people a feeling of strength, and indeed recognition that at least part of the army was with them. Just as importantly, it reminded the soldiers and officers among them that they, too, indeed, were part of the people. They came from this nation, their Mothers, Fathers, and brothers, wives may well have been in the crowd.

The Rákóczi statue at the Parliament

The people were still demanding Imre Nagy. Believing that he could voice the people's desires his stature grew to immeasurable proportions. Some began guessing that he could not come because he'd been detained by the authorities. "But if the army is with us..."

Promises were repeated from the balconies, so they stayed.

Another time a truck loaded with youth drove slowly into the crowd shouting:

"People are being shot at the Radio! They are shooting at us!"

People looked at each other. Who is shooting? Obviously, the communist system. But this... no, it is impossible. Who can believe this? Perhaps this was just a trick the authorities are using to break up the crowd. If there were fewer demonstrators, the demands might not have enough clout...

"Don't leave! Let's stay here and continue demanding Imre Nagy! Don't give up!"

A few hundred left anyway following the withdrawing trucks. Andy and others shouted after them: "Don't leave! We need you here!"

Then finally close to nine o'clock some movement could be seen in front: "Imre Nagy is coming," somebody said. Ten or fifteen minutes later Imre Nagy appeared on the balcony. The crowd cheered him, then, filled with anticipation, it became silent. Everyone wanted to hear him.

"Comrades!" he began with the traditional communist greeting. The crowd responded with boos and whistles almost in unison as they listened with some disappointment. They wanted him, but only if he joined the people. "No comrades here, only citizens!" they yelled back. Then Nagy began again:

"Citizens! My Hungarian Brothers!" as if his voice was trembling – Andy thought it might have been because of emotions. The crowd roared its approval.

Nagy gave a short speech in which he promised to review and apply remedies to the hurts of the people – if he were to become the Prime Minister, which he thought would soon follow as the Party would have to recognize the wishes of the people. At the end of his speech he pleaded with everybody to return to his or her home. He did not want anyone to get hurt.

After the speech the crowd began dispersing slowly. But not too many were in the mood to go home. Groups of people were still standing, talking, and debating what had happened and what would be the right thing to do from this point on. Imre and Andy drifted to the edge of the square, from group to group. At one they met a girl, Molly, who was as undecided about what to do as the boys were. She joined Andy and Imre. As they walked on, they heard people debating whether anything actually happened at the Radio. When they arrived to the edge of the square, they heard excited talk in another group. A tall, young man stood in the middle, his hair and face disheveled, loudly describing something. Andy, Imre and Molly joined the group.

"...and they were shooting at us, I tell you" he was using his inflection to emphasize his point.

"Where were they shooting at you, when and who?" a late arrival asked.

"At the Radio, where we demonstrated. It was the ÁVO. We wanted to read our demands, the Sixteen Points into the Radio. The student delegation went in to negotiate terms of the broadcasting of the demands. We, a large crowd, waited outside for quite a while, when one of the delegation members jumped out to the second floor balcony and yelled that they'd been captured. Then he was grabbed and dragged inside. Then the crowd pelted the building with stones; we probably broke all windows in the Radio block. Then from the Brody Street entrance they turned fire hoses on us. Demonstrators fell, because the water pressure knocked them over, but then we attacked and wrestled the hoses away and turned it on them... They ran to the gate, retreated into the building. That's when they began shooting. Several people were hit..."

"Let's go to the Radio. I think this guy is telling the truth." Andy said to Imre and Molly. They passed by the side of the American Embassy; the windows were dark, like all the other buildings around it. Andy wondered if those inside knew what was going on in the streets.

They were only a few blocks from the Kiskörút, the "Lesser Ring Road" one of the main boulevards, enclosing the Downtown. They were too impatient to walk, so they started running. But others had the idea, too, for they were running in the midst of a group of a couple hundred people. They ran by the American Embassy, this time not interested in the flashy cars parked on the side street; the building was dark and curtains drawn in the windows. They were still running when they turned on the main boulevard and a truck driver called to them:

"Where you runnin' to?"

"To the Radio."

"Give you a ride," he said immediately folding down the rear gate.

People stormed the empty 3-ton-truck. Imre pulled and Andy pushed Molly up to the flat surface where the space got sparse in no time. And the truck driver was already starting the vehicle. When Andy jumped on the flat bed of the truck, Imre and Molly pulling him by his clothes, the vehicle was already rolling.

The truck took them on the main boulevard to the Astoria; it could not go farther. From there the three went on foot, holding hands so they would not lose each other.

Between the Astoria and the National Museum the large boulevard was full. Full of people, streetcars standing on their tracks, some cars and trucks stuck in the congestion. The closer they got the more skeptical Andy became. Had there been shooting at the Radio, we should have already heard it, he thought to himself. The Radio was a block off the main boulevard, behind the National Museum, bordering on the Bródy Sándor Street. It was a huge complex occupying several blocks. The closer they got, the denser the crowd became. When they arrived to Bródy Street, it was completely filled with people. One glance at the situation made it clear it would be hard get to the Radio without having to wrestle their way through the crowd. There were no shootings, and the crowd was reasonably peaceful.

"Let's go through the park of the Museum," Andy suggested. Imre and Molly followed instantly and so did about a dozen others, who were around them. And then more people followed. The Museum Garden was surrounded by a tall decorative wrought iron fence, whose gates were open. The Andy-led group entered the park from the Museum Boulevard and ran around the building, across the walks and lawn of the formal garden, to a back gate opening to the street that separated the Museum Garden and the blocks of the State Radio. This way they got around the crowd filling Bródy Street and faced the Radio directly. They stopped and looked back at the wrought iron gate. Andy could see that more and more people came, many looked, lining up behind the fence. At this place the street level was a few feet below the level of the Museum's garden. Directly across from them behind the Radio, there was an internal court. Dimly lit, they could distinguish shrubs and people moving behind them. Some wore flat-topped military hats: the fearsome ÁVH.

"Damned bastards," a man hissed next to Andy. Then someone opened the wrought iron gate and they went down the steps to the street. There the group – about a hundred strong – stopped and started yelling slogans at the figures who were stooping low behind the shrubbery. Now they could see, they had weapons in their hands. Some officers standing behind them with revolvers in their hands, motioned to the troops, or so it seemed. The group where Andy was did not move, but kept yelling and those remaining behind the fence raised their voices. The crowd that had filled Bródy Street was to the left of them a short half block away, extending only to the line where the solid wall of the building ended. And from the point where the ornamental fence of the court replaced the solid wall the front line of the crowd carefully angled away in a wedge shape. Andy thought that there in fact might have been some shooting; that's why these people sought the protection of the solid wall.

Andy barely had time to survey the situation; people in his group were still shouting, and some were shaking their fists at those in the courtyard, when the first round of firing sounded. Immediately they heard wailing, but none on the street seemed to have gotten hurt. The troops raised their rifles and sent shots over their heads. Perhaps they only wanted to disperse the demonstrators, but the volley of bullets hit some who'd remained behind the wrought iron fence, on slightly higher ground.

"Oh, my God! Help me! I'm hit! I've been shot," calls pierced the air in a mixture of cries and confusion. It was a frightening, shrill response to the hard burst of gunfire.

People ducked behind the fence; the brave dragged away the hurt. But Andy did not have time to survey the situation. His group on the street began to run, to join the crowd standing protected by the building wall. There they were, at least partially shielded, away from being an easy target. Andy still could hardly believe that troops would shoot at unarmed people on the street. He was frozen and did not move. Or, rather, he did not move fast enough for those, who – thank God – did not take time out to assess the validity of their beliefs in this situation. The crowd of about a hundred people pushed him over unceremoniously in their effort to get out of harm's way. As people ran over Andy, he just instinctively covered his head with his arms.

"What a scared bunch," Andy thought in disbelief. He was perturbed as the last person ran by and he began to brace himself to recover. That's when the second volley of fire sounded. The bullets hit the low retaining wall of the Museum Garden and Andy was glad he had not stood up. Otherwise, he probably would have gotten hit. Andy looked around; there were about four more people on the ground and none seemed hurt. After the second volley of fire no one got up, they just crawled on their bellies, hands and knees to the people who were still standing and shouting slogans at the Radio Building about forty yards away. Andy was slowly awakening from the shock: those behind the shrubbery were Hungarians, shooting at them: Hungarians. "This is unbelievable, just unbelievable," he kept repeating.

The crowd at the intersection was of very mixed composition. Young, old, blue-collar workers, white-collar workers, students, some officers, but mainly the everyday people of Budapest who had become disappointed. They were upset because those people hiding behind the closed windows of the Radio Building and behind the wrought iron fence were doing exactly the opposite of what they had been preaching they would do for more than a decade: everything for the people. "But, we are the people. The brazen liars…" Andy thought. We used to think that even if they did not understand us, at least their philosophy meant they wanted to establish solidarity with our daily problems, with our struggles concerning the issues of society. Now, we see what they really meant.

They consider themselves the 'people' and want everything 'for the people,' as one of his co-workers once said with bitter irony. Now, they have not shown any interest in what the people on the street wanted to say, they were protecting what they had established. When Andy got to the first line of the crowd and finally stood upright, several people showed genuine concern and asked if he was hurt. The ÁVH did not shoot in their direction, so they probably were not looking for any more confrontation than they could handle. At least not at the moment.

As the people standing in the crowd exchanged stories of the day, Andy soon heard about the street confrontation again. The people led by students marched to the Radio and wanted to read the 12 Points – or, by some accounts, 14, others even talked about 16 Points, for broadcast. At first they were refused, and later they were told that a committee could go into the building to negotiate. A committee of students was formed quickly and disappeared behind the gates.

Then they heard nothing for a long time.

All of a sudden a door opened on the second floor balcony, and a student jumped out, shouting:

"We've been arrested! We've been betrayed!"

He got only so far before he was dragged back into the building again. The crowd broke all the accessible windows on the building and banged on the gate that opened onto Bródy Street. The ÁVH in turn, opened water cannon on the people, who at first scattered and the water pressure knocked some down. But they soon recovered, took the hose away from the uniformed men and turned the water on them. Now it was the ÁVH's turn to taste their own medicine. The ÁVH, however, soon began to fire into the air, into the crowd and forced the retreat of the unarmed crowd from the gates.

When the newcomers arrived, they were at a standoff.

There were rumors that the ÁVH troops were reinforced by truckloads of troops, who had entered the building complex a couple blocks away. But that did not scare anyone; the crowd still kept up the chant. It wanted the students back. Meanwhile, the ÁVH men behind the iron fence went on the offensive. They threw smoke and tear-gas bombs over the fence onto the street. But that, too, backfired. Courageous young men jumped forward from nowhere and lobbed the bombs back into the courtyard, before those had a chance to explode. They then exploded inside the courtyard of the Radio complex. Andy wasn't a slow thinker, but was dazzled at the instantaneous reaction these youngsters had. What if the bombs blew up in their hands? They just smiled when Andy asked the question. The ÁVH then tried to keep people away from the smoldering bombs by firing again across the street. Although the youngsters generally ignored the deadly danger, a few bombs, that landed farther away, did explode. People began wiping their eyes and nostrils.

And then it happened.

The first casualty that Andy saw. A young man in a brown coat was particularly brave and practically ignored the gunfire that cracked sporadically in the courtyard. Then as he jumped to throw back a bomb, gunfire sounded, he grabbed his stomach and fell. There he moaned and yelled. In seconds, four young men in the front, (Andy was one), dropped to their hands and knees, crawled to the hurt man and carried him, stooping, running low, back to the safety of the crowd. There, a doctor, in a lieutenant-colonel uniform, with medical insignia and a doctor's case, gave him first aid. The crowd gave way as the young men carried the brown-coated hero to the beginning of the Bródy Street, where – they were told – the Italian Embassy owned a few buildings. The colonel came with them and stayed with the boy who was carried into one of the buildings. Andy went to the Museum Boulevard away from the Radio, to breathe some fresh air, for by then, the smoke of tear gas and the sour smell of gunpowder lingered everywhere in the side streets.

On Museum Boulevard lots of people were milling around; some in groups discussing the events. Others stood on the sidewalks, like spectators, quietly horrified, because they didn't know what would be the communist authorities' retaliation and when it would come. Could all those who now were in the forefront of activities disperse in time before the authorities identified them?

Andy was about to return to the front line when trucks pulled in on the Museum Boulevard and came to a

halt in front of the Museum. The vehicles were covered with tarps, and they were loaded with soldiers. People quickly surrounded the trucks.

"Did you bring weapons?"

"C'mon, we need you against the ÁVH. They should be smoked out of the Radio building."

A young officer stood up, came to the end of the truck, apparently courageous enough to confront the crowd. He shook his head. But before he could utter a negation, a barrage of questions was thrown at him.

"Then what did you come for? To disperse us? Hey, everybody! They are sending our soldiers against us. Aren't you ashamed to come here against your own?" People of the street were not afraid at all. Accusations and questions were flying without order, or logic. The soldiers were sitting inside the truck on benches, not saying much. Then one of them, perhaps defying orders, said:

"Don't worry, we wouldn't shoot at you." Then, pausing a bit, he continued: "But we cannot fight alongside of you."

"Why not? You are Hungarians, aren't you?" "If you cannot fight, then help us and give us your weapons!" others said impatiently. The exchange took on an urgent tone.

"Yeah, give'em to us. Even if you are afraid, we can use them."

"We don't even have bullets in our weapons," said the lieutenant.

Nobody believed him. At least not until one of the soldiers opened his rifle. Its magazine was indeed empty. People turned away disappointed.

The trucks drove away.

Andy returned to the corner of Bródy Street and Pushkin Street, working his way through the crowd. Just in time. Due to the tear gas bombs, the crowd was becoming agitated. A young soldier in uniform was being pushed around. In the midst of some loud shouting, he was trying to explain something, but the crowd would not listen. As Andy got closer, he saw his insignia: the pick and shovel. He was from a "work-service" division as the communist authorities called the forced labor branch of military service. Andy used to be part of that outfit, for his Father had been imprisoned as a political prisoner. That regiment was reserved for the "politically unreliables," for those the communist system did not trust. After "the unreliables" were drafted they worked in a coal mine in southern Hungary, then on building and road repair in Budapest. They were unexpectedly released from the Kilián Barracks in the last days of 1955, when Hungary embarked on a drive to become a member of the United Nations. Hungary had been criticized for keeping slave labor. Andy stepped in the circle of confrontation and held up his arms asking to be heard. Somehow, the people did what Andy asked and suspended the angry confrontation. Andy turned to the soldier:

"What are you doing here?"

"We heard there were demonstrations and came. There are several of us here. We are from the Kilian Barracks. Working regiment."

"I know. I recognized your insignia." Andy turned to the crowd and explained to people, who were still ready to push and shove that a terrible mistake was almost made here. These soldiers were from a forced labor regiment. The young soldier accepted the apologies and asked how they could help.

"Bring weapons here," several urged. "Otherwise the ÁVH will disperse us. If they feel strong enough they may attack us."

"I'm sure I could get at least fifty who'd come with weapons to smoke out the ÁVH," the soldier turned to Andy. Andy asked if he should go to help, because more weapons might be needed, but the other shook his head. "I don't know what the situation is back at the Kilian Barracks, so it is better for me to go alone."

The soldier left, promising to bring back weapons and more of his fellow workers.

Sporadic shooting still could be heard from the direction of the Radio building, although most people withdrew from the fence of the Museum Garden. The crowd reacted angrily to every crackle of gunfire. "These idiots don't even allow people to calm down," Andy thought. As the young man of the labor regiment disappeared in the direction of the Calvin Square, Andy was not sure any longer whether he desired the soldier to return with others as promised, or just to disappear for good. He knew he had no right to expect the soldier to put his life on the line by coming back. No one will remember him in this chaos, but in uniform, if caught, he would be dragged to military court and executed. God! What's coming yet? However, there was not much time to contemplate for the situation was changing by the minute.

Then, another group arrived on the boulevard to the Museum gates. Youngsters from the Rákóczi Military School in dark uniform with red piping. They came in loose order, but in a disciplined manner. A couple shouted orders, the others obeyed silently. The leaders began asking people to come out of the Museum Garden because that's where they wanted to take up positions. They'll clean out the ÁVH from the Radio Building. Andy, who happened to be on the Museum Boulevard at the garden's gate, near their arrival, was quietly impressed. The leader asked him to help to get people out of the Museum Garden. "What serious and determined boys! No, these are young men!" Andy corrected himself. "Are they going to be the first to fight back? Cadets from the military school that had been established by the communist government?" Andy shook his head. But soon he set aside his perplexity and asked the cadets for weapon, so he, too, could participate in the fight. The cadets did not have extra weapons, did not want extra help. Andy went with them into the garden, beyond the statues and asked people to move out and stay out.

"This is not for those who are not used to it," one of the cadet leaders said. "We will ask for help if we need it, but now, please divert people from the garden. We don't want anybody to get hurt."

Sounds filtered out from the garden, but suddenly the sound of other weapons also filled the air. The cracks of the new weapons began to dominate. People looked at each other with an anxious smile and moist eyes:

"These are our boys! They're shooting back! Unbelievable! This is shocking!"

The young soldier also returned from the Kilián Barracks in about an hour. He brought reinforcements: other soldiers with weapons, ready to take part in the fight. Standing on the boulevard Andy was talking with a young cadet who came to get fresh air. When he realized the kind of soldiers who were approaching, he turned to the newcomers. The cadet's face brightened. He, too, was glad to see reinforcements. After a short talk, the newly arrived soldiers moved into the Museum Garden.

Now, the crowd had to be gradually withdrawn from the side streets, too. The sound of shooting became steady; the battle took on serious proportions. Andy and others kept asking people to move back from Pushkin Street to Museum Boulevard. They could do no good in the battle area, but could be useful if the boys got attacked from the rear.

As people gradually realized their inability to participate in the developing battle, they began to disperse. This was no longer a demonstration. Imre and Molly had been long gone; Andy did not even know when they'd lost each other. The rattle of the guns was still going strong at an hour past midnight. Looked around, then slowly Andy began walking toward Calvin Square. Not knowing what else to do, he wanted to get home. Once there, he would tell everyone what happened, to carry the good news to his family. Maybe there'll be more to do tomorrow. He could hear streetcar wheels rumbling on the tracks beyond the square. He was not heading to Szentendre, but to his sister's apartment in the 11th District. He walked isolated, numb, his steps accompanied by the crackle of gunfire. As he climbed onto the deck of the streetcar, the memories of the magnificent day and the fate of the fighters were whirling around in his mind.

And the fighters – how could they eventually take on an entire army? True, the 1848 freedom fight began here, too, but not against such odds. Even if they only had to fight the ÁVH reinforcements, they would stand little chance, much less against this entire force. What a pity to lose such brave boys. For they would all die. Either in battle, or they'd be executed. Communist dictatorships are vengeful. By the time the streetcar rolled onto the Freedom Bridge, Andy's mood got gradually more despondent. He would have liked to turn back to persuade the fighters to disperse and return to their barracks or dormitories, before they got recognized. The country needs brave people in the long run, who won't buckle under Soviet oppression. Andy was not afraid,

but now, feeling let down, he sensed a great futility in this sacrifice of precious human lives. If he had any weapon, he probably would not be contemplating, but be among them, fighting the ÁVH without pondering the consequences. But standing on the deck of the streetcar, he felt deep sorrow for those who were destined to die. He leaned against the cool metal doorframe of the streetcar, and his chest heaving, he was on the verge of crying. But tears did not come. He just kept staring on the dark, rocky silhouette of the Gellért Hill hovering over the Danube like a frightening omen.

At dawn, about 5 a.m. they awoke to the shaking of the earth. Earthquake? Buildings were trembling, rumbling sounds of metal tracks were grating on the stone of the Fehérvár Road, just half a block away. Heavy columns of Soviet tanks were rolling into the city. It was obvious to Andy that they came to maintain the Soviet system. But this was a Hungarian affair! How could they interfere? This was an international scandal! God, help! What'd happen here? Andy and Árpád, his brother-in-law were grabbing for their clothes and getting dressed hurriedly. Andy's sister, Kati was fixing sandwiches for them. "You two be careful. Won't you?" She kept repeating while stuffing the sandwiches into their overcoat pockets. "Where are you heading?" "Back to the Radio."

That morning, between ten thirty and eleven o'clock the insurgents took the Radio building.

László G. Fülöp

Raised in the towns of Tiszakécske, Máramarossziget, and Szentendre, László G. Fülöp was conscripted to a forced labor division in Komló and Budapest in 1954-55. He took an active role in the Revolution of 1956, then fled to Austria in January of 1957. He studied architecture in Vienna, Austria and at the University of Minnesota; he worked in private practice, then at the Universities of Minnesota and Wisconsin as Director of Planning and Construction 1975-90. With his wife Ágnes Sylvester, Fülöp has long been a leader of the Association of the Minnesota Hungarians. He has been a member of the Executive Committee of the Hungarian American Coalition since 1996, a former President of the Hungarian Community of Friends, and is also a member of the American Hungarian Federation.

László G. Fülöp is the husband of Ágnes Sylvester Fülöp.