

56 Stories



Personal Recollections of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution
A Hungarian American Perspective

For those who bore witness to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, it had a significant and lasting influence on their lives. The stories in this book tell of their universal desire for freedom and the uncommon courage with which they tried to attain it in 1956.

Fifty years after the Revolution, the Hungarian American Coalition and Lauer Learning collected these inspiring memoirs from 1956 participants through the Freedom-Fighter56.com oral history website. The eyewitness accounts of this amazing modern-day David vs. Goliath struggle provide a special Hungarian-American perspective and pass on the very spirit of the Revolution of 1956 to future generations.

“56 Stories” contains 56 personal testimonials from '56-ers, nine stories from relatives of '56-ers, and a collection of archival photographs and original illustrations.



Photo courtesy of the International Rescue Committee

Photographs on front cover:

Three young freedom fighters. Miklós Bedő and Katalin Korbuly, Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection

Small photos of: Charles Farkas, Éva Kisvarsányi, Paul Maléter, Jr., Éva Kiss

Photograph on back cover:

Revolutionary flag at Corvin Passage. Leslie A. Toth, Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection

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Pictured above (clockwise): the Hilberts, the Novak siblings, the Hitter Grandparents, the Szabó family and Imre and Lily Farkas and friends



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Pictured above: the Szablya family, Bulcsú Veress

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Demonstrators on top of a tank on Bajcsy Zsilinszky Road



DEDICATION

This collection of personal stories from the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is dedicated to all who dreamt of freedom from Soviet domination. By honoring their memory, we, Hungarian Americans, wish to pay homage and remind the world 50 years later of the hope, courage and sacrifice of those Hungarian Freedom Fighters. Their heroic resistance revealed for the first time the terrible face of communism, and hastened its eventual collapse.

Dr. Ferenc Butor, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



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Ata Kandó



Refugees on the border between Hungary and Austria



Crowds gather around a captured tank on the streets of Budapest

FOREWORD

This year is a great gift to all Hungarian Americans, but especially those of us who had the privilege to witness or participate in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. On the 50th anniversary of this historic time we pay homage to the heroes who died for freedom, and whose memory has been indelibly engraved in history.

The authors of “56 Stories” bring alive those unforgettable days. All over the United States there is great interest, a wonderful sense of pride, and a flood of creativity to organize conferences, books, films, concerts, church services, and exhibits to honor the 1956 Revolution.

Such occasions are sometimes honored through orchestral compositions. In a way, I see “56 Stories” as a symphony of words: the voices reflect hope and fear, joy and sadness, kindness and cruelty, but above all, they sing of patriotism, honor, and courage. As the recollections of 56 individuals blend into a symphony, the reader gradually learns not only about the actual events, but also about the essence of 1956: man’s universal yearning for freedom.

Much is revealed in these stories: the terrible years of communist rule from 1948-56 that included domestic deportations, property confiscation, forced work battalions, arrests and show-trials on false charges, severe prison terms, and too many death sentences.

The events of the Revolution also come alive: the large initial demonstration on October 23rd, followed by the first shots fired that night in front of the Radio; the bloodshed on October 25th in front of the Parliament; the resourcefulness and uncommon courage of the mostly young freedom fighters; the euphoria of the few days when the Russians seemed to be withdrawing; the appearance overnight of grass-roots councils in preparation for a democratic future. But we also see the fallen, the injured, and the widespread destruction all over Budapest. And many writers recall the horror of November 4; the desperate call for help from the West that never came; and the bleak hopelessness that followed when Soviet troops reentered Hungary to crush the Revolution with overwhelming force.

And finally, the decision to leave the beloved homeland; the difficulties of crossing the border; living the life of a refugee; and the eventual arrival into the unknown, the United States. Of the 200,000 refugees who escaped from Hungary after the Revolution, more than 30,000 settled in the United States. When we arrived, we experienced the true spirit of American openness and generosity. Communities, churches, universities and individuals provided unprecedented assistance to Hungarian refugees.

This great wave of immigration not only served to revitalize the Hungarian American community, but it also provided a group of highly committed and passionate advocates in the United States to speak on behalf of those Hungarians who suffered under reasserted communist rule. In his book, "Creative Struggle," Hungarian writer-politician of Slovakia, László Dobos, aptly describes our "56 generation" this way:

"...This generation took with it a hate and fear of dictatorship and violence; a deep sense of patriotism; the acceptance of responsibility for its homeland; and an abiding desire for freedom... Even at great geographical distance it paid close attention to the fate of its homeland...It helped the opposition forces organize... Its members became acting diplomats who were appointed on moral grounds. This generation of Hungarian '56-ers in America, with its behavior, institutions, and intellectual values represents the outstanding achievement of our modern-day Hungarian history."

For "this generation" the great challenge was to take with us and keep alive in our adopted homeland the spirit of 1956, while our countrymen who stayed behind were sentenced to silence. Yet, even under political oppression and years of propaganda, the deep desire for freedom survived and principled resistance grew in the hearts and minds of many Hungarians. By establishing close ties with the opponents of the system, we could support their attempts to loosen the bonds of communist control.

It is a deeply ironic turn of history, that in 1989, when the fall of communism was ushered in by the long-awaited, emotional public reburial of the heroes of the 1956 Revolution, the lines between guilt and innocence began to blur as victim and victimizer participated together in that moment of national catharsis.

Although fifty years ago Hungarians were united in the common struggle against the enemy, in today's Hungary the Revolution is seen through different prisms of ideology. Questions, such as who was a freedom fighter, what was the Revolution's goal, and whose actions were innocent or guilty, are increasingly difficult to answer. As stated by a bewildered '56-er: "How can we forgive, if no one apologizes?"

It will take a long time to heal the pain and bridge the deep divisions in Hungarian society caused by forty years of communism. But the lives of tragedy and triumph described by the writers of "56 Stories" provide such vivid snapshots of people and events that our children and grandchildren will recognize the values the Revolution stood for.

My daughter, Andrea, and I have considered it a privilege and a labor of love to collect and to contribute our own stories to this book. We present them to you, our readers, in the genuine hope that the voices you hear when you read "56 Stories" will help you gain genuine insight and understanding for the inspiring story of Hungarians in those miraculous twelve days of 1956.

Edith K. Lauer
Chair Emerita
Hungarian American Coalition



A piece of the Stalin statue torn down by freedom fighters

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people helped us complete this year-long, multimedia oral history project. We would like to give special thanks to the following people for their guidance, support and encouragement:

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all authors, photographers and artists for sharing their personal stories and original artwork and photos. We are honored by your confidence. In addition, several authors helped translate their own stories, once we made the decision to publish everyone in both languages. Thank you.

Thank you to our wonderful team of translators: Katica Avvakumovits, Éva Bánszki, Ajna Pfenninberger, Ilona Somogyi and Zsuzsa Szúnyog.

Special thanks to our talented team of editors: Katica Avvakumovits, John Lauer, György Mátyásfalvi, Barton Rice and Edina Varsa. Endre Szentkirályi has been our dedicated website editor from the beginning of the project. Special thanks for the countless hours invested in the project go to both Endre and his wife, Eszti.

Lorelei Grazier, along with her team at Grazier Design Works, has been wholeheartedly committed to this project from day one and is responsible for the design of the website as well as both books. Her creativity and passion for her work have been a real inspiration. Thank you!

There is a long list of people who have provided additional help and support above and beyond the call of duty. Special thanks to Zsolt Szekeres, László Dobos, Ágnes and László Fülöp, Kathy and László Megyeri, Francis Laping and Valéria Kormos.

And thank you to all of the professionals who believed in our project and lent their support and expertise: János Rainer, Director of the 1956 Institute, Mária Schmidt, Director of the Terror House Museum and the former U.S. Ambassador to Hungary, George Herbert Walker III.

And lastly, thank you to our family for their moral and financial support. John Lauer and Barton Rice have been patient, understanding and generous in helping with this special project. To Éva Kiss (Nagymami), and Elemér Kiss (Nagyapji), thank you for your bravery and for your inspiration.

INTRODUCTION TO 56 STORIES

For many Hungarians who witnessed 1956, the Revolution had a significant and lasting influence on their lives. Hearing these stories of heroism, second-generation Hungarians, spouses of '56-ers and people everywhere have been deeply inspired.

In this special 50th anniversary year, the Hungarian American Coalition and Lauer Learning have collected these inspiring stories from 1956 survivors through the www.FreedomFighter56.com oral history website. Our goal is to help complete the picture of this amazing modern-day David vs. Goliath struggle by passing on not only the stories, but the very spirit of the Revolution of 1956 to future generations.

Our initial idea was to publish "56 stories" about 1956 in this volume, but we published 65 stories instead. We also added a section for family members of '56-ers to tell their own story, and to answer the question, "What is the legacy of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in the Hungarian-American community?"

Each of the 65 stories adds a new detail, a different perspective or a unique personal recollection about 1956. When woven together, all the stories and material create a rich tapestry that reveals the full story of the 1956 Revolution through the eyes of Hungarian-Americans. Each tells its own story of survival and of love for and pride in a country that transcends borders and generations.

We are extremely grateful to all those who have submitted their own stories from this unforgettable time in their lives, and to the photographers and artists who allowed us to use their material. For many people, this was the first time they shared their story of 1956.

We hope you enjoy reading the personal stories contained in these pages and pass this volume onto the next generation. We will continue to collect stories through our website to add to the historical record. In addition, we have created a way for you to donate copies of this volume to schools and libraries in both the United States and Hungary.

This will ensure that the heroes of 1956 and the suffering of a nation will never be forgotten.

Maximillian Teleki
President
Hungarian American Coalition

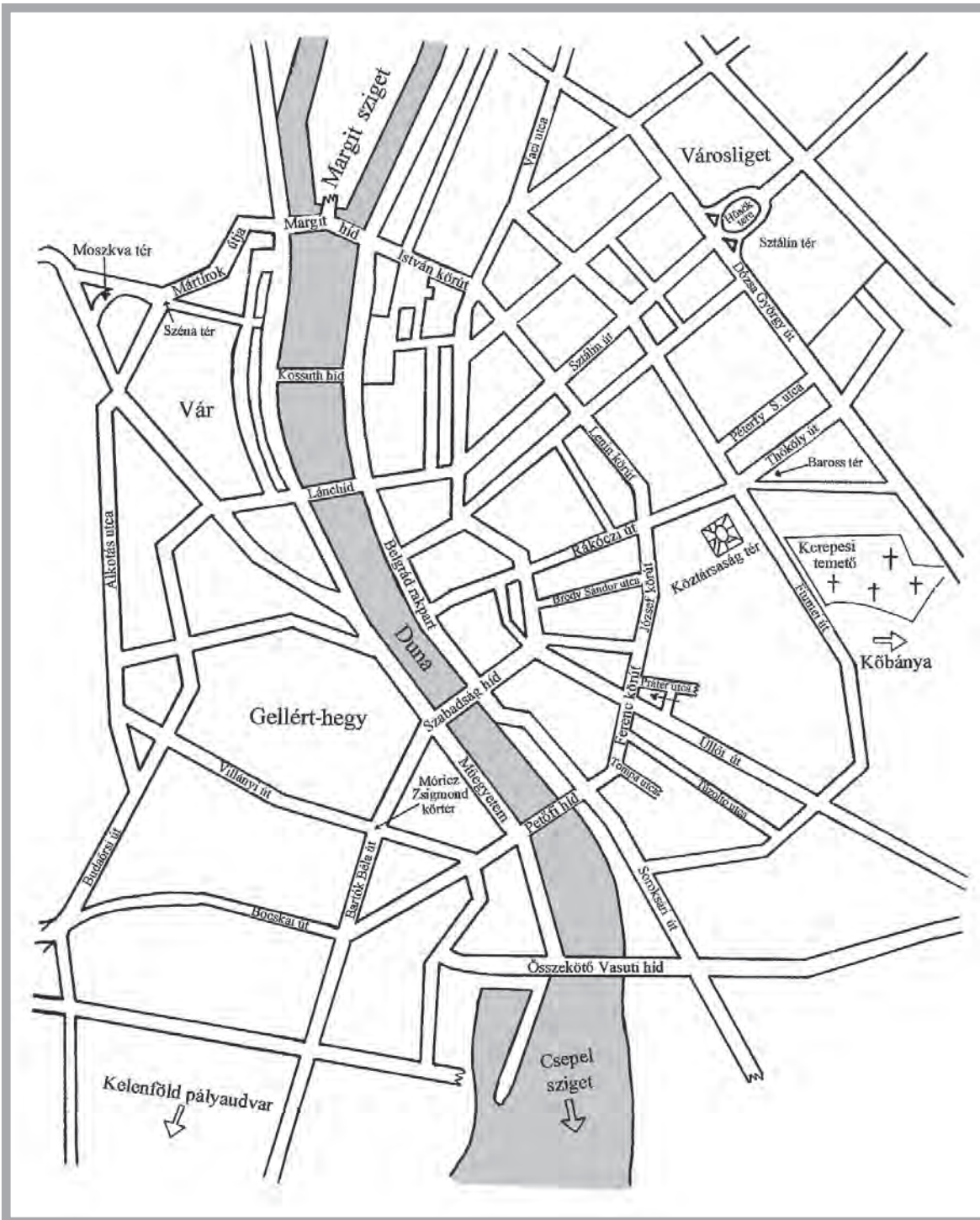
Andrea Lauer Rice
CEO & Founder
Lauer Learning

August 6, 2006

EDITOR'S NOTE

The stories, articles and perspectives published in this book contain personal recollections from a diverse group of Hungarians. In gathering these testimonials, we chose to honor individual memories of certain events and celebrate different styles of writing, instead of attempting to make all references uniform. This is a collection of their stories in their own words. As a result, there are some inconsistencies in content, language and format used. Please consult the glossary beginning on page 209 for brief historic definitions. Additional educational reference material can be found on our website. www.FreedomFighter56.com

Major Sites of the Revolution: Budapest, 1956



Map created by C. Barton Rice, Jr.

LEGEND

A Technical University
B Bern statue
C Parliament
D U.S. Embassy
E Petőfi statue
F Hungarian Radio building
G Corvin Passage

H Kilián Barracks
I Péterfy Sándor Hospital
J Stalin statue
K Yugoslav Embassy
L Keleti (Eastern) Train Station
M Nyugati (Western) Train Station

TRANSLATION

hegy - hill
híd - bridge
körtér - plaza
körút - ring road
pályaudvar - train station
sziget - island

temető - cemetery
tér/tere - square
út/utca/útja - road/street

Tibor Arany

AN ORIGINAL “PESTI SRÁC”



Arany's military credentials from 1956

Arany does not know what became of the others, since he was taken to a separate facility, where he received a week's worth of treatment. When he was returned to the military camp hospital, the officer in charge tried to get Arany to agree never to talk to anyone about the circumstances of the accident. The officer threatened that if he did, he would go back to prison.

On November 11, 1953 – with unusual speed – Arany was sent to forced labor detail at a mine near the town of Pécs. His official record stated that he would have been a “poor influence” on his fellow soldiers. On January 14, 1954, he was released from the mine for medical reasons and returned to Budapest, where he was required to report to the police station on a weekly basis. He later learned that the Hungarian army newspaper reported that accidents involving snake bites had occurred at the Böhönye military camp, but there was no mention of the seriousness of the injuries or of the death. Arany never received any compensation for his suffering and persecution.

Revolution erupts

When the 1956 Revolution and freedom fight erupted, Arany was working at the Laboratory Equipment Factory, where he manufactured thermometers. He participated in the revolutionary events as one of the legendary “Pesti Srácok” [Budapest Boys], and took part in the battles against the invading Soviet military forces, at the very heart of the freedom fight at Corvin Square.

On October 25, Arany attempted to go to his workplace on Tűzoltó Street to see what was happening. When he reached the main intersection of Üllői Street, he saw two T-34 Russian tanks speeding toward Kálvin Square, then turn around and begin slowly inching their way back toward the Kilián Barracks. It was clear that major clashes were imminent. Arany stood at the Museum of Applied Arts, inside the fence, when the two tanks reached the intersection. The first tank stopped halfway up on the curb, with its caterpillar tread in a rather precarious position; the second tank stopped just behind it and to the left, giving some cover to the first one. Across the street, at the second floor balcony of the Kilián Barracks, the soldiers built a fortified shooting station with drum-fed machine guns.

In 1952, Tibor Arany was drafted into the Hungarian military. He later attended the officer training academy in the city of Pécs. On charges of refusing to obey orders and insubordination he was condemned to forced labor in 1953. On August 23, 1953, he was set free due to the amnesty announced by Imre Nagy. Following his release, he was sent to the town of Székesfehérvár, then to the military training camp at Böhönye, where he participated in war games observed by high government officials. When he completed the games “with distinction,” he was rewarded with three volumes of “The Complete Writings of Mátyás Rákosi.”

The day after the government officials left the military camp, Arany's unit was involved in an assault rifle battle and explosion during training exercises. Six soldiers were seriously injured, among them Arany. Hit by pieces of shrapnel under his nose, as well as a blast of air pressure, Arany was rendered temporarily deaf. He was also bleeding from the mouth, which led him to assume he had injured his lung.

To top it off, as the Russian and Hungarian officer corps looked on, it became clear that neither an ambulance nor a doctor was on hand for the training exercises – an oversight for which the military did not take responsibility, either then or later on.

The wounded were finally loaded onto a truck, but by the time they reached the hospital at Kaposvár, one seriously injured lieutenant was already dead, and the rest of the injured were in critical condition. To this day,

Since street repairs were underway nearby, the paving had been removed and the macadam stones piled up in piles about one meter high. The first tank started firing at a building on a corner of the boulevard, and everyone in the area took cover. When there was a moment's lull, Arany together with a friend, jumped in behind one of the piles of macadam. From the barracks, the soldiers began firing phosphorescent bullets at the tank's tracks and wheels. There were bitumen blocks piled up behind the macadam barricade, which Arany began to throw at the tank's rear wheels. Throwing from a prone position was difficult, but even staying behind the barricade was difficult. His friend suffered a thigh wound because his leg could be seen from behind the tank. Arany was able to quickly tie off the injured leg using his belt.

Meanwhile the fighting continued. The first tank fired twice, causing the machine gun fire from the barracks to cease for a few minutes. When another soldier took over and continued firing from the window, the first tank began to move away, but its tracks slipped. Arany tossed about ten more bitumen blocks at the tank, which began to emit smoke. When the second tank came forward and fired twice more, the balcony of the barracks came crashing down. The two tank drivers must have been communicating with each other, because shortly thereafter, the second tank – firing from all sides – left the area. The next act of the drama ensued.

The remaining tank personnel may have been overcome by smoke because the tank's emergency exit opened, and one of the soldiers inside waved a white cloth from the end of the gun barrel. Arany approached the tank, yelling out "Don't shoot!" and escorted the soldier into Corvin Square. He heard later that the soldier, who was originally from the Carpathians, became a cook for the Hungarian freedom fighters based at Corvin Square.

During a break in the shooting, the white-capped paramedics transported the wounded to the hospital on Mária Street. Arany and his comrades removed the machine gun from the top of the tank and brought it to the Kilián Barracks. Because several people were killed or wounded as a result of the shooting, the crowd grew wild and started throwing Molotov cocktails at the destroyed tank. This was the first T-34 tank to be destroyed in Budapest. After November 4, the incoming tanks were of the T-54 type... but that's another story.

Guarding the Hungarian Women's Democratic Association building

On October 29, the freedom fighters requested reinforcements to act as guards at the Hungarian Women's Democratic Association building, on Belgrád rakpart (today the headquarters of the Smallholders Party). Since Arany lived on Molnár Street, he knew the neighborhood well, and so he was sent together with another young man. They organized guard duty in Szerb Street together with an armed fighter recruited from the nearby military institute. One guard was always on duty to screen anyone who tried to enter the offices of the Writers' Association, headed by Péter Kucka.

The caretaker showed them the building, the basement, the kitchen, and the emergency exit, which opened onto Molnár Street. This was the day that the Secret Police, sensing that the game was up for the system they served, began disguising themselves and trying to escape. There was a boat landing across from the building. That night, Arany sent one of the boys there to keep watch on the street and to signal if any armed units approached. Meanwhile, Arany twice delivered messages to Tibor Déry at the Kecskeméti street college, which was Déry's headquarters – possibly also the headquarters for military studies.

At around 11 p.m., the guard signaled that uniformed units, in a rather strange formation about 10 meters apart, were approaching from the direction of the Erzsébet Bridge. Arany went to the gate of the building, called the guard in, and they waited. They opened one wing of the gate and prepared the machine gun.

The uniformed men slowly approached the gate. When the first one came near enough, Arany and his partner stepped out and yanked the soldiers in one after the other – all five of them – and quickly disarmed them. There were two officers and three privates, all members of the Secret Police. Upon questioning, Arany learned that these soldiers had been defending the Party Committee building in the Fourth district; only one of them, the higher-ranked officer, was armed. The entire unit was from the region of Kalocsa, Hungary. Kucka was very upset when he saw the captured Secret Police: "I never ordered anyone to capture Secret Police; now what are we going to do with them?"

Arany suggested they bring the captives in to Sándor Kopácsi the next morning, at the Police Headquarters at Deák tér. Kucka could not decide, so someone suggested they ask Tibor Déry for advice. But who would go out to Déry now, at night, when the city was full of Secret Police and Russians? Everyone looked at Arany, who had been to see Déry several times. Kucka said: "You did this, it was your idea, and you know Déry."

Arany was able to meet with Déry that night, on the balcony under the cover of night. They agreed that they would provide the captured agents with shoes and clothes from the university dormitory on Szerb Street, and then let them go free; the judicial system of the victorious Revolution would then bring its verdict if the agents were proved guilty. Meanwhile, Arany wrote down the names and addresses of the captives for himself, but the captured officer also wrote down Arany's data, which explains why, years later, Arany was not allowed to return home to Hungary. Yet something compelled Arany to be cautious, and so he gave his birthplace as Tiszazug instead of Tiszaföldvár – no one but those five captives knew this bit of information.

After the Revolution

After the Revolution was crushed, Arany fled to Vienna, then immigrated to the United States. His first job was in Wilmington, Delaware, as a thermometer maker for Dupont. From there he moved to Philadelphia, and finally settled in New York with his family. For decades, he worked for several Hungarian radio programs in New York.

Currently, he is a board member of the 1956 World Federation and of the 1956 "Pesti Srác" Scholarship Foundation. He has financially supported the education of many college students in Hungary.

In 1982, he finally received a visa to enter Hungary with his family. When he arrived at the Budapest airport, he was immediately steered away from his family and escorted into a separate room. Here the officials told him he was an "undesirable" person. When reading his personal data, they gave Tiszazug as his place of birth. Arany asked where they'd gotten that information, but they did not reply. His family was allowed in, but Arany was arrested in the morning and interrogated as to whom he knew in 1956 and also, in the United States. Arany gave no information, but asked – as an American citizen – to telephone the U.S. Embassy. This request was denied. His then-74 year-old Mother, who had not seen her son for decades was waiting for him at the airport. Upon hearing what happened, she fell ill and had to be taken away by ambulance. The next day, Arany was put on a plane to Amsterdam.

With the end of communist rule and the emergence of a free Hungary, Arany was officially recognized by the Hungarian government for his integrity and contribution to protecting and promoting the memory and spirit of the 1956 Revolution. In 1991, Hungarian President Árpád Göncz awarded him the 1956 Memorial Medal. He is also especially proud of the certificate and decoration awarded to him by the Corvin Square Fraternal Society.

In 2001, he moved home to Hungary. The World Association of Hungarian Freedom Fighters recognized his patriotic works with the "Loyalty to Country" Order of the Cross.



Tibor Arany

After the Revolution was crushed, Arany fled to Vienna, then immigrated to the United States, finally settling in New York with his family. For decades, he worked for several Hungarian radio programs in New York and after retirement, he ran an independent Hungarian radio which was self-financed. Currently, he is a board member of the 1956 World Federation and of the 1956 "Pesti Srác" Scholarship Foundation. In 2001, he moved home to Hungary where he currently resides. He is the recipient of a number of awards and medals, including the "Loyalty to Country" Order of the Cross from the World Association of Hungarian Freedom Fighters.

Éva Apor Bálintt

THE “HEALTHY HATRED” OF THE WORKING CLASS...

I was married in September of 1956, so I was very much a newlywed when the Revolution broke out. Both my husband and I were considered “enemies of the people”, who were persecuted – In the words of Mátyás Rákosi – by the “healthy hatred” of the working class. This hatred took the form of several years’ imprisonment (for my husband) and a prohibition on higher education (for me). So when we heard the news on October 23, we were more than happy.

Fragmented memories of the Revolution

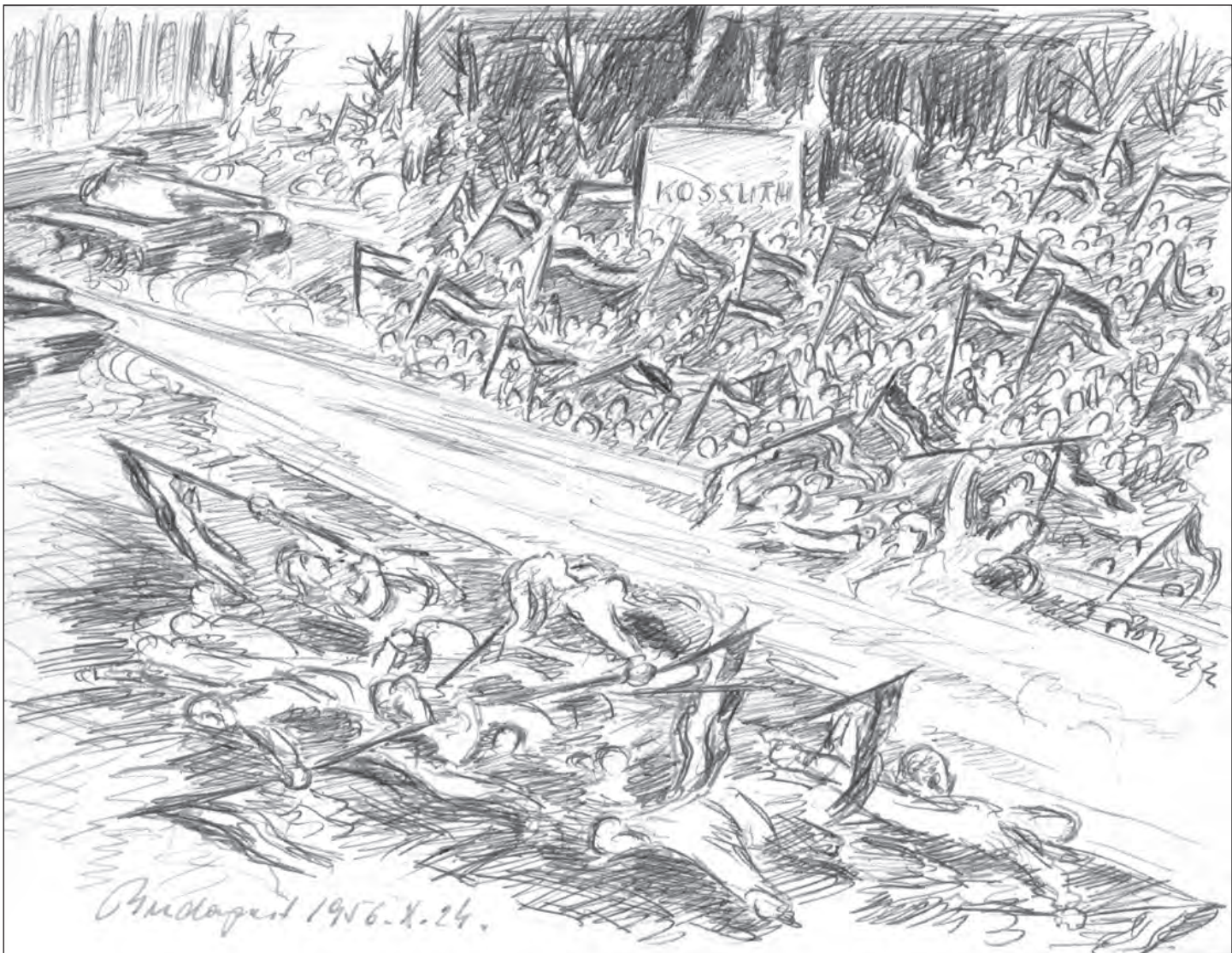
Those days were a blur of activity, but there are a few memories that stand out...

I don’t remember exactly which street it was on, but there was a pastry shop with its windows broken in. Someone had taken the baked goods from the little display baskets, but paid for them – leaving the money behind in the baskets. Even though the windows were gone, the money was untouched.

A Russian tank stood at the corner of Kossuth Lajos Street and Magyar Street, topped by a Hungarian flag. Next to the tank, a Hungarian and a Russian soldier stood and saluted while a crowd on the street sang the Hungarian national anthem.

We lived on the fourth floor of a building on Egyetem Street. From our window we saw young freedom fighters,

Illustration by Ferenc Bitó



The demonstration at Kossuth Square

machine guns in hand, run down the street, peer around the corner and then enter the next street. One day we saw the freedom fighters tear down the large red star from the wall of a nearby building and toss it into the street.

October 25th at Parliament

On October 25, we heard that a big demonstration was taking place in front of the Parliament. We were curious, so off we went. An enormous crowd had gathered on the square behind the Parliament building. We stopped underneath the arcades of the Agricultural Ministry, on the far side of the square. When a tank rolled by, we tried to guess whether it was Hungarian or Russian. The tank proceeded around the square, rolled toward the river, then stopped.

All of a sudden shots rang out. We didn't know where the shots came from, and cowered behind the pillars of the ministry building. Behind each column, about 20-25 people piled upon each other in an effort to get out of the line of fire. We saw the red-hot bullets crackling on the ground.

After a while, my husband climbed up on the pile of people and pushed me through the window of the ministry building, then came after me, and someone pulled him inside. Some of the employees warned us that whoever did not work there would be arrested, so we quickly climbed out of a back window. Later we heard that many people died outside on that square. Although I sprained my ankle dropping out of the window, a doctor who lived across the street was able to set it for me.

When we started off for home, we saw a funeral procession on one of the boulevards. Everyone – men and women – were dressed in black and carrying Hungarian flags and black mourning flags. They walked slowly and silently down the middle of the street.

We continued on our way home and turned onto Váci Street. There we heard cheerful music filtering out from one of the cafés. It was full of well-dressed men and women, chatting pleasantly, as if nothing were happening.



Éva Apor Bálintitt

Éva Apor Bálintitt is related on her Father's side to Bishop Vilmos Apor, the Roman Catholic bishop who died a martyr while defending civilian victims of the occupying Red Army after World War II. When Bálintitt fled Hungary as a refugee in November 1956, she carried only a small silk cocktail dress folded into a tiny square, and a high school history book, so that her future children could learn about Hungarian history. Both were put to good use. She remains very active in Hungarian-American society, and raised her son and daughter to be proud Hungarians. Together with her husband, she has worked tirelessly for Hungarian American institutions, including New York's Hungarian School, the American Transylvania Society, and the New York Hungarian House. As a measure of compensation for her family's persecution under communism, in 2000, the Hungarian Government officially recognized the family's contributions to the émigré Hungarian community. She currently lives in Staten Island, NY.

László Béres

THE PIG ROAST WILL BE ON SATURDAY

I was born on July 31, 1944, and grew up in a small town named Buj near Nyíregyháza.

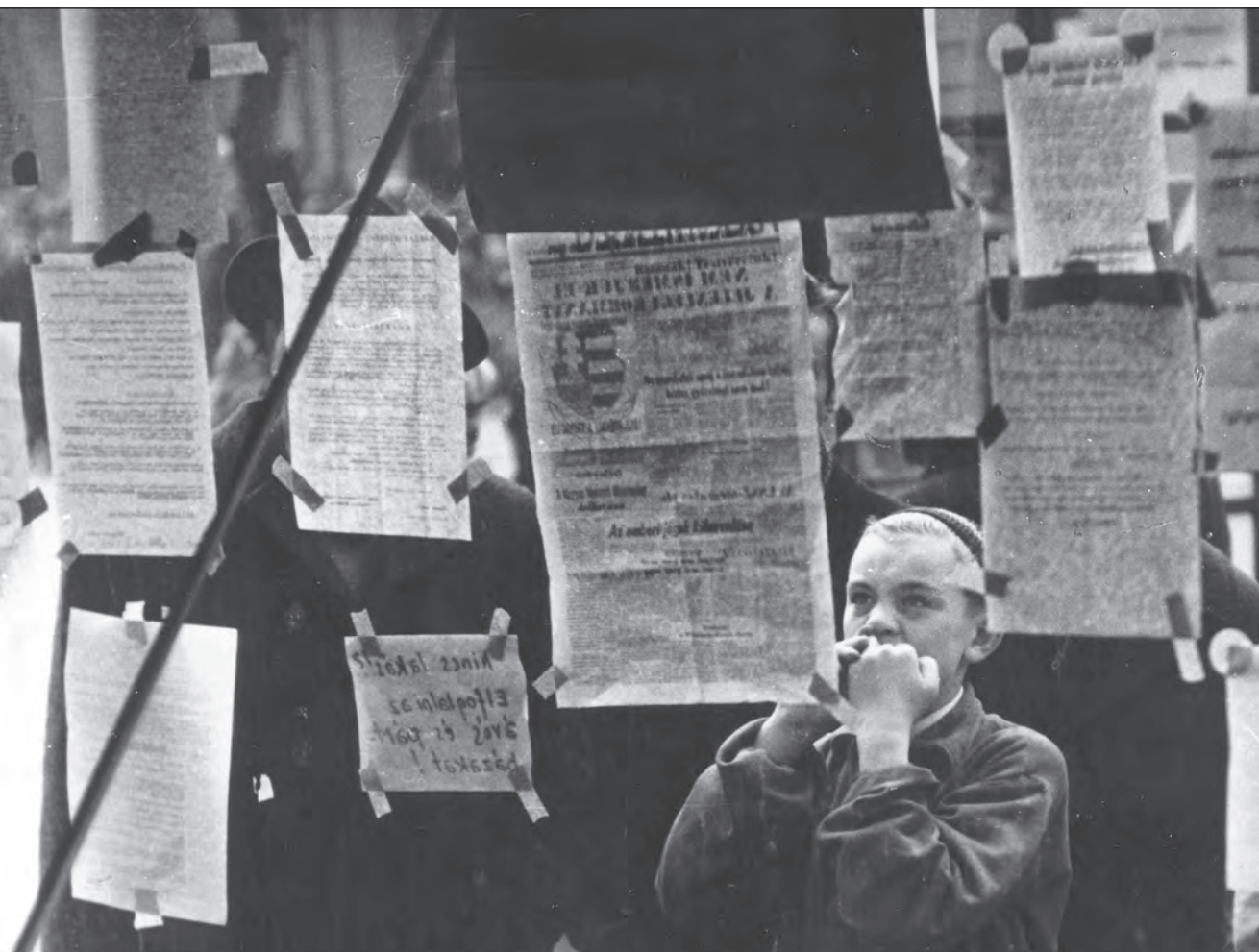
When the Revolution started I was 12 years old and living in Buj with my Mother and Grandmother. My Father, whom I did not know except through letters, left Hungary in 1944, fled to Germany and made his way to the United States to work on a farm owned by a relative in Connecticut. He became a U.S. citizen and tried very hard to get my Mother and me to join him in America, but all his attempts were rebuffed by the Hungarian government. The Revolution presented my Mother with an opportunity of a lifetime, albeit a very risky and dangerous one, to leave the country.

After the Revolution was brutally suppressed by the Russians, thousands of Hungarians fled the country into Austria. My Mother, with the help of my Uncle, planned to do the same. She arranged with relatives in Budapest to make contacts with a farmer they knew who lived on the border near Sopronkövesd to help smuggle us out of the country for a fee of 10,000 forints. It was going to be a difficult undertaking, since we first had to cross the country by train to get to the border.

Pig roast

One day near the end of November, my Mother received a telegram from Budapest that said "We Are Waiting For You – The Pig Roast Will Be On Saturday – Come As Soon As You Can." This was the signal to let my Mother know that the arrangements were made and we should start as soon as possible. The next morning my Mother, Uncle and I left by train carrying only a few suitcases on an adventure that changed our life forever. I did not, could not, as a young child know that morning as the train pulled out of the tiny train station at Buj, that I would not be back to my birthplace for thirty years.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery, Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection



Reading the free newspapers and flyers of the Revolution

Our first stop was Budapest, where we stayed with our relatives for a few days. I remember the city in ruins, that there were still demonstrations, and what I thought was gunfire could be heard at night. The rest of the trip to the border was tense, but uneventful. Somehow, we were overlooked by the train security officers who were checking identifications and inquiring about people's destinations.

We finally arrived at the home of the farmer whose property was near the Austrian border, and we stayed with him and his family for about three days, waiting for the right time to cross the border. On the night of December 6, a clear but very cold night, we were led through the fields to a wooded area, which we crossed. In the next clearing, the farmer pointed my Uncle in some direction and left us there.

Crossing to Austria

I remember walking for hours in the frigid cold, being very scared and terrified. Were we lost; were we going to get caught, or worse; would we get shot by border guards? I could tell panic was setting in as my Uncle was crawling on the ground looking for land mines. We finally happened on a dirt road but had no idea where it led. In one direction we saw a faint light in the distance and decided to walk in that direction. After some time we came upon a crucifix on the side of the road. My Uncle could tell in the moonlight that the inscription on the crucifix was in German, and we became more confident that we were going in the right direction.

We eventually arrived at the light which we were walking toward. It turned out to be the police station of a small Austrian town. When we went inside, we met five or six other Hungarians who also successfully escaped that same night.

The plan was that my Uncle would help us escape and then return to his family back in Hungary. After the ordeal we went through, he decided not to return but instead, to arrange that his wife and son, as well as the relatives in Budapest who helped us, would escape as well. They did successfully, but under even more harrowing circumstances, a few weeks later. We were all reunited in Vienna in January of 1957.

Washington's birthday

My Mother and I, along with my Uncle and his family, arrived in the United States on February 23, 1957, which happened to be the holiday of George Washington's birthday. We were part of a special program ordered by President Eisenhower to airlift 10,000 refugees to the United States. I saw my Father for the first time three days later, when he came to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey to take us to his home in Shelton, Connecticut.

This is just one of 200,000 stories of Hungarian refugees escaping the communist terror during and after the Revolution of 1956.

László Béres

After escaping from Hungary at the age of 12, László Béres finally met his Father for the first time. He eventually obtained a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from Yale University in 1971. He worked at a research products company and later at DuPont in various technical and managerial positions for 26 years. He has been married to Linda Béres since 1967. A cancer survivor, he is now retired and lives in Hull, Massachusetts, a small coastal community south of Boston.

László Bójtös

TOGETHER IN SPITE OF THE DISTANCE

As a recently married, recent college graduate, I experienced the intellectual and emotional atmosphere that preceded the events of October 23, 1956, while working at an architectural design firm in Budapest.

I was affected by the popular spirit which had been ever more audaciously challenging the strictures of the dictatorship. Finally, a demonstration of solidarity with the strike in Poland was planned for the afternoon of October 23, beginning at the Technical University. I joined the protesters, who proceeded along the banks of the Danube toward the statue of Joseph Bem at Bem Square. Onlookers cheered us on from their apartment windows. They started to hang flags from their windows; then everyone started cutting out the communist symbols from the middle of the flag – creating the “hole in the flag,” which was to become a defining symbol of the 1956 Revolution.

Enthusiastic crowds of people were arriving at the Bem Statue from every direction and soon filled the entire square. Several cars equipped with loudspeakers underscored the fact that this demonstration had indeed been planned. I later returned home. The next day I learned from the radio, and later witnessed personally, that the people's uprising had turned into an armed battle.

In the days and weeks following October 23, I split my time between Budapest-Vadosfa (where my widowed Mother and younger brother lived), and the city of Győr. I did not take part in any of the fighting, but I was present, together with my wife, at many of the historic events.

From tyranny to national unity

Hungary's situation during the period before 1956 was best expressed in Gyula Illyés' poem “One Sentence on Tyranny” (written in 1950, but suppressed by censors). The poem illustrates the basic condition of the human being who lives under tyranny: he is completely at the mercy of the state. The poem expressed the recognition that when the state extends its unlimited powers over every sphere of human life, then life becomes unbearable; such a system robs the individual and the nation of its human dignity, and deprives them of their their conscious self, their very identity.

On October 23, 1956, the Hungarian nation rose up against this totalitarian tyranny. The people's bitterness had grown and festered in the sufferings of a betrayed, defenseless, oppressed nation over the course of a long decade. The Revolution was preceded by the deportation, punishment, or forced relocation of half a million innocent people, as well as internment camps, lists of “undesirable” people, show trials and Secret Police terror.

This Revolution expressed the common will of a whole nation, not just a social segment of dispossessed or disadvantaged people. The entire nation, as one, rose up against the system which left no room for individual human will or dignity, but placed every individual at the total mercy of the state.

This common national will

Within a few days, this will of the people had coalesced into a comprehensive declaration of the basic principles of a modern European way of life: individual freedoms, national sovereignty, political neutrality, self-government, democracy and a multi-party system of governance. These demands expressed the Hungarian people's complete national unity.

The Revolutionary government was a government of the nation; the government followed the will of the people. It was only during the days of the Revolution that the Prime Minister showed himself worthy of representing the nation. On November 2, our most esteemed writers lauded the miraculous achievement of the “nation lifting itself up” (in the words of László Németh), achieving the “greatest and first victorious Revolution in its history” (Tibor Déry), as Hungarians became the “guiding star of the human race” (István Örkény). But then came the dawn of November 4, when a brief radio statement by the Prime Minister announced the national tragedy: “...Today, at dawn, the Soviet forces launched an attack against our capital city, with the evident intent of toppling the lawful Hungarian democratic government.” This was the great tragic moment in our history; the destiny of a small country abandoned to its fate.

Flight

Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, on December 1, my wife and I decided to take advantage of offers of help to flee the country. An acquaintance of ours, who lived in Mosonmagyaróvár (near the Austrian border), brought us by motorbike, one by one, to a villager whose backyard was just a few meters from the border. With the guidance of this man, who held a 6-foot stick in front of him to detect any trip mines, we set off. The border was already being resealed, and we had to drop to the ground every time a reconnaissance rocket lit the sky. We had reached a place that had no distinguishing characteristics, when our leader announced that we were now in Austria. There we stood, the starry sky above, completely unsure of what to do next. We then got on board a tractor which took us to a Red Cross station set up in an Austrian village restaurant.

We got through our first days in Austria with our spirits completely depleted by having experienced the Revolution and its subsequent destruction. Sometimes we were housed on mattresses in YMCA gymnasiums with a hundred other refugees; at other times, in recently vacated Soviet barracks, or in a corridor of a train station with our winter coats for blankets. Our days passed in the total insecurity which comes with homelessness and the feeling of being cast out. The lethargy of those days was only slowly lifted by a glimmer of hope for some solution, a measure of stability. With the sponsorship of the World Lutheran Association, we arrived in America, the country of our choice, in the final days of December. A few days later we started our new lives in Cleveland.

Remaining Hungarian

Even at such a great distance, I could not accept the thought that I had left my home. Constant reference to our “temporary” situation gave us a way to psychologically accept the current situation. While looking for work,

I met another Hungarian refugee, who had left Hungary in 1945 and had already lived in the United States, for 6 years. I asked him, “I guess you’ll be going home, too, as soon as things settle down?” His negative response depressed me for days, for I felt that he had consciously given up everything, and was lost to the nation. The everyday pressures of making a living, of having to adjust to a new language and professional expectations, helped me get through this period.

As the years passed, we looked for practical ways to remain a part of the Hungarian nation despite the physical distance. In our erstwhile homeland, the tremendous experiences of the Revolution and its goals had never been abandoned; they became a force for national unity during the subsequent decades of occupation. And ever more openly, Hungarians continued to express their demands for justice. For a time, these expressions of freedom could only take the form of poetic metaphor and coded speech. The call for justice, condemned to silence, nevertheless made itself heard in a variety of ways.

The fate of our community: a spiritual homeland

We in the West took advantage of the possibility to openly honor the Revolution and its ideals. Gloria victis! Glory to the victims! – we could say it, and we engraved it on memorials to the Revolution. I became an active member and leader of the Hungarian Community of Friends, a group which sought to foster a spiritual and intellectual community of and for Hungarians dispersed outside of Hungary. As speakers and friends, we invited guests from Hungary – those who continued to stand for the ideals of the Revolution, for honor and decency.

We first returned to Hungary on a family visit in 1968, then several more times during the communist era. The double crossing gates at the border, barbed-wire fence and the armed soldier watching us from the guard tower all remained throughout the years, but the surveillance which dogged us during our first visit, during which agents were pressed to report on any “negative” statements we were making, lessened over the years. During these decades, we realized that we were no longer preparing to return home; instead, we were building up a spiritual homeland around us. This homeland is not a function of the political system that happens to be in power in Hungary; it is a form of our individual and community fate here in the United States, which is nourished by Hungarian intellectual and cultural values. In other words, it is an expression of national identity whereby we, as carriers of Hungarian language, history and culture, are part of the collective Hungarian nation, no matter where we live. Part and parcel of this identity are individual commitment and a principled way of life.

1989: Are we living up to the possibilities and responsibilities of freedom?

Since October 23, 1989, the Republic of Hungary too has had the opportunity to live up to the ideals and values of the 1956 Revolution. Our ties to the homeland are open and unrestricted. Now, in addition to a spiritual connection fostered over the decades, I have additional opportunities for community and nation-building work as Hungary’s Honorary Consul in Cleveland. Often, however, it seems that our behavior is unworthy of our hard-won freedom. It seems that our Hungarian penchant for bickering and back-biting have come to the fore. Yet a common national cause can only come about if we agree on basic things. This requires adherence to moral principles, the capacity for objective analysis, and actions which will bear up under the scrutiny of history. To achieve this, let us take as our example the common will, the unifying determination which forged the Hungarian people into a nation during the days of the Revolution and national freedom fight in 1956. Let this be our life’s goal as we approach the 50th anniversary of October 23, 1956.



László Bójtös

László Bójtös is an Architect and Honorary Consul of the Republic of Hungary in Cleveland. For years, he has been a leading member of the Hungarian Community of Friends, which organizes the annual Itt-Ott conference of Hungarian scholars and leading cultural personalities. He and his wife Györgyi live in Brecksville Ohio. His daughters and grandchildren all speak Hungarian.

Charles Farkas

SIEGE OF THE RADIO BUILDING



Farkas in 1956

On the evening of October 23, 1956, I was having coffee and plum brandy with my Mother and her friend Erzsike Sárkány at Ruszwurm Café. The sun had set. The lighting in the coffeehouse was a subdued yellow, and people were immersed in quiet conversations. Everybody had a flyer in hand. The heading on the top of the flyers – “The 16 Points” – recalled the 12 Points that had led to Revolution against the Hapsburgs in 1848, while the first point read: “We demand the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary in accordance with the peace treaty.”

I finished my pipe, we sipped the last of our coffee and brandy, and the three of us walked outside to Fisherman’s Bastion. Looking across the Danube toward Pest, around the Parliament building we saw a reddish light that projected up toward the clouds. We descended Castle Hill, walked through the Tunnel, and crossed the Chain Bridge. Walking along Stalin Avenue, we reached Lövölde Square.

Someone told us that a crowd was trying to topple the statue of Stalin. My Mother and I felt compelled to witness this. Parting from Erzsike, we hurried on in the now complete darkness, across Gorkij Avenue and by the trade union headquarters. The large red star that only hours earlier had still risen above the façade of the building was now torn down and shredded. The alley was crammed with groups of people, all focused on the statue of Stalin. Ladders leaned up against the monstrous body. From a distance the people climbing the ladders seemed like small figures, ants on a tree trunk. Suddenly welding torches lit up the colossal bronze sculpture. The welders wrestled with the massive mass of metal. Winch vehicles wound steel cables around the statue and tried to wrest the gigantic figure from its base. The statue reared for a moment, and then the wire ropes snapped. The ladders were put back in place and the welders resumed. This time they decided to use their torches at the point where Stalin’s pants met his boots.

An hour might have passed while we stood there, but nobody stirred. Military trucks occasionally passed by filled with civilians, mostly young workers from various factories. Once the welders had finished their work and descended, the long ladders were removed, and the trucks with their winches headed off toward the dark corners of the square. The crowd was quiet, and the searchlights lit up the gigantic figure from every direction. The wire ropes were taut; the sculpture reared again and then began to slowly bend until it crashed onto the pavement. The crowd cried out in exultation.

To the Radio building

Suddenly a line of trucks turned in from Gorkij Avenue. “The ÁVO is shooting at the Radio! Let’s go to the Radio!” shouted the people on the trucks. I bid goodnight to my Mother and walked across Rökk Szilárd Street, where my paternal Grandparents had once lived. Splinters of glass, crushed shards crackled beneath my feet. A crowd crisscrossed in front of Szabad Nép’s printing shop, gaping at the ransacked interior. The street lamps were off and the street became dark. I reached Sándor Street, where people were walking in single file, pressed up against the wall. Now only the moon gave off a meager light, creating silhouettes of people as they passed by. Two tanks were maneuvering in the center of the road. They came to a halt, their hatches opened, and the head of a soldier appeared in each.

“Why aren’t you firing?” asked a man from the crowd.

“We don’t have any ammo,” answered one of the drivers.

“Can’t you break the wall?” asked another voice.

“No, we can’t,” answered the soldier.

They were referring to a wall of the Hungarian Radio building. The tank crew climbed out. One of the tank drivers opened up his tunic and wiped his sweaty forehead with an oily hand. The noise of crackling firearms became stronger. The soldiers climbed back into their tanks and drove slowly forward toward the station. A few young boys with rifles were using the tanks for cover. “Where did you get your guns?” a streetcar conductor asked them. “The police gave us their guns. We told them that we needed them more than they did, but it’s not enough. We can’t shoot the Radio’s walls with rifles. They have too many hand grenades.”

Just a week before as I was riding my box tricycle down Sándor Street in front of the Radio building, I had noticed a truck parked in front of the Studio. A group of ÁVH (Secret Police) was carrying boxes of ammunition from the

truck into the building. That evening at our usual family get-together at my Aunt Blanka's flat, I mentioned this strange sight – ammunition crates being taken into the Studio? Apparently the ÁVH had had more foresight this time around (or a premonition) than Governor Miklós Horthy had had 12 years earlier on October 15. For it was at the Radio that Horthy, in 1944, had read his armistice proclamation, and where, after his departure, one lone policeman had found himself defenseless against Skorzeny's approaching storm troopers, firing until his ammunition ran out and then taking his leave through the rear exit.

Amidst the fighting

Now, as I stood there watching, an explosion shook the air and lit up the façade of the Radio building. Later I learned that Januci Thierry and a few other friends of mine were the ones shooting from the building opposite the ÁVH unit. The firing intensified, illuminating our surroundings. A few teenage boys came running down the road, in my direction, keeping close to the wall. Another group scurried in from the firing line. Stopping beside me, two of the boys traded ammunition as if they were swapping stamps. One with a Tommy gun had only rifle shells. After finishing their exchange, they turned and hastily retreated in the direction from where they had come.

Drained, I sat down on the windowsill of a dairy shop. A young man sat down beside me. Suddenly a bullet whizzed by right between the two of us, followed by another. "They're shooting from the attic!" someone shouted. "It's coming from this house!" Half a dozen boys rushed up the stairs above the shop, followed by me and my new companion. On the fourth floor, someone yelled, "There are Secret Police officers in the closet!" That explained the bundle of ÁVO uniforms that had been thrown out of the windows a short while earlier – the Secret Police had been changing into civilian clothes.

The sound of firing died down. Now we could hear shots coming from the Radio building, but there was very little return fire. "Why can't someone bring us ammunition?" called out one man in the crowd.

"There are no vehicles to bring it in," replied another.

"There are trucks all around!" somebody protested.

"There are," responded a young man, "but they're all shot up."

"Let's look!" I heard my voice say, much to my own surprise. A small group of us went in search of a functioning vehicle. In Mária Street we came upon a truck with a flat tire. The young man from the dairy store climbed up into the truck's flatbed and found a spare inside. He dropped it down onto the street. We searched for tools and replaced the tire – another first for me. A driver was found and a few boys jumped onto the back of the truck, which now took off for the lamp factory, which everyone knew was stocked with munitions. The lamp factory, or lámpa gyár in Hungarian, was the subject of various jokes, including a play on its name; everyone referred to it as the "little lamp factory," using the diminutive form lámpuska – puska meaning gun. As the truck took its leave, I wiped my oily hand on a wall.

An ambulance appeared. Medics came back with their stretchers. On one of them lay a body, motionless, soaked in blood. On another a man was being carried with a bandaged leg, likewise bloody, yet he was holding onto his rifle for dear life. At the corner of Mária Street he jumped off the stretcher, cursed in Gypsy, and hobbled back in the direction of the Radio. The stretcher bearers looked after him, dumbfounded for a moment. Then they lit up a pair of cigarettes.

A window on the ground floor of an apartment opened, and a radio was placed on its sill. A person in pajamas briefed the bystanders. "The announcer says," he related, "that the government demands a ceasefire. Those who have firearms should put them down in front of building entrances." Nearby a man was handing out flyers with the headline "Imre Nagy for Prime Minister." A worker ran over from Mária Street, asking for volunteers – a group of ÁVO members had been captured and needed to be guarded. None of us had a rifle or ammunition, though.

Ammunition at dawn

It was early dawn and I was getting cold. To warm myself up I walked over to Mikszáth Kálmán Square, where a group of people had been anticipating an attempted breakout from the Studio by the ÁVO. "I spent my entire night here," said one man. "I feel totally useless." I returned to Sándor Street, feeling somewhat the same.

I could hear the noise of a motor coming from the direction of Sándor Square. The gathering dispersed, ducking into doorways and looking for cover. Now what? was the general anxious reaction of the crowd. But instead of Russian tanks or ÁVO members, a truck was approaching with a majestic slowness, shining its bright lights on the road ahead. From the back of the truck a young boy shouted, "We brought ammo!" People ran out of their hiding places. The truck turned off its headlights, was put into reverse, and crawled into a safer spot. Then crates of ammunition were unloaded. A chain was formed on the street and the crates were passed from one pair of hands to another. Within about 10 minutes the whole truck had been unloaded. The rattling of machine guns could be heard coming from the top floor of the building opposite the Radio.

The dim light of dawn began to spread slowly over the street. By then some people had gone home, but the more enduring had stuck around for further developments, and as day broke the crowd grew. A few of us walked



The damaged facade of the Hungarian Radio building after freedom fighters hung a new banner reading "Free Hungarian Radio"

up to the corner of Szentkirályi Street. There was a brisk exchange of fire. The defenders of the Radio were being kept engaged by Thierry's brigade on the opposite side of the street from them, distracting their attention from the happenings right below.

The side of the Radio building was covered in scaffolding left over from some earlier construction work. A few young boys with machine guns hanging from their necks and pick-axes in their hands began to climb the scaffold. At the height of the top floor they set about chiseling an opening in the wall. By then the Secret Service personnel had withdrawn to the other side of the courtyard and the exchange of fire on the street front had slowly abated.

Officer cadets

A long line of trucks now appeared at the end of Sándor Street. They carried infantry men, armed to the teeth and wearing steel helmets. Soldiers stood in the backs of the military trucks and aimed Maxim machine guns that rested on the roofs of the trucks' cabs ahead. Then the line of trucks came to a halt. The crowd surrounded the vehicles. The women tried to pull the soldiers off the trucks. Most of the soldiers were poker-faced. A few seemed nervous or had smirks on their faces. Some of them looked on at the crowd, stunned. "What are they thinking?" wondered aloud a woman who was standing near me. "The soldiers should help the boys," remarked one of the medics. Another woman yelled at the soldiers, urging them to join the fighters against the ÁVH. "You could take the Radio in no time," she shouted.

The captain of the column ordered the soldiers to park the trucks at Szentkirályi Street. Once the trucks had stopped, the soldiers jumped down and were given the command "at ease." Soon the soldiers were surrounded by women and children urging them to take part in the fight alongside their countrymen. Nevertheless these young cadets of the Officer's Training Corps of Tatabánya stood by their vehicles stoically, with their weapons and haversacks still on the trucks, kept under control by their commander.

Into the Radio courtyard

The gunsmoke and dust were suffocating. Now we bystanders were only a few steps from the main entrance of the Radio. Most of my companions were armed. There was some sporadic shooting to and fro. When the firing stopped, we – about 50 of us – emitted some sort of a war cry and ran across the dark and cool doorway into the courtyard. Even though I was scared, I was swept away by the fever of the moment and kept on running across beneath the archway. It occurred to me that if someone were to drop a hand grenade in the midst of us from above, it would be a massacre, but this was only a fleeting thought.

The glass roof of the courtyard had been shot to pieces and shattered glass covered the ground ankle high. On the left of the courtyard stood a burnt-out truck loaded with ammunition crates; I took a detour around it. Along the way I noticed blood stains mixed in the mud. We also came upon the bodies of fallen ÁVO officers. I passed by a young lieutenant lying on his back, his open blue eyes gazing upward at the sky. A streak of blood seeped out of his mouth. His hat lay a few feet away.

Another group of young boys ran into the stairwell. A middle-aged man climbed on top of the burnt-out truck and shouted to the boys. "Gather up all the guns and ammunition. We will need them!" On the right side of the courtyard a group of people emerged from the stairwell. Most of them were civilian employees of the Radio – among them Szepesi, the well-known announcer and sports broadcaster. At the head of the group was an ÁVO captain

wearing the green epaulettes of the border guards. He was an outright evil-looking man. One of the boys approached him and said, "Comrade Captain, please remove the red star from your hat!" Even though it was spoken politely, the words were uttered in a firm voice. I didn't hear the reply of the officer, but I saw the face of the boy turn red in anger and the next thing I knew he gave the captain a tremendous slap. The officer's hat and glasses flew off.

Fire from above

At that very moment all hell broke loose. We were fired upon from the roof, from the attic. We dashed for cover. I ran back toward the entrance and ducked into a room facing the street. Only once I was hiding inside the room did I realize that it had at one time been the office of my Father, publisher of *Rádió Élet* (Radio Life), the Radio's weekly magazine. Here, as a young boy and a teenager, I had frequently visited him. The last time I had been here, sirens had chased us down into the air raid shelter. Now, as I stood in front of his former desk, I imagined him behind the desk, adding up columns of figures with his ubiquitous Waterman fountain pen.

Two other boys had come into the room behind me and were hidden behind the door and a chest of drawers.

I recognized one of them as the son of the eminent poet, Lőrinc Szabó. The windows had iron bars; the entrance was blocked. We were trapped like mice. The other fellow tried to load a flair pistol, hammering a shell into it with great effort. I was scared to death. I didn't want to become a victim of "friendly fire." The three of us waited for the noise to abate, and then we slowly ventured out.

The shooting had stopped. The stairwell had become an anthill. Wounded ÁVO men were being carried down from the top floor on stretchers. Next the able, unharmed ÁVO personnel were ushered out amid a teeming crowd that surrounded them and shook their fists at the bewildered captives. In the meantime, a young man removed the flag with the red star from the façade of the Radio and replaced it with one from which the emblem of communism had been cut out. Suddenly a feeling of sleepiness overwhelmed me. With a desire also for a warm cup of tea, I decided to go home.

Aftermath

On Sándor Street I passed a line of burnt-out vehicles. On Múzeum Boulevard the yellow streetcars stood motionless, some of them on their sides. As I turned left onto the boulevard, I caught sight of a group of Russian soldiers standing by their armored cars in a long line extending into Kálvin Square. A few steps ahead of me two Russians lifted up one of their wounded comrades. By the looks of it, his bandaged knee had probably been shot straight through. They lifted him up and placed him into their armored car. At the same moment an unarmed civilian was walking by parallel to them. As if to "even the score," one of the officers turned around and shot him in the temple. The man collapsed and rolled along the ground for a few minutes until the corner of Múzeum Street. There he stood up, covered his ears with his hands, and began to run. Blood spurted out of his head. He had barely run five yards before he fell headlong onto the ground.

Witnessing this bloody scene, I sped across the boulevard and headed toward Kecskémeti Street. There a group of civilians and Hungarian soldiers had formed a crowd, watching the Russians on the other side. A second group of Hungarian soldiers stood at the corner of Magyar Street. These were artillery men, equipped with light mortars, radio trucks, and field guns. The rank and file had a somber look on their faces.

I turned into Váci Street, and in a few minutes had reached my flat in Dimitrov Square. The apartment was quiet. The tenants must have gone somewhere to listen to Radio Free Europe. Radio Budapest told its listeners that the uprising had been crushed and urged those who were still fighting to lay down their arms immediately. Mentally I tried to recapitulate the events of the previous day. Then, exhausted, I dozed off.



Charles Farkas

Charles Farkas arrived in New York Harbor aboard the USS Marine Carp on January 16, 1957. After earning a master's degree in library science at Columbia University, he became director of the Briarcliff Manor Public Library. He married Edit Novak, with whom he raised four children in Chappaqua, New York, where he and his wife still reside. This account is an excerpt from Farkas' memoirs "The Story of My Life," which he hopes to eventually publish.

Also see Edit Martha Novaks' story on page 117. She is Charles' wife.

Imre Farkas

THE VÁC PRISON BREAK

On that day, the dream of 1,200 political prisoners held captive in the infamous political prison of Vác came true. I was serving the sixth year of my life imprisonment, which had been commuted from a death sentence for “anti-communist activities, Western connections and conspiracy and treason against the People’s Democracy and the Soviet Union.” Among the 1,200 prisoners, about 500 of us were serving life sentences.

On the morning of October 24th, the guards didn’t wake us at 6 a.m. as usual, and later told us that the prison factory would not operate that day. The cell doors were locked all day. At first we were happy that we didn’t have to work, but later we became suspicious. We felt that something was happening which would decide our future. During the evening of October 25th, an ÁVO officer distributed cigarettes among the prisoners, saying “Men, everybody is entitled to one pack.” We couldn’t believe our ears – he called us “men.” After so many years of humiliation, torture and suffering, we were suddenly being treated as human beings by our captors?!

The next day we were allowed to walk in the prison yard. All the usually bloodless, pale faces were glowing with excitement. From snippets of overheard conversations we managed to put together that there was a Revolution going on in Hungary! The people, in whose name Moscow’s lackeys committed all the atrocities, the people had said “enough!” and revolted against the communist regime.

We couldn’t sleep all night. Then came the morning of October the 27th. During the last 3 days tremendous tension had been building up in all of us. We rushed to the windows and saw that the red star – symbol of the Soviet tyranny – had disappeared from the caps and uniforms of the guards. Instead, they were wearing the red-white-green national colors.

We started to sing the National Anthem, and somebody recited the “Nemzeti Dal” (National Song) by Sándor Petőfi. We finally reached the limit of our patience and shouted: “Let’s break out!” With our iron bedframes and every other possible means, we hammered on the cell doors and succeeded in breaking them open. Within 20 minutes everybody was out of their cells. We agreed that we would not harm the prison guards, regardless of how cruel they had been to us during the past. Nobody touched them. We were proud that our liberation was free from vengeance and retaliation. The next step was to determine how to break out of the prison complex through four consecutive heavy iron gates leading to the main street of the town of Vác.

Some people suggested negotiating with the commander of the Security Police, but about 50 of us, the younger ones, insisted on going all the way. We were unsure how the armed Secret Police troops would act who guarded the prison from outside, but we took the risk. We started toward the iron gates and with the help of some friendly, non-ÁVO guards we broke open the last iron gate. Outside the gate several thousand people, the inhabitants of Vác, were waiting for us, crying and embracing us. The people, in whose name we were sentenced, were welcoming us. We sang the National Anthem again. Suddenly, in this emotional moment, shots of automatic weapons rang out. The crowd tried to disperse quickly, but some had already fallen dead or wounded. The Secret Police, the ÁVO men, were shooting at us from the roof of the prison building. We ran as fast as we could, still in our prison uniforms. As we ran through streets, backyards, over fences, the people were throwing their civilian clothes to us. An old man gave me his only top coat; children brought their parents’ jackets. One of the most poignant scenes was when a little boy about 8 years old, ran to me and said: “I can’t give you anything else, but here, take my comb, you might need it!”

In a few days, on October 30th, I arrived to Budapest and after 5 1/2 years of confinement was finally reunited with my wife!



Imre Farkas

Sentenced to death for “anti-communist activities, Western connections and conspiracy and treason against the People’s Democracy and the Soviet Union,” Imre Farkas arrived with his wife Lily to the United States on Christmas Eve, 1956. With a Rockefeller Foundation sponsorship he became a teaching fellow at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He worked for W.R. Grace and Company as a chemical engineer, retiring in 1994 as Vice President. He was the President of the American Concrete Institute in 1986 and Chairman of the American Society of Testing Materials in 1992. Imre and Lily Farkas have lived in Sarasota, Florida since 1994.

Please also read his wife, Lily Farkas’ submission on page 18.



The damaged facade of the Hungarian Radio building after freedom fighters hung a new banner reading "Free Hungarian Radio"

Lily Farkas

RELEASED ON AMNESTY



Arriving in Austria, November 1956 – Imre is pictured in the middle, Lily is on the right

were torn out of our red-white-and green tricolors. We started singing our National Anthem and old folksongs which cried of battles and heroes of old, foretelling of new battles and new heroes to come. We marched to Bem Square, and then on to Parliament Square. A young man read the 16 points the students had prepared. Freedom of speech, freedom of press, free elections and the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungarian soil... thoughts and demands punishable with torture and long years of prison during the years before. It was unbelievable!

The huge Square was jammed with people. I had always hated crowds, but now I felt happy with all these people; we were brothers and sisters under the darkening sky, not knowing when the Secret Police or the Soviet troops would start firing on us. But we didn't care; we were intoxicated with the simple thought of freedom!

Suddenly, as if everybody was hit by the same idea, we made torches of the daily communist newspaper – we had been forced to read and discuss it – and we stood there holding the burning papers up high.

Plans and strategies were discussed and different groups took off to the Radio Building and to the Stalin statue. I stood there and had to make an important decision. Should I go with my new friends on a hazardous venture to take up arms, and cause further danger and heartache to my parents, who had suffered so much in the past years? As gunfire bursts started screaming through the dark streets, I went home. That night history was made, and the Revolution broke out in Hungary.

Ten glorious days followed. Ten days full of danger, excitement, death and happiness. I roamed the streets in a euphoric state, watching the red stars being pulled off the buildings by the freedom fighters. I jumped into doorways when machine gun fire broke out over and over again. One day I wandered to Parliament Square, where the previous night Secret Police had massacred hundreds of people. The weather beaten old stones of the Parliament were blood-spattered, and a bloody student cap was lying on the ground like a sacrifice to a cruel God.

After 2 1/2 years in political prison from 1951 to 1953, I was released during the Imre Nagy government's amnesty. My husband, whose death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment, was in Vác Prison, and my parents had been deported to the country. I lived in my Aunt's tiny apartment in Budapest, where my parents joined us once the deportees were allowed to return to the capital.

There was a special feeling in the air on that cool, autumn day of October 23, 1956. My office, where I was holding a small, unimportant job (the 17th since I was released from prison), was buzzing with good news. People, who until that day didn't dare to trust each other, boldly volunteered information about the students who were holding meetings and preparing 16 demands from the communist government. And we saw groups marching down the street, carrying Hungarian national flags.

This was the day we were waiting for! We had to go and join them, forgetting the consequences of rebellious acts – leaving our desks and running down the old, worn steps of the office building in downtown Budapest.

From everywhere small groups were hurrying, forming a more and more organized demonstration. The depressed, fearful mood of the last 10 years changed almost miraculously to one of elation and hope. We smiled at each other, strangers though we were; we all knew how we felt, what we were thinking, what we were hoping for. Scissors appeared from nearby houses and the hated hammer and sickle emblems

Reunited

I had a message from my husband, who with hundreds of other male political prisoners had broken out of the infamous Vác Prison. The message said that he would return to Budapest soon.

In the evening of October 30th, the doorbell rang, and there stood my husband – thin, ragged – but alive! He was dressed in clothes that had been thrown to him by the people of Vác, as he was running and yanking off his prison uniform. We hadn't embraced each other since April 29, 1951, the night of his arrest (I was arrested a month later). Except for those terrible trials, we had only seen each other at the infrequent 5 minute visits he was allowed in the last few years in Vác.

Long into the night we talked about all that happened to us in the past 5 1/2 years. He told me the story how the prisoners broke out from Vác Prison. We fell asleep that night exhausted in body and soul, but full of hope for a better future for us and for Hungary.

Decision to escape

After that horrible dawn of November 4, we didn't want to believe that everything would be over in a few days. But we were forced to realize that we had to escape. With the return of the communists to power, they surely would take my husband back to prison. My brother-in-law participated actively in the Revolution; they were already looking for him. So on November 21st, with him, his wife and a prisonmate of my husband, we said the difficult goodbyes to my parents and Aunt, and slipped out of the apartment building and walked to Kelenföld train station.

We got off at the little town of Kapuvár in the cold November evening. A tall, friendly stranger came up to us and whispered, "We are leaving at midnight to the Austrian border!"

The peasants of this little border town had organized themselves in this heroic operation, saving the lives of thousands of refugees while asking nothing in return. We later learned, to our horror, that they had been brought to trial for those activities and many of them were executed.

And so we followed our guides through the frozen marshes. When we heard patrols, we had to hit the ground and wait for the all-clear signal. We crossed canals in little boats or rickety log-bridges. When rockets flared, we tunneled ourselves in haystacks. We walked on; as the night passed, we neared the Austrian border. Our guides, tall gaunt working men with honest faces and brave hearts, pointed to the West.

Bonfires were burning there, lit by the Austrians, showing us to safety and freedom.

Ahead was a new beginning.



Lily Elizabeth Farkas nee Tersztyánszky

Arriving in the United States with her husband on Christmas Eve in 1956, Lily Farkas started her new life as a library assistant at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, staying in the Boston area for 37 years. She worked at Harvard University, M.I.T., Newton College of the Sacred Heart, and finally at Regis College as a librarian. She was active in the local volunteer Hungarian School and in the fundraising and organization of the construction of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution Memorial Statue on Boston's Liberty Square. Since 1994, Lily Farkas and her husband Imre have lived in Sarasota, Florida.

Please read the submission of her husband, Imre on page 16.

Andrew P. Fodor

PAGES FROM AN OLD DIARY

Our memories are fading like pages from an old diary. Our memories are fading, as fewer and fewer of us are still here to talk about them.

I remember what Marcel Proust wrote in his book, "Remembrance of Things Past:" "...when from a long distant past nothing subsists...the smell and taste of things remain posed a long time...and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection..."

I cannot remember anymore the cries of my wounded and fallen cadets and my brothers-in-arms, but I can still remember the smell of their blood.

I can still remember the smell and taste of flowers in a Budapest park, where I first embraced a lovely Hungarian girl, whom I deeply loved.

I can still remember the smell of the river Danube on that dark, depressing, sad, autumn morning of November 4, 1956, when the Russians returned with overwhelming force.

I can still remember the wonderful smell of cookies which my Grandmother used to make.

But, most of all, I still remember the many smells and tastes of my much loved city of Budapest, on that heroic day of October 23, 1956, when the Revolution broke out.

In years past, during the month of October, as the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution approached, regardless of where I was or what I was doing, I would open my diary, which consisted of only a few pages, to relive those turbulent, unforgettable days.

With time, the pages of my diary became more and more difficult to read as they yellowed, became brittle and broke apart. For some time, I have been planning to reconstruct some of it from memory. The 40th anniversary gave me this opportunity. As the 50th anniversary approaches, I have added more to those pages, starting with October 29th and ending with November 7th, as these were the dates recorded in my diary.

On the following pages, I pay homage to those cadets, to those fellow soldiers, to those brothers-in-arms, who were wounded or lost their lives during the Revolution. I want to praise those who were executed or imprisoned during those brutal years of oppression, and those who in spite of their indoctrination and orders remained loyal to their nation. I want to commend those who had to leave the country or were tossed into poverty and joblessness because they refused to take the loyalty oath to the communist government reinstated by the Soviets after they crushed the Revolution.

October 29

I remember, the news spread like wildfire: "The Russians are leaving! The Russians are leaving!" There was joy everywhere.

The cadets of the Artillery and Technical Artillery Officer School were marching on the streets, singing the Hungarian National Anthem and the songs from the 1848 Revolution. Our battalion flag, the Hungarian flags and the revolutionary flags with the hole in the middle were crackling in the fresh, gusty wind.

I saw on the sidewalk some older gentlemen who took their hats off, ladies who fell on their knees, and young girls who were bringing us flowers. Some people were crying, older women were praying as they saw us marching past. They were shouting, "Long Live the People's Army" and "The Army is with Us!"

When we passed the Kilián Barracks and the building of Corvin Passage where some of the bloodiest fights had taken place, soldiers and resistance fighters were cheering and applauding us from the windows.

We stopped at Boráros Square because our orders were to secure the place and direct the withdrawal of Soviet troops from some strategic points in the city. Our parliamentarians approached the Soviet tanks at Petőfi Bridge. The tanks started to withdraw slowly.

It was raining very hard and it was cold. Lots of civilian fighters were gathering around us and brought us food. Then, we started to march again. I felt reborn, because we were the new army, we were the revolutionary army; we were treated as heroes of the Revolution.

I felt immense pride, tears were rolling down my cheeks and I did not even want to hide my emotions.

November 4

At dawn, the alarm was sounded and we were informed that the Russians were returning with overwhelming force. Most of us were eager and ready to fight, except some of our commanders.

On the school grounds was the headquarters of the 27th Division of the Army under the command of a lieutenant colonel. By order of the Supreme Revolutionary Council the cadets came under his command as well.

At 3:30 a.m. the new commander received orders to organize the defense of this southern section of Budapest, against the Russians who were approaching with overwhelming force. Sixteen Soviet divisions, including armored and mechanized infantry, began their concentrated attack on Budapest.

Our defense perimeter was Üllői Avenue, all the way to the intersection with Kőbányai Avenue. The school's Revolutionary Council ordered that artillery be set up and ready to fire. Our commander insisted, however, that it was impossible to defend the school against the overwhelming power of the Soviets. But the head of the Revolutionary Council insisted that orders must be carried out. The commander, therefore, sounded the alarm and ordered the cadets into firing positions of readiness, but decided not to resist the Russians with full force.

At 5:20 a.m. we heard an emergency message on Radio Budapest: "This is Premier Imre Nagy speaking. Today at daybreak Soviet troops attacked our capital with the obvious intent of overthrowing the legal democratic Hungarian government. Our troops are in combat; the government is at its post. I notify the people of our country and the entire world of this fact."

When the first Soviet tank column appeared on Üllői Avenue at the defense perimeter of the school, they swept away some of the anti-tank weapons which we had placed there. Suddenly, two Russian soldiers and an officer approached the building and demanded to talk to the school commander.

When the school commander appeared, they escorted him to People's Park (Népliget) where the Russians had established division headquarters. There the Soviet Colonel Bachtin presented our commander with an ultimatum. The cadets had to surrender all their weapons within one hour. Upon any sign of resistance, including the refusal to surrender weapons, the Russians threatened to open fire from People's Park with all their tanks and artillery and promised to pulverize the building along with the students inside.

When the cadets were told of the Soviet demands, most expressed their wish to die rather than put their weapons down. Many vowed to resist to their last breath. When some officers tried to talk the cadets out of committing suicide, some of the cadets refused to heed the advice and began shouting, "This is treason!"

In the confusion, some armed cadets (among them my friend István and I) escaped through the back exit either to go home or to continue fighting in the city. Those who remained were finally convinced by some of their officers that resistance was futile. They collected their weapons and surrendered to the Soviets. Some of them were crying out of frustration, and many were cursing their Soviet captors.

November 5

István and I ran into the basement of a crumbling old house that resembled a total inferno. All that was left were a couple of broken beds and weapons everywhere, most of them destroyed by the explosions, and body parts scattered all over. Only the gravely injured and dead were there. Some were staggering around wounded, with their flesh literally hanging from their mangled bodies. The smell was unbearable; blood and urine were everywhere and everything was thick with masonry and stone dust. There was a radio playing martial music in the background with calls for the freedom fighters to surrender.

We tried to lay the gravely injured on the broken iron beds. I used all I could remember from my army first aid course and tried to apply a dressing made out of a bed sheet to a wounded freedom fighter lying in front of me. István's hands stopped me. I looked up. "What else do you want me to do?" I was shouting at him. I started to become very angry. "Can't you see, he is dead, he is dead," he said forcefully but gently.

I looked at the body. I did not want to believe it, but he really was dead. The youngster could not have been more than sixteen. I felt disgusted and I felt really tired and sad. I did not want to dress anybody's wounds anymore.

When it seemed to be quiet again outside, István and I left the basement. As I took a last long look at the iron bed, his face seemed even younger than before.

"These kids of Budapest, these kids of Budapest, these are the real heroes of our time," I mumbled to myself as I crawled out to the street.

November 7

Once in a while, mortar shells still fell around us as István and I found refuge in a small factory.

The workers who were there were very helpful in feeding us, providing shelter, and as it came to be somewhat dangerous to walk around the Soviet-controlled streets in Hungarian military uniforms, they provided us with some workmen's overalls.

We must have spent around two or three days there. They asked us to bring some supplies to a small resistance group who were holed up in the basement of a building on the nearby square. To bring supplies to them was not difficult, since the walls of the basements of the surrounding buildings were broken through, so we never had to go up to the street. Then, there was a long, long silence; no gunfire was heard for hours. István and I hesitantly came up from the basement.

I peeked through the factory gate. I could hardly believe my eyes. Across the street, in the dark, shadowy doorway of a rundown building, a fellow cadet from my school was standing armed to the teeth, aiming his weapon at something. But at what? I peeked out again; there was a lone Soviet tank standing about two blocks away.

Again, I looked across the street, for I thought he was going to fire at the tank – and he did. The tank immediately replied. Across the street, the whole doorway collapsed and part of the building disappeared. István and I hurriedly retreated to the basement again.

I cannot forget this cadet's face. It was partly lit by a weak, autumn sun after a rainy day, on a sad, very sad November day in Budapest. His fight was futile and hopeless, yet he was a real patriot. When István and I finally left the factory, I crossed the street and wanted to put some flowers where he stood, but there were no flowers around. I reached into the pocket of my workman's overalls, where I carried my military cap and slowly placed it on the shattered plaster pieces, all that remained of the doorway where he once stood.

As the years passed, his image faded in my memory, but once in a while his desperate act still haunts me. The last time I remembered him vividly was when I saw the picture of a lone Chinese student in Beijing trying to stop a long column of Chinese army tanks going to Tiananmen Square...

"Pages From an Old Diary" excerpted from and added to "The Legacy of the 1956 Revolution, Five Participants Forty Years Later." Hungarian Alumni Association (Bessenyei György Kör): New Brunswick, NJ 1996, ISBN 0-910539-07-3.

Note: The Gábor Áron Artillery Technical Officer School became the Lajos Kossuth Artillery and Artillery Officer School, which is the forerunner of the present János Bolyai Military Technical Faculty of the Miklós Zrínyi National Defence University.



Andrew P. Fodor

At the time of the Revolution, Andrew P. Fodor was a cadet at the Gábor Áron Artillery Technical Officer's School in Budapest. He fled the country in 1956. Upon immigrating to the United States, he earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the Polytechnic University in New York. He earned further degrees and certificates in mathematics and engineering from Columbia University and from the University of London, England. He spent the majority of his professional life based in London, researching and designing deep-sea, offshore, oil and gas production platforms and experimental undersea facilities in the North Sea and around the world. He currently resides with his wife Kathy in Stamford, Connecticut. He is active in American Hungarian organizations, and is spending his retirement years consulting, researching and lecturing in the history of science and technology and trying to fulfill his long-awaited literary ambitions.

Ágnes Sylvester Fülöp

A STUDENT'S MEMORIES OF THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION



Fülöp in 1956

It was a regular school day with a regular class schedule for Tuesday. As I did at the beginning of my schooldays, I wrote the date on my notebook. It was October 23.

In the morning my Mother talked about my upcoming birthday party. So, going home from school in the afternoon, I was thinking about inviting my girlfriends to the celebration. In school I belonged to a study group that stayed there longer every afternoon; it was 4 p.m. when I left for home. My school was on Isabella Street on the Pest side and I lived on the Buda side of the city close to the Déli Train Station. Traveling home on the Ring Boulevard everything seemed to be the same as it was every day. The streetcar – everybody called it “the #6” – was crowded as usual, although there seemed to be more pedestrians walking on the sidewalks.

When the streetcar reached the Nyugati Train Station, the traffic came to a halt. Here people were walking toward the Danube and the Margit Bridge not only on the sidewalks, but in the traffic lanes as well. Excitement filled the air.

I got off the streetcar and walked with the crowd. When we arrived to the corner of the famous Budapest theater, the “Vígsház,” it became obvious that it was impossible to get across the Margit Bridge to Buda. Thousands of people marched from rail to rail on the bridge toward us. They were singing Kossuth songs, from the 1848 Hungarian Revolution and Freedom Fight. Hungarian flags were floating in the wind, above the crowd. “We are coming from the memorial statue of Bem,” they shouted. Joseph Bem was a famed and well-respected Polish general who had volunteered to fight on the Hungarian side in the 1848-49 uprising.

The huge crowd moved slowly on St. Stephen Boulevard, sometimes stopping and waiting patiently to join other waves of people coming from Buda. Windows opened on adjacent buildings; they were filled with waving hands, singing and smiling faces. On one of the balconies little kids and their kindergarten teachers waved their small Hungarian paper flags to the crowd. “Vivat, Vivat,” people shouted back to them. They laughed happily, sang, clapped and all faces were lit up by smiles. Oh God, what was happening? I totally forgot my birthday plans.

As a 15-year old, I was not interested in politics. I just couldn’t understand the many strange and unfair turns of the communist rules and regulations in our daily lives. My parents’ grave warnings to be very careful what we talked about outside of our home became ingrained in us kids. In those years people were jailed by the government if they were accused by anyone as an enemy of the communist party and the government.

But here it was something absolutely different happening: a great and surprising event and the air of free expression after many terrifying years of terror. Something unbelievably beautiful...! And I witnessed this fantastic day!

At the Parliament

The shoulder-to-shoulder crowd simply absorbed and carried me into the side streets, toward the Parliament Building. I marched along with them as we talked, sang and shared the happy moments and liberated feelings.

Sunset painted the Fisherman’s Bastion and the Matthias Church a magic, glittering red color. The streetlights lit up as a series of pearls on the sidewalks. The huge five point red star dominated the top of the Parliament Building. Finally, the many thousands of demonstrators stopped on the Kossuth Square at the Parliament. I was relatively close to one of the lion statues guarding the entrance. The excited, singing and peaceful crowd was just growing, filling up the entire plaza and extending into the adjacent streets everywhere. Someone cried out and began chanting: “Turn off the light of the red star, save some electricity!” The crowd picked up the slogan and loudly repeated it. More and more slogans came up that everybody shouted in rhymes. Another voice emerged: “Confiscated Church-properties should be given back to all Churches!” People turned back right away in disagreement: “This is not the time for this, first we want freedom! Russians go home!” There were several speeches given from the balcony of the Parliament by well-known politicians and student leaders of the demonstration. Actors recited the National Anthem written by Ferenc Kölcsey as a poem, and other rousing, beautiful poems about freedom by Sándor Petőfi.

A young college man touched my arm gently. “You don’t have a rosette (kokárda) yet,” he said and pinned a tiny tricolor ribbon to my coat collar. He smiled and stepped to the next person. My heart was filled with faith and enthusiasm.

I still have this little piece of red-white-green ribbon that I cherish as one of my great treasures. It has reminded me over the years that I was there in a historic time when Hungarians bravely stood up for their freedom.

When Imre Nagy, a respected politician, stepped out onto the balcony of the Parliament to give a speech, I couldn't stay any longer. It was late in the evening and I feared my parents would be very worried about me. Slowly, step by step I managed to wiggle out of the thrilled and excited crowd of demonstrators. At this time the simple pontoon bridge named Kossuth Bridge was a functional connection between Buda and Pest. I chose to take this shortcut home, running through narrow little streets up the Castle Hill and down on the other side. My heart was pounding, filled with never-experienced impressions and emotions, and I could hardly wait to share them with my family.

My parents were relieved to hug me because many hours had passed after I'd left school and finally showed up at home. As I learned later, my Father was also on the Kossuth Square, but, of course, it was impossible to meet each other on the huge space filled with hundreds of thousands of people shoulder to shoulder. I told them everything I saw in the afternoon. My parents, my brother and little sister, my 92 year-old Great Grandmother and my Grandmother were listening to my stories. My "grannies" had lived with us after they had been bombed out of their home and lost everything they owned in a carpet bombing of World War II. My Great-Granny, who was completely alert mentally, beamed with happiness when she said: "Oh Lord, thank you for giving me the chance to see freedom again. Maybe I'll live to see my great grandchildren learning the truth in school, not ridiculous and distorted statements about almost everything, like they called my favorite poet and freedom fighter, Sándor Petőfi a communist! Communism did not even exist at his time."

Late in the evening we were "hanging on" the radio's news. We heard the speech of Ernő Gerő (first Secretary of the Communist Central Committee) filled with repulsive and outrageous statements. My Father's eyes were flashing in anger, and in a choked voice he whispered his thoughts to my Mother. A little later, loud noise and shouting was heard from the streets and drew us to the windows facing the Vörösmarty Park and the Moscow Square. On the street we saw a big truck packed with young people holding up a soaring Hungarian flag with a hole in the middle heading in our direction. The despised communist seal was cut out of the flag. The voices got louder, and finally it became comprehensible: "The Stalin statue was toppled! The Stalin Statue has been destroyed!"

Oh my God! It was unbelievable! We were thrilled ...They were, of course, referring to the huge statue of Stalin erected in place of a church in the Pest City Park. Newer and newer information spread; everything happened so fast. Like a sharp knife piercing hope the news was relayed that serious shootings happened at the Radio Station. There had been so many unimaginable happenings that day, it was hard to go to sleep.

The next day

It was still dark when we awoke in the early dawn hours to a chilling, roaring, rumbling noise. That spring there had been an earthquake of 5.6 on the Richter scale in Budapest and vicinity. It was very scary. The trembling of the apartment building was similar to that. What was happening this time? We ran to the windows. The roaring, ear-splitting noise was increasing. It shook up our stomachs and froze our hearts. In less than a minute we saw: from behind the corner of our building suddenly emerged the first Russian tank followed by the next and a never-ending cue of others. These monsters were creaking and rattling on the cobblestone road as they proceeded, passing our building and moving toward Moscow Square. The top door of each tank was opened and a dark figure rose out of each machine. Fear started flowing into my heart. The peaceful demonstration yesterday, the cheerful mood, songs and hopes of the multitude and our belief in a miracle... seemed to have faded far away in this early hour of threatening, gloomy daybreak. Our fearful eyes couldn't see the end of the line of those thundering tanks.

On the next day, October 24th, schools were closed. Everybody in my family hurried to stand in line to buy food, just in case, because everything became so uncertain and we wanted to store some groceries. My alert Mother was able to get salami; that wasn't easy to buy in those days. In fact, this was the first time I ate salami in my life.

Tension was vibrating in the air all day. Everyone sensed that something would happen soon. The news spread about fighting and shootings in different parts of Budapest, especially at the Radio building.

Early that afternoon, the freedom fighters pushed railroad cars from the Déli Railway Station to the street intersection and tore up cobblestones of the road to build a barricade that would stop a new column of tanks. It happened very close by, just a short block from our building. My Uncle, who'd heard about the barricade building, came over and stayed with us to see if we needed help. Later that evening my Father sent us, the children, to a safe room in our apartment, away from the bedroom that faced the street. It was getting dark. Suddenly, we heard the threatening noise of a tank coming toward our building. The tension was increasing to a flashpoint. A series of gunshots came from the barricade. The tank responded, and an enormous detonation shook our flat because the shot hit our building. Then another firing came. Our windows broke and the panes shattered on the floor in a million little pieces. "Everybody hurry, run to the shelter!" cried my Dad. My Uncle hugged my Great Grandmother, lifted up her frail body on his shoulder and ran out of our apartment, down the stairs to the underground area. There was panic on the staircase; yelling and crying residents running down from seven floors. A family with two little children was crawling on their knees out of a huge cloud of dust. Oh God! The memories of World War II just came back! Huddling in the cellar we could hear the fight above us. Shootings, detonations filled the air. Some people carried a wounded man down to our shelter. It was a Russian

soldier who was shot in his lung. He was laid down on a blanket and a couple of people ran for a doctor. The soldier cried out for his Mother. This detested, wounded enemy was the beloved son of someone... somewhere. We, the youngsters, were sent away from this site. My heart sank. I never found out if they could save him.

My Father

On the next day, the 25th, my Father left for work as usual. He was a lawyer at the Ministry of Agriculture. During the early fifties he lost his job because he was labeled a “class-alien” due to his background, and because he declined to become a member of the communist party. In the spring of 1956 he was asked by the Department to come back to work in the same position, because his knowledge and the high-quality work he had done was much needed.

The 25th of October is remembered as “Bloody Thursday.” Again, thousands of people marched to the Parliament and on the Square and were caught between the crossfire of Soviet tanks and the Hungarian Secret Police. The Agriculture Ministry faced Kossuth Plaza and the Parliament Building, enabling him and his colleagues to witness what happened on the square. We had already heard about the horror and the slaughtering of hundreds of innocents on the plaza. I will never forget the scream my Mother gave out as she flew into the arms of my Father very late in the evening on that day, when he finally arrived home exhausted, but alive and safe. My Father told us how he and many of his colleagues in the department tried to save panicking people, who were desperately running for their lives, pulling them through the first floor windows into the building. He also told us about the communist party secretary of the Department, who was yelling furiously, ordering the Ministry staff to close all windows and doors to keep the rebellious men, women and children out of the building. That would have meant to simply let them be shot to death on the street. Father wept as he told us, how the secret police (ÁVO) hunted people down one by one, under the arcades of the building. He described how horrible it was seeing the piled up bodies of the dead around the Rákóczi statue on the plaza. Words cannot express our feelings...

Days passed and the battles got more serious. We heard reports about additional divisions of the Russian army entering Hungary at our eastern border and advancing upon Budapest. Apparently, the Russian troops that had been stationed for years at Székesfehérvár, at Győr, on the Szentendre Island and elsewhere were not enough to crush the Revolution.

November 4

By November 4, the advancement was complete, and they attacked Budapest at dawn. It was a tragic day.

At this time, I was allowed to go out only as far as the nearby grocery store. Although I was not involved in fighting, I learned the names of Pál Maléter, Gergely Pongráz and Szabó bácsi. People were talking about serious fights on the Pest side at the Corvin Passage and at the Kilián Army Post Building on Üllői Avenue. Also there was serious street fighting on the Buda side at the Széna Square, and at the Viennese Gate that was an entrance to the historic Castle District. In the following days the Soviets bombed the Kilián Army Post and the Móricz Zsigmond Plaza. One night, when we heard the explosions of bombs and ran to our windows that faced the Vérmező Park and the Castle Hill district, we watched in horror as the roof of the National Archives burned. The fire colored the entire horizon red and the flames continued to spread fast. This horrifying scene showed me what nonsensical and mindless waste a war can inflict.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



The first edition of the free and independent Népszava

The fighting had grown far more intense. We (the three kids) moved to my other Grandmother's place, because her home was safer in the back hills of Budapest. Even there we heard bullets being shot over our heads because two fighting groups, freedom fighters on one and Russians on the opposite hill had set up their lines and they were shooting at each other. Later most of us got used to standing in line for bread while the adjacent street was under gunfire. One day, I was standing in line for milk when a Russian tank showed up at the corner. The tank slowly moved closer with a rattling noise, stopped and lowered its cannon aiming, it seemed like, at the people standing on the street. Everybody ran in all directions. A smaller group tried to hide in the store. They pushed me in, too. I was stuck and scared. What would happen if the tank just fired into the store? After a few breathtaking minutes that seemed like hours to me, the monster moved on. The fear remained in my mind for a long time.

What happened to the faith in freedom that filled the people's hearts just a few days ago? What happened to the powerful will that bonded Hungarians together, from the capital city to little villages, with the great dream of freedom?

Many escaped to avoid the Soviet reoccupation. More than 200,000 men, women, children left the homeland because of fear and to find a better future in the West.

We listened to Radio Free Europe and Voice of America constantly. Hungarians were wishing desperately for help that would come from the West. Many families hoped to get radio messages from loved ones or friends who made it to the "free world." Often it was hard to understand reports on the radio from the West, because of jamming. Our apartment was still dark because all of the front windows were covered by plywood after we lost the glass of the windows. People in Budapest stayed home in the evenings, for it wasn't safe to go outside. Rumors spread fast about robberies, attacks, assaults. Who was doing this to us? One late evening a spine-chilling scream of a woman broke up the quiet hours. It came from the street. We became numb with fear. What was happening? Who was in danger? After a while the prolonged, desperate screaming died down, leaving us with a feeling of helplessness and a sense of terror.

My Great-Grandmother

In mid-December, my Great-Grandmother became ill. She lost her dream to see Hungary free from communist and Soviet domination. The first euphoric feelings faded fast and disappeared when it became obvious that the Russian army had crushed our Revolution. The fight for Hungary's freedom seemed over. My Great Granny had been born in 1864, three years before the Hungarians made the compromise agreement with the Habsburgs following a heroic 1848-49 freedom fight that Austria crushed with the help of the Russian Czar's army. Granny survived World War I and the 1919 short-lived communist takeover in Hungary. She lost everything during World War II; her home was bombed to the ground. Now she had lost her will to live. She refused to eat and just lay in bed with her prayerbook in her hands. She left this world just two days before her 92nd birthday. There was a rattle of firearms in the distance when we buried her in the cemetery.

When school started again, many of my classmates were missing. They fled the country with their parents or family. We were sad to learn the fate of our favorite gym teacher who was a famous athlete competing in the pentathlon. His athletic figure became part of the design on the back of the 20 Forint bill. He was shot on the street when he went to his Mother's house to bring her food. For us he was an exceptional coach and teacher, and so young... as young as many boys and girls, the fearless, bravest of the brave, who perished.

The regular classes started again at the end of January. A strange silence surrounded the turbulence of the preceding few months. But that year instead of the required Russian language, we started studying German. That stopped again with the school year, and we resumed studying the Russian language the next September. People talked about the revenge of the government, arrests, prisons and concentration camps, even executions of young rebels. We were gripped by an insecure and fearful feeling for years. But then, life slowly started changing for the better. I never found out whether I was on a list of monitored people due to my cousin sending letters and post-cards to me from Germany, and later from California...

"A nation cried out. But the only echo was silence."

(from Sándor Márai's "Angel from Heaven..." New York, 1956)



Ágnes Sylvester Fülöp

Born and raised in Budapest, Ágnes Fülöp was in high school in 1956. She spent the aftermath of the Revolution living under the Kádár regime, raising two children. She immigrated to Minneapolis, MN in 1989, following her marriage to László Fülöp. She is currently a researcher in the geological laboratory of the Department of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota. An active leader in the Hungarian Society of Minnesota since 1990, Fülöp assumed and has held its presidency since 1998. With her husband she is also a member of the Hungarian Community of Friends (MBK) and the Hungarian American Coalition (HAC).

Please also read her husband, László Fülöp's submission on page 27.

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 guard-house. 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

Illustration by László Fülöp



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 “traitor 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 I 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.

Szabo 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 Andrassy 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 Petőfi Square earlier," said someone when the boys asked. So they were on the right track. The Petőfi 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 Petőfi 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 Petőfi 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 Petőfi'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 Petőfi 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?

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



An appeal to Soviet soldiers in Russian: "Soviet soldiers, we are fighting for our country, for freedom for Hungary! Don't shoot us!"

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 Brody 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 AVH.

"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

Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



Tanks on the streets of Budapest

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 AVH 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 AVH 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 AVH’s turn to taste their own medicine. The AVH, 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 AVH 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 AVH 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 AVH 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 AVH. 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 unreliaables," for those the communist system did not trust. After "the unreliaables" 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 Kilián 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 Kilián 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 Agnes Sylvester Fülöp. His wife's submission can be found on page 23.

Anikó Gáal Schott

THE NIGHT MY LIFE CHANGED

At barely twelve years old, I was still young enough to play hopscotch, yet old enough to understand what was happening in October of 1956.

The Revolution electrified the entire country, young and old alike. On that day in school, on Budapest's Váci utca, we watched with excitement as throngs of university students marched below our windows demanding that the Russians leave the country. To show solidarity, we took off our obligatory Pioneer's red neckwear, shined our shoes with it, and then cut it up. Such a small gesture, but it felt like we were striking at the heart of the regime which had made our lives so miserable.

As the days and weeks progressed, reality set in. By November, we saw that the Revolution had failed and disillusionment set in once again. Those who took part in the uprising and stayed in the country until December, had no choice but to flee, risk incarceration or worse.

One family's story

On December 9th, 1956, we left Budapest, bound for Sopron, leaving all of our worldly possessions behind. Armed with hope and courage in our hearts, two changes of clothing on our backs, and salt, paprika and spices in one suitcase, we pretended to be going to a pig-slaughtering ceremony in the event of capture. My Mother, Father, little brother and I thus began our journey to freedom.

At Győr, the Secret Police boarded the train. We quickly got off. They were checking documents, and we did not have any. During communism, only the "party-elite" would have travel documents. Attempting to take another route led us to Kapuvár, a small town 26 km from Austria. Since the borders were ostensibly closed by then, we needed to find a guide or farmer to lead us to Austria.

Our initial attempts to find a suitable guide failed. At dinner that night in a small inn, our meal was interrupted by a voice at the next table, who said, "These glasses are cheaper in the West." This was a cue to which my Father responded in kind. They soon made their deal. The man boasted of having led 20,000 people to freedom. All for a price, of course! But since freedom has no price, we gave him all we had, about half a year's salary for a professional at the time in Hungary, and whatever small amount of jewelry we had.

The man was awesome! He led us to his home, gave us hot chocolate, which, as children, we coveted but rarely had. As we started our journey, other people joined us. Soon a group of 96 of us was assembled. Our guide instructed us to march strictly in a single-file formation. The six-hour escape began at ten o'clock at night. As our pace picked up, we were breathless and hot, having so much clothing on our backs. But the falling snow seemed to cool our faces. At first my brother and I welcomed all this as an adventure, but adventure soon gave way to reality, and I composed the following little poem:

Leszállt a hó s minden oly csendesnek látszik,
De szívemben háborút játszik
A fájdalom.

Snow is falling, all is quiet,
But in my heart such a riot,
Such pain.

The walk continued to get more and more intense. Beset by freezing rain and sleet, the task of reaching our goal became more arduous. After a four hour walk punctuated by hiding in the ditches along which we were walking, we struggled forward.

Left by the side of the road

Soviet tanks scanned the fields looking for escapees. Their reflectors provided the light of day in the depth of night. Looking up from the ditch, fearing capture and its consequences must have drained my body. I fainted.

Two young men offered to carry me. In the meantime, we all got a bit separated. However well intentioned the young men were, fatigue must have set in, and they left me at a tree trunk along the side of the road. Miraculously, my brother heard me weeping. My Father, holding on to my brother, came to pick me up. They were the last two in the single file. An hour or so later, I regained consciousness. We were just an hour from the border.

Our clever guide had bribed all the Hungarian border guards to assist in the final few kilometers of our crossing. A systematic communication system of bird's whistles was developed between them. Certain bird's whistles meant we could advance; others meant for us to be still or duck in the ditch.

Sparrows, Red Robins, Bluebirds, Crows, they all meant something. To this day I have never heard so many birds' whistle at once.

At one point we crossed a stream. The guide made all of us huddle, and quietly whispered: "I can only take you this far. From now on, you are on your own." He pointed to a glimmer of light, that he told us was Austria. As he slipped back into the night, we were left with the longest kilometer of our lives.

Austria

The Red Cross was waiting for us on the other side, piling us into trucks and transported us to the first of three refugee camps we were to experience.

This first destination was an old large barn with thick straw – piles on the dirt floor. But the straw felt like silk against our bodies. Finally, we slept soundly... and for the next few weeks I was pinching myself to see if this journey was reality or just a dream.

Finally, Freedom. Liberty. Is this what it feels like? We were about to find out.

In the first few days, we received our initial documents. The document labeled us "stateless." We welcomed our rations of bread and cheese and hot soup for dinner. Neisidlamsee, Eisenstadt and Styer were our next three homes, refugee-camps run by the Red Cross, various religious organizations and the benevolent Austrian government.

By the time we arrived at Styer, the most established of all the camps, we were "seasoned" refugees. We were now accustomed to bunk-beds, rooms full of strangers, lack of privacy and rations. Despite the discomforts of life here, we were overjoyed to be free.

And the joy of freedom is a powerful elixir. It was truly the first time in my life that I was not afraid of authority; the ability to hear radio broadcasts, Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, looking at western magazines and reading western newspapers, were all overwhelming.

Finally, my parents decided that they did not want us to witness the squalor of the camps any longer. Through the intervention of Otto von Habsburg's offices in Vienna, my brother and I were taken to a Sacred Heart Convent in Styer where we stayed the next four months, awaiting permission to enter Canada. We were excited at the thought of making our home in a young country full of opportunities.

Ferenc Kóczy, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



'Russians Go Home!' – A comedy on the marquis for the Nap Movie Theater

Meanwhile, we visited our parents every Sunday. On these days, the family got together and we ventured into Vienna several times to experience normalcy, it was spring. Vienna is beautiful in the spring with people on walks, children in parks, coffee houses buzzing with well dressed people, church bells ringing, students laughing. What happiness to see all that! The city was so clean, the architecture of the Opera House, the churches, the castles and museums so breathtaking. As we took one streetcar after another to see all we could see, one very kind gesture kept being repeated. Strangers would always give us handouts: chocolates, bananas, candy and the like.

Perplexed, I asked my Mother: "Why are these people giving us things?" "Because we are refugees, my dear," she said. "But, how do they know we're refugees?," I asked? "Because we look like refugees." And slowly, I not only accepted my status as a refugee, but began to feel very proud of it.

At nights, I would dream of having a life like the people I had just seen in Vienna.

Canada

One happy day, our permission to enter Canada arrived. On April 6th, 1957, a Canadian military plane took us to Montreal. We could hardly wait see our new homeland. As we descended, we saw a snow-covered Canada. It was beautiful!

The years that shaped my life thereafter were the direct results of the harsh realities of my childhood and the opportunities that came my way in my adopted countries. I was grateful for everything, never taking anything for granted. I am indebted to Canada for accepting us, giving us citizenship, providing a good solid education, and for introducing us to freedom, democracy and a land of plenty,

America

Later, I was grateful to America for accepting me as an U.S. Foreign Service wife and for teaching me tolerance and diplomacy. And for the many opportunities that came my way thereafter, I am still overwhelmed and humbled.

I was blessed with wonderful parents who taught us truths when the communists did not, who instilled in us drive to accomplish, hope for our dreams, compassion and charity. I feel I am also blessed with good Hungarian genes, and shall always be proud of my roots...even though I now have more than a good dose of Americana in me.

Throughout its 1,100 year-old history, Hungary had suffered from invasions and occupations from the Mongols to the Soviets. But like a phoenix, somehow Hungary always resurrected itself through perseverance.

The brave men and women who fought for freedom and democracy for Hungary are very much a product of the essence of this land. And how proud we are to pass these genes on to our new homeland, yet never forgetting from whence they came.

I take this opportunity to salute all those who fought in 1956. It was their sacrifice that will allow us to celebrate the upcoming 50th Anniversary. To see a free Hungary celebrate this anniversary of the 1956 Revolution that has finally born its fruits is the greatest joy of my life!



Anikó Gáal Schott

Anikó Gáal Schott grew up in Montreal, Canada, where she completed her Bachelor of Science degree in biochemistry at Sir George Williams University and went on to study dentistry at McGill University. From 1967-1978, she traveled abroad with the U.S. Foreign Service as a dependant, serving in Ecuador, Brazil and East Germany for 11 years. She is the founder of A. Gaal & Associates, a Washington, D.C. based design and consulting firm, and is active participant in numerous charities, including many Hungarian causes. As a Presidential Appointee, she is serving on President George W. Bush's Cultural Property Advisory Committee, representing the public (2003-2006). Among her awards are: the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary, Brazil's National Order of the Southern Cross, the Star Medal of Honor from the Transylvania World Federation and New York City's Gold Key Award. She is married to Nash Whitney Schott, a Federal Prosecutor who recently retired after 30 years of service in the Department of Justice. They live in Washington, D.C.

Ildikó diósadi Bodó Gajda

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM



Gajda with her parents. Inci and Tihamér, in the United States, 1957

I was getting ready for school the morning of October 24, 1956, when my Grandmother informed me that school had been canceled due to fighting in the streets. The Hungarian Revolution started the night before. Although I was not sure exactly what was going on, the fact that there was no school was wonderful news to any 13 year-old. In fact there was no school for a long time. At this point, Bulcsú Street, where I lived, was quiet.

A few days later, I joined two of my friends in our apartment building and went door to door asking for money and books that we could take to the freedom fighters in the hospital. My friends knew a nurse, who felt that the young people in the hospital would really appreciate this gesture. After collecting all the money, we went to the tobacco store to buy ciga-rettes. However, since we could only buy 2 packs ourselves, we stood outside the store and asked passersby to go in and buy the cigarettes with our money. The three of us finally made it to the hospital and visited the men's ward.

I met one young man who told me that he would not be there when we planned to return in a couple of days for a second visit. He wanted to make sure that he would be discharged from the hospital even before he was fully recovered to continue the fight against the Russians. He was accomplishing this by taking the thermometer out of his mouth early so it showed that he did not have a fever. Due to the lack of space in the hospital and

this clever trick, he was indeed discharged before our return. The saddest part of the visit was when a woman came in to say goodbye. She was very bubbly and happy because she was going home. However, we noticed that the whole room became quiet and did not seem to join in her happiness. After she left the room, we were told that she was so happy because she thought she was going home to her family, especially her husband. Unfortunately, when she was shot in the beginning of the Revolution, she did not remember that her husband had died in her arms. No one had the courage to tell her the truth.

Soldiers in our neighborhood

Although the section of town where I lived was really out of the mainstream of fighting, we did have two incidents. One was when a Russian tank ran up on the sidewalk and the soldiers inside the tank were too afraid to come out. Although, the soldiers did eventually come out of the tank and were not harmed, I wasn't allowed to get too close. But, it was very exciting to witness for a few hours. The second incident happened when the soldiers performed a door-to-door search of all the apartments, looking for guns. Anyone caught with a gun was arrested. However, before they got to our apartment, some freedom fighters showed up and engaged in a gun battle right under our window. We ended up in the basement bunker for safety.

Both of my parents were out of town when the Revolution started. It was over a week before they were able to return to Budapest because public transportation was stopped all across the country. As soon as they arrived, my activities were further curtailed and I was unable to visit even the hospital during the day. I did eventually talk my Mother into taking me downtown so I could see what destruction had taken place. I saw apartment buildings reduced to complete rubble with rooms just broken in half. In part of one building that I saw, half the structure was blown apart, yet the dining room table was still standing untouched with cups still intact. There I saw my first dead person, in one of the doorways, with flowers on his chest.

Life in Budapest during the Revolution was pretty difficult. Getting food was not easy. Fortunately, we did have an open market across the street from our apartment, but meat and bread were still difficult to get. I remember spending many hours standing in bread lines, which was scary, because once in a while people were shot and killed in these lines.

Escape

My parents discussed the idea of leaving the country, especially after Sunday, November 4th, when the Russians re-took Hungary. My parents wanted to escape in as safe a manner as possible. My Father came home on November 24th from his place of employment, where he had found a ride to the border with some co-workers. We had to leave almost immediately. I remember my excitement at this new adventure. I put on several layers of clothing, since we could not be seen leaving the apartment with suitcases. My Mother packed some sausage and bread in a briefcase. That is all we took with us.

After a tearful goodbye to some of our relatives on November 24th, we departed on foot, since there was still no public transportation running. First, we had to make our way to a square in Buda to meet my Father's coworkers. The driver had permission from the government to take a truck to the border to find missing trucks from the company that other workers had used to transport their own families to the border. Our truck was packed, since there were seven people in the cab, and three men including my Father in the back of the truck. Since we knew that we would be going through police checkpoints, everyone was given a job, position and reason for being in the truck. My Mother and I were being taken to "relatives" close to the border. The eight other men in the truck were either truck drivers or mechanics.

Driving to Austria

As we drove along, three trucks suddenly passed us from the same company. Our driver knew who was in the other trucks, and also knew that the men had driven to the border, checked it out for ease of crossing then driven back to Budapest to pick up their families. This was a Godsend to us since we had no idea where we would cross. This was obviously scary because soldiers could shoot you or police could arrest you if you tried to cross in the wrong place. So, we decided to follow these three trucks, but they had other ideas. They felt that four trucks from the same company was a caravan, and it would attract too much attention. I wonder why three were less conspicuous? So, our game began.

We would drive way ahead of them until we were not sure which way to go. At that point, we would slow down until they caught up to us, and would have to pass us. We continued this all afternoon and into the night. As we arrived into a little village around midnight, we were told that we better stay there until morning, since between the village and the border there was a Russian tank checkpoint and in the dark, they may shoot after us. All the women and children were housed in local peoples' homes. However, by the time we arrived in the village, we could not find anyone awake who could have give my Mother and me a bed to sleep in. We ended up spending the night in a greenhouse on the seat of the truck.

The next morning we were up early, and by 6 a.m. were driving the short distance to the border. Since we were not really sure which way to go, we let the other trucks lead the way again. Although we were the only ones with legal papers, the driver of the first truck gave vodka, bacon and money to the soldiers at the checkpoint. After that, they never checked the other trucks, but just waved us on. Once we had driven as far as we could go, to our surprise, we found three more trucks from the same company, abandoned close to the border. From here, we had to go by foot, since it wasn't very far to the border.

There was a deep creek between Austria and Hungary, but one enterprising man had a chain stretched between the two countries and was taking people across in a little boat. It was like a movie scene, where people came from all different directions to get to Austria. The man's pocket was bulging with money from all the people who were using his services. We had the scare of our lives during our boat trip. A dredge boat floated nearby the chain, with a young Hungarian soldier sitting on top watching everyone leave. In his boredom he decided to shoot into the air, just about giving everyone a heart attack. He was told in no uncertain terms to stop shooting immediately. We finally made it to the boat and soon found ourselves in Austria. We were free.

Life as a refugee

The village was some distance from the border, but the kind Austrians sent out tractors to take people into the center of the village. There were so many of us that we could not all fit on the bed of the tractor, until it made a return trip. Once in the village, the Austrian people paired us with families to be fed. We did manage to go into a church to give thanks to God for our safe journey, but had to be back at the train station by nightfall. Once there, we were all loaded onto a train, with eight people in our compartment. That night there was no supper or any other amenities at all. In fact, being November, it was pretty cold with no heat on the train. The train stayed in the station until it was completely filled. Then we started a two-day trip, while authorities tried to find a camp where they could lodge a whole trainload of Hungarians. During this time, the only food we had was the sausage and bread that my Mother packed in the brief case at the start of our journey. We shared it with our companions.

Finally the authorities opened a new camp at Kaisersteinbruck, since all the others were full. It was really great to get off the train. Since this was a new campsite, most of the barracks did not even have beds in them. All they had time to do was lay down straw on both sides of the room and give everyone two blankets. Families made small pathways in the straw to be together, but there was no privacy, since all ages and sexes were housed in this huge room. After spending over three days in the same clothes, it was great to take a shower, even though the water was cold. Food was brought into the room in very large kettles and dished out. There was a Red Cross used clothing store where we went since I had a hole in my shoes. The people working in the store did not speak Hungarian, and most Hungarians did not speak German, so they were thrilled to find my parents who both spoke good German. They both got a job working in the store. Even though there was no salary, they were happy to be able to help fellow Hungarians in need. That was enough.

The time in the camp went by very slowly since there were not many recreational activities. Although, we were not allowed to leave the camp area unless we were going to Vienna on official business, we did make a number

of trips to Vienna to apply at the American Legation to be able to get into the United States. On one of our trips my Father sold his warm winter coat, so we could have a few shillings to spend.

Our name was finally called out over the loud speaker on December 26th. We packed what little we had accumulated from the Red Cross, and reported to the bus. There were four buses loaded with Hungarians who were being driven to the American army base in Munich, Germany. It was close to midnight when we finally arrived. The base was not equipped to handle whole families, so the men were lodged in the men's barracks and the women separately. Eventually, we were all loaded onto an army plane to be flown to America. How we were lucky enough to be sent on a plane was a mystery to us. Since families with small children and the elderly had a chance to fly, the rest of the people came by boat. We did stop in the Azores Islands and Bermuda before arriving at McGuire Air Force base in New Jersey.

Arriving in the United States

After we arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, we were first housed in the small camp, where they did all the paper work. This was a slow process. Once all paper work and physicals were finished, we were moved to the large camp across the street. From this camp, people could leave if they had relatives, a job or a sponsoring organization. We had none of these. Fortunately my Father found that the Council of Churches of Wilmington, Delaware was looking to sponsor three families. To our joy, we were one of the families chosen! So on January 31, 1957, we arrived in Wilmington to live with a DuPont chemist and his family.

After living with the DuPont chemist and his family for about six weeks, some wonderful person offered eight apartments to Hungarians for \$1/month rent for the first four months, after which time the rent was \$45/month. Of course, we had no furniture at all, but some kind strangers were able to find all sort of used items for us. It was heaven for us, since this was the first apartment that my parents had which they did not have to share with other relatives since the end of the war.

My Mother found a job with DuPont Company, first as a temporary worker and then a permanent position. My Father eventually found a job with Wilmington Trust Company, where he became an auditor. I initially was enrolled at a local Catholic elementary school, but because I could not speak English, I was sent for a year and a half to a boarding school run by the Benedictine order in Ridgely, Maryland. After returning to Wilmington, I was enrolled at St. Elizabeth High School and graduated in 1962.



Gajda with her Mother and Grandmother

Ildikó diósadi Bodó Gajda

Ildikó Gajda graduated in 1966 from the University of Delaware where she received a B.S. degree. She married her husband in 1968, who was also attending the University of Delaware, where he received his Ph.D. in chemical engineering. Until 1994, they lived in Wilmington at which time her husband was transferred to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where they live today. Gajda has two wonderful children and two beautiful granddaughters.

Dr. Miklós and Mária Hitter are the Grandparents of Ildikó Gajda. Their letter can be read on page 54

Sándor T. Halász

WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED 11 YEARS AGO

During the summer of 1956, a Budapest streetcar conductor broke into a store that had been unoccupied for several years, and moved in with his family, which included several children. Until that point their living conditions had been startlingly primitive, even by those current day standards, and consisted only of a one room cottage without running water or a washroom.

The communist authorities allowed them three days to vacate the store; otherwise they would be removed by the police. The deadline passed, and when the conductor did not move out, the police came to carry out their orders. However, they were greeted by more than one hundred conductors standing in front of the building, who let them know that they would protect their fellow conductor at all costs. After consulting their superior officers, the police withdrew and the streetcar conductor and his family were free to enjoy their new living quarters.

This was how the Hungarian workers learned they had power. The opportunity to use this power came soon enough.

At the steel mill

On October 23, 1956, I had to visit a large steel mill in the east of Hungary for a consultation. The train was slow, so I arrived at around noon at the factory. There was unusual silence because no one was working. The workers were instead sitting around their machines. They were on strike, the first in 25 years.

The party bosses tried to persuade the men to pretend to work or at the very least to stop playing cards. Because of the strike I was unable to do my job either, so I took the evening train back to Budapest. There was no sign of disturbance on the train and I ate a nice meal in the dining car. I still remember how good the beef soup was. At around 10 p.m. the train reached the Keleti Railroad Station. The general atmosphere in the rail hall was somewhat unusual as there were crowds of people milling around despite the late hour. There was also a strange smell in the air – fog and perhaps gunpowder? Some three or four trucks rolled by loaded with young men who chanted, “Russians, Go Home!” The air was now heavy and guns crackled in the distance. At the bus stop a crowd of perhaps one hundred people waited for the bus.

Imre Balassa



Burned-out streetcars used as barricades against tanks in Budapest

I asked, "What happened here?"

"What should have happened 11 years ago!"

This was quite clear. I was extremely tired, however, and wanted to get home. But how? The only possible way was to walk 3 miles, so I started out on foot. On the way home, I heard some small arms fire in the background and saw a crowd besiege the building of the chief communist daily newspaper – what an incredible sight! I also passed a military barracks and saw Hungarian soldiers throwing weapons out the windows for the revolutionaries. The rest of the walk home was uneventful. In the Buda district, the trams were even running. I found my family in good health.

The next morning, I hastened to my workplace where the discussion centered on the events of the previous day. A meeting of all employees was called by the newly formed "workers council." The modern reader probably cannot appreciate how volatile the situation was at the time, and that the whole question of whether there would be a Revolution or other serious developments was still in doubt.

It was announced that an emissary of the Hungarian Labor Party (communist party) would also be present at the meeting and planned to address the people assembled.

"Question even before the Labor Party delegate speaks," a colleague of mine got up. He was a short, little man who walked with a cane. Most of us did not even know his name. "I am pleased that the Labor Party delegate is here. I hope he will explain what I have been wondering about for the past 11 years. Who does the Hungarian Labor Party really represent?"

All hell broke loose. Everybody rushed to shake hands with the unknown speaker. He was one of the few real heroes whom I met personally during my lifetime.

The Labor Party delegate made a hasty exit through the back door. I heard somebody start to recite the Lord's Prayer. And so it began.

Sándor T. Halász



Finishing his studies in Budapest in 1949, Sándor T. Halász worked as a mechanical engineer until the events of 1956. After fleeing his homeland in 1957, he eventually settled near New York. He earned a Masters degree in Engineering from Columbia University and was Chair of the Department of Technology at the City College of the City University of New York until his retirement. He and his wife Elizabeth currently live in New Jersey.

Please read his wife, Elizabeth Halász' story in the Families of '56-ers Section.

Péter Hargitai

NO-MAN'S LAND 1956

"When 'Stalin's Torch' lights up the sky, you have to hit the ground," my Father said. "Fall down. It's a matter of life and death." My Father and I were crammed together with a bunch of strangers in a truck headed toward the Austrian border. But the truck could only take us so far. We would eventually have to trek across several kilometers of frozen marshes known as No-Man's Land. "We all fall down," my Father winked at the dark faces, "like in the game 'a pocket full of posy.'" It was meant as a joke but no one was laughing.

I frowned. I was too old for a nursery rhyme. I was already nine. Old enough to know that we could not go back to our homeland because the Russians crushed our Revolution. And if I didn't do as my Father said they might even shoot us. There were Russian soldiers along the border. My Father had smeared black shoe polish all over my cheeks, nose, chin, ears, behind the ears, everywhere except the eyes. I had trouble seeing in the dark of the canvas-covered truck. My Father's face was a black smudge. Pieces of straw stuck to his patchy coat. I wasn't used to being on a truck, not for this long, not at these breakneck speeds, and not at these hours, way past my bedtime. I didn't want to play 'a pocket full of posy'. I didn't really want any black shoe polish on my face, didn't really want any war paint. And how could Stalin, the "great father and liberator," light a torch in the sky? He was dead, wasn't he? Even his statue was torn down during the Revolution. I knew. I was there with my Mother when it happened.

My Father saw that I was about to cry or get sick so he said: "Oh, don't worry about 'Stalin's Torch'. It's not like his ghost is haunting us in the heavens. It's just a fancy name for a flare. That's all." I told him I missed my Mother. "I know, son. I miss her, too." She had been with me when the demonstration started on Petőfi Square on the 23rd of October in 1956. I remember how she squeezed my hand when we heard a man on a makeshift pedestal recite "Rise Up, Magyars":

Rise up, Magyars! Your homeland calls!
The time is here! It's now or never!
Shall we be free or slaves forever?!

Amidst the crowd at the Stalin statue

"FREE!" the crowd roared. Thousands swelled the square, banners in hand, students arm-in-arm from the nearby university; workers from the factories, wearing their light work clothes and berets. My Mother let me climb a lamp-post sign so I could see. There were people everywhere. Hungarian colors waved in the air, many with a gaping hole cut in the center where the red star had been. Then a chant: "Ruszkik haz! Russians Go Home!" A red flag burst into flames and they cheered the rising smoke. Word got out that there would be another demonstration at Heroes Square where demonstrators were trying to pull down the statue of Stalin.

My Mother and I took the subway to the square, hundreds joining us at each of the stations where one wave after another lapped into overflowing cars. I had never seen anything like it. Something told me there would be no homework due in the morning, or the morning after that. We were soon among a mass of people swarming up the stairs into the darkening air.

The throng at Heroes Square clamored wildly. Truck headlights crisscrossed beams, fixing at last on Stalin's giant bronze knees. The metal knees creaked like a hinge, then buckled, the steel-braided noose vibrated around the statue's neck. The truck's engine whined. Something had to give. It was Stalin. His legs. They gave out, ripped just under the knee, and left a pair of hollow boots on a pedestal of marble. The truck dragged the hulk onto the cobblestone, showering sparks each time the "great father and liberator" clanged against trolley tracks along the boulevard that carried his name. A woman spat. There was shouting and screaming. Feet shuffled somewhere in the crowd. A voice not very far away said that ÁVO men, the dreaded secret police were ferreting a stash of guns into the city sewers. "Flush them out!" the crowd shouted. "Flush out the rats!"

My Mother jerked on my arm. Dragging me alongside her, she wormed her way through the jostling crowd back toward the subway entrance. But there were so many people, it was impossible to take the subway back. We had to go on foot for several city blocks. Strange faces surged from every direction, and we were losing our way. Then we heard what we thought was gunfire somewhere in the distance. The crowd was going wild. The air reeked of gasoline. More cries of "Flush out the rats!" Suddenly there was panic everywhere.

Seeking refuge in a church

My Mother found the church in the nick of time. We darted through an alley to get to the church, a vast, dark cathedral. The heavy doors creaked as they opened. There was just enough light coming through the stained glass windows to see a metal bird perched over the altar. Its wings radiated shiny rays like a rising sun. My Mother took me over to the statue of the Virgin Mary. I remember asking her why the nose was broken off. She took a deep breath, let out some air and said, "the war," as if those two words explained everything. I nodded as if I knew. It was not the time to ask any more questions, especially when she was praying.

I remember slipping out of her hand and wandering back to the heavy doors. It was stupid of me but I opened the door. Just a slit. That's when the shooting started. RAT-TAT-TAT. Like that! Bullets were flying, chipping stone. The next thing I knew, my Mother let out a cry and yanked me from the door. She held on to me so tight I couldn't breathe.

A family debate over escape

I told my Father I couldn't breathe. That I was going to get sick. Right here in the truck. Right in front of everybody. "No, you're not," my Father said. "You're just scared. You're going to have to be brave. Your Mother would want you to be brave."

I was scared. Not of the Russians so much but of never seeing my Mother again. Every time I thought of her,

I felt something tighten in my chest and I thought I was going to get sick.

"We'll be there soon," my Father said. "I don't want you to worry about your Mother, son." If she doesn't come after us, I will go and get her. I promise." Soon the bumpy ride would be over and we'd start our march across No-Man's Land. I hated telling my Father I was going to be sick. It was only yesterday that I got really sick. It was when my Mother and Father had their big fight about leaving Hungary and going to America. My Mother had run out of the apartment in her pajamas and into her brother's car. The gray Pobeda. It was a Russian car. She slammed the door and pushed down the locks. My Father stormed after her. And I after him. He picked up a loose cobblestone and threatened to bust the windshield. "Come out or I'll break the window and your neck."

"No!" I shouted. I tried to pry the cobblestone from my Father, but he had an iron grip on it. My Mother yelled at him from inside the car, "Get him inside, or he'll get sick!"

My Father slammed a cobblestone against the windshield but only made it crack. I remember wheezing, gasping for breath. My Father threw the cobblestone at one of the headlights and the glass exploded into a thousand tiny pieces.

My Mother bolted from the Pobeda. My Father tackled her.

"Let me go! You're insane! You wrecked his car!"

"The hell with your brother and the hell with his car. The son of a bitch works for the AVO. You know it. I know it."

"You're crazy," my Mother shouted.

But my Father grabbed my Mother and was twisting her arm.

"Let go of her!" I screamed, but my Father ignored me.

"You're going to do as I say!" my Father shouted at my Mother. He stabbed a finger at her chest. This was it, he said. This was where their ways went apart. "Damn you!" he said before letting her go.

"Well, I'm not going," my Mother shouted back. "No one's going. There's no money to go. You think they're going to let you walk across the border just like that? Because your son needs a blessed operation?! What are they going to do in America? Give him a new heart? Don't you think I know you're just using that? Just to kick up everything and get the hell out! Go! What should you care? You don't even care if your son gets killed!"

No-Man's Land

There was that tight feeling in my chest again. I grappled with the truck's canvas where there was a flap. I needed some air to rid myself of the feeling. The man who was our guide directed a flashlight at me, then moved the light to a gaping hole in the floorboards.

"If you have to vomit, vomit through there," he said.

I crawled to the hole, the flashlight turned off. Once I was done throwing up into the hole, my Father took a handful of straw and wiped around the edges.

Then suddenly the ride got very bumpy. They were saying we

Géza Kisvarsányi



Stalin's boots keep watch over the square

must be close to the border. On No-Man's Land. A few snowflakes swirled in through the opening, empty fields stretching along both sides of the highway. Not a tree in sight. Only brown hedges along the canal. I was about to close the flap when I spotted a headlight in the distance. The headlight was gaining on us, swelling to a huge circle. There was no mistaking. We were being followed.

Our guide ordered everyone to get down. Then he fished out a machine gun from among the hay. The headlight gaining on them belonged to a military vehicle. Of that our guide was certain. By its brightness, he said he could tell it was a military cycle in hot pursuit. A lot more than 6 volts. And the light was flashing on and off. "Probably the god damn AVO," he said.

I swallowed hard.

Our guide pounded on the cabin with the butt of his gun, "Give it gas, for Christ sake."

Pobeda

"What if it's the Pobeda?" I heard myself blurt out. "My Uncle's car!"

"The boy's right. The boy's right," my Father said. My Father was insistent. "It's my brother-in-law's Pobeda, I'm telling you. It's got a cracked windshield and a busted headlight. It does that. It flashes on and off. It's crazy."

"You're crazy," the guide said.

I knew my Father wasn't crazy. He was the one who busted the headlight.

"Stop the truck!" my Father shouted.

"Get down!" the guide bellowed at the top of his lungs. "Everybody get down!"

We all lay still, flattened to the floorboards and each other. The guide and his gun were moving toward the back of the truck. Before he could stick the muzzle through the opening and get off a few rounds at the mysterious headlight, my Father was on him. They grappled for the gun. The gun went off erupting in a flash of loud volleys. The tires screeched as we lurched forward. My Father slammed the man into the canvas which gave unexpectedly. Our guide was pitched headlong onto the icy corn-stubble, right into the path of the car following us. The car fishtailed to a stop, its one headlight trained on a snow-covered ditch.

It was the Pobeda. My Mother and her brother did come after us like my Father promised they would. When we were reunited with my Mother, I couldn't begin to describe what I felt. All I know is that she held me as tightly as she had in that church once the bullets started flying.



Péter Hargitai

Péter Hargitai wrote his first poem, "Felkelők" ("Revolutionaries"), during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when he was nine years old. Since then he has authored and translated over a dozen books, among them his volume of poems, "Mother Tongue: A Broken Hungarian Love Song." His selection of the poems of Attila József in "Perched on Nothing's Branch" garnered for him the Academy of American Poets Landon Translation Award and a listing among world classics in Harold Bloom's "The Western Canon." For his translation of Antal Szerb's novel "The Traveler," he was awarded the Füst Milán Prize from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; and for his steadfast commitment to translating, publishing, and teaching Hungarian literature in a world language, he was awarded the Pro Cultura Hungarica Medal from the Republic of Hungary. A Fulbright Scholar, Professor Hargitai is on the English faculty at Florida International University in Miami and a member of the Hungarian Writers' Association in Budapest.

Edward and Judy Hilbert

CARTOONIST'S ESCAPE



The Hilberts in 1956

The whole idea to come to the United States actually started in 1941 when my Uncle, who had years before emigrated to New Jersey, returned to Budapest on holiday. When he emigrated to the United States in the early 1930s, he had landed in New York City. Since his trade was that of a sign painter, he got a job right away. Eventually he and my Aunt moved to New Jersey where they wound up in a small town called Fords, near New Brunswick. He opened a small sign shop. Time passed, his business grew, and their two daughters graduated from Rutgers University. Then one day the town's only movie theatre came up for sale. They purchased it and from that point on they showed movies, and sold tickets, lemonade, and popcorn.

Throughout their visit to Hungary, he told us this and several other stories about the life and the opportunities in America. He said, that with hard work, determination, and a little luck, you can achieve a great life there.

I was 14 years old then. Listening to his stories I decided that someday, somehow, I would go to America and I would become a proud American, too.

Opportunity

Judy and I both worked hard, but we didn't see any future for us in Hungary. The country had been under Soviet rule for years, and their controlling domination separated us from the rest of the world. Freedom for us was just in our imagination.

In 1956, when the Hungarian Revolution started and the Hungarian border opened up for a short two weeks, Judy and I took a chance to make our dream of freedom into reality.

We lived then in an apartment in Budapest near the Danube River. During the intense and violent fighting that ensued, a shell from a Russian tank had hit our apartment building, destroying our home. One early morning our friend, who owned the place, rang our doorbell. "Are you ready for a truck ride?" he asked. Apparently, he knew a truck driver who was willing to smuggle the two of us plus my friend and his small family (five of us total) out of the city to a place near Sopron where an acquaintance of his was escorting people across the Austrian border. We had a half-hour to make our decision.

The trip

"Okay," we said, and started to pack our backpack right away. The five of us were crammed in between crated apples, standing uncomfortably for 8 hours.

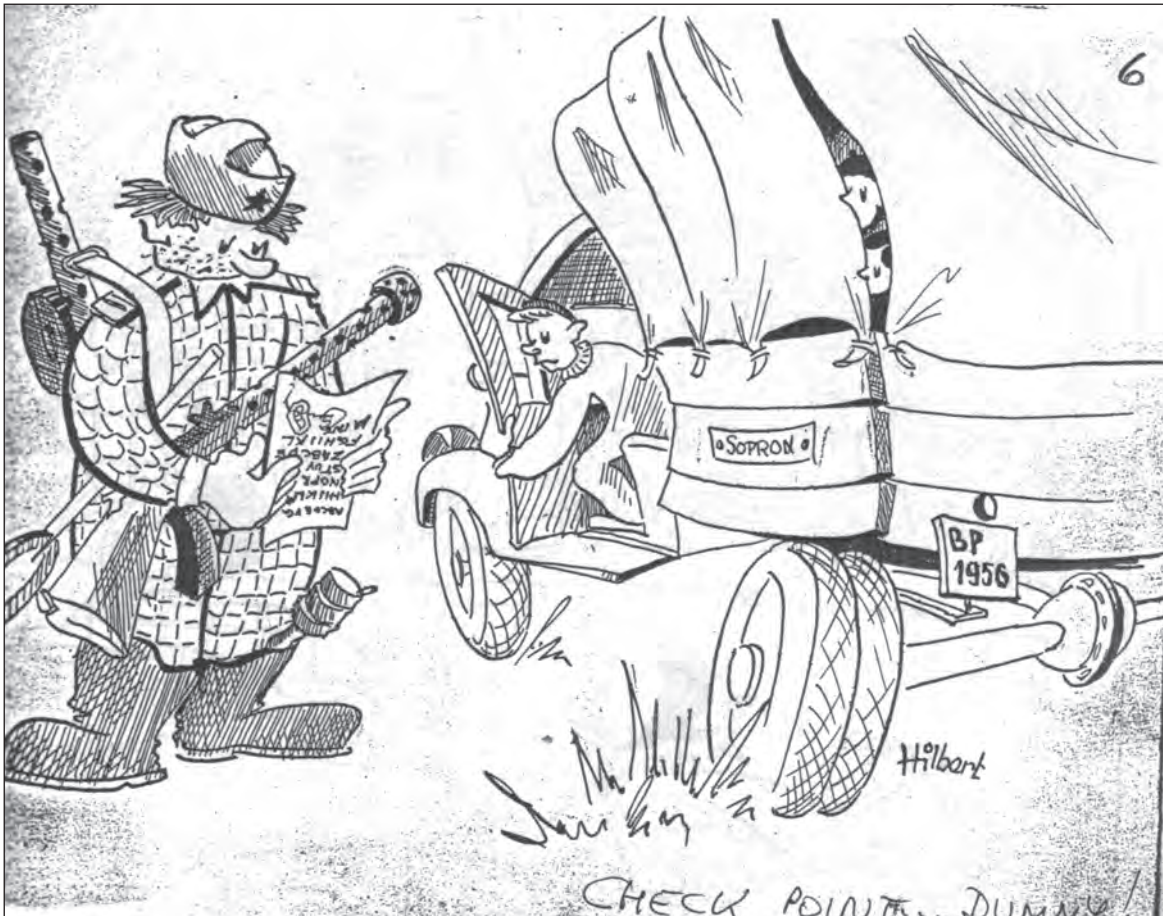
Looking back to all this now, it's somehow unbelievable. We left behind our family, our friends, our jobs ... in thirty minutes our whole life changed!

After a few nervous moments at some checkpoints, we arrived at a farmhouse near the Austrian border, but still in Hungary. The first night we slept with a friendly cow in a barn. The following morning, everything was covered with snow. Our host took what few pieces of jewelry we had (including our gold wedding rings) and all our money. This, he said, was for the dangerous service of escorting us past the Russian border guards and across the Austrian border.

We walked across a recently plowed field, which was about 6 inches deep with snow. Judy strained her ankle tripping over a furrow. It seemed as though we walked for hours.

We had been directed to walk towards a certain farmhouse pointed out to us from a great distance. This house, we were told, was in Austria, and the farmer who lived there would help us. When we finally arrived at the house and knocked on the door, the first thing we heard from inside was a deep voice calling out in Hungarian, "I'm coming." We heard the Hungarian and thought we'd been tricked! Our hearts sank. We'd just given up all of our valuables for nothing! Then we realized that on the border residents speak both Hungarian and German! We sighed in relief. The farmer opened the door and it was clear we were in Austria. We had made it. Free land at last!

My main concern now was for Judy's ankle. In the farmer's horse stable, we removed her boot. The ankle was swollen, purple and painful. Everyone but the horse felt sorry for her.



Checkpoint Dummy – Illustration by Edward Hilbert

Bright Vienna

The next day the friendly farmer helped us onto a bus to Vienna. We arrived on the 6th of December. The city was beautifully lit and festively decorated for Christmas. Such a bright contrast from the darkness of bloodstained Budapest. By this time, Hungarian refugees had been entering the city for several weeks and all had been welcomed by the Austrian Government. Some people, like ourselves, received additional aid from HIAS. People helped us everywhere we went!

We were placed in the gymnasium of a high school. There we had our own straw sack, like the other Hungarian families who shared the space with us. We didn't like it. Too many people, too little privacy. Luckily we had our free transportation pass for buses and streetcars. We used them frequently and roamed the city everyday in between visits to the American Consulate, where we waited in long lines to try and obtain entry into the United States.

Our time in Vienna wasn't easy, but it was fun. We visited the Burg, Schönbrunn Palace, the Stephansdom, and several museums. Judy and I were together. We had only been married for three months, so this was a kind of honeymoon for us. We were young. We trusted in our abilities, our youthful energy, the dedication we had to our dream of freedom, and the power of passion. We had guts, and we weren't afraid of hard work. We had some luck, too.

We felt free, and we had a lot to look forward to. As a cartoonist, I never took anything one-hundred per cent seriously. I had looked for and found some humor in almost everything throughout this journey of ours.

I started to draw my cartoon journal while staying in the gymnasium. I drew cartoon images of all the



Our "Motel in Vienna – Illustration by Edward Hilbert



things that had happened to us along our escape: the blast from a Russian tank that destroyed our home, the truck ride, the scary checkpoints ... and all the people we met: the farmer who robbed us, the aid workers who helped us. These drawings later turned out to be the basis of a documentary film about our escape called "Freedom Dance."

To America

Thanks to an affidavit from my Uncle in New Jersey, Judy and I were able to get into the United States. A train took us to Bremerhaven, Germany, and an old World War Two transport ship, the General Leroy Elting, carried us across the Atlantic.

When we arrived to New York in 1957, all I knew in English, was "hi" and "bye" – and I always used these two words in reverse! Now, almost 50 years later, it is much easier, but I'm still learning the language... and starting to forget some Hungarian words.

Looking back today, the most interesting memory is how unafraid we were then of an unknown future. We depend-ed only on each other and on our faith. We were fortunate things worked out as they did. I would not change any of it. Today we are proud to be able to put down roots here in America and be the pioneers of our own little family. Knowing that our children and grandchildren will grow up in a free world makes it all worthwhile.

Edward and Judy Hilbert

Edward D. Hilbert was born in Budapest, Hungary. After completing his undergraduate work, he received his Fine Arts degree from the Commercial Art Institute of Budapest. In addition to being a fine artist, he is a professional cartoonist, illustrator, sculptor and a drawing and painting instructor.

Upon arriving in Baltimore in early 1957, Judy Hilbert got a job with a drapery company where she learned the tricks of the drapery business. Within 2 months she started her own drapery business, serving local interior decorators. Her business enjoys much success to this day.

During their four months as refugees, Edward kept a journal in cartoon form detailing their adventures. His sketch-book is the basis for "Freedom Dance," an animated/live-action documentary that is being produced by Emmy-nominated filmmaker Steven Fischer and Telly Award-winning animator/producer Craig Herron. This unique movie uses character-driven animation to retell their adventurous escape from Hungary to the U.S. ([www. freedomdancethemovie.com](http://www.freedomdancethemovie.com)).

Miklós and Mária Hitter

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Cegléd – 1956 November 24 to December 1



Dr. Miklós and Mária Hitter

work wherever you go! And what are you going to do – under what economic and personal conditions – among what type of people? It is easy to paint a rosy picture but to make them come true is uncertain and probably also difficult.

We are writing all this not to sadden you but to ease our own pain. You may never receive and read this letter.

Otherwise, the radio broadcast this first message last Sunday (Nov. 25): “to Dr. Miklós Hitter and family in Cegléd, do not worry until you receive a phone message”. We did not actually hear it, we were just told about it Tuesday morning (Nov. 27). And at 4 p.m. we had a phone conversation with János Boronkay in which we heard what actually happened. Obviously, we left for Budapest the next day. There we heard the details and read your farewell note. Since then, Anyu is constantly reading it – crying, by now without tears. I returned Thursday, she on Friday. We brought back with us your dirty laundry, your silver, your scarves, etc. We inventoried everything but left everything in its place – locked. For the next few months, until we hear good news from you, we will leave everything there, and will bring it all back home then. And we will try to safe-keep everything for you, and will account for everything – if the occasion ever arises.

At home the political and economic situation is still completely uncertain. As a lawyer I haven’t earned a penny in the past six weeks; this is a great blow since we do not have anything to sell. And we have to pay for everything to be able to live. Of course, everybody here is telling us we should be happy about your certainly better

Our dear Children

The past few days, and most likely many more days to come, are grief-laden for us. And probably today’s gray sky will never clear up completely for us.

So you have left!? And you left the two of us to ourselves, us the old ones who stand at the edge of the grave, with the hopeless feeling that we may never see you again? We may never again hear your voices, the sharp-tongued back-talk of our suddenly grownup little grand daughter, and we cannot hold you close to our hearts any more. We cannot expect your return home Saturday nights, and we won’t have to prepare our love-packages of wine and other goodies for you any longer. We will not celebrate the holidays with you; we will not spend peaceful quiet friendly evenings with you any more.

The door of our life closed suddenly and painfully. And the only suitable sign above the door comes from Dante’s writing: “Lasciate ogne speranza” – Abandon all hope.

We are trying to become a little calmer, to convince ourselves and let others convince us that we have to overcome our selfishness and consider only your interests. But we are not very successful at it. We realize that you want to live your own lives for the 35-45 years you still have ahead of you, and although you have a right to do so, this realization does not help in healing our broken hearts. We are without present and future, and our life seems to be senseless and aimless. We have no more hope in this life. All of life’s beauty and joy died for us. And what do you imagine for your future? To what shores is the stormy and capricious wind of life going to blow you? Especially now, in the middle of a bitter winter, when you left in almost flimsy clothing, thin shoes – without snow boots! – on your difficult and uncertain voyage! And you will have to

future, and this should comfort us. All this sounds good, but it is not enough for us – we wanted to spend the little time left to us with you. Seeing and hearing each other, helping and supporting each other, even if struggling, but always hoping for a better, happier future, free of all politicking. With half of our hearts we hope that you won't succeed in your escape and will return; the other half wishes you the very best with our most sincere love. God is going to choose the better way both for you and us which we hope will result in happiness for the rest of your lives. I am trying to quote and preserve in my heart another thousand-year old Latin proverb according to which “dum spiro spero” – while I breathe, I hope.

We hope that God will provide the opportunity for us to see each other again in this life so that we can embrace you – I just hope we won't have to wait too long!

With lots of love and kisses to all three of you,

Your Mother and Father

Dr. Miklós and Mária Hitter †

Grandparents to Ildikó Gajda, Dr. and Mrs. Hitter wrote this letter to their only daughter and granddaughter after discovering they had fled the country after November 4, 1956. The Hitters lived in Cegléd, Hungary, and frequently visited their family in Budapest. Dr. Hitter, whose house was confiscated by the government in the early 1950's, had a law practice in Cegléd. Although it was his greatest wish to see his family once more, he died in 1959 without ever seeing them again. Mrs. Hitter traveled to America in 1963 and lived with her daughter and granddaughter until her death in 1976. She attended her granddaughters wedding and knew both of her great grandchildren.

Ildikó Gajda is the granddaughter of Dr. Miklós and Mária Hitter. Her submission is on page 43.

János Horváth

THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION IN THE EYES OF RONALD REAGAN

President Ronald Reagan had a great interest in and knowledge of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and this knowledge helped to shape his world views and contributed to his morally firm statesmanship. Contrary to the conventional wisdom of his time, he understood that the Soviet Union was not the strong, stable superpower and the wave of the future that it pretended to be. Moreover, he was aware that the smaller nations that had been engulfed into its colonial empire strongly resented the yoke under which they were held. As President of the United States, these convictions helped to shape the foreign policy of his administration – a policy designed to further weaken the USSR.

I became acquainted with Ronald Reagan in 1974 when he was Governor of California. At the time I was head of the Department of Economics at Butler University in Indianapolis. Governor Reagan came to Indiana repeatedly during the early months of that year to help the Republican primary election campaign of his friend and colleague, Governor Edgar Whitcomb, who aspired to become a U.S. Senator. I was Chairman of Economic Advisors for Governor Whitcomb, and in that capacity I accompanied the two men on many campaign trips throughout the state.

My background

Beyond my professional activities I was also known in public life for leadership roles I had taken as a young man in Hungary, my native country. During World War II I had an active role in the patriotic independence movement in opposition to the Nazis. In December 1944, I was arrested, interrogated, and came within hours of execution when I was saved by the advance of the Soviet Army into Budapest. After the war I joined the Independent Smallholders Party and was elected to the Hungarian Parliament in 1945 at the age of 24. In January of 1947 I was again arrested, this time by the communists, who charged me with being an “enemy of the people.” I was convicted in a show trial and imprisoned for four years. Years later I became a political leader in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. After leaving Hungary, I was a founder of the Hungarian Revolutionary Council, an international organization of exiled Hungarians leaders.

On the campaign trail

As the two governors and I criss-crossed the state of Indiana during the primary campaign of 1974, the presence of Ronald Reagan always caused a great deal of excitement. Whenever the former filmstar and television personality stepped out of the automobile or strolled the street, a crowd would gather around him. We would greet the people, urge them to vote in the primary for Governor Whitcomb, and listen to their concerns.

Sometimes we would go to a playground or stand at the entrance of a shopping center. There were scheduled speeches, too, addressing everyday topics. Often we used a question and answer format. The number of participants might be as few as eight to ten or as many as 200. When no audience was at hand we would drop in on the local radio station, offering a chat around the microphone. By the side of the two prominent governors I was supposed to talk about political economy. Since taxation, inflation and unemployment reappeared as frequent topics, the questions were often directed to me, the expert. Sometimes I got entangled in professorial lecturings, and Reagan would pick up the topic and give a short, concise answer. He did so very effectively. Afterwards, when we were riding in the automobile or sitting in a restaurant munching on a sandwich, I would meticulously elaborate on the theoretical as well as the institutional background of the question. Reagan repeatedly redirected the conversation to other topics. Almost always he reached back to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and fight for freedom, and he revealed a surprising acquaintance with the details.

Conversations

Governor Reagan during those months repeatedly questioned me about the events and circumstances of the 1956 Revolution. Frequently, he interrupted my explanation of economic matters with an unexpected question. “János, you were there. Tell me about the demonstrations on the Parliament Square. Who brought the 300,000 people to the square? Why did the ÁVO open fire on the crowd on October 25th when it hadn’t on the 23rd? Is it really true that the demonstrators did not possess weapons initially?” And he had further questions regarding the Kilián Barracks and the heroic resistance at Széna tér (Haymarket Square). When at one of our subsequent luncheons I began to elaborate about one of the monetary-fiscal concepts – because I believed he would certainly feel a great need of such things – he listened for about ten minutes. Then he switched the conversation to the Soviet tanks defeated on the streets of Budapest. At another occasion, the future president of the USA turned to me and said, “János, my attention span in matters of economics hardly extends ten minutes and you are belaboring it for much longer.” Then, as if it were the world’s most obvious topic, he posed the question: “Why did János Kádár call for negotiations with József Dudás, who was hanged just a few days later?”

I asked questions of Governor Reagan, too. I asked why he knew so much about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Was it because he was contemplating the future outlook of the Soviet Union? What would he do in the role of making foreign policy? From his responses and comments it became crystal clear that he was quite close to the position that had evolved during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, namely, that the Soviet Union and communism in general were not as stable as they had appeared to be.

Reagan's interest in the Revolution and his concern about the spread of communism had led him to learn more about Hungary and its history. He was aware that in 1945 free elections had been held in Hungary. Voter participation was greater than 90 percent, and the communist party received only 17 percent of the votes. Reagan was aware that in February 1947, in the words of President Truman, a "shameful Soviet putsch in Hungary" destroyed parliamentary democracy and replaced it with a communist dictatorship. As a result of this breach of the Yalta Agreement President Truman started to build the NATO military alliance.

In 1981, when Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency of the United States, the Cold War tension and the atomic war horizon forecasted the shadow of nuclear disaster. Within these circumstances the President's self-confidence became decisive. He did not hesitate to brand the Soviet Union an "evil empire," and to emphasize that "in the arsenals of the world there exists no such weapon as the moral courage of free men." Then he continued with these sentiments: "I call upon the nation's scientists, who had created the nuclear weapons, that this time they turn their talents to the service of humanity and world peace, and create those instruments that render nuclear weapons ineffective." During the subsequent years it happened that in the Star Wars competition the Soviet Union fell so far behind that the whole colonial empire went bankrupt and fell apart. In this way the rockbed fortitude and moral statesmanship of Ronald Reagan led, in 1989, to the freedom and independence of Hungary for which the freedom fighters of 1956 had fought so valiantly.

[adapted from a necrology of Ronald Reagan published in the Hungarian newspaper Magyar Nemzet]



Dr. János Horváth

A distinguished emeritus professor of economics, Dr. Horváth has been a Member of the Hungarian Parliament since 1998, in the ranks of the FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Party. He first entered public life as a university student via the Hungarian Independence Movement against Hitler and the Nazis. In December 1944 he was arrested and cruelly interrogated by the Hungarian branch of the Nazis, the Arrow Cross, and was saved from execution by the advance of the Soviet army into Budapest. A few years later he was again imprisoned, this time by the Soviet-imposed communist dictatorship. Meanwhile he had been elected Member of the Hungarian Parliament in 1945, where he served until his arrest and imprisonment in 1947. He became a political leader in the 1956 Revolution. Thereafter, he lived in the United States for 41 years, where he was also active in public life. In 1998 he repatriated to Hungary and was elected to the Parliament a second time, and in 2002 he was reelected. As a lawmaker his focus is political economy and world affairs.

Béla Király

TEN TRUTHS ABOUT 1956

The Revolution of 1956, because it was so unexpected, because of its sequence of events, because of the triumph of youth guided not by persons or organizations, but by the very spirit of freedom, the collapse of the allegedly invincible Communist power, the rapid evolution of democratic institutions and the repeated, massive intervention of the Soviet superpower confused the political scientists, the media, and people around the world.

In this confused situation the positive interpretations were dominant: the good reputation of the Hungarians had not soared this high since 1848. Nevertheless, many factors were in doubt. The Soviet propaganda machine took advantage of these doubts to spread false rumors, sometimes with success. Even today, half a century later, these rumors are spread by enemies of liberty, or by the ill-informed: for instance, the notion that the Revolution failed, whereas it triumphed; or that the proclamation of neutrality was the cause rather than the effect of Soviet aggression.

Hence, I feel it necessary to summarize the events as an eyewitness and as a historian.

1) In 1956, the sensible patriots did not ask for a Revolution, but urged fundamental reforms. For them, the Age of Reform, and at its climax, the April laws of 1848, were the model. As in 1848, in 1956 they trusted in peaceful transformation, but the aggressive intervention of power once again dissolved these illusions.

2) The objectives of the Revolution were most clearly formulated in the Sixteen Points proposed by the youth of the university, yet they were often misinterpreted. These included the following: national independence and a democratic bill of rights; the elimination of the communist terror, by review of political trials, rehabilitation and the return of war prisoners still held in the Soviet Union, and the bringing to justice of Mátyás Rákosi and Mihály Farkas; the restoration of national symbols and holidays: the restoration of the Kossuth coat-of-arms, the declaration of March 15 as a national holiday; a Hungarian uniform for the soldiers; the democratization of government by removing the Stalinists and placing Imre Nagy in the cabinet; re-evaluation of the colonial status of Hungary, and a review of Hungarian-Soviet and Hungarian-Yugoslav agreements; non-intervention in domestic affairs, and a settlement of the issue of access to uranium.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



The tunnel between the Corvin Movie Theater and Kilián Barracks

What was not demanded in the Sixteen Points? It did not demand the elimination of the communist regime: its future would depend on the results of the elections to be held. Although it did not demand the immediate elimination of socialism, it did ask for a review of economic plans, the industrial productivity quotas, the system of requisitions and mandatory contributions. All this does not mean that the authors sympathized with either the communist method of leadership or the socialist organization of society. They asked for quick reforms, but left the future of the country up to the popular will.

3) The Revolution triumphed. I declared this much already at my first press conference upon my arrival in the United States. A journalist asked me why then had I left Hungary. I replied that on October 28, Imre Nagy declared an armistice. A radical political transformation of the country got underway; the ÁVH was disbanded. With the leadership of János Kádár, the Hungarian Worker's Party was reconstituted under the name of the Hungarian Socialist Party, and the process of reforms started. Kádár committed himself to respecting the democratic rules of the game and even the principle of national sovereignty. Imre Nagy formed a coalition cabinet, which was able to carry out consolidation quickly.

Revolution is an internal affair, but armed aggression is an international one. Although Hungarian society was choked in blood in this regard, that does not mean that the Revolution did not triumph.

Although the American journalist accepted this explanation, there are still some today who write and speak about a "failed" Revolution. I feel that a person of truth should not do that.

4) The victory was won by young Hungarians. The ÁVH used weapons against the demonstrators; then came the Soviet tanks. How do we explain the victory? Of course, the answer is faith in the cause and determination, but there were two technical factors that also contributed to the victory.

The Soviets considered our country among their most loyal allies, and the Communist Party boasted that "Our country is not the breach, but a powerful bastion along the wall for peace." Secondary school students were given basic military training, university students training as officers in the reserve. Thus the communists themselves trained their adversaries to become fighters and commanders of sub-units. At the same time, Hungary was well endowed with weapons and ammunition depots, which opened their gates to the revolutionaries. Thus the greatest weaknesses in 1848, the lack of training and the lack of material, did not manifest themselves in 1956. These factors contributed to the victory in large measure, but could not guarantee its achievements. This was why it became necessary to form the revolutionaries into a National Guard, under central command.

5) For the sake of political consideration, the victorious youth opted for centralized leadership. Until the day of the armistice, the freedom fighters had no united leadership. The university students took two essential initiatives. They opted to bring the combat units under the umbrella of a National Guard and a unified command, on the model of 1848. Their endeavor was backed by Colonel Sándor Kopácsi, who sided with the Revolution, and made the police headquarters at Deák Square available to them. By October 29-30, the delegates of the various foci of freedom fighters arrived in such large numbers that their resolutions could be considered the common will of the revolutionaries. They selected the Revolutionary Committee for Public Safety, which formed the base of a competent higher command with a military character, the Command of the National Guard. They elected me to lead these, with Kopácsi as my deputy. Imre Nagy recognized both revolutionary organizations.

Although the Command of the National Guard accepted increasing numbers of freedom fighter units from the provinces, it nevertheless considered the restoration of order in Budapest as its principal task. As a consequence of its organizational activities, armed action became increasingly sporadic, and, by the night of November 1, the citizens could sleep in peace, undisturbed by the sound of shots being fired. Consolidation had begun.

6) During the night of October 30 to 31, the Soviet Union launched armed intervention against Hungary. The Revolutionary Committee for Public Safety gathered reliable information on the strength and movements of the enemy. We reported to Prime Minister Imre Nagy on the tightening encirclement of the capital city, several times a day.

7) The declaration of neutrality on November 1 was the effect of the Soviet intervention, and not the other way around. Having ascertained the dimensions of the Soviet forces preparing for intervention, and having protested to the Soviet government and to the Soviet ambassador, Yuri Andropov, to no avail, Nagy sent a report to the United Nations. Since the Soviet authorities countered the Hungarian objections with transparent excuses, and there was no formal response from the United Nations, the government announced the country's neutrality and its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. Nagy must have been guided by the notion that if Russian aggression were viewed as coming from an ally, the West might consider the events as nothing more than "a family quarrel." But this was not the case, since the attack was aimed at a neutral country. Maybe the United Nations would see fit to take action; there was nothing else to count on. Outsiders often concluded from the fact that the neutrality was declared on November 1, whereas the Soviet attack started on November 4, that Hungarians were once again hot-headed, that they provoked the attack. In view of the above, such a conclusion is not justified.

8) The whole of the Soviet bloc has to share moral responsibility for the events. Once China gave its approval to Soviet Intervention, on November 1st a Soviet Party and government delegation arrived in Brest, where Khrushchev briefed the Polish leaders. Next the Romanian, Czechoslovak and Bulgarian leaders were briefed in Bucharest. The former explicitly asked to be allowed to participate in the bloody repression of the Hungarian war of independence. Finally, on the island of Brioni, Tito was briefed regarding the action.

9) Soviet intervention was a war without a declaration of war. It was a war as far as its objective was concerned, for it aimed to overthrow the Hungarian government. It was also a war as regards its dimensions; in this operation, officially named "Whirlwind," some 100,000 Soviet troops took part, with about 2,000 tanks. Moreover, it was a war between socialist countries, since the program of the Revolution did not include dismantling the socialist system.

10) The West and the United States recognized the justice of the cause after the Revolution. The free world reacted surprisingly swiftly to the events in Hungary. There were mass demonstrations in Paris, the headquarters of the Communist Party were set on fire, and large numbers of intellectuals resigned from the Party.

According to Hannah Arendt, the most outstanding feature of the Revolution was that of the councils, and since the Russian equivalent of the term is "soviet," she wrote thus: "When Soviet-Russian tanks crushed the Revolution in Hungary, they actually destroyed the only free and acting soviets in existence anywhere in the world." Milovan Djilas, Tito's former deputy, came to a prophetic conclusion: "The Revolution of Hungary meant the beginning of the end for communism." Raymond Aron wrote as follows in his work, *The Meaning of Destiny*: "The Hungarian Revolution, a historic tragedy, a triumph in defeat, will forever remain one of those rare events that restore man's faith in himself and remind him, beyond his proper lot, of the meaning of destiny: truth."

The final report of the Commission of Five of the United Nations in 1957 states the fact of Soviet intervention; it was not until November 11, 1992, that the Russian side came to the same conclusion. At that time President Boris Yeltsin declared, in his speech in front of the Hungarian Parliament, that "1956 [...] will remain an indelible shame of the Soviet regime..."

These are the truths of the Revolution of 1956.



Béla Király

Born in 1912, Béla Király was commissioned as a second lieutenant of the Hungarian Army in 1935. He fought actively in the Second World War and afterwards joined the Hungarian Communist party. He became a major general in the post-war Hungarian army before being arrested in 1951 on trumped-up charges. His death sentence was reduced on appeal to life imprisonment, but he was freed in September of 1956. During the Revolution he was appointed commander-in-chief of the military guard and military commander of Budapest.

He later fled to Austria and eventually settled in the United States, where he attended Columbia University. In 1962 he received his doctorate in history and began teaching at Brooklyn University. In 1989, Király delivered a speech at the reburial of Imre Nagy and his martyred associates. He was an independent member of the Hungarian Parliament from 1990 to 1994. Since then, he has acted as a government adviser in Hungary.

Amadé Kis

COMMANDER OF REVOLUTIONARIES ON MÓRICZ ZSIGMOND SQUARE



Amadé Kis in 1956

On October 23, 1956, the Hungarian nation awakened to the most glorious day of its history. The nation – having had enough of decades of slavery, physical and spiritual assaults and terror – shook off its chains and turned against its oppressors. As in 1848, the nation's youth took the leading role in the unfolding Revolution and freedom fight. The nation wished to live free in its own country and to be rid of its oppressors.

University students called on young people throughout the country to join a peaceful demonstration. But within 24 hours, this demonstration was transformed into an armed uprising. After Ernő Gerő delivered his radio speech, in which he referred to the patriots as “riff-raff,” he ordered troops to fire on them.

At this time, I was living on Móricz Zsigmond Square, where small groups of people were gathering, as they were throughout the city. Everyone was discussing Gerő's speech, which made our blood boil – and how we should react. As I walked among the people, a truck from the Lamp Factory, loaded with weapons, drove up. It had brought ammunition for the crowd, which was, as yet, uncertain about what to do. Those in the truck told us that gunfire had broken out in several parts of the city between the Secret Police and the patriots. At the same time, a large group of students, bearing arms, arrived from the Technical University to join the crowd, which had started to organize an uprising.

Shortly afterward, another group of about 60 students from a nearby Technical University dormitory also arrived to join the crowd. The hastily organized rebels occupied the building at Number 10 Móricz Zsigmond Square. With the agreement of the residents, a group of 4-5 rebels took up their positions at each of the windows of the upper stories, so as to have a view of the neighborhood and to intervene if necessary. To maximize the safety of the local population, I suggested that we organize ourselves for the fight. The first step was to survey the block from a tactical point of view, as the open square was easily approached from several directions.

Organizing the defense

We agreed on how to defend the square and how many people to delegate to each task.

Our first task was to prepare to block the enemy vehicles as much as possible. So we removed the cobblestones of the pavement and created roadblocks. On the rest of the pavement, we tossed greased cobblestones to make the pavement slippery. Next, we started making Molotov cocktails.

Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



A barricade made from cobblestones in the street attempts to block tanks on Móricz Zsigmond Square

The battle was not long in coming. The soldiers of the enemy Soviet forces and the Secret Police murderers attacked the square from all sides. Naturally, we joined the battle and fought off the attacks, with mixed success. The fighting varied in intensity – sometimes it was more violent, at other times quieter.

Unfortunately, many of the revolutionaries were wounded or killed, but the same could be said of the other side. During each lull in the battle, we tended to the wounded or took them to the nearby hospital. We buried the dead, temporarily, in the ground next to the statue in the center of the square.

Our sources reported that the Secret Police were firing at the entrances of the Technical University, and one student was killed during the battle. Also, the attackers fired a cannon into the textile store at one corner of the square, which immediately burst into flames. I personally witnessed the Secret Police drag out two 11-12- year old boys from the basement of the neighboring building, shoot them without a word, and toss them into the burning store. Then the murderers ran from the scene. We pulled the two boys out and brought them to the hospital on Tétényi Street, but their lives could not be saved. Later I learned that they were brothers, who had not even participated in the fighting.

One striking example of the people's cooperation and unity was that people from the surrounding countryside came into the city – in cars and in horse-drawn wagons – bringing us food, which we then distributed equitably. In addition to the food, they brought us assurances of solidarity: "We are with you! Keep it up, boys!"

The battles raged intensively until November 2. On November 3, the fighting stopped. Taking advantage of the break, we drove out to the Lamp Factory in the city's Soroksár section to get more weapons and ammunition.

At dawn on November 4, we heard a tremendous volley of gunfire and the sound of tanks roaring down the road. The attack resumed on all sides. The tanks fired, and we fired back. Using Molotov cocktails, we destroyed six of the cars which had supplied ammunition to the enemy tanks. Afterward, a deathly silence.

Hopelessness

Surrounded by enemy forces, we saw that taking up the fight against the much stronger enemy was a hopeless task, and would result in our certain and meaningless death. Throughout the city, hearing the news on the radio, the youthful revolutionaries laid down their arms and slowly dispersed. However, in some parts of the city, the bloody and embittered fighting continued.

The days of the crushed Revolution and freedom fight were followed by the years of terror: the searches for revolutionaries, prison sentences, executions. János Kádár promised amnesty for underage freedom fighters, both those in Hungary and those hiding abroad. He did not keep his promise; once they reached legal adulthood, he sent them to the gallows.

For several months after the Revolution's bloody defeat, I hid out in several different locations. Finally, I decided one day to return home to my apartment in Budapest's Csepel district. I planned to return after dark, assuming I would not be seen, but I was wrong. It was 11 p.m., but the Secret Police arrested me.

I was taken to a military headquarters in Zsombolyai Street, where I suffered horrible treatment. They branded me an enemy of the people, a counter-revolutionary, and beat me bloody. I retained barely an ounce of strength. The same day, they pushed me into a car and took me to the police station on József Street. There were more interrogations, followed by another terrible beating, because I would not sign a document that would have betrayed my associates. From here, the car took me to the internment camp at Tököl. On 3-4 occasions, they took me back to the city for interrogations, trying to get me to identify people, but they were not successful.

Unbroken

I spent two and a half years in the camp at Tököl. Even after I was freed, I spent two more years under police surveillance. I can only thank God that I am still alive. My commitment to the Hungarian nation and my love of our country has remained unbroken, but I can never forget the horrors and treachery I lived through.

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Amadé Kis †

The fourth child in a large family of nine, Amadé Kis was schooled in Csepel early on and performed his military service at a local garrison in Budapest. He was later taken prisoner of war at this location. In 1956, he acted as the commander of the freedom fighters at Móricz Zsigmond Square and as a result of this role, was later arrested and held in the Tököl Internment Camp for two years. Kis married Ida Melczner in 1979. He passed away in October 2004 and is buried in the Fiume Road Cemetery, in Parcel 57, dedicated to Heroes of the 1956 Revolution. This article was submitted to "56 Stories" by his brother, Ferenc A. Kis, of Cleveland, Ohio.

Ilona Éva Ibrányi Kiss

FOR ME THE REVOLUTION STARTED IN 1955...



Kiss in 1956

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 Zrínyi'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 Zrínyi "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.

Leslie A. Toth, MTI



Female freedom fighters

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 Füzesi 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.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



Donation boxes used to collect money for the families of fallen freedom fighters

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 Fűzesi, 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 Fűzesi. 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, Sztrapkovic, 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 ÁVÓ 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 Hajdúnánás, 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, Agnes, 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.

Éva B. Kisvarsányi

RECOLLECTIONS FROM 1956



Kisvarsányi in 1956

In 1956 I was a 20-year-old university student in Budapest. I was born and raised in Budapest in a family of intellectuals in pre-World War II Hungary. My Grandfather was the chief engineer of the Capital City's Water Works, a job that carried a cabinet-level position ("Miniszteri Tanácsos") in pre-1945 Hungary. My Father was a meteorologist and served in the fledgling Hungarian Air Force as a weather observer/officer. He served a tour of duty on the Russian front, and by the end of the war, he rose to the rank of captain.

After the communist takeover in 1949 my Father was interred to the provinces and my family lost everything. I was valedictorian of my High School graduating class in 1954 and had the second highest APT score among 200 applicants to the university, but was denied admission on account of being a "class alien." With nothing to lose and being 18, I appealed the decision. After a lengthy process, and thanks to the courageous help and recommendations by the faculty and staff of the university, I was finally admitted as a freshman in Geology to the Eötvös Loránd University in December 1954.

Unforgettable people

The most unforgettable person I ever met has to be Imre Nagy, whom I met shortly before the Revolution on Kosuth Lajos Street. It was on a sunny but somewhat cool autumn day and he was wearing a light overcoat with no hat. My classmates and I were going to have lunch in the City and we were walking on the sidewalk when he suddenly appeared in the crowd walking toward us. We immediately recognized him and stared, unbelieving. I'll never forget his face. He appeared calm and wise. It looked like he was just having a quiet stroll in the autumn sunlight. We did not talk and there was really not much to this meeting, but in retrospect I always felt that it was significant that I should have been so close to him. I know he was a communist, but I believe that when the chips were down, he stood with his people and his martyrdom washed away his sins.

The Revolution's effect on my life

The Revolution really affected my life profoundly. Really, that is all I can say. If it had not been for November 4 and the Soviet invasion, I would never have left my country. I marched with the students in the front row under the banner of "Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem" and decades later recognized myself on a French documentary about the Revolution, which aired on NBC television. My husband gave a rousing revolutionary speech to the plenary session of the University. After the Revolution was crushed, we were afraid of the retribution and having given up hope of getting help from the West, we left Hungary on December 1.

Our escape

By the time we tried to leave in December, the borders were under close surveillance. We crossed the border to Austria at Pamhagen under the cover of night, partly on the back of a truck, partly on foot. At one point we passed by a stationary Soviet military column (about a dozen troop carriers full of armed men) headed by an empty jeep. I was certain they were going to kill us, but nothing happened. Our truck sped by them and we escaped. In retrospect we figured that the empty jeep was the key: the commanding officer was not in his place, and there was nobody to give the order to shoot!

I have to mention another incident right at the border. We were to cross into Austria at a place where the border is a narrow canal, maybe 10-15 feet wide. Refugees before us laid a tree across the canal to make it easier to cross. Our local guide told us that Russian troops stay a few kilometers inside from the border lest Western news agencies and photographers should spot Soviet troops on the border of neutral Austria, thus creating an "international incident." We arrived at the canal at the first dim light of dawn. As I was about to cross over the tree/bridge, two figures emerged from the mist. They were two young Hungarian conscripts with guns. In quiet, almost gentle tones, they kept repeating the phrase over and over again: "It is not permitted to cross here." They did not draw their guns, however, and did not seem especially threatening. I remember their faces, too. Nice looking, young Hungarian boys. After a few seconds of hesitation, I started across the tree/bridge and was soon across the border. The rest of our group, about 8-10 people, followed me. The two soldiers still stood on the other side and never fired a shot.

In America

I completed the university education I fought so hard for and had a successful and very satisfying professional life as a geologist and administrator with the State of Missouri. When my daughter left to go to college, she asked me to tell her my story, so I did. I tape-recorded the entire history of the year 1956 for her, beginning with the January earthquake (a real one!) up to our escape from Hungary. She asked for it in Hungarian and I was happy to have granted her wish. She is bilingual, you see, and visited Hungary many times with us after the 1963 amnesties made it easier to see our families.

Conclusion

The spirit of 1956, in a word, was freedom. We revolted against foreign occupation, tyranny, injustice, intellectual duress, and physical torture. I firmly believe that the 1956 Hungarian Revolution will enter the history books as the purest, cleanest and by far the most idealistic Revolution ever recorded by mankind.



Éva B. Kisvarsányi

Born in Budapest, Éva B. Kisvarsányi was a Junior at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 1956, majoring in geology. She participated in the students' march on October 23 under the banner of the University. After November 4, she and her husband, Géza Kisvarsányi, waited in vain for a month for help from the West, and escaped to Austria in December. The Kisvarsányi's arrived in the United States on January 16, 1957, and moved to Missouri. Eva continued her study of geology at the University of Missouri, and earned a Bachelor of Science in Geology in 1958, followed by a Master of Science in Geology in 1960 from that institution. From 1959 to 1993, she was employed at the Missouri State Geological Survey, rising from the rank of research geologist through Section Chief to Assistant Director. She has published more than 100 scientific research papers, maps and books in the field of Precambrian geology. She retired in 1993 and moved to Sarasota,

Florida where she is the Executive Director of the Hungarian American Cultural Association, Inc., The Kossuth Club of Sarasota, and founder and editor of the Club's newsletter, The Hírmondó.

Erika Kisvarsányi is the daughter of Éva B. Kisvarsányi. Her submission can be found on page 191.

Géza Kisvarsányi is the husband of Éva B. Kisvarsányi. His photographs can be found throughout the book.

Levente Koller

'56 THROUGH THE EYES OF A YOUNGSTER

"Star fell, the earth shook, came the year of miracles..." – János Arany January

1956 Budapest was shaken by an earthquake.

In October 1956 the whole world was...!

Distant and immediate antecedents

My Father obtained his high school and later his medical diploma by studying under the electric streetlights in Kőbánya. He was born into the family of an ironworker and had seven brothers and sisters.

In 1942, Dr. Louis Koller, adjunct professor of dermatology, changed his employment from St. Steven's Hospital to the clinic at the City Police Headquarters in Budapest. On the day of the proclamation he dissuaded his guests, Agnes Sz. and her husband 'Uncle' Imre from leaving. For good reason. They remained in hiding in the shaded 'servant's room.' Later on he allowed the members – wanted by the police – of the Hungarian Revisionist League to meet in secret at our apartment in Práter Street. This was the last meeting of the League.

After the war, during the short lived era of democracy, he visited the Prime Minister, Ferenc Nagy, with a delegation of senior police officers, in order to convince the Prime Minister to oppose a proposed law, supported by the Interior Ministry, that would have permitted the discharging of unlimited numbers of senior police officers in order to fill the ranks with newly promoted, communist sympathizers.

While Ferenc Nagy's attitude was: "don't worry," the Prime Minister was soon traveling toward exile in the United States. They were left in the Rákosi era. My Father said: "Roosevelt replaced the black plague with the Asian cholera."

He was taken away twice by agents of the ÁVH despite the fact, that by this time he had to wear the uniform of the police.

The BBC, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, broadcasting on the 13, 16, 19, 41, and 49 short wave frequencies kept the faith in those believing in democracy.

I could not say a word about this to anyone, even though I was only five years old.

Nor could I tell anybody about Scola Benedictina, the chorus of Father Alfonz at St. Joseph's Church in Józsefváros.

In about 1952, Stalin started to have his doctors beaten, because they could not make the old mass murderer young again. The leaders of the communist party were in panic in Budapest. In early 1953, they promoted the Roman Catholic, non-party member doctor from a working class family background, to the rank of lieutenant colonel; this promotion required the approval of the Council of Ministers. (The problem faced by the Interior Ministry was that they had no other doctor with a working class background in police uniform in the whole country. Despite these facts: "After he educates the new generation of police doctors, he should be fired;" I read this conclusion on his evaluation in 1957.)

My Father smiled about this and became a "comrade" despite his ideals.

He helped those arrested for political reasons by tampering with their blood samples by passing a piece of cotton soaked in pure alcohol over the vial of blood taken. If the lab determined the prisoner was a drunk, they would usually get away without a long prison sentence, which was quite different from the fate of political prisoners.

He studied throughout his life. He acquired his medical diploma with a teaching certificate, specialized in dermatology, VD, and later forensic medicine. The last specialty he acquired was dentistry.

At Police Headquarters he was on duty for 24 hours and off for 48. On October 23, he was working in his recently opened dental office in Ráckeve.

We heard about the events in Poznan from western radio broadcasts.

We really did not care about personnel changes within the communist government or alterations in the "5 Year Plans." The general opinion among our friends and relatives was that only war could end this rotten regime.

I had no idea about the goings on within the Writer's Union, the universities, or other similar political developments.

October 23, Tuesday

I was involved with the preparation of a book report about Mór Jókai's "Stonehearted Man and His Sons." The next day I had to give the very first presentation in the eighth grade

After school I started to take notes immediately. Radio Kossuth provided the usual programs as background music. I suddenly realized, that the scheduled program stopped and the announcer was talking about denial or permission for some demonstration in the afternoon.

Radio Kossuth halted the program later and brought up the subject again with contradictory information about the demonstration. It reported that the Interior Minister had actually revoked the permit etc.

Unease and excitement came over me. What is this? What is happening? What is a demonstration? I continued writing but I could not fall back into the usual homework preparation mode.

Later on, one of our neighbors showed up. Since there were only two telephones in the apartment building, many people used ours. The teacher was called by her husband, the writer, and they were discussing the exciting on-going events.

We realized after a while that Radio Kossuth was filling our head with propaganda and lies. Their "news" about marshal law, cornered anti-revolutionary groups and criminal gangs increased our concern and insecurity. Everyone started to get nervous. And my Father had to be at his office in Ráckeve! At this time!

In the evening the writer called back again from the statue of Stalin. I heard about dangerous, exciting, unbelievable, things! They were going to tear down the statue??!!

The agitation became louder on the street and also in our home.

On the street small groups of people were talking everywhere. Práter Street was filled with noise. The tension was close to sparking.

It was getting dark when we heard shots and machine gun rattle from a great distance.

The tenants using our telephone advised their loved ones with the greatest concern, to be careful and head home immediately.

My Father arrived home late from the train. Almost as soon as he stepped in the door a uniformed policeman handed him a written order addressed to him. He was to report to Headquarters immediately, there were numerous casualties.

October 24, Wednesday

We woke up to a great explosion on Wednesday morning. It was early, I started to get ready for school.

The phone rang. It was my Father. He said that there was street fighting and no one should leave home. There was no reason to become a casualty from bullets or shrapnel.

The weather was pleasant, so we opened the windows. The street was full of people. We could hear everything from our second floor window. They were discussing the events while the distant sounds of fighting provided background noise. Most of the sounds came from the direction of the intersection of Üllői Avenue and the Körút (Circle Avenue). Most were rifle and automatic small arms fire but greater explosions could also be heard.

Imre Balassa

Around ten a great explosion was heard. Suddenly I saw something fall down into the middle of the street, among the people. My friend Ernő brought it up to the apartment. I was holding shrapnel from a heavy artillery or mortar round in my hands.

From Kossuth Radio, among the unsettling propaganda "news," gunfire and explosions could also be heard.

It is difficult to remember the exact time we heard this, but at one point Free Kossuth Radio announced: "We have been lying to you day and night..." This was something memorable! Maybe the uprising had been.



Tanks preparing for battle

victorious? However, we still heard lots of shooting from the direction of Corvin Circle.

During the day, a huge mass of people marched through Nagytemplom (Big Church) Street and Práter Street. Everyone was filled with enthusiasm. Being truly liberated was a miraculous, wonderful feeling! On this day, people placed flags on their houses after they cut out the Rákosi emblem with scissors.

Due to the sounds of street fighting people started to prepare. We collected water in the tub.

On this and other days young people with arms came to visit Mr. B., their retired teacher. Other times they walked through the apartments, looking for positions from which they could fire.

We were very concerned for the victory of the Revolution!

Our telephone was still utilized from time to time by the tenants. There was lots of news and rumors swirling around, but we knew, we were free at last! It was an intoxicating feeling!

The street was active all day, every day. Every piece of news had to be discussed, whether it was true or not. From the direction of the fighting I was certain not to be able to see the inside of my school for a long time.

October 25, Thursday

I recall a cloudy day, and the feeling of complete vulnerability. The street was active but people were in line at a small store across the street since early morning. Mid-morning suddenly the people hurriedly went into the entranceways of apartment houses. Soon everyone disappeared. The street became empty. The roar of truck engines filled Práter Street from the direction of Illés Street.

My God, maybe the Russians were coming?

Soon two truckloads of helmeted "green ÁVO" – internal security and boarder guards – passed under our windows. They carried rifles with bayonets. They were watching the windows. They passed through the intersection of Nagytemplom Street and drove toward Futó Street. After this we could no longer see them, as the protrusion from our house obstructed our vision.

A minute later a long barrage of submachine gun fire could be heard. We all hit the deck. Long return fire was the response from the trucks. Later I heard they turned into Futó Street and took off in the direction of Baross Avenue. It seemed they had no desire to advance any closer to Corvin Circle. Understandable. We were happy from the bottom of our hearts.

All the stucco was missing from the apartment house on the corner of Futó Street.

After this, we removed the inner set of windows, hid them behind the wardrobes, and started to carry our belongings to the cellar.

If I recall correctly, the radio reported that Prime Minister Hegedűs called on the Soviet Union for assistance under the Warsaw Pact agreement. Our emotions hit bottom. We knew all was lost, maybe by evening.

Maybe it was early afternoon when a few unshaven individuals, carrying submachine guns and wearing Russian heavy jackets and caps, taking cover in doorways, slowly went along the length of Práter street from the direction of Illés street. They were advancing toward Corvin Alley. Maybe there were five of them?

As they arrived at the Nagytemplom Street corner, they seemed undecided. One started in one direction, the other in another direction. Finally they huddled in a doorway and waited.

We just watched from behind the curtains and were excited. What would come next? We were concerned that these agents would take over the area. What was going to happen to the revolutionaries?

Suddenly they stepped out to the street and started running back where they came from. A huge unarmed throng arrived from all directions and gave chase to the Russian jacketed group.

Where did this crowd arrive from? Who called them? How did they know where the enemy was hidden?

I heard much later that one of them was thrown out a window on Papp Square.

My Mother went out for bread and met my Godfather. They were talking in line when bullets hit the wall above them. They hurried home right away.

During the afternoon people started walking toward Köztársaság (Republic) Square. We heard about some happenings at Köztársaság Square amid heavy weapon reports. Lacking any details we did not know at that time what was going on. Later we gathered from lots of confused rumors that the party building was under siege and the fight was over.

Large crowds walked through our streets again.

We removed the curtains and carpets by evening, because we wanted to fireproof our apartment as much as

possible. Small suitcases were waiting at the door for each member of the family, in case we had to run down to the cellar. There were some who felt it was safer to sleep in the entry hallway.

October 26, Friday

It must have been a nice day because we were watching the long line in front of the store through open windows. I did not know what could still be purchased in that small shop. The street had traffic, it was filled with passers-by and groups talking. Occasionally a truck roared toward Corvin Circle with bloody sheets covering the back. It was unpleasant to watch. We knew some poor casualties were being transported to the clinic.

The preparations went well. All of the grown-ups remembered their duties from the war. The cooperation was also exemplary. Everyone knew, even the children, that these were very serious events.

Although we had not seen it yet, we heard that a couple of armored vehicles had also been destroyed at the intersection of Üllői Avenue and Nagykörút. The unique configuration of Corvin Circle provided an excellent defensive base. We heard something about some Hungarian armored units fighting alongside freedom fighters around the Kilián Barracks. The explanation from the street was that “they changed sides.”

Our second floor neighbor invited us over to take a look down into Nagytemplom Street from their apartment. At the edge of the sidewalk, glass bottles were lined up in a row. Someone was pouring gasoline through a funnel into the Molotov cocktails from a metal can. Young people in a great hurry carried pairs of these newly manufactured anti-armor weapons under their arms to the “front.”

We observed scenes where a young person brought two rifles from somewhere. He left one leaning against the

Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



Freedom fighters standing guard in front of the Corvin Movie Theater

wall and continued walking toward Corvin Circle. Within minutes someone picked it up and followed him. Who said this was not the people's revolt?

Late morning, while we were leaning out our windows, a great roar was heard from the upper end of Práter Street. The deep sound could also be felt as a vibration in our legs. The line disappeared from the store in seconds. The street became empty very quickly. The roar got stronger very quickly, maybe a few shots or automatic weapon fire could be heard. We caught on almost simultaneously: THANKS! Run to the CELLAR!

I ran to the hallway, grabbing my coat and suitcase. The door was already open; from our apartment everyone was running to the staircase. I must have been among the last, I ran alone down the stairs, through the courtyard, when the tank fired its cannon in front of our house.

The power of the sound was felt not only by me but also by all windows facing the street. After the deafening noise I could hear the continuous breaking of glass for quite some time.

At this time I arrived at the cellar entrance and ran down the steep stairs. Everyone was there already. The noise of the weapons intertwined and created a scary cacophony.

As I stood there with my back against the wall, I knew what was happening was not a game.

As the time passed, the fighting continued, and smoke and dust came in through the cellar windows filling every nook and cranny. We did not have time for hunger, thirst or even fear. We were afraid and prayed for our young fighters.

Nobody left the cellar for hours even after the battle was over. From a distance we heard shots, automatic fire, and explosions all afternoon.

Finally, in late afternoon Mr. B. appeared. He was the only one who watched the whole battle from his fourth story apartment. After this everyone questioned him. But he had stayed because he was curious about his student's bravery and success. He wanted to see it first hand.

This time some tried their luck and went upstairs to their apartments. It was getting dark when my Mother and sister went upstairs. They came down with the news that all our windows are shattered. They could look out and see wreckage at the Futó street corner. Some of it was still burning.

I went upstairs. As I entered the darkness it surprised me that all my steps could be heard reverberating. I was walking on broken glass, and it was certainly noisy. I was stepping on our broken windows and it echoed through Práter Street.

I leaned out into the darkness. I did not see flames but a smoking mound of wrecks blocked Práter Street at the Futó intersection.

We had supper in our kitchen but after all this, many elected to spend the night in the cellar. We slept there also with all the children from the building.

October 27, Saturday

We awoke in the wash room in the cellar. Since we did not hear any more shooting, we went upstairs to our apartment on the second floor. I examined the bullet holes on the ceiling caused by shots from below. I located the fragments of these projectiles. With lots of effort we swept up the broken glass. As far as it was possible, we removed the shards of glass from the window frames also.

A crowd of people was swarming throughout the streets.

Since we were curious about the wrecks at Futó Street, we went down to look around. We approached the scene of combat slowly. The blackened mass of wrecks appeared confusing at first but later they started to take shape. Among the distorted, burned wreckage of four trucks and two towed artillery pieces, we could also see numerous bodies of Russian soldiers. Most of them were partially burned to ashes. The trucks were carrying artillery crew and munitions too.

I saw many human remains, blackened skulls in black helmets. It appeared that the flames destroyed mostly the upper torsos, but left the rest of their bodies intact.

We were stepping over the bodies.

The first vehicle of the destroyed column was an armored car. The flames must have been extremely hot, as from its corner the dripping steel formed a metal colored puddle over a foot in diameter. The brown, macaroni like tubes of nitro-cellulose, packaged for the artillery pieces, were strewn all over. We collected some.

Those who saw it said the column was led by two tanks. As soon as they passed the intersection of Práter and Futó Streets they came under fire. Whatever happened to them I do not know. After the battle, the freedom fighters allegedly towed two functioning artillery pieces to Corvin Circle.

Lots of unlucky young Russians had to die there for the Soviet Empire.

This was a sad scene, but we realized the freedom fighters had won.

The amateur infantry defeated the armor and artillery of a great power. Maybe communism can be defeated after all?

After returning to our apartment we did not reposition the hidden windows. Instead, we covered the frames with brown craft paper. The apartment became livable again.

We were not assured that we wouldn't have to run to the cellar again. It was better to wait.

October 28, Sunday

The Revolution was victorious! Groups of the patrolling 'National Guard' with red, white and green armbands were walking everywhere. Armed civilians, policemen and soldiers were walking together. The new National Guard!

I am not absolutely sure when, but two wounded Russian soldiers were found at the lumber storage lot on the corner of Práter and Nagytemplom Streets. They were survivors of the battle on Futó Street.

The people helped them onto two bicycles and pushed them on Nagytemplom Street toward Üllői Avenue. The throng followed them and everyone wanted to help push the bicycles. The Kilián Barracks was the goal, so there they could turn the two "prisoners of war" over to the Hungarian soldiers and rebels. Everybody was proud of the humane treatment.

Farmers brought food from the villages and passed it out to the folks. I have never seen anything like this in my life.

Finally my Father came home. He showed us his new National Guard ID.

He told interesting stories about events at the police Headquarters.

He treated many unlucky civilians, casualties of walking about, standing in lines, etc.

Sándor Kopácsi, the Chief of Police took a stand with the revolutionaries. This created tension inside the building between the police and ÁVH (Secret Police). The two upper floors belonged to the ÁVH. The leadership of the police was concerned about an attempted takeover. They positioned wheeled machine guns at each floor, pointing at the elevators, as a preventative measure. There was 24-hour guard. All police personnel slept with their arms at the ready, some on tables. It was discovered days later, that the ÁVH left their uniforms and evaporated from the building.

I went down to the Futó Street combat scene with my Father. We examined it thoroughly.

He suggested that we should go over to Buda, to the apartment of his assistant, because Corvin Circle may become a battle zone again. He requested a car, and we all got into it. His National Guard ID helped us through checkpoints.

After the battles this was the first time that I had seen the intersection of Üllői Avenue and Nagykörút (Grand Circle Road). It was unrecognizable. The exploded tanks, wrecks, and damaged buildings showed the results of heavy combat. Russian dead were all over. It was horrible.

Being stopped by the National Guard was a special feeling. They did not represent the oppressive regime, but the liberated people. The free Hungarian people! Finally!

We spent less than a week in Buda. By the time we returned to Józsefváros, I no longer saw dead bodies. Just the ruins. But there was peace. A new Hungarian government led the country, and we were hopeful that all would go well from that point on.

To our dismay the good news was quickly replaced by bad.

My Father became very upset when Radio Free Europe read the content of a telegram from President Eisenhower to Tito of Yugoslavia. According to him, everything was over. Eisenhower's words almost goaded the Soviet Union into action against the new Hungarian government.

It was the 3rd of November when we slept in our apartment with brown paper windows for the very first time since the fighting began. The small suitcases were still ready at the door. Just in case.

November 4, Sunday

The next morning we were awakened early by a huge explosion. The whole building shook. My Father directed us to get dressed and go to the cellar fast. There were repetitious explosions; we were downstairs in minutes. Soon everybody was down in the cellar. Concern and fear were in the air, as everybody was talking nervously.

At the bottom of the stairs in the small central hallway children were sitting on benches. I started to tell them stories.

The detonations were coming more frequently. Those with war experience opined: this was heavy artillery.

Mr. B. was in the cellar also. Suddenly two young fighters appeared. Did they need something? I did not know. The tenants only cared about their safety.

As the frequency of the explosions increased, everybody quieted down. Some were praying. I had to stop my story-telling since every word was punctuated by detonations. My Father directed the family to a protected corner.

The roof tiles were falling. Sometimes the impacts seemed to have metallic noise. The ruins were crumbling down. Dust and the smoke from the explosives filled the air.

A few people became pale. Some were shaking their heads. Nobody spoke. We were all praying. We endured the heavy artillery barrage for hours.

Finally the explosions started coming less frequently. The clanging of tank tracks and clouds of exhaust gases filled the hallways underground. This lasted for hours.

Russian soldiers came into the courtyard and two of them came down the stairs, looked over the people, then retreated up the stairs and out of the building. There was one person, a member of a uniformed tenant's family, who appeared to be glad to see the Russians.

Somebody turned on a radio. You could hear every word of the cry for help. The tenants started to talk about the United Nations. They must be coming soon!

My Father noted: "Do not believe it. Nobody is going to come." As if lightning struck, I realized the communists were going to be back.

We spent the night of November 4th in the cellar. And the 5th, and many more days after that. After the 5th we did not hear any more shooting. We realized the resistance had ended along with our sunny days of freedom.

Epilogue

When we went up to our apartment to look out our paperless windows, we saw Soviet tanks positioned at the corner of Nagytemplom and Práter Streets. They also stood at other intersections for weeks.

At Tom Street, close to Nagytemplom, there was a crater so large and deep, that the sewer was flowing at the bottom. This must have been caused by a bomb from an aircraft.

The windows that we saved were repositioned in the frames. We knew a dark era was coming. The news was sad. Tens of thousands immigrated to Austria. Their messages were broadcast by Radio Free Europe. My Father was talking about our country "bleeding to death."

My Mother crossed the border on her birthday, December 10th, with my sister and brother. The plan was that we would follow them after they arrived at her sister's place in the United States.

Deep down, I knew it would never happen.

Sometime later there was a silent protest called. There was no one in the streets. Nobody. For hours. This was a unified nation's last breath.

There was marshal law and a curfew. My cousin was arrested. A strike was also called.

The wrecks on the street were removed, along with the unexploded giant mortar round lying in the hallway in our apartment building.

Students from Práter Elementary were sent to other schools. We burned our Russian language books. We received Swedish aid breakfast. Plot chocolate with an excellent bun and meat spread.

By spring, my Father requested retirement. He was successful.

During the time of "MUK" – Márciusban Újra Kezdzük ("We will restart in March") the rooftops were full of pre-positioned snipers. It was unnecessary. By that time Kádár was orchestrating the "New Patriotism" and the fight against the "counter-revolution."

My Father's friend was fired from his job because the workers had elected him to the Worker's Council. He was an older person who could not find another job. He lived in poverty even after retirement.

I started high school after the Revolution. An acquaintance of mine, a youngster named Antal, committed suicide. God forgive him.

The KISZ (Communist Youth League) was created. Only two students joined the ranks from our class. One of them came from a (communist) "party line" family who were true believers of Komszomol; the other is a film producer in the United States.

B. Zoltán, a young priest, was convicted for spying in 1958, for sending newspaper articles to his friend in

Rome. Working with young people became very dangerous for everyone not connected to the Communist Youth League. We were living in dark times.

A number of students joined KISZ during the third (junior) year of high school. One of my classmates, who vacillated about whether to join or not, finally joined KISZ. He committed suicide later. God bless his soul.

By the time of graduation only two of us were not members of the "party."

At the end of high school, before we parted ways, some of us promised that we would never forget the sad events of our history, the lost provinces and our quest for freedom.

After this, nobody spoke about the events of 1956, politics, or "Hungarian fate," other than my family and friends.

Kádár was working on the plans for "gulyás communism," while strenuously emphasizing the need to fight against the "counter-revolution" and its crimes.

Among themselves, people only discussed financial issues and sports.

Ramos's "proselytization" with rubber truncheons, was gradually replaced by a much more insidious "lightening," based on self-censorship, public "confessions" and "repentance."

The nation was forced to endure a complete, penetrating, all-inclusive, "brain-wash" and "hallucinogenic drug treatment" lasting for decades. The underpinning of this "therapy" was improvement in the standard of living. Based on foreign loans.

With systematic lies, or even worse, half-truths, they achieved a total corruption of the nation's soul. Hungarians were ensured a new refrigerator or a Trabant 23 by having abortions.

Balkanization inside and outside. We had to feel gratitude for the smallest easement of the oppression, based on the idea: thank them for not beating you.

The propaganda from the Kádár regime ruled.

The heroic Revolution of 1956 became a non-event for the masses. During my college years I never heard a word about that subject. Slowly a revision of history was written; nobody cared about that either.

Why should the nation remember such a painful event? We had too many already.

We were living in the "we just have to forget" era.

In 1963, the young priest, B. Zoltán was released. His hair turned white.

In 1964, I received a passport, miraculously, to visit the New York World's Fair and my Mother.

My Father passed away in 1977. Maybe three hundred paid their respects. God bless his soul!

He said something during the heavy artillery barrage that resonated in me for decades: "Hungary has written her name into history."

"We did not forget the heroic young freedom fighters of Budapest."



Levente Koller

I was born in Budapest in 1943. My Father was a physician. I began my schooling at the Práter Street school, where I was an eighth grader in 1956. We spent the days of the Revolution in our Práter Street apartment. In 1957, my Mother with two of my siblings arrived at the home of her sister in the United States.

After finishing Vörösmarty High School, I continued my studies at the Eötvös Loránd University of Science.

Since 1964, I have also lived in the United States. I was drafted and served for two years in the U.S. Army.

I continued my professional studies at New York University. During my whole career I worked as a plastics researcher. I was named laboratory director, and served on the board of the Society of Plastics Engineers and the Society for the Advancement of Material Process Engineering. My name can be found on chapters of technical books, as well as on several patents.

I retired in 2003, but continue to work on patent submissions.

Presently I serve on the Board of the Hungarian Communion of Friends.

John S. Kőrössy, Jr.

VIOLENCE AND TOLERANCE

I was born and raised in Budapest, Hungary, and at the time of the 1956 Revolution we lived in the XIth district (kerület) in the Lágymányos area of Buda. As a fourteen year old I was in the 6th grade of the grammar school located just off Móricz Zsigmond Square.

In the early hours and days of the Revolution life moved on as usual, not much filtered down to the level of a fourteen year old. All or most of the events were going on across the Danube on the other side of town. Before long, word of mouth information started to spread like wildfire concerning the demonstrations, the occupation of the radio station and the soon to become evident violence. My Mother reacted in a full demonstration of Motherly love and concern: I was pretty much locked in, and nearly completely unable to join the groups of people who were discussing the events of the day on the street. Soon the situation changed, and my family participated in our new and much welcomed freedom in sharing all the news of hope and anticipation, which by this time was all over the city. I very much doubt that I understood the full meaning and impact of the events, which had just taken place so recently.

My most distinct memories of personal experiences include walking around on Móricz Zsigmond Square, and looking at the barricades of peeled up blocks of pavement stones which we helped a little to build, the turned over streetcars as they lay on their sides, the various vehicles which were piled up so as to block the five major thoroughfares the intersection of which formed the Square itself. People were walking about while discussing the news of the day; it seemed that everyone knew everyone else. There were a good number of young and older men working on the barricades in the midst of buildings damaged by large caliber gunfire. I remember walking past several stores with broken glass shards where the store windows used to be. I wondered in seeing the store window itself full of items originally on display: no one took anything. One particular window with the glass broken out had a fairly good sized wooden box in the middle with the lid open. I will never forget it: the sign explained that the spirit of our Revolution permits that money be collected openly for the surviving victims of the secret police brutality. The box was overflowing with money!

This was a strange time. It was a time of incredible violence when all human senses were set aside by the invaders of our country. It was also a time of tolerance and near peaceful coexistence under the cloak of uncertainty and unclear expectations. I remember being out with my friends – about five or six of us – and as we walked around our neighborhood we noticed a parked Russian tank on one of the side streets. The main gun of the tank was elevated so as to appear non-threatening, the turret hatch and gunner's hatch were open, and the tank crew was sitting, lounging, on the deck. So what is more normal for kids? We walked over and started speaking to the friendly-looking crew. All of us had studied Russian for several years by now: one of the benefits of the communist regime. Turned out that they wanted cigarettes. A few of us ran home to get some, and as a reward were permitted to examine the interior of the armored vehicle through the open hatches. I do not remember feeling any sense of fear or concern at the time.

Darker days

The much darker days which followed late October formed the rest of my experiences. My Father had been gone for days, and my Mother – strangely enough – while she seemed worried about his absence, and perhaps safety, did not offer any explanations for why he was gone. I woke up one night to find my Father and two other men in our front room. One of the men was wounded, and my Mother was bandaging his arm and shoulder. I was not given much of an explanation, but by that time I did not really need any. I was finally permitted to walk around in the nearby city during the daytime with my Uncle, and witnessed an oncoming column of Russian tanks on Bartók Béla Street. We hid safely in a doorway as the tanks rolled by, and saw one of the tanks rotate its turret and fire at point blank range into a large red sign on the wall of a restaurant on the corner of Lágymányosi Street and Bartók Béla Street. The sign was merely advertising the appearance of a certain band in the restaurant. The Russian gunner apparently thought that it contained an element of anti-Soviet propaganda. I dread to think how many victims his senseless act created in that split second.

Continuing our journey we once again met with another Russian armored column. I felt safe in hiding behind the massive wooden doors of a nearby apartment house, but my Uncle yanked me down the hall and around the stairway. As we waited for the tanks to pass, we heard the roar of the turret mounted machine gun, and saw the splintering of wood as the stream of bullets shredded the bottom of the doorway to pieces. It is extremely unlikely that I would be writing these lines if we had stayed behind the doors instead of taking further care to remain safe. Apparently this was just the beginning of our dangerous outing. We were crossing the intersection at Villányi Street as it opens to the Móricz Zsigmond Square and we saw a Russian tank parked in the middle of the intersection. We walked past the tank, and nearly reached the other side of the street when the tank fired its main gun in the direction of an apartment house some mile or so down Villányi Street. The nearside wall of the apartment house was hit, and we could see a gaping hole with smoke and plaster pouring

from it. The surprise and terror of the people on the street – ourselves included – was inconsequential. In comparison to the extensive damage to the apartment house and likely, the injury to the people within it.

Refugee

Soon November passed into December, and a sense of helplessness overcame most of us. The nation was alone in the world as it had been so often before. Thoughts and aspirations of escape materialized, and in early December my family started the long journey west. Having taken the train to within about twenty kilometers of the Austrian border we continued our trek on foot. After a night of walking through the deep snow of a silent pine forest, to be startled by an occasional armored car patrol, we reached the edge of the woods. On the far side of the clearing we saw a large group of people and large red crosses painted on banners flapping in the breeze. We were safe. As we drew closer to the shouting and waving crowd and their words became discernible I remember a thought flashing through my mind. I did not understand their words. I realized that we were entering a strange land with a different language, a place where I knew no one, and that this is how it would stay from here on forward. I suddenly felt alone, scared and wanted to go home. But we did not; our westward journey continued, and after enjoying the warm welcome in several refugee camps, we eventually arrived in the United States... fifty years ago.

Fitting into the American way of life for me at that young age was relatively easy, although not without occasional difficulty. Acquiring the necessary language skills and continuing my disrupted education became the central focus of my life in the coming years. Along the way I served my new country in the United States Marines. I soon became a US citizen and became exposed to the concepts of human rights, civil liberties, constitutional rights, freedoms of speech and religion; topics which occupy so much of our time and effort in our contemporary society. I have also seen regrettable examples of what can happen when these basic human rights are not accompanied by a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Conclusions

In my view the Revolution in 1956 was the final outburst of a nation's demand for the ability to put into its daily life the practice of these esoteric concepts. The failure of that system to recognize and fairly deal with these basic human demands over the span of decades finally erupted into the last resort: violence. The real heroes of the Revolution are the men and women who chose to lead the way for all the others to follow. And what a following there was! The spirit of the entire nation was forged into one iron fist in a manner only seldom seen, much less experienced, in history and became the guiding spirit of the Revolution. The historical message of the Revolution is clear and simple. Any attempt by a ruling regime to persistently suppress and curb the God-given rights of a people will sooner or later end in failure. As it surely did in Hungary. I am proud to call myself a Hungarian, and will for the rest of my life take pride in being a son of nation of such courage, determination and will to stand against all odds in its demand for freedom.

Although I have not returned to Hungary since my departure in 1956, I have remained a Hungarian in heart and spirit. I read, write and speak Hungarian fluently and many Hungarian books can be found in my house. Born in Erdély, my wife Ildikó and I share this precious heritage equally along with our children. Much of our time is devoted to maintaining and sharing with others our heritage, culture and language.



John S. Körössy, Jr.

Director of Engineering at a manufacturer of capital machinery, John S. Körössy, Jr. continues to be active in the Hungarian community of Cleveland. He serves as president of two active Hungarian organizations: the Cleveland chapter of the World Federation of Hungarian Veterans and of the United Hungarian Societies, an umbrella organization encompassing many of Cleveland's Hungarian churches and civic organizations.

Francis Laping

AN EPITAPH FOR HEROES



Laping in 1956

In the autumn of 1956, a small nation along the banks of the Danube stood up almost to a man, woman and child, and struggled for a breath of freedom.

This story tells of this struggle. But it is not the real story. Nothing written in words and printed on paper can be that. For the story of the Hungarian uprising was written in blood.

Ernő

The Hungarian revolt, the fighting part of it, began on October 23, 1956. The day before, Ernő, a 22-year-old student, attended a meeting in the lecture hall at Budapest University of Technology. The meeting lasted until 2 a.m. Its purpose was to organize a street demonstration for government reforms allowing relief from repression. After all, the students reasoned, the Poles, staring down the hard-line factions of their government, had recently gained a measure of liberalization. Stalin was dead. Had not Nikita Khrushchev, the sturdy miner's son himself, eased the shackles of his own people? Had he not condemned the brutal excesses of Beria's secret police?

One of the speakers at the meeting was a lieutenant colonel attached to the university as a military instructor. He warned the students that general orders had gone out to the army to curb any demonstrators.

At 2 p.m. on October 23, Ernő and his fellow students started a parade at the General Joseph Bem monument, erected in honor of the Polish general who had fought with the Hungarians in the 1848 Revolution. But the young people did not linger there.

They paid tribute to Bem's valor, and expressed solidarity with Poland's drive for greater freedom. Then, silently, they marched to the Parliament.

At 5:30 p.m., Radio Budapest broadcast the news of the event. Then came a significant admission, a straw in the wind. The Ministry of the Interior had initially banned all demonstrations, being harshly opposed to all popular demonstrations, but now the Politburo of the Hungarian Workers' (Communist) Party had changed the decision.

The crowd grows

At first, there were only thousands but they were joined by young workers, passersby, motorists, soldiers, old people and secondary-school students. The vast crowd grew to tens of thousands. The streets resounded with these slogans: "People of Kossuth, march forward hand in hand," "We want new leadership – we trust Imre Nagy!" The shouts reverberated; the national colors fluttered in the air; windows were open. The streets of Budapest were filled with a new wind of greater freedom.

Having sung their songs, the crowd began to shout. Hungarian flags, with the communist emblem cut out, fluttered in the cool breeze. Hungarian Army troops had been watching the demonstration, uneasily at first, then with approval. Spontaneously, without fuss, the crowd suddenly began to move over to the radio station to try to have their demands broadcast.

It was at this point that what started as a spirited but rather mild-mannered protest changed to grim rebellion.

About two hours had passed since the delegation had left for Radio Budapest. Ernő and the crowd grew fearful. Somebody said, "Let's go in." Others took up the cry. Slowly, inexorably, the crowd moved toward the station.

"There," recalls Ernő, "we got bad news. Our delegation had been arrested and was held captive by the secret police. There was only one thing to do. We had to rescue our friends. We knew what the police would do to them. They had tortured and killed so many before them. We started to attack the building."

Meanwhile, another student group went to the head office of the communist newspaper and persuaded the printers to start turning out revolutionary leaflets. When two of the newspaper's bosses arrived on the scene to see what was going on, the students set fire to their car. But back at the radio station, the police staved off the students' surge. They did so by firing wildly into the unarmed crowd. The revolt had drawn its first blood. The sacrificial altar was the free expression of Ideas.

Feri

Among the most vivid and detailed firsthand accounts of the Hungarian Revolution is the story of Feri, a young man working at the Ganz factory in Buda when the first rumblings of discontent emanated from the capital.

“There were some 6,000 workers in the plant,” Feri recalls. “Some were communists, some were not. As for myself, I worked by day to make a living. At night, I studied in a technical school. I just wanted to learn something. I never joined any of the communist organizations, and for that I spent three years in a forced labor camp,” he said.

“Quite a few days before the fighting began, the factory workers had been restless. There was a lot of grumbling about poor wages, red tape and the general lack of freedom to do as you pleased. We just didn’t like the way the government was running things. Everybody was constantly being watched. There were daily rumors of midnight arrests and executions by the secret police. We didn’t trust the newspapers because they were of course controlled by the regime.

Suddenly word spread through the factory – there would be a big demonstration at 3 o’clock that afternoon. The date was October 23.”

The workers march

The demonstration was a fateful gathering of young people around the statue of General Bem and a thousand workers marched to the scene; Laping Feri was among them.

After watching the students and joining them in shouting “Down with the government,” Feri and the workers walked to the Parliament building.

The government had heard about the disturbances and they cut off the electric power, perhaps hoping to keep everybody off the street. It was dark by then and suddenly something amazing happened. Thousands of people rolled up newspapers and lit them with matches. It was a fantastic sight, a sea of torches. Everybody was yelling and singing. The Minister of the Interior, Ernő Gerő, finally appeared at the window. “You are scum,” he roared at the people below. “You are trash.”

We shouted back to him. Then somebody cried, “Let’s go to the radio station.” And the whole crowd began to move toward the center of the city. More and more people joined us along the way. These people had no guns, no weapons at all. We just wanted to get into the radio station to announce freedom. But when we reached the station, demonstrations had already started in front of the building. We were told that the Secret Police that were inside the station had just shot a Hungarian army officer who had led a delegation of students and workers into the building trying to negotiate a peaceful surrender of the communists. This, I believe, was the first blood spilled in the revolt.

The milk truck

It must be remembered that most of the regular police and most of the army were with us, not against us. The real enemy was the Secret Police. They were now tossing tear gas bombs into the crowd. We staggered about, holding wet handkerchiefs to our faces. A milk truck drove up and somebody in the crowd recognized the driver as one of the Secret Policemen and dragged him down. The milk cans tumbled from the truck and they were full of guns. We took them.

Then, out of nowhere, an injured army officer, a colonel, appeared and took charge. He had been shot in the face. He was bandaged but in good shape. He told us to set up barricades, and we overturned a few trolley cars to block off the streets to the station. Then, after a night of vicious fighting, the crowd broke through the police guard at 10 in the morning and took over the radio station.

I didn’t go in myself because the colonel had assigned me to guard the entrance, checking everybody coming and going. Later I found out that the people had entered the station and cut down the Secret Police to a man. The freedom fighters went on the air and the revolt spread to every corner of Budapest.

With a couple of friends, I was called into the colonel’s office in a building across the street, some museum as I recall. “I need a car,” the colonel said. “Get me a car.” “Where from?” I asked. “What do I care?” he said. “Just get me a car.” So there we stood on the street, Hamerli Jóska and I, looking for a car. We weren’t used to this sort of thing at all. I was getting worried.

But suddenly I spotted a Mercedes, a large one, coming toward us. We stopped it. There was a chauffeur in the front seat, and a lady in the back seat. “We are the Revolution,” we yelled. “Get the hell out.” They did, and we delivered the Mercedes to the colonel, who was very pleased. He appointed us his personal bodyguards.

The communists and the Russians

“The communist government by then was desperate. They were saying over the radio that they were in control and that this was a fascist uprising. The rebels were not fascists, of course. They were workers, students, including many communists who were disillusioned and fed up with the way they had to live.

As for the Russians, I must say they gave us little trouble in the early days. Many of the soldiers had been in Hungary a long time and had become friendly with the people. Some even helped us, gave us weapons. But those were the regulars, and old timers. The Russians were the new troops Khrushchev sent in. They were very young and some didn’t even know where they were. They thought they were being sent to the Middle East to fight the



A young refugee waits outside the train station

Israelis, the French and the British who have moved into Egypt. They kept asking, "Is this the Suez Canal?" when they were looking at the Danube.

The next morning I saw a bunch of people standing in the street. I went closer. There was a young Russian on a tank, and an old lady was crying up to him, "Don't shoot us, we don't want to fight you, we're fighting our own government."

And the Russian, a kid of no more than 20, burst into tears and said, "Mama, mama, I don't shoot mama..."

At the Parliament

At noontime, word spread that there would be a rally in front of the Parliament. No new government had been formed yet.

When I arrived, there must have been 50,000 people there already. The whole square was filled with old and young men, women. I edged my way closer to the Parliament steps so I could see what was going on. I stood on the second step, craning my neck. There were Russian tanks hemming the people in. And suddenly somebody started shooting.

The whole bunch around me dropped to the ground. People began to scream. I couldn't see at first who was shooting at whom. Everybody was running, pushing in all directions. I caught a glimpse of a Russian tank. Its machine gun was firing upwards. To this day I haven't figured out exactly what happened. Some say the Parliament was full of Secret Police and they started firing on the people, and the Russians shot back at the Secret Police. Later on I found out that the Russians were firing at the roofs of the surrounding buildings, where Secret Police were firing at the crowd. There was chaos and panic. I jumped off the steps and people were all over me, people on top of other people, trying to run, trying to get away. I fell to the ground. Somebody stepped on my neck, pinning me down. I couldn't breathe. I looked at the ground and saw a large puddle of blood. People all around me were falling. I thought to myself, "My God, they're shooting at us. They're killing everybody."

Somehow I wriggled free and dashed to a corner of the Parliament building that seemed to offer some cover from the bullets. A burst of bullets bit into the wall and I hit the ground again.

When the firing stopped for a moment, I crawled on my stomach to the protection of the corner. A young man came running toward me, clutching his stomach. He stumbled and fell. He cried, "Help me, I can't move." I crawled toward him, but they started shooting again and he lay still. He was dead. I heard a noise behind me, and turned and saw a Secret Policeman aiming a gun through an open basement window from the Parliament building. He fired a few bursts. Then the window closed and he vanished.

By then a dozen people had found my corner and they cowered there, and someone was firing at them. Three or four were hit, right next to me. I was covered with blood.

Again I struggled free. I looked over the square. It was nearly empty now. An ambulance drove up to a cluster of wounded lying near the center. Two men in white coats stepped out of the ambulance and were immediately cut down by machine gun fire. I thought to myself, "I'm going to die, there is no hope." But I decided to make one more attempt to save myself. I stood up and started running across the square, I tripped over a wire strung to keep people off the grass. I hit the ground with full force. I lay there, stunned. When I regained my senses, I saw a middle-aged woman lying close by me. "Please," she begged. "Help me move out of here. My legs are hit. I can't walk."

I took hold of her under her arms and tried to drag her behind a tree.

There was a shot and it struck her. I held her briefly, but could see that she was dead. I let go of her and ran like a fox.

Away from the shooting

I didn't know where I was running, but suddenly I spotted a large store window in front of me, and I flung myself at it and went right through it. It was a communist book store, of all things. I almost laughed in a crazy way. I went deeper inside and I saw a corridor with a stairway leading down. I staggered down the steps. I came to a cellar filled with people. They were hiding from the shooting. Somebody said, "We can't stay here, there are Secret Police on the roof and they'll be coming down." A little old man became very excited when he saw me, covered with blood and dirt. He grabbed me and screamed, "Let's show them what the communists have done to us. Let's go to the American Embassy."

We did. An American official came out to meet us. He seemed shocked. He told us he'd informed his government of all that was happening here. He couldn't do anything for us, he said.

On my way home I stopped at the radio station. The colonel was there. He stared at me. "Where the hell have you been?" I said, "I was at the Parliament." He said, "Well, you look like a mess. You better get cleaned up; you can't go on the street this way."

So I went home, took a bath and slept 10 hours. The next morning I went outside. I wanted to go to the station as the colonel had told me to. The street was strangely quiet. There was no traffic. I saw some people walking by fast and they told me, "The Russians are here with their tanks."

I went to a friend's house but he wasn't in. In the hallway, a little boy, maybe 11 years old, stood, holding a small rifle. I asked him what he was doing. "I want to shoot a Russian tank," he said with a grin. I told him to give me the rifle and get himself down the cellar before he got hurt. He didn't like this at all, so I grabbed him by the arm and pushed him along.

By then the revolt was three days old and Budapest was in flames. The colonel moved into an office across the street from the radio station and tried to coordinate his moves with the moves of other forces throughout the city.

Get medical supplies

He ordered us, me and Jóska Hammerli to take three trucks to the Austrian border near Győr, to try to bring back medical supplies for the wounded. We were nearly starving and unshaven and looked like hell. All we'd eaten was a little bread and meat which the people had brought us from their homes. So we took off in the trucks towards Győr.

On the way, we witnessed a horrible sight – the bodies of the victims of the police massacre in Mosonmagyaróvár. The corpses were lying in a school building, and their relatives were weeping over the dead.

It was the worst sight I had seen up to then. We drove on but for a long time we didn't feel like talking. At a crossing near the border some men flagged us down. They were in uniform but without insignia. We didn't know who or what they were and we were scared.

One of them pointed a gun at me. "Where are you going?" he demanded. We told him we were looking for medical supplies for the wounded in Budapest. "I don't believe you," he said. "You want to escape across the border." He added that we were under arrest. They put us in a room and we spent an uneasy night. The next morning we were taken before a colonel for interrogation. He did wear Insignia. He was a colonel of the border police. He kept insisting that we wanted to escape. We kept denying it. Back to jail. Another night.

At 3 a.m. five soldiers entered our cell. They told us to get dressed, and then loaded us into a truck. One of my friends whispered, "Now we've done it. It's all over. We're going to be shot." I said, "Don't be silly." I wasn't feeling very confident myself.

We drove through the darkness. The leader of the group, a young lieutenant, had told us we were going to Budapest. But we could see we were driving through a wooded area, and my friend said, "Hell, we're not going to Budapest."

Suddenly the truck stopped. The lieutenant motioned for us to get out of the truck. "What's going on?" I asked. The lieutenant looked uncomfortable.

I suddenly felt very angry. I started to shout at the lieutenant. I yelled at him. "So this is what they teach you – Hungarians shooting Hungarians... Is that what you learned in communist school?"

"Shut up," the lieutenant said, "just shut up."

But I could see that he was embarrassed and so I kept shouting at him. He fingered his gun, uncertain what to do. He turned to us. "Get the hell out of here," he snapped. "And don't come back." He didn't have to say it twice.

Released

It was snowing and we kept walking, completely lost. We had been wandering about a couple of hours when we saw a small railroad shack ahead. We knocked on the door. An old man was inside. He told us how to get to the nearest road.

The road was deserted, but suddenly a truck approached and we stopped it. "We're farmers taking food to Budapest," the driver told us. We told him who we were, and he said, "Good, hop in."

It was bitter cold. It was an open truck, and my friends dug themselves into a heap of potatoes. There was the carcass of a cow, with the innards removed, and I used the cow's body to protect myself from the biting wind.

Suddenly the truck slowed to a halt. There were strange loud voices ahead of us. The driver hissed, "Russians." Just before I ducked I saw Russian soldiers walking toward us. I made a quick decision. I knew I couldn't run.

I squeezed myself deep into the cow's carcass.

One of the Russians looked into the back of the truck. I could hear him breathing. "Any guns?" one of the soldiers asked. "No, tovarish," our driver answered.

"Go on then," he said.

Lost cause

We finally reached the outskirts of Budapest, and saw dozens of Russian T52 tanks entrenched, surrounding the city.

As we reached Budapest, I went back to the radio station. Everybody was gone. I went home. The next day I finally found the colonel at an army barrack. We fought around the place for three days. But it got worse and worse. People were killed. Some were weakened with hunger and just went home. There was no ammunition left in the end.

The colonel came up to our little group and said, "There is nothing we can do anymore. It is no use." He slowly walked away. I never saw him again.

It was clear that the Revolution was lost. But there was still some fighting going on. I went up to the Fortress of Buda where an old man, Szabo bácsi – as they called him – was organizing some last remnants of resistance and I helped out there. The man was amazing. He was teaching us how to trap Russian tanks with bed sheets. When a tank came near, we would stretch a wet sheet across the street. The sheet clung to the vizier so the Russians couldn't see. When they opened the turret to get their bearings, the people threw Molotov cocktails into the tanks.

We also smeared the hilly streets of Buda with industrial soap to make the tanks skid and slow down. After a while of this work, I went back to the factory. They were giving out two weeks' wages because most of the workers had been too busy fighting to collect their pay.

It was obvious by then that the battle was ending all over the city. I was undecided whether to stay in Budapest or flee to Austria when a group of Russian soldiers picked me up on the street and shoved me into a covered truck. It was already filled with young people. They were telling each other that they were being sent to Siberia.

I was still hoping for a miracle.

We were sitting in the truck, just waiting. There was a commotion. The door opened and a young guy with a rifle stuck his head into the car.

"We got rid of the Russians," he said. "Get out of here. Don't let them catch you again." I could have kissed him. Once again I was free. But I knew that I had to get out of Hungary. I said goodbye to my parents. They understood

Goodbye

After reaching the city of Zalaegerszeg, we walked towards the border over secondary roads. A truck full of young people like myself stopped beside me. They were in high spirits.

"Where are you going?" they asked me. "To see my Grandmother," I said.

"So are we. Get in."

We were stopped only once at a bridge crossing the Rába river. A communist guard threatened us. But there were maybe 25 of us and some had guns. We disarmed him, and someone suggested we kill him on the spot, and we argued about it for a while. I said, if there's to be any shooting, a bunch of border guards will be on top of us. So we tied him up and sat him in cold water off the road to let him cool off until his comrades found him.

It was late at night when we finally crossed the border. We saw our first Austrian village. There was a restaurant of some kind, and the people came out and gave us cocoa and food.

I spent some time in a refugee camp. The Austrians had a good setup for people like us. I helped an American Army intelligence officer screen refugees for several weeks. Then, at the end of December, I was taken to Bremerhaven and we sailed on a Navy ship, the Leroy Eltinge, to America.

America

The Brooklyn Navy yards, then Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. Then Philadelphia. Work, college, a new life.

In 1965, I visited my homeland as an accredited photojournalist for the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin. The country had a little more freedom than it had before the revolt. The people no longer lived in quite the same terror. But there was little real joy in Budapest and wherever else I traveled during my visit. The color of communism is not red, but a uniform gray, and Hungary, for the most part, is covered by a gray cloud.

The people still talk about what happened that fall of 1956. They say things are not good but they are better than they might be. The Revolution was terribly costly to the people, but the communists have learned a lesson, too. They know that people will face death rather than live with torture and humiliation.

I do not think there will be another Revolution. The last one cost too much. The older people I talked to seem resigned. The young ones want to get out. They kept telling me, "You were lucky."

The world stood by while Hungary died. Sheer human courage turned this into one of freedom's most agonized and finest hours, even as the democracies looked on in compassion and then turned the other way. The Hungarians who merely sought a measure of human dignity had to fight alone.

In the chess game of the giants, the Hungarians were pawns. But for thirteen days they fought and died like kings. Remembering them is the most we can do.

It is also the least.

This story by Francis Laping (Feri) was written and published by the Philadelphia Bulletin in 1965.



Francis Laping

Born in Krnjaja, a small German village in Yugoslavia in 1929, in 1948 Francis Laping illegally escaped from Yugoslavia to Hungary, where he was accused of being a spy for Tito and was jailed for 3 months. In 1952, he was interred and spent 3 years in a forced labor camp in Verpelét, Hungary. In 1957, he fled to the United States, where he specialized in photojournalism after studying at the Philadelphia Museum College of Art. He is honored to have been on the staff of the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, and his photos have also appeared in the magazines Life and Time. He is married to Cathy Mikszáth, Kálmán Mikszáth's great-granddaughter, and his book, "Remember Hungary 1956" was published by Alpha Publications in 1975. He currently lives in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Edith Lauer

1958: WHEN THE IMPOSSIBLE SEEMED POSSIBLE

Károly Szabó



Outside the U.S. Consulate in Vienna, from left to right: Ferenc Bitó, György Mocsáry (Montgomery), Nora Kiss (Szabó), Edit Kiss (Lauer), Dr. Elemér Kiss, Éva Kiss and Pál Kandó

It all started so innocently on a beautiful sunny October 23rd, back then in 1956. I was a 14 year-old student at the József Attila Gimnázium in Budapest, whose classmates excitedly whispered the forbidden word, “demonstration.” And soon we all set forth to march with university students chanting in support of the recent strikes of workers of Poznan, Poland.

Before the day was over, I would experience things I never dreamed of. Carried along by a swelling crowd from Buda to Pest, climbing up on one of the lions by the Parliament steps, I shouted and cried in disbelief along with tens of thousands of Hungarians. Never did a crowd recite our patriotic poems, or shouted demands for freedom, nor sang the poignant prayer, our Hungarian National Anthem, the way we did that night!

Although in the days that followed I am sure I must have felt fear, what I remember most is a state of constant excitement and hope, shared by family and friends, that a new life of freedom would be possible for us after all. When political prisoners, among them Cardinal Mindszenty, were set free by the freedom fighters, we reacted with such joy of gaining justice at last! Even as rumors spread on October 29 and 30th that the Soviets would surely retaliate, most of us fervently believed, that “the West,” that far-away, magically benevolent force, could not possibly let Hungary down and would certainly come to our help, if needed. And finally, I remember a crushing sense of hopelessness, when on November 4th, thousands of Soviet tanks and troops re-invaded Hungary, and in a matter of days destroyed what seemed a possible dream only days before.

But many unforgettable things happened between these two dates. When I got home from the initial demonstration of October 23rd, instead of being reprimanded by my Parents for being so late, I found them huddled around Radio Free Europe’s late news, trying to catch every word through the usual government static. Only the following morning would we learn that the hated Hungarian ÁVO (Secret Police) shot into a crowd of demonstrators that had marched on from the Parliament to the Hungarian Radio. Thus, what had been a spontaneous and peaceful demonstration, turned overnight into a bloody Revolution.

The days following October 23rd seemed to fly. Rumors spread quickly about violent confrontations between freedom fighters and either Hungarian ÁVO forces or Soviet soldiers in various parts of Budapest. In a matter of days Hungarian army recruits and officers deserted in droves to side with the freedom fighters. My sister, Nora and I heard about friends and schoolmates who disappeared only to turn up in one of the most dangerous areas of fighting, the Moscow and Széna Square, or the Kilián Military Barracks.

Witness to history

But much happened right before our eyes. Our third-story apartment overlooked the busy transportation hub of Móricz Zsigmond Circle, a transfer point between buses and streetcars. We could watch communist symbols toppled, and Hungarian flags hanging from nearby balconies with the hammer and sickle ripped out of the middle. Across the street from us was the XIth District administration building. One day, a young freedom fighter, whom we had earlier observed throwing Molotov cocktails at the steady stream of Soviet tanks turning into our street, climbed from the building's balcony to the roof to pull off the hated red star. We watched with horror as he lost his balance in the effort, and fell with the star to the pavement below.

Each day our Father left to work with the Hungarian National Bank's Revolutionary Committee. After making us promise to stay at home and be extremely careful, my Mother, a pharmacist, went off to her job in the neighborhood pharmacy right on Móricz Zsigmond Circle. It was she who had the closest contact with the young freedom fighters who often came for alcohol, cotton and bottles to make Molotov cocktails. Later, many were carried in when injured, and laid down behind the counter, as their friends went out to the Circle to continue fighting.

Because few Hungarian families, including our own, were allowed to have telephones, we relied on the newly freed radio and visitors for the latest news. When the first independent paper, *Igazság* (Truth) was printed, in moments it was sold out. So we waited in long lines on the street to read the single copy posted on the nearest kiosk, and we ran home to carry the news to our Grandparents, who also lived with us. For several days we joined impromptu brigades with people of all ages working in a chain to pull up the paving stones on our street for building barricades against the Soviet tanks. Even our Grandfather came to help, although later he sadly admitted he never could really bring himself to believe that "David would defeat Goliath."

In the early 1950's, the hated food rationing cards had caused unending lines to form in front of all stores. In 1956, there was widespread destruction of shops in our neighborhood, so obtaining everyday necessities for our family of six became a real challenge. While many store windows were broken, no one took their contents. Makeshift boxes filled with contributions for the Revolution's victims remained untouched. Hand-made signs proclaimed: "Help us honor our dead by keeping our Revolution pure!" And everyone acted accordingly.

In the mornings, my sister, Nora, and I rushed out to nearby Béla Bartók Street, where farmers from the countryside brought fresh bread and other food items to a large but orderly crowd. In the afternoons I lay for hours on our third-story balcony floor, and peered down between the columns to see the frightening sight of open-bed trucks speeding by, filled with wounded, perhaps already dead freedom fighters.

When All Saints' Day, November 1st came, rows of women dressed in black marched in silent mourning for their fallen husbands and children. That evening Móricz Zsigmond Circle, as all of Budapest, was bathed in the soft glow of thousands of candles as the city remembered its dead.

Retribution

Soviet retribution against the Revolution came in the form of an armada of tanks that rumbled into Budapest from Romania and the Soviet Union on the dawn of November 4th. When they entered our neighborhood, there was fierce but short-lived resistance on Móricz Zsigmond Circle. Along with many neighbors we took refuge in the underground shelter that had last been used at the end of World War II, when the Soviets occupied Budapest. As we listened to what seemed like relentless shelling outside, there was no way of knowing if our own building had been hit by the Soviet tanks. Eventually, we were greatly relieved to see it had not been destroyed.

By mid-November, although pockets of resistance remained both in Budapest and in the countryside, everyone was forced to recognize that the Revolution's defeat was inevitable. When military resistance became impossible, Hungarians called for strikes across the country. But arrests began immediately. The new communist government rapidly consolidated its control, and families, including ours, began to discuss the frightening possibility of escaping to the West. Each evening, whispered conversations took place, and family members came furtively to say hurried good-byes. A curfew was strictly enforced, and anyone on the streets after 8 p.m. could be arrested, or even shot.

In the end, my parents reluctantly decided we would have to leave Hungary to escape persecution and to provide a chance for higher education for my sister and me. As "politically undesirable elements" we would not have been accepted at any Hungarian university. Keeping our plans secret and saying good-bye to my Grandparents were the hardest part for me. With the help of my future brother-in-law, Károly Szabó, and a good friend of his, my Father and I left Budapest on the morning of November 22nd in a "borrowed" taxicab. My Mother and sister, Nora, would only manage to escape a week later, under much more difficult circumstances.

Although our papers provided us with a flimsy excuse for traveling to a plant-protection site, we did not need them, as we encountered little resistance. At several roadblocks we handed over bottles of liquor as we made our way

toward the border town of Mosonszentjános, where two people took away our cab as soon as they saw us. We hid at the local shoemaker's house until nightfall, when he started leading a larger group of us across the border. With spotlights scanning the fields where we walked, we fell to the ground at regular intervals to await the safety of darkness. Soon we saw lights and a group of smiling Austrians in cars and trucks, waving us toward them. We could hardly believe we had reached Austria.

Austria

The next day we sent the agreed-upon coded radio message of our safe arrival to our family. I was soon ensconced in a beautiful home in Vienna of my Father's childhood friend from Szentgotthárd. Suddenly, I lived in what seemed a life of utter luxury where I could have all the unfamiliar but delicious oranges and bananas I wanted. A uniformed maid served me hot chocolate in bed, and soon I was taken to a "clothing center," where I was able to pick out a beautiful "grown-up" skirt from a huge clothing pile. But the best of all was getting to see "Gone with the Wind," my favorite story. Although the film was in German, I needed no translation, for it was Lola néni, the Grandmother of my best friend, who had translated the book into Hungarian, and I had all the important scenes memorized!

Soon our family had to decide where we would settle. With invitations from relatives in both South Africa and the United States, my Father, who favored the former choice, was voted down by the three of us who chose the legendary "America." After weeklong stays in refugee camps in Austria and Germany, we flew on a military transport plane to New York, and were taken to Camp Kilmer in New Jersey. Our sponsor/relatives, Kati and Ferenc Kovács, soon came and took us to their home in Silver Spring, Maryland, just in time to watch President Eisenhower's second inauguration. I remember wondering why such a kind-looking man did not come to the aid of Hungarian freedom fighters.

I finished my high school and university studies in Maryland, and after marrying my husband, John, embarked on a life of many corporate moves. We first returned to Hungary in the 1970's, when our daughters, Kriszta and Andrea, finally met their Great-Grandparents. We made many trips back, and with my sister and her husband paid some early and somewhat scary visits to the Hungarian towns and villages of Transylvania, Romania.

In the 1980's we started supporting the work of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation. In 1990, after the fall of communism, I was one of the founders, then the President, and eventually the Chairman of the Hungarian American Coalition. I got my Hungarian citizenship back in 1993, and bought an apartment in Budapest the same year. Since then each year I travel 3-4 times to Hungary, and also to Romania and Slovakia, to work on educational, cultural and human rights projects with the large historic Hungarian communities in the region. The projects are sponsored by the Hungarian American Coalition, but in many cases they are supported by the Pannonius Foundation, established in 2003 by our family.

What does it all mean to me?

It took me many years to realize what a significant, life-defining experience the 1956 Revolution was for me. The ideals, the courage, the sacrifice Hungarians willingly made then to gain their freedom began a process that continued in Poland, then Prague, and culminated only in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. But it must be remembered, that nearly 50 years ago, it was those young Hungarian freedom fighters who first gave the ultimate sacrifice to show the world the true and terrible face of communism.

Many of the 200,000 Hungarians who left their homeland for the West felt responsible for keeping the flame of freedom alive, until Hungary again became free. The privilege of living through those unforgettable days has inspired a deep commitment on our part to pass on to our children what love of freedom meant then, in 1956, and what we must do today to make sure that all Hungarians, including members of historical Hungarian communities in the Carpathian Basin, have the freedom to live free, productive, and satisfying lives.



Edith Lauer

Edith Lauer serves as Chair Emerita of the Hungarian American Coalition, the organization she helped found in 1990. In addition, she serves on the Boards of various Hungarian-American as well as American organizations. She has been a dedicated supporter of Hungarian education and culture, and a tireless advocate for human rights of the 2.5 million Hungarians who live in historic national communities in countries bordering Hungary. After Lauer witnessed the 1956 Revolution, her family escaped to Austria and settled in Maryland in 1957. She and her husband currently spend most of their time on volunteer work in Cleveland, Ohio, Budapest, Hungary, and Washington, D.C. Her husband, John, daughters Kriszta and Andrea, sons in law, Robert Nagy and Charles Barton Rice, Jr. and grandson Miklós, will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution together in Budapest.

Edit Lauer is the Mother of Andrea Lauer Rice whose story is on page 192.

Andrea Lázár

THE SZABÓ FAMILY



Andrea Lázár and her sister Judy in 1956

My story is about the journey of a family, the Szabó family: my Father, Dr. András Szabó, my sister Judy, and my Mother Emilia, who during her life went by many names, the most recognized one being Kathy Kapossy, Cleveland's Hungarian radio producer for more than 40 years.

I was 8 years old when the Revolution broke out; my sister was 9. I remember the evening like it was yesterday – or do I? When I talk to my sister, we have such different memories that it almost seems we couldn't possibly have gone through it together. Sadly, as both my parents are gone, we have no one to ask, no one to correct the differences or to fill in the many missing pieces. It's hard to tell the difference between what is my actual memory and what I may have vividly imagined from the stories I've heard from others. That is probably natural, for it must surely be difficult for the mind of a child to absorb such an unfathomable upheaval.

My family

I truly do, however, remember having a very happy childhood, safe and secure in the love of my family, relatives and friends. My Father was a lawyer in private practice; my Mother, a medical technologist who worked at the Sport Physiological Research Institute, where they did research

on the performance of athletes. She was a wonderful tennis player, and also took and developed photographs as a hobby, which not many people could do at that time. My sister and I took ballet lessons from a friend of my Father's who happened to be the ballet master for the Hungarian Opera. As the two Szabó sisters, we performed at some pretty prestigious events. I loved that, more than anything, and had life not changed, I was determined to be a ballerina.

There were times when my Father would be gone for a time, but that seemed not to need explanation, as he was a lawyer and, sort of like a Perry Mason, did a lot of the detective work himself. Unbeknown to my sister and me, he often defended Hungarian citizens against the innumerable trumped-up political charges which landed thousands of people in prison all over Hungary during the communist regime. I do remember hearing him talk about some of the cases, of someone accused of having a gun and his attempts to disprove it, but I didn't really understand. In any case, some of his absences, we later found out, were spent in prison, as he himself was arrested many times in connection with the cases he took on.

My Father built a radio so we could regularly listen to Radio Free Europe. We knew not to say anything about that to anyone, especially not to anyone in school. We also knew our parents thought about things very differently from others, and we knew full well, especially as we grew older, that Hungary was not free, that there were communists everywhere, and we had to be careful what we said to whom.

The Revolution

My Mother and Father were on Bródy Sándor Street in front of the Magyar Rádió on the night of October 23, 1956. My sister and I were home, tucked into bed and listening to some kind of drama on the radio. My Aunt who lived downstairs was there with us, when suddenly my parents burst in, extremely agitated – something was terribly wrong. They had gone to the Opera, or at least that's what we thought, but now they were talking about huge crowds, gunfire, and someone being shot who was standing right next to my Mother. My Father went to get my Uncle, and he said they were going back.

What had begun as a student demonstration in front of the statue of Polish General Bem had turned into a demonstration with some 100,000 Hungarian citizens protesting against the communist government, attempting to be heard over Budapest Rádió, demanding reforms. When the ÁVO, the Hungarian Security Police, opened fire on the crowds, the demonstration turned into a bloody Revolution. Martial law was declared; a call for Russian troops was issued; and during the night, Soviet troops and tanks came to take over the city. Street fighting broke out, and it soon spread to other parts of the country as the "freedom fighters" took over factories, weapons depots, and many Soviet tanks.

During the following days I remember huddling together in my Uncle's basement, then with strangers in the hospital, hearing the gunfire outside, seeing people who rushed to help the wounded. Both my sister and I recall vividly the buildings in ruins and tanks bombed out and abandoned, the sounds of the guns and tanks. We definitely remember being afraid, especially for our parents whom we didn't see sometimes for long periods. My Father and my Uncle had gone back to fight – I really don't know where they were or what they did – my Father never said, and we never asked. My Mother tended to the wounded at the hospital, and believing it would be safe from attack, we also stayed there. Later, this assumption proved to be wrong.

As terrifying as all this was, I remember it seemed we were all just waiting, desperately holding out, believing that help will arrive. I remember listening to the radio, the appeals for help that went out over Radio Free Europe, Szabad Európa. We all believed help would come; America would come to our aid. And then we heard that America was not going to help, no one was coming to the aid of the Hungarian freedom fighters, the rest of the world didn't want to get involved. That was so unbelievably devastating, that I will never forget the look on my parents' faces.

Suppression

I remember November 4th; all of us together huddled on the basement floor, listening to the staccato of machine guns now and then, as above us the ground rumbled as the Soviet tanks fired their heavy guns at house fronts all the way up Alkotás utca in a show of complete domination and suppression of the Revolution. In the months that followed, we lived under the terror of the new regime's relentless pursuit to arrest, interrogate, imprison, and later to execute the freedom fighters and those who assisted them.

In December 1956, a trusted friend tipped off my Father that he would soon be arrested. He had already been detained, questioned and released, and knew he was being watched. With both facing possible execution for their part in the Revolution, my parents made the painful decision to escape to Austria. Leaving everything behind and taking only one small suitcase, we took the train to the border town of Győr. We were sitting in a restaurant, waiting for the contact arranged for our escape, when Russian soldiers suddenly appeared in such numbers, that my parents decided it was too dangerous to go through with their plans. Later we learned that the train we had gotten off went on to break through the guard station at the border, and took all its passengers into Austria, whether they wanted to escape or not. Though we understood that this was a matter of life or death, the most heart-breaking thing for my sister and me was to leave our dog, Buksi, and we cried for him the whole time. So, when we could go back to him, we were glad.

Back again in Budapest, my Father's friend, who was a member of ÁVO, warned him again, that an order for his arrest was coming within days. They quickly made new plans, this time to escape to Yugoslavia. Again, like the first time, we left without saying goodbye to anyone. It was too dangerous for them as well as for us; it was better that no one knew. On January 29, 1957, we arrived at the border town of Baja, and according to the plans, set out on foot for the border around 10 p.m., in snow up to our knees, carrying only our small suitcase. We wandered for hours in the night, unable to find the designated crossing of a small river, our way lit only by the brightness of the deep snow in the fields. When we came upon a small hut, my Father peeked in the windows and was horrified to see Russian soldiers inside. Miraculously, they were inattentive and thus, unaware of our little family outside.

Guided by the church bells

It was cold, tiring and very hard to walk in the deep snow, especially for my sister and me, but we walked on and eventually came upon a farmhouse. My Father took a chance and roused the family inside. He begged them desperately, trying to convince the man of the house to lead us to the crossing. The man said he was being watched and had been suspected and already warned that his family would be killed if he were found to help anyone else across the border. The two Fathers talked as both families looked on; until the man's wife told him he must help my Father, for the sake of the children. He agreed to lead us part of the way to where we could find the crossing on our own.

When the man left us, we walked on as instructed and crossed the small river. But then we crossed the meandering river again. And again. Something was wrong. We could not tell now which side we were on, Hungary or Yugoslavia. (I learned recently that what I remembered as a river was probably the undulating water-laden trenches dug to mark the border.) We were all very cold and tired, when my Father saw lookout towers in the distance. After he determined they were unoccupied, he led us up the ladder of one tower for shelter and much-needed rest. Then we heard a church bell in the distance, and my Father noted the direction of the sound. My Mother had gone to school in Zombor in Yugoslavia, and remembered that the church bells were rung at 5 in the morning instead of 6 as in Hungary. So we waited for an hour, listening for the church bells again. When the bells rang again, my parents knew which direction we needed to take.

We soon set out with renewed energy and hope and suddenly saw houses in the distance. Dawn was breaking and bathed the little town ahead of us in pastel shades of pinks and yellows that reflected off the snow – it was an enchanting, surreal sight, like something from a story book. It was magical; that is how I remember it and still picture that morning in my mind's eye – a beautiful vision of our reaching freedom safely together. As the four of us walked into the town, a man on a hay wagon called out to us in Hungarian, "Jó reggelt!" – but seeing the terror on my parents' faces, he quickly reassured them we were, in fact, in Yugoslavia.

Over the next eight months, we lived in a number of camps in the then-communist Yugoslavia, twice facing the threat of being sent back, until eventually arrangements were successfully completed in August, 1957, to immigrate to the United States.

Life in Yugoslavia

As a child I was not burdened with the uncertainty and dangers of our situation in a neighboring communist country, or the negotiating and dealings that my parents were involved in with the local authorities on a daily basis for

food, shelter and transportation. My Mother spoke Serbian and my parents became spokesmen for the refugees in every camp we were in. These were difficult times for them both and for everyone around us.

I vividly remember the sadness and homesickness everyone felt around us, especially when we were in Belgrade, in a huge building with many cots, lined up in row after row. There was often the melancholy singing of songs, with one song in particular about missing one's homeland, expressing "honvágy" (homesickness). Years later I realized this was sung to the tune of the American song, "Memories are made of this." It should be remembered, that many of the refugees, the freedom fighters, were very young, some of them teenagers and some in their early twenties. Along with the feeling of sadness and loss for all that had happened and all that we left behind, seeing the sadness in my parents for the loss of their homeland hit my sister and me the hardest, for as young as we were, we understood.



The Szabó family (including Andrea) after they escaped across the border into Yugoslavia.

In this strange and uncertain time, the best thing for me was that we were all together. We felt safe, my sister and I, and I actually have some fond memories of our time in Yugoslavia. Some nights we had cream of wheat, my favorite, for dinner. We were allowed once to leave and visit a classmate of my Mother for a weekend in a beautiful house, where we had wonderful food. Some of our best times were in the old concentration camp in the mountains in a town called Gerovo. With a number of the young men who became friends of our family, we went on mushroom-hunting expeditions, and on those evenings we were rewarded with "gomba pörkölt," or mushroom stew, cooked outside over a fire. On one occasion we found a fairly large and rapid stream, and my sister and I rode the current repeatedly until someone waiting downstream would catch us. Two of the young men from the camp who ended up somewhere else in the States, years later came to visit us in Cleveland. They were the typical freedom fighters, "vagány srácok," "tough young lads," my Father called them.

And we got CARE packages. That was very special. I particularly remember the pink toothpaste that tasted like strawberries, and I secretly ate bits of it every chance I got. But we also got delicious candy bars sometimes, and sardines, a lot of sardines. For years after this, my Father lost his taste for sardines. Sometimes we went into town and saw movies. The most memorable was "Ulica," or "La Strada," which we cried through certain parts we saw when we didn't have our hands over our eyes. It's quite interesting that it affected my sister and me that way because we couldn't understand a word, as it was either in English or Italian and the subtitles were in Serbian, in the Cyrillic alphabet. We got special treatment for a little while when my sister became ill and spent time in the hospital. And we could walk out of the camp in Belgrade sometimes to get ice cream, which was delicious. The people in Yugoslavia, especially around the town of Gerovo, were generous and good to us, although they had so little themselves.

New lives in the United States

With all this behind us, we arrived in the United States, and were met by my Uncle in New York. He had two sons about the same age as my sister and I, and he welcomed us, his brother's family, with open arms. He took us home to Cleveland where we lived with his family for a few months. And so began our new lives in the United States.

As we arrived in late August, school soon began. My first day was uncertain, at best. When the teacher read all the names out, and everyone, except for me, was standing in the class, she figured out I must be the new little refugee child my Uncle had told them about. If it weren't for a little girl in my class who spoke broken Hungarian, I would have been lost. She became my first friend and introduced me to a bologna sandwich with mayonnaise on white bread. The soft bread stuck strangely to the roof of my mouth, and to this day that is the only way I can eat white bread.

My Mother quickly found a job working for a Hungarian man at a local laboratory. Because of the Latin base of medical terminology, it was easy for her to understand her work as a medical technologist. On the other hand, my Father had an awful time as a Hungarian lawyer. He could not practice law in the United States, and having two small children, he needed to be employed right away. He went to work first in my Uncle's gas station. Later, when my Mother began to work in the lab at Suburban Hospital, my Father got a job there as assistant to the pathologist, and without a degree or prior training, learned on the job and became proficient at dissecting and making slides of tissue samples. Eventually, he got a job in the Cuyahoga County Auditor's office where he worked until he retired. It was there he first worked with a young George Voinovich, later governor of and U.S. senator from Ohio, who became his life-long friend.

Finding a way to reconnect: Heritage Radio

The sadness I saw in my parents for having lost their homeland was particularly severe in my Father. He lost his career, his prestige, perhaps his dignity, his own family, his history, the city he loved, the Hungarian people and

his Hungarian way of life. He never truly recovered from it. His heavy accent in English made it difficult to convey to others the intelligent, well-read, highly educated man he really was, rather than just a foreigner with an accent. But he took life as it came and our small family and the home we eventually built became the world he cherished.

But when we first came to Cleveland, it didn't take him long to find an outlet for his pent-up desire to serve his Hungarian heritage. He went on the air on a local Hungarian radio program, first doing sports and news. Before long, he had his own program on WZAK, and under the name András Kapossy, he produced the Saturday Evening Hungarian Family Hour. In 1967 he coaxed my Mother to join him, and she became Kathy Kapossy. The program gave my Father the opportunity to revisit his beloved Hungary each week as he wandered in his imagination, taking his listeners along the streets of Budapest, visiting his favorite haunts, cafes and restaurants, scenes and places from his memories, playing Hungarian folk and gypsy music. The goal, my Father said, was to keep alive the feeling that we still belong to Hungary, and he not only fulfilled the need of his listeners, but also his own through keeping alive Hungarian memories as well as music.

My parents got to know many people in the Hungarian community through the radio program, and we attended many of the functions that the various organizations held, primarily the Hungarian Balls. There were many of them still in the late 1950's and early 1960's. As a matter of fact, I met my husband, Andrew Lázár, at the Anna Bál in June of 1964; he was a DP (displaced person) who came here with his family in 1949. He and all his Hungarian friends became my friends, and we all hung out at Lake Plata all summer. We all went to the Cserkész (Scouting) Picnics on Labor Day, and attended all the other Balls. These were beautiful, memorable Hungarian times and events.

Family traditions

When my Father passed away, my Mother continued his work on the radio by herself. She also took a more active role in the various Hungarian organizations. Eventually she became the president of the United Hungarian Societies for 19 years. She received every award bestowed by the various Hungarian organizations upon individuals in recognition for her work on behalf of her Hungarian heritage and furthering Hungarian culture in her many undertakings. She was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in 1998 – the only foreign-born woman to that time. She lived a rich and rewarding life, immersed in her Hungarian heritage to the last days of her life.

My Mother was responsible for involving my husband with the Cleveland Hungarian Heritage Museum, and he has been doing their exhibits since the first one in 1986. This has been a large part of our lives, enabling us to immerse ourselves in our Hungarian culture, share it with the community and ensure its preservation for future generations. And it continues within our own family including our daughter, Krisztina. Growing up in this environment, her Hungarian heritage and involvement in the Hungarian community are naturally a large part of her life. As for my sister, life took her in another direction. Although she moved away from any major Hungarian community, she has a rich and full life with her husband in Lexington, Kentucky, where the history and traditions of our family live on as deeply in her as they do in me.

The events of 1956 altered our lives irreversibly. My Father spoke often and with unbounded admiration and reverence of the "srácok," the heroic kids who fought in the streets of Budapest, but not about the details of their fighting or what part he himself had in it. That we never knew. Yet for both my sister and me, without knowing the details, just the emotions we felt from our Father, it is all just as much a part of us. Our homeland, our parents' Hungary, 1956, the escape, being a refugee, starting over – that is who we are; it defines us to this day. Interestingly, we seem to never be "at home:" when we are here in this country, we refer to Hungary as "home," and when we are visiting in Hungary, "home" is here in America. And that is the legacy my parents left me – as my Father put it, the feeling that we still belong to Hungary.



Andrea Lázár

Andrea Lázár is a CPA in private practice. Along with her husband, Andrew, she has been involved in a number of Hungarian organizations in Cleveland, most notably with the Cleveland Hungarian Heritage Society for which Andrew has served as the Director of Exhibits for 20 years. Together with her husband and occasionally her daughter, she continues the Kapossy Family Hungarian Hour on WCPN 90.3 FM.

Like her parents, she is on the air every week, continuing to bring the music, the stories and the events of her culture to the greater Cleveland Hungarian community.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



Coffins of fallen freedom fighters are gathered outside Corvin Passage

Dr. Alfonz Lengyel

RELEASED FROM PRISON IN TIME FOR THE REVOLUTION

On September 1, 1956, I was released from the prison of the communists. As I arrived at the train station in Budapest, my friend, Erwin Baktay, was on hand to meet me. From the station I went home to Szentkirályi Street. In front of our building, I ran into our former cook, who took one look at me and fled, terrified, making the sign of the cross. I ran after her. Though she did her best, her girth and age did not allow her to outrun me. I took hold of her arm and asked why she was afraid of me. "I'm Alfonz Lengyel," I said, "in the flesh." The cook's mouth turned purple; she shook with fear. Finally, she realized that I had not come to take her with me into heaven, where she wasn't ready to go yet.

She calmed down and learned that I had not died, and I was not a ghostly spirit pursuing her. She told me that my Father had died the previous Christmas, and only my stepMother lived alone in the apartment. She also told me the reason she had been so frightened at the sight of me: my Father had paid 1500 rubles in exchange for the information that I had been shot dead while trying to escape from prison. As it turned out, my poor Father had to pay for false information.

The next day I had to report to the police. They gave me two letters: one from the prison authorities, stating that I was obligated to pay them for the six years' worth of housing and food they had provided during my years of imprisonment. The other was from Dr. Laci Kardos, Director of the Hungarian National Museum — he informed me that I had a job as adjunct at the museum's folk art collection.

As soon as I got myself together, I went to the Museum, where Dr. Kardos, my former boss, greeted me with great affection. He had heard that I had not given in to my prison interrogators, and was happy to hire me in his museum. He assigned me a room full of books and said that I should, for the time being, just read and learn rather than work. While in prison, I had kept up my studies. As a way to keep myself alive, I was constantly reviewing my college and law school studies. But after the years of physical labor in the mines under horrific conditions, the respite at the museum was welcome indeed.

October 23

All of my museum co-workers — though they did not dare say the traditional "Isten hozott" (God be with you) greeting — were very gentle with me, sometimes patting my shoulder. One day, the Director telephoned me from out on the street. He told me not to leave the museum until he personally gives me the okay. The Secret Police and Ministry of the Interior had permitted the students to hold a demonstration at the Petőfi Statue, but he believed it was a trap — he expected the official policy to switch overnight from Stalinist communism to De-Stalinized communism. He reminded me that I had recently been let out of prison, and, as a former officer under Horthy, I was suspect. Even if the communists themselves are organizing their own revolutionary transformation, he said, they might still try to identify scapegoats to blame for the "Revolution."

An hour later, Kardos telephoned again. But this time, he was ecstatic: "Come, Alfonz," he said, "this is now OUR REVOLUTION!" By the time I made it from the Museum on Könyves Kálmán Avenue into the city, the student demonstrators were chanting their slogans in front of the Radio building. Since my Stepmother lived in a building just behind the Radio, I started off in that direction and saw the crowds. The first guns were fired. Those nearest the entrance of the Radio building ran inside, followed by a crowd, including me. I spent that night at my apartment on Szentkirályi Street.

I heard on the Radio that two major areas of conflict were at Corvin Köz and Moszkva tér. I started off in the direction of the communist book store, and there I saw people carrying the books out of the store and burning them in great piles. I recalled the many examples of book-burning throughout history. We had, naturally, always condemned book burning as a crime — yet now, somehow, I felt that these were not books being burnt, but rather instruments that took people's freedoms away; these books were the ideological instruments for keeping people enslaved. So I joined the crowd in burning the books.

We heard that smaller groups at the above locations clashed with armed security forces, and that political officers in civilian clothes were on the streets to report on developments, as well as to sow confusion among the freedom fighters. But practically the entire population joined the Revolution — even those who were communists, for many had joined the party under duress; others had realized they did not want this kind of communism. Many of these were like the communist I met at the prison hospital who had become a communist out of a belief in its ideals, but found it a dead end.

Of course, there were some workers from the Csepel part of the city who had been adherents of National Socialism, then — in 1945 — switched their allegiance to international communism. These, too, were disappointed, and so on October 23, 1956, they went out onto the streets to drive out the Soviet forces and their treacherous Hungarian communist lackeys.



"The struggle must continue. Don't give up your weapons while the Soviets are still here!"

Freedom

During a lull in the fighting, I joined the Ervin Papp group in founding the Association of Christian Hungarian Political Prisoners. I became the interim president. The Imre Nagy government even approved the founding documents of this organization. (I later took these documents with me to the United States, and when the World Association of Former Hungarian Political Prisoners was formed, I merged our own Christian Association with that one, and became the co-President of the new organization).

Meanwhile, Pál Pálinkás, a former classmate from the Military Academy, freed Cardinal Mindszenty from his prison cell and escorted him to his Residence. (Pálinkás' real family name was Count Pallavichini, but the communists did not approve of this title and made him change his name to Pálinkás. After the Revolution was crushed, Pálinkás was executed.)

Soon after, in connection with the show trial against Bishop Grosz, I took the Ervin Papp group up to Cardinal Mindszenty's office. The Cardinal greeted me as an old friend (he had once administered the last rites to me after a serious military injury in Veszprém; later, in 1948, he had helped me get a job at the Ministry of Religious and Educational Affairs). Mindszenty authorized me, together with the chaplain of Budapest's Rókus Hospital, to reorganize the Actio Catholika movement. We tried to do so over the next few days, but without success, because a collaborator priest, a remnant of the Rákosi era and head of the Actio Catholika, declared that Mindszenty is a nobody, and if we do not leave the premises immediately, he would call the State Security Police and have us removed. I told him he should call anyone he wants, but we would not leave. Then I began the job of going through the archives.

We returned to Mindszenty's office to report on our progress. Later that afternoon, I went down to the courtyard where, to my surprise, I saw my boss, Dr. Laci Kardos. He, too, was waiting to see Mindszenty. International journalists were coming and going; the Vienna-based Caritas aid organization was also conducting extensive discussions with Mindszenty's office. Dr. Kardos told me that Imre Nagy had sent him with a message to Mindszenty, asking him to encourage the Hungarian people to support the Imre Nagy government, which had already committed to announcing an election based on a multi-party democracy.

At that moment, I felt myself to be a participant in one of Hungary's great historic turning-points. I rushed into the office and pulled Mindszenty off to one side to give him Imre Nagy's message. He looked at me with those knowing eyes of his and replied that he had already written his radio address, and it would be just as Imre Nagy asked, for he – Mindszenty – was fully aware of the great responsibility weighing upon him as a spiritual leader of the Hungarian nation. He added – as he did later in his radio address – that his conscience was clear with respect to his activities under both the extreme right-wing regime and the communist regime, and owed no one any apologies. (Many people at the time were making public radio announcements “regretting” their actions that had caused suffering or death to millions of people.)

November 4

The ecclesiastical leader of Actio Catholika at the time asked me to come into his office on the morning of November 4, for he had changed his mind and wanted to hand over leadership of the organization to us. Needless to say, after I heard Imre Nagy's plea for help on the radio the next morning, I did not go to that office, for the same fate would have befallen me as befell Imre Nagy's Parliamentarians who were summoned to negotiate with the Soviets. As members of Parliament, they were protected by international law, yet they were killed anyway.

Kádár, who had been imprisoned under Rákosi, nevertheless agreed to take on Hungary's leadership according to the Soviet model. Initially, he was a minister in the Imre Nagy cabinet. He even announced that Hungary was now – for the first time in its history – truly free. Yet he proceeded to betray our Revolution and had his compatriots hanged.

For a little while after the Revolution was crushed, I continued to go to work at the Museum, but after learning that freedom fighters and the released political prisoners were being rounded up, I asked my boss, Dr. László Kardos, to help me escape to the West. Dr. Kardos did help; apart from his wife, no one knew that Kardos and his friend, Attila Szigeti, helped me get out to Austria.

Kardos's wife gave me a piece of paper with the name of a man in Vienna who was smuggling Hungarians across the border, and asked me – once I got out to Vienna – to have him bring a thank-you note back to Kardos and to Attila. I tossed the paper away and never made contact with the man. Nevertheless, a “thank you note” in my name arrived – which I had never written. Based on this forged note, Kardos, Attila and many others were arrested, some of them jailed and even hanged.

More than 40 years later, when the Soviet troops left Hungary, I went to Budapest on a visit – that's when I learned, from one of my former prisonmates, about the existence of this “thank you note.” Upon returning to the United States, I gave a declaration under oath at the Hungarian Embassy that, while in the West, I was never in any personal or written contact with any of the individuals who were arrested in connection with the forged note.

I placed a copy of this declaration in the official file on these cases. The declaration included my acknowledgement that while my statement could no longer help any of those who were arrested, it might serve to let future generations know how honest Hungarians were convicted or executed based on false and forged documents.

To the West

I left Budapest on December 13, 1956, and crossed the Hungarian border at Pamhage on December 24. I fell into the water, which then froze over my entire body. Locals found me lying unconscious in the snow; they took me home and called a doctor who beat the life back into me. I went on to Vienna, to the Caritas aid society, and told them that Mindszenty had authorized me to run the Actio Catholika movement in Budapest. They immediately put me to work as long as I was waiting to be assigned my next destination as refugee.

One day, a worker came to me in despair, saying a Hungarian girl had attempted suicide, and that I should talk to her. Naturally, I agreed. The girl told me that her fiance had just arrived in Vienna from the Melbourne Olympics, and the Austrian Government would only permit them to get married if she got written permission

from her parents. Her parents, however, were dead. At this, I offered to legally adopt her and give my permission for the marriage. I even organized a very nice wedding for them. The newlywed couple went on to the United States, where, after a short while, they were divorced. So much for love unto death. I never heard from them again.

One day I went to the U.S. Embassy in Vienna, where a long line of Hungarian refugees was waiting for immigration papers. While I was standing there, a tall, skinny Catholic priest called out to me. – “Alfonz, don’t you recognize me? I’m Imre Domjan from Miskolc. My Mother taught at the same school as your Aunt.” Imre (now Emerico) had gone to the West in 1933, then to study at the Vatican Gregorian Institute, where he was ordained a priest, then ended up in California. In short, the little kid I remembered had become a very tall, very thin priest. He told me he’d gotten funding from Bing Crosby to help a group of refugees come to the United States, and if I wanted to come, he’d put me on the list. I said yes, then got through my official immigration interview. The interview occurred in Hungarian, because the Consul, Dr. László Tihanyi, was born in Hungary, became an American diplomat, and was sent to Salzburg to conduct interviews with the Hungarian refugees bound for the United States (Interestingly, 16 years later he retired from the diplomatic service and became my colleague as a professor at Northern Kentucky University).

After Salzburg we were sent to Bremerhaven. From there, we boarded the military ship “General Walker” for a very long ocean journey memorable for diarrhea and vomiting. Finally we arrived, through the Port of New York, to the Promised Land...



Dr. Alfonz Lengyel, RPA

A graduate of the Ludovika Military Academy, Dr. Lengyel also earned a law degree in Hungary. He earned his doctorate at the Sorbonne Institute for Art History and Archeology (Paris). He is a retired American university professor. During the 1956 Revolution, Lengyel founded the the Association of Christian Hungarian Political Prisoners. At present, he is the U.S. Director for the Sino-American Field School of Archaeology.

Béla Lipták

A RESPONSE TO IMRE NAGY'S GRANDDAUGHTER...

In January 2005, the Hungarian daily newspaper, Népszabadság, published an article by Katalin Jánosi, Imre Nagy's granddaughter, who described her reaction to a recent film by Márta Mészáros, "The Unburied Dead."

Katalin Jánosi was a small child when she witnessed the tragedies which befell her Grandfather and Father, and looks back onto those years which affected her greatly and which impelled her to follow an "inward oriented life." In the article, she expresses her firm objections to the film, because it approaches the sufferings of Imre Nagy between 1956-58 not as a documentary, but as a feature film; also, because there is practically no mention of the sufferings endured by Imre Nagy's associates who suffered a common fate. "I would have liked the bells to toll not just for my Grandfather, Imre Nagy, but for his companions too," writes Katalin Jánosi.

In this writing, Béla Lipták reflects upon Katalin Jánosi's thoughts and opinions.

On the statement by Imre Nagy's granddaughter...

It's hard to begin writing this, because for me it is still very strange to consider Népszabadság as a forum for my writings. The last time I held an issue of this newspaper's forerunner was on the night of October 23, 1956, while waiting for Imre Nagy to appear. Then, too, I needed the newspaper only to serve as a torch on the darkened square in front of the Parliament.

But the deeply affecting statement by Imre Nagy's granddaughter, Katalin Jánosi, impels me to write. I could imagine, and it is a disturbing picture indeed, how a 4-year-old little girl must have felt as she learned about life – not playing with dolls, but rather having to see her Mother cry for days on end, and seeing the snarling guard dogs of the Romanian soldiers. I can well understand that after such a childhood, she chose a life of internal exile, a solitary existence for a lifetime. I hope that every small Hungarian Katalin will learn to understand that their Fathers were told to remain silent about anything they cannot talk about without crying. Ferenc Jánosi, Katalin's Father, was only obeying this rule when he remained silent about his own and his Father-in-law's torture, and remained silent about the fact that the blackmailers could force a "confession" from them only by threatening to murder their wives and children.

But I want to say something else, too, which little girls who were only 4 years old in 1956 could not have seen or understood: that people like Imre Nagy, Ferenc Jánosi, Mr. Szabó and István Angyal – with their heroic stance and at the cost of their lives - dealt a death blow to the communist behemoth, and it was they who launched the most important trend of the 20th century: humanity's common fight for the freedom of each individual human being.

35 days

Like Katalin's Father, I did not talk about certain things – not even to my children. For example, about Marika, who died of wounds from a Soviet tank in the Revolution's defense of Móricz Zsigmond Square. Marika, just before she lost consciousness, whispered into my ear, which I had moved next to her mouth: "I have a little candy in my pocket, help yourself!" Or about Jancsi Danner, whose life I could have saved, if I had known how to shoot a gun, but I didn't know how - I didn't tell my children about that, either. The first time in my life that I really had an inkling of what death means was when Jancsi's shoes had fallen off, and I tried to force them back onto his feet, which had already gone stiff, and of course I didn't succeed. Both of them were my friends; I was next to them when they died; and they remain with me today – their memory is part of my every thought, but even today I cannot talk about them.

When your friend dies in your arms, you are changed for good. In my case, I have carried the memory of Jancsi and Marika since the age of 20. And with this memory I carry a feeling of guilt – after all, we all had the same dream, yet only they died for it. I survived the fighting, and fled. I mention this guilt not to complain – for me, it is sometimes a source of energy, which is often useful because it is combined with optimism. It is this optimism which I want to share with the Katalins of Hungary, who feel that our nation is living in an era of pessimism and self-destruction, a nation incapable of finding strength in the memory of the heroic days of 1956 – that we are incapable of finally coming to terms with our common past. But I do not believe this is the case.

During those dramatic days in 1956, I ate at the table of perfect strangers, slept as a guest in the homes of perfect strangers without ever having to spend the 20 forints in my pocket, because no one would accept any payment. I crossed the border into Austria with that 20-forint note in my pocket, because during the 35 days of the Revolution, no one would accept a penny! In every Hungarian house in the country, my tricolored armband was enough payment, and enough to make me a member of the family.

The memory of those 35 days made me an optimist for life. That experience showed me how brave, self-sacrificing and patriotic the average Hungarian person could be. In a healthy society, the average person is capable of serving as an excellent resource, an excellent building block if he believes in the country's leaders and in the goal toward which the nation is striving. Even today – despite recent setbacks in Hungary's political life – I am an optimist, because I know that the blood of Jancsi, of Marika, of those families who hosted me a half-century ago, could not have turned to water in their children and grandchildren! I know that the spiritual destruction that my homeland has undergone can be healed. I know that the communist system attempted to exterminate community spirit, self-confidence and patriotism from our children and grandchildren, but they attempted this in vain, because statements such as those by Katalin Jánosi do not allow, cannot allow them to succeed!

Yes, it is true that still missing from our textbooks are not just the spirit of 1956, but also the writings of such great philosophers and statesmen as István Bibó and Ferenc Deák. I know that Hungary has yet to come to terms with its past, has yet to complete a true change in the system. But I also know that Rome was not built in a day, either, and that the United States has not always followed John F. Kennedy's wise advice: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country!" I believe that the Hungarian nation, as it stands today, will indeed be able to come to terms with its past, will be capable of healing the spiritual wounds inflicted by the communist past – after all, their forebearers were capable of much more.

A young freedom fighter shows her Hungarian pride

Photo courtesy of the International Rescue Committee



Donations at the Writers' Association

How many nations can say that boxes filled with donated money stood unguarded on the streets of their capital at the Writers' Association headquarters? Is there any other city in the world where such a thing is imaginable? Is there any other city where the widow counted out the cost of a coffin and removed that amount, 600 or 800 forints, from the donation boxes without anyone to oversee the transaction, even as the donated banknotes continued to fall into the boxes like falling autumn leaves? No, only the people of Budapest can say this, only the Katalin Jánosis of this world can say this about the capital city of their Fathers!

At the same time, there is a genuine need for reconciliation! There is a real need for the grandchildren of prisoners sent to Romania and to the forced labor camp of Recsk, and for the grandchildren of their prison guards, for the descendents of those tortured and of those who tortured them, to finally leave the past behind and work together in peace to build a better Hungarian future. The Katalin Jánosis of this world have good reason for optimism, because this reconciliation is easily attained, but it does have some conditions. In order for society to forgive the prison guards and the Secret Police, we don't need revenge; we need no Nuremberg trials or public hangings; we only need that the perpetrators ask pardon of the nation. That, however, is an absolute necessity.

When the Hungarian Green Party nominated me to run against Gyula Horn as a candidate, I ran into Mr. Horn in Somogy County. He reached out his hand, but I could not bring myself to shake it. I saw in his eyes that he was offended, but I saw no sign that he understood what he owes – not to me, but to his entire nation! Whoever does not ask forgiveness, who does not admit the wrong he has done, who defends the actions of the Secret Police and would sweep the murder of Jancsi Danner and others like him under the rug of history as mere “events” – cannot be forgiven.

The other necessary step, which has already been taken in several neighboring countries, is to make public the reports of the Secret Police from years past. A healthy society must be clear on its own past; only if it knows and accepts its past can a society turn its attention to the future. Everyone must know who the informant was in his apartment building; they must know what and to whom the informant submitted his reports; and they must know also that the informant himself is responsible for his crimes – not his party, nor his religious or ethnic background, nor his children or grandchildren, but he himself. Our society as a whole must realize that spying or treason are not the acts of a right-wing or left-wing person, they are neither conservative nor liberal acts – they are simply sins, for which individuals are responsible.

I believe that the soul of the Hungarian nation will be cured of the disease with which communism infected it; that the Hungarian nation will be able to close the past chapter of its history, put an end to the finger-pointing among its members and to the partisan bickering which paralyzes any possibility for national unity. When this – genuine – change of system has taken place, and when it has become evident that the former spies and secret police are to be found in every one of the current political parties, then society will also understand that a person is not a traitor because he is conservative or liberal, but because he is a despicable human being. Only then will Hungarian young people have new role models, such as Ferenc Jánosi.

Broken store windows

Let's consider the stores whose windows were shattered as a result of the fighting during the Revolution, and the untouched inventory which no one thought to loot. Isn't it incredible that, during those days, no one believed that looting and stealing was more important than preserving the nobility of the revolutionary cause? Isn't it incredible that darkness fell upon the city streets, yet when the population got up the next morning, the items in the stores were still there, untouched? Is there any other nation in the world capable of such unity and self-control? Or let's consider the horse-carts brought in to the city from the countryside, from which farmers passed out free food to those fighting on the streets of the capital. If our Fathers could behave like that, then why would it not be possible for today's Hungarian society to join together and heal the spiritual wounds inflicted on them by the twentieth century?

Of course it is possible. After all, the spirit of the Hungarian Revolution was not quenched even after the heroic days of 1956 were over. This spirit prevailed on June 16, 1958, when we in New York learned that Kádár and his government murdered Katalin Jánosi's Grandfather, as well as Pál Maléter, Miklós Gimes, Géza Losonczy, József Szilágyi and Mr. Szabó, and were soon to murder István Angyal and Péter Mansfeld. In response, a group of us in New York attempted to occupy the Permanent Mission of the Soviet Union to the United Nations on Park Avenue and to establish the Free Hungarian Government there. This representative body would have been headed by Anna Kéthly, the only member of Imre Nagy's government at the time who was in the West. The New York Police foiled our plans, and I ended up in jail.

Katalin Jánosi and today's Hungarian youth should know that in that jail cell, along with me and my brother Péter, was Gyurka Lovas who, upon hearing the news of the execution of Imre Nagy and his associates, climbed up the Soviet Union's flagpole in front of the United Nations building, tore the Soviet flag down with his bare hands, then fell several stories onto the cement below. In the same jail cell with us was Csanád Tóth, whose journalist Father was executed for daring to research and report on how József Mindszenty's interrogators were able to extract a statement from him – you see, Katalin, anyone(!) can be forced to give a statement! Later, Csanád Tóth became an official of the U.S. State Department; in 1978, together with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, he brought the Crown of St. Stephen back to Hungary.

Katalin Jánosi ought also to know that not only István Angyal, executed at the same time as her Grandfather, was Jewish. Béla Fábián, who survived the labor camp at Recsk and later, as President of the Association of Hungarian Political Prisoners, posted bail for us in New York, was also Jewish. This is relevant, because the communists, though covertly, did fan the flames of anti-Semitism. One reason they let Mátyás Rákosi and Gábor Péter take power in the Hungarian Communist Party was so that the people would blame not the communists, but rather “the Jews” for the Party’s crimes. The Communists also did not fail to note that there were many “Jewish secret police” at the Recsk camp, but they did not mention that many of the Hungarian anti-communists at Recsk were also Jewish! The communist party papers were similarly silent about the fact that the Auschwitz survivor István Angyal, the heroic leader of the Tűzoltó Street freedom fighters in 1956 later executed by Kádár’s secret police, was also Jewish.

The future

I am optimistic about the future; after all, the country is now free, and today Katalin Jánosi’s generation, and their children, can read this article in the Népszabadság newspaper. Now we only need to vanquish our own selves to ensure that the Hungarian nation undergoes a healing process. For this, we must put a stop to our self-destruction and Internecine fighting, and instead, use our talents the way we did for 1000 years: to be a leader in Central Europe.

I know that the Hungarian nation is capable of this – whose sons not only dealt a death blow to communism, but also brought atomic power and computers to the human race. I know that this nation will finally be capable of uniting and working for the national good. I know that the society of Katalin Jánosi is capable of this – after all, their Fathers and Grandfathers were capable of much more. I know, viewing Hungarian history in perspective, that the past 15 years represents the briefest of time periods. What are these 15 years compared to our crushing defeats at the hands of the Mongols, the Turks, and the Russian and Austrian forces in 1848? We not only survived the Mongols, Turks and Austrians, our defeats were followed by outstanding statesmen who could build upon the tremendous strength of the Hungarian nation.

I not only believe – I know – that when our consciousness has absorbed the tragedies of the twentieth century, when the spiritual wounds of communism and fascism have healed, and when the nation has reconciled with itself and again forged a unity among the spiritually and physically separated parts of the nation, then we too will follow the example of our greatest statesmen – we too can create great things. This is within reach: we ourselves need only believe that our grandchildren’s future depends upon us, and that this country really does belong to us! That is why we must take note of statements like that of Katalin Jánosi; that is why we must vote; and that is why we must, with wisdom and patience, elect as a national leader a great statesman in the best Hungarian tradition.



Béla Lipták

In 1956, Béla Lipták was one of the drafters of the Revolution’s “16 Points” (demands), and is now engaged in ensuring that a memorial to these 16 Points be erected for the Revolution’s 50th anniversary. In the U.S., he taught at Yale University and wrote 26 technical textbooks (three of the prefaces were written by Edward Teller). Today Lipták is researching the technical requirements for an economy based on hydrogen-based energy.

Béla Lipták published his memories of the 1956 Revolution in a book whose Hungarian title is “35 Nap” (35 Days); the English edition is entitled “A Testament of Revolution.”

Paul Maléter

CHILD OF THE FIVE YEAR PLANS



Maléter in 1956

Much of Hungary's twentieth century history – both tragic and inspiring – is reflected in the complex story of the Maléter family.

Paul Maléter's parents, Mária and Pál, came from families who knew each other well in the city of Kassa (Kosice), that was part of Hungary until 1920, then of Czechoslovakia, and today, is in Slovakia. They met in the terrible aftermath of World War II, when Mária's family property was confiscated by communists, but she luckily managed to escape after being arrested. A friend recommended she turn for help to Pál Maléter, a young commander of the Hungarian Frontier Guards, located in Debrecen, Hungary. Upon her arrival, Pál Maléter found housing for Mária, offered her a job, and they soon fell in love. In August, 1945, they got married and started their life together in the largely destroyed city of Budapest, where inflation was rampant, food was in serious shortage, and people's lives were in danger from marauding Soviet soldiers.

Pál was transferred to Vác, and since Mária was pregnant, he urged her to go to her Mother in the relative safety of Szeged, where she gave birth to Paul in June, 1946. They soon moved to Vác, so the family could be together. The next years were filled with happiness, as two daughters,

Mária and Judit, joined the family. Pál proved to be an attentive and loving Father. With his professional advancement, however, came frequent transfers, and in 1950 the Maléter family moved back to Budapest.

Strong communist pressure

In the 1950's the worst days of Stalinist Soviet rule descended on Hungary. The communists demanded total loyalty to the party line, and Pál Maléter's military career and growing co-operation with the communists began to take a serious toll on the Masters' marriage. Mária's Mother, who lived with the family, and who was the niece of Cardinal Lőrincz, was a special thorn in the communists' side.

Pál's initial attraction to communism began in 1942, when during a time of capture and injury on the Russian Front, to his great surprise, he found his Russian keepers to be unexpectedly kind. His Father, a law professor with Socialist beliefs, was strongly anti-German. Pál was subjected to propaganda lectures by Hungarian communists, and soon distinguished himself by volunteering for dangerous "partisan" missions working with the Russians to free Hungary of Nazi occupation. He believed that a better future awaited Hungary under Soviet rule than under the Nazis.

On the other hand, Mária, whose family members were conservative and deeply religious Catholics, was unable and unwilling to accept communist tenets. Consequently, in the eyes of the communist hierarchy, unless she could be "re-educated," she was a liability for her husband's fast-advancing career. The Maléters, as many others, were under constant surveillance, and Pál had to prove his loyalty to the party time and again.

At age five, young Paul was sent to Rábatamási, to stay on a farm for the summer. He recalls getting a series of short-lived "jobs" – with a gypsy merry-go-round operator for the price of an ice cream cone, and with the local farmer as a cow-herd and ox-cart driver.

In the spring of 1953, party pressure grew on Pál, and he left his family. After attempting a short reconciliation, Mária and Pál were divorced in 1954. The daughters stayed with their Mother, but as was customary in Hungary, Pál got custody of the first-born son, eight year-old Paul, for a short while. After a successful fight in the courts to get Paul back, Mária and the children were on their own, and they faced two years of severe hardships. Once her beloved Mother died, Mária was forced to deal with her children's and her own serious bouts with illness, standard living conditions, and systematic intimidation by the communist authorities, in the form of forced settlement of inappropriate strangers into the Maléter apartment.

Paul Maléter was only ten years old at the time, but he remembers October 23, 1956, quite vividly. Next door to the Maléters' apartment, freedom fighters broke into the Marcibányi Square armory to obtain rifles and ammunition. He recalls seeing dead bodies of victims on the sidewalks, both Hungarian and Russian. He observed children first spreading jam on the window of a Russian tank, then throwing a Molotov cocktail down the hatch when the driver emerged. Because his Mother locked Paul into the apartment to keep him away from danger, he had to content himself with making leaflets with revolutionary slogans, "Drive Out the Russians," "The Russians Are Bad, Don't Believe Them," and throwing them down to the street.

Pál Maléter's true character revealed

When news spread all over Budapest of an extraordinarily brave Hungarian colonel, who refused to follow his superior's order to fire on freedom fighters, and instead, chose to join them, Mária Maléter instinctively knew and told her children this brave colonel was surely their Father. She recalled what Pál Maléter had told her years before, when she questioned his patriotism: "Don't worry, Mária, when the time comes, I will be where I belong."

And Pál Maléter was a man of his words: he placed tanks inside and at the entrance of the Kilián Barracks, and repelled all Russian attempts to capture it. In the newly formed Imre Nagy government, Lt. General Pál Maléter was named the new Minister of Defense. He spoke on the radio, calling on citizens to return to work and a normal life: "We must ensure milk for our children, coal for our factories, regular transportation for our workers...". His children felt their Father was speaking directly to them. Paul wrote a letter telling his Father how proud he and his sisters were of him, "because you are a great hero and are fighting on our side." But he also expressed the bewilderment of a child of a broken family when he wrote: "Where were you when we called you and you didn't come?"

On November 3rd an old friend and colleague of Pál Maléter from Vác came to see Mária, with a message that Pál was well, and would come to see the family soon. But that same evening, he fell victim to an oft-used Soviet trap: invited to negotiate at Soviet military headquarters, instead, he was arrested and never returned from the meeting.

He never received his son's letter, nor did he ever see his family again.

Illustration by Ferenc Bitó



In front of the Kilián Barracks on October 25

Escape from Hungary

After Soviet tanks re-entered Hungary on November 4th, the Maléter family was in grave danger, as their apartment was in the area of the worst fighting. The roof of the building had been destroyed by a tank. They spent days in the neighboring building's basement to keep safe. Maria was urged by friends to leave Hungary as soon as possible, and on November 21, an opportunity for escape was offered to her. Since her daughter, Judit, was ill with the flu, she was forced to leave her with friends, and set off at dawn with Marika and Paul to reach the food truck that would take them to Yugoslavia. (Judit was able to join the family a month later).

Dressed in multiple sets of clothing, the three were hidden in the back of the truck and driven to Zalaegerszeg. Once, they came perilously close to being discovered and turned back by a road patrol, but a Hungarian soldier pretended not to see them under the tarpaulin, and they continued their journey. After taking a train to reach Sopron, at nightfall they embarked on the perilous journey crossing on foot into Austria.

Paul was first taken in by his Mother's cousins in Germany, who wanted to adopt him.

His Mother and sisters were in a camp in Austria, and eventually Maria chose to keep the family together and settle them all in Canada. They flew to the far-away land, and Paul remembers his shock at seeing purplehaired ladies with rhinestone glasses at the airport. Once they arrived at a Canadian refugee camp, Paul saw cold cereal for the first time, and couldn't understand why they were being fed breadcrumbs with milk on it. In Canada the Maléters lived with a French family on a lake. Paul remembers his Mother helping out with housekeeping, but also the good times with "fancy boats," and costume parties held there.

In October 1957, Mária was invited by the International Rescue Committee to speak at the U.N. in New York on behalf of her husband and the other captured government officials. She worked tirelessly to try to get her former husband released from Soviet captivity, but to no avail.

The trip to the U.N., however, enabled her to take her children to the U.S. on a temporary visa. His sisters were put in a boarding school in Philadelphia run by Hungarian nuns, and Paul was soon enrolled in the Buffalo Hungarian Piarist School. After 1958, when his Father was executed, the school would not renew his scholarship, but, Maria had found close friends in James Finan and Walter Mahony, editors at the Reader's Digest, which was interested in the family's story, and who assisted them to settle in New York and arranged for the children to attend schools with their children. A special act of Congress gave the family green cards, backdated to June 16, 1958, the day of Pál Maléter's execution. In January 1959, the Reader's Digest published Mária's feature story on Pál Maléter, "Hungary's Proud Rebel."

Paul leads an American life

The contact Paul previously had with Hungarians stopped. He attended exclusive American boarding schools, and lived a largely American life. He spent six years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, and his studies at Columbia University led to a fine career in hospital architecture, including over 20 years with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Paul first returned to Hungary in 1983, accompanying his wife who was a U.S. delegate to an international conference in Budapest. While it would have been embarrassing for the Hungarian government to deny them visas, Paul's was only issued at the last minute before their departure, and was loosely paper clipped in his American passport – leaving open the possibility that it could be removed at any time. At official conference functions, with his name badge highly visible, Paul found government officials' reactions to be cool at best, and the suite they were provided in the Hyatt Hotel had some very suspicious cabling running under the bed and into the wall. When returning six years later for the dramatic ceremonies around the re-burial of his Father and the other members of the Nagy government, Paul's visa was still on a separate piece of paper, but this time the Hungarian Embassy staff in Washington apologized profusely, and the reception in Budapest was warm and welcoming.

Paul and his wife have subsequently made numerous visits to his many family members remaining in Hungary. His Mother and two sisters live in Florida, and have also returned to Hungary in the years since 1989. He has retained his knowledge of Hungarian remarkably well, and has established friendships with the Hungarian diplomatic corps in Washington. He is immensely proud of his Father's historic role in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, and looks forward with great anticipation to participating in the upcoming 50th anniversary commemorations.

As told by Paul Maléter to Edith Lauer



Paul Béla Maléter, AIA Emeritus

Paul Maléter is an architect, recently retired after a career designing, planning and building hospitals for the Department of Veteran's Affairs and the Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Born in Szeged in 1946, raised in Budapest, he left Hungary at the age of 10 in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution and the arrest of his Father, the Minister of Defense. After living briefly in Austria, Germany and Canada, he emigrated to the U.S. where he attended The Harvey School, The Hotchkiss School and Columbia University, obtaining a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts, a Masters Degree in Architecture, and a Master of Science in Health Services Planning and Design. Maléter served in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves from 1965-1971. Paul is now retired, and lives with his wife in Central Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Tamás Markovits

I MISSED THE SHOOTING AT THE RADIO BECAUSE OF HOMEWORK I NEVER HANDED IN

My address in Budapest was Petőfi Sándor utca 6. In 1956 I was 14 years old, and had just started high school at the Közgazdasági Technikum. On Tuesday, October 23, I got home from school at about 2 p.m. and intended to do my homework right away in order to have some free time in the evening. No one was home, but I found a note from my Grandmother asking me to pick up something at the grocery store. So I ran down 5 flights of stairs and walked through the long, dark hallway to our building entrance and there, mesmerized, I stopped. I could not believe what I was seeing!

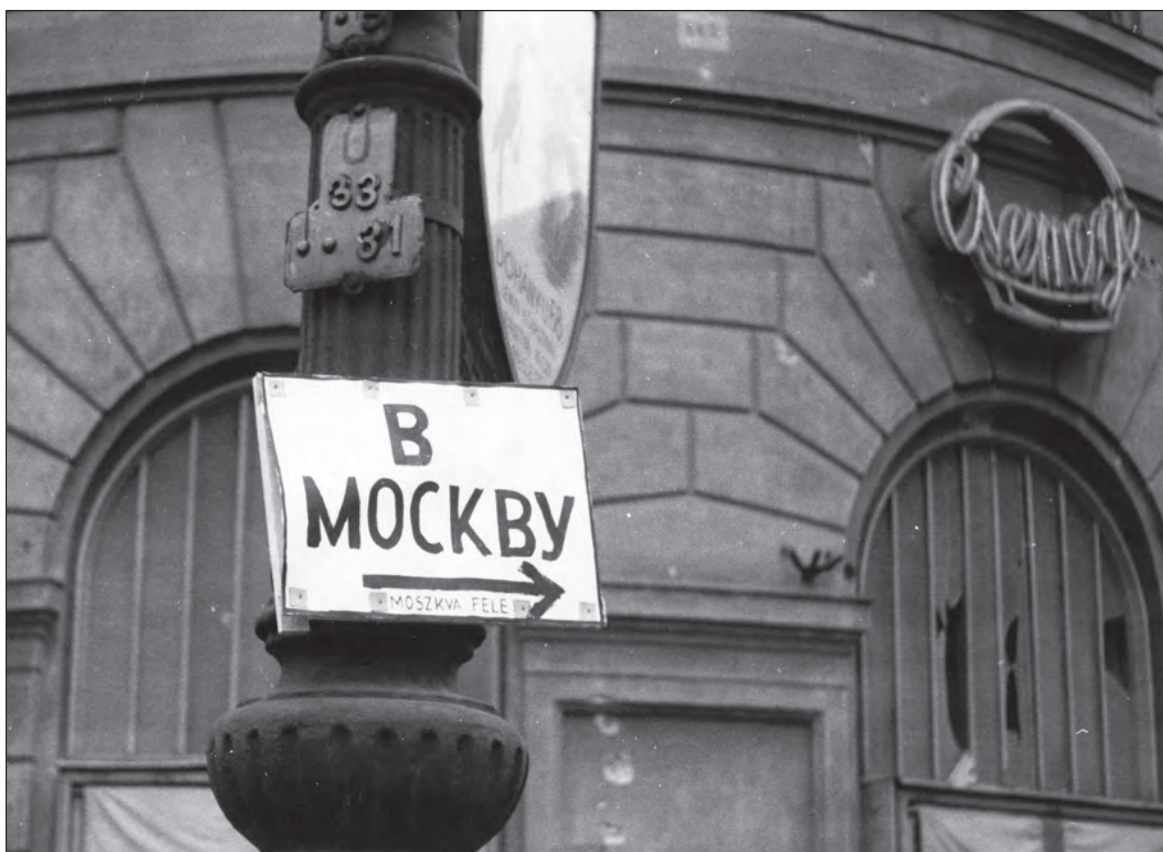
Our narrow street was jammed with people, from one side to the other. They were marching in rows as far as I could see. Demonstrating! They were carrying signs, "RUSSKIS GO HOME! – WE WANT IMRE NAGYI – WE DEMAND INDEPENDENCE!" I stood there, numb, with goosebumps spreading over my entire body. And then an extreme feeling of pride overtook me. My handful of people, my tiny nation, my little Hungary, has the guts to do this? To demand freedom? To stand up against a SUPERPOWER? Why, the city of Moscow has more people than all of Hungary, I thought.

Huge crowd

Slowly, I regained my senses and joined the demonstrators. We ended up on Petőfi Square in front of the beloved poet/hero's statue. At least I was lucky to end up in front, because the adjoining two squares all the way to the Danube's shore were packed with people. All the trees were occupied; people even climbed up onto lampposts and the sills of lower windows. A well-known popular actor recited Petőfi's fiery poem "RISE UP, HUNGARIAN!" (Talpra, Magyar!) and the crowd went wild! Every Hungarian knows this poem by heart and at the end of each stanza they thundered the refrain: "For by the Hungarians' God above we swear, we truly swear, the tyrant's yoke no more to bear!" It was an incredible feeling to hear thousands of voices in unison repeat each refrain. There were no loudspeakers, no amplification apparatus, yet the farthest individual knew what was being said. If they couldn't hear it, they could certainly feel it!

Next, a delegation of students from the Technical University read their "14 Points," which dealt with demands for independence and freedom for Hungary, followed by a couple of patriotic speeches. This was when someone cut the much-hated communist emblem from our tricolor flag and held it high for all to see, and in a short while, all the

Jenő Virág, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



Moscow is that way

flags had the symbolic hole. Someone mentioned the ongoing struggle in Poland and it was decided to go to the General Bem statue (Gen. Bem was a Polish national who fought on the side of Hungary in 1848) on the other side of the Danube. We all marched to Buda to Bem Square. There it was a repeat of what happened on Petőfi Square, but after the students' "14 Points" were read, it was decided the crowd should go to the state-controlled Radio station and read them on the air for the whole nation to hear. By now it was getting dark, and I remembered that I had homework to do. So I went home without ever buying the groceries I was supposed to. Even my Grandmother forgot about it.

Consumed by the event

We were consumed by the events of the day. I didn't go to the Radio because of homework. Little did I know, that there would be no school the next day or the day after, or for me, ever again in Hungary. Around 10 p.m. we thought we heard gunfire coming from the direction of the Radio station. At 11, my Mother came home, and since she was on a streetcar that traveled by the Radio station, she confirmed that indeed there was gunfire there. (A friend whom I later met here in the United States was shot in the knee there.) I missed going there because of homework I never handed in.

We woke early the next day, and witnessed members of the ÁVO (Secret Police) in their trench coats, stopping people in front of our building. They were on both sides of the street in two groups, frisking people, and if they found weapons on someone, one of them would hold those persons at machine-gun point. This went on until they had about a half a dozen detainees, and then marched them off down on Harris Street. A few minutes later we heard automatic weapons fire. Later I found out that freedom fighters killed the ÁVO policemen and freed their prisoners.

Sporadic fighting broke out all over Budapest, but there were certain areas of sustained battles that had the all-out earmarks of a war. I spent the next two weeks walking all over the city witnessing fighting, the aftermath, and the execution of much-hated ÁVO members. I even took pictures. One memorable example of bravery I encountered was the hand-to-hand combat between a young freedom fighter and a Russian soldier at the side exit of the Ady movie theater, until a Soviet tank went by and killed both of them. Overall, the Revolution seemed to succeed. We were elated. Hungary reveled in its freedom. But it didn't last long.

National Anthem on the radio

On November 4th, it was over. I woke up around 4 a.m. The radio was on and it kept playing the National Anthem. And it kept playing it repeatedly, over and over. I sensed that something was wrong. It was the most sinking, depressing feeling I ever had. About 6 a.m. Prime Minister Imre Nagy made the announcement that Russian troops were returning to our country. It was over! This was the end. We were all alone. Abandoned by the rest of the world.

On November 22, I left my home with my Uncle and his wife. On December 29th I arrived in Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, and on January 7th, in Detroit, Michigan. Nearly 50 years have passed, but the proudest day of my life is still October 23, 1956, when my Hungarian people dared to make an impossible stand, and the saddest is November 4, 1956, when the free world abandoned them.

I would define the spirit of 1956 as Hungary being a David against an army of Goliaths. What I would like to see taught and passed down to future generations about the Revolution is that Hungary put a huge crack in the Soviet Bloc. 1956 was the beginning, and their handling of the East German situation in 1989 was the end of Soviet domination. Without a question Hungary was responsible. Let the world give us the much-deserved recognition. The Revolution altered my life inasmuch as I left and lived the rest of my life as an American.

Tamás Markovits

Born in 1942, Tamás Markovits now lives in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and has been to Hungary twice since his escape. He has been the owner of a floor covering business for 30 years. Markovits will take part in the commemoration for the 50th anniversary of the Revolution and is raising funds for the documentary "Torn from the Flag." He is currently president of the Hungarian Arts Club of Detroit and is also a member and past president, vice president and treasurer of the Hungarian American Cultural Center of Taylor, Michigan. For 20 years he either helped with or produced the "1956" and the "1848" commemorations.

Leslie László Megyeri

ODE TO A HUNGARIAN FREEDOM FIGHTER



Megyeri in military uniform in 1956

He was a teenager, who lived in Budapest during the fateful days of October, 1956. He attended gymnasium in Kispeszt and studied hard to be a good student.

He despised the communists for their godless ways and their hate of Hungarian customs and traditions. He hated still more the occupying Soviet Army who terrorized the population since 1945.

He feared the Secret Police who tortured Hungarians just because they voiced the wish to be free. He hated traveling across town to attend church on Sundays to avoid recognition by the local police and subsequent punishment for worshipping.

He read history books of the heroism of Hunyadi and Kossuth. He often recited the Petőfi poem that states, "Stand up Hungarians – Your country is calling, the question is "Do you want to be slave or free?"

He attended the funeral of László Rajk on October 6, 1956, when 200,000 stood in the cold, soaking rain and shrieking winds to pay their respect for the victim of terror.

On October 23rd, with many other students, he gathered in front of the Bem statue in Buda to support the Polish rebellion against the communist regime. That same day, he demonstrated in front of the Hungarian Radio building when shots were fired at the peaceful demonstrators by the police.

He marched to the front of Parliament on the eve of October 23rd with 200,000 others who heard the reformer, Imre Nagy, speak to the assembled.

At fifteen years of age, he followed his Father and took up arms to fight the communists and the Russian occupiers. Miraculously, the Russians withdrew, and the Hungarian Army disarmed. He was jubilant that freedom triumphed.

Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection



A tank rounds the corner...

He witnessed the complete collapse of the Hungarian communist regime and the withdrawal of Russian occupiers. But he wondered why the Free World was focused on the closure of the Suez Canal and the British and French conflict with the Egyptians.

He believed the rumors that the Russians were amassing new forces to return and crush the newfound freedom. And he trusted Radio Free Europe when they announced that help was on its way.

He again witnessed the attacks by Soviet tanks on a foggy, damp and frosty Sunday morning, November 4. By firing his rifle, he tried his best to stop the tanks from rolling to the center of Budapest on the main road leading from Ferihegy, Budapest's airport.

He was among the 10,000 Freedom Fighters who had no chance of winning against the overwhelming Soviet ground troops and their tanks. But he was lucky not to be among the 3,000 dead and 20,000 wounded who fought so desperately for independence. And, fortunately, he was not among the 20,000 individuals condemned, of whom 229 were executed, by the Kádár regime.

Instead, he was among the 200,000 Hungarians who fled to Austria and freedom. He was welcomed by the democratic world and thus, he had found his answer to Petőfi's question,

"Do you want to be a slave or free?"

He came to America and found freedom and happiness. His independent and patriotic spirit was renewed in his new country. Fifty years have elapsed, but that Hungarian Freedom Fighter is still alive and strong today.

I am that Freedom Fighter!



Leslie László Megyeri

Both a CPA and an attorney, László Megyeri currently serves as treasurer of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America, a fraternal life insurance company in Washington, D.C. He is also a retired U.S. Army Reserve Colonel and graduated from the U.S. Army War College. He and his wife Kathy Megyeri live in Washington, D.C.

The story of his wife, Kathy Megyeri, can be found on page 195.

Thomas P. Muhl

MY JOB WAS TO PAINT PORTRAITS OF LENIN AND STALIN

It has been 50 years since Russian tanks crushed the dream of a free Hungary. But it has not been long enough to forget.

I was an artist. My job was to paint larger-than-life portraits of Lenin and Stalin. That wasn't so bad. In fact, I was almost content with my lot. But then the Russians came back, and I had to paint sores on my wife's face to keep her from being raped by the soldiers.

It was then I decided to leave Hungary.

That decision has haunted me ever since.

It was 1956. On the streets of Budapest, the euphoria had disappeared with the smoke. Now fresh Russian troops – soldiers of the same army that had saved our lives 12 years earlier – were coming house to house, restoring a brutal order. There was little I could do for myself except pray. But for Letty, my wife, prayer was not enough. With flour and water, and oil paint, I was again a serious artist, hurrying to complete my greatest creative work. Heart pounding, I struggled to steady my hand while transforming the smooth, young face of my wife to a visage ugly enough to repulse the most bestial of men.

And it worked. When the Russian troops burst into Letty's parents' house, they fired a burst of machine-gun fire into the ceiling, then stopped short in front of the sickly looking woman who sat in a dark corner, a babushka around her head.

"Nagyon beteg," I said. "Very sick."

Shuddering in disgust, the Russians quickly left the house.

And the next day, Letty and I left for Austria.

We had no plan. I knew only if anybody asked, we would say we were going to visit relatives. We took a packed train to Szombathely, near the border. But there were rumors on the train that the station there was occupied by Russian troops. We jumped off the train when it slowed on the outskirts of the town. It was dark and we did not know what to do. We decided to play out our charade, walk into town and get a hotel room, pretending we were visiting friends. At 2 a.m. I woke up to the sound of boots stomping down the hallway. I heard a fist slamming

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



The independent newspapers of the Revolution, with titles of: New Man, Democracy, Independence and Free World, among others

on doors, and shouted orders. When they came to our room, I was cowering under my sheets. I remember the clear, blue eyes under the cap. "Where do you think you are going?" he said. I quaked. My throat was dry. "We are visiting relatives."

For a moment he looked into my eyes. "It's amazing how many people are coming here to visit relatives. Have a good time, see you next year." And he was gone.

In the morning we got on a train going West. I felt the gaze of a man in a railroad uniform from across the aisle. "I know what you are up to," he said. "Maybe I can help."

He told us that the end of the line was crawling with Russians. We followed him, getting off at the station before the end, and through a tiny village. He took us to the edge of the forest and pointed the way. We must have made the wrong turn. For hours we wandered in the dark, looking for the edge of a swampy field that we were told marked the no-man's land between us and the Austrian border. We grew tired and panicky. Suddenly the sky was floodlit with phosphorescent flares, and machine-gun fire seemed to surround us. I felt the flash and force of an explosion. Next thing I knew I was on my back in icy water.

"Come on," Letty shouted. "Crawl!"

We moved along the edge of the water until we reached a farmhouse. There, while on my hands and knees, I came upon a package of Austrian cigarettes. We walked to the house still shivering with cold and terror, so exhausted we didn't care if it was Austrian or Hungarian. A man came to the door. "We haven't seen any of you lately," he said. "How did you make it?" The next morning, Austrian border guards told us they had recovered the bodies of six Hungarians in the swale we had crossed.

We had thought we were alone.



Thomas P. Muhl

Fifty years ago Thomas P. Muhl fled the Russian invasion of Hungary, braving minefields and Russian tanks. Today he is a successful artist and writer, living in South Florida, dedicated to depicting the beauty and richness of his tropical environment. Muhl knows that in the mind of the eternal exile, there is a fine line between courage and cowardice. His book, entitled "Retouching Stalin's Moustache," includes a more detailed version of his experiences during the 1956 Revolution and subsequent escape from Hungary. It is available at www.amazon.com.

Károly Nagy

THE LEGACY OF THE 1956 HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION

Liberty, democracy, and human rights are like health. Servitude, oppression, and discrimination are like sickness. Totalitarian tyranny is death. A Revolution that overthrows tyranny and achieves liberty is a resurrection. During the last week of October and the first few days of November, 1956, most of us in Hungary felt as if we were risen from the dead.

It was euphoria – we sang our long-forbidden national anthem, embraced each other on the streets, laughed and cried with joy, we felt redeemed. We were intoxicated by hearing and saying words of truth. And it was also serious and sober determination – we were feverishly drafting proclamations, drew up lists of demands, proposals and plans to eliminate all instruments and institutions of dictatorship and to construct a new, humane society. And we were organizing autonomous local, democratic self-governing bodies to realize those plans.

It was this resurrection, this hope, this truth, this creative planning and democratic organization that was crushed by the massive armed aggression of the Soviet Union. The joyful song of freedom was silenced again by the horrifying sounds of war, the terror of prison cells, torture chambers and the gallows.

What can be learned from the drama of those twelve days? What is the legacy of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution?

Its international significance cannot be overemphasized. From the contemporary perspective it is increasingly obvious that the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was the event that began the fall of the modern Soviet Empire. Milovan Djilas wrote in Belgrade: “The Revolution in Hungary means the beginning of the end of communism.” (Milovan Djilas: “The Storm in East Europe”, *The New Leader*, New York; XXXIX, 47; November 19, 1956, p. 6.) The French philosopher Albert Camus remarked: “With the first shout of insurrection in free Budapest, learned and shortsighted philosophies, miles of false reasoning and deceptively beautiful doctrines were scattered like dust. And the truth, the naked truth, so long outraged, burst upon the eyes of the world.” (Király, Béla. et al. ed.: “The First War Between Socialist States: The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and Its Impact. Social Science Monographs, Brooklyn College Press, NY. 1984, p. 81.)

And once this truth – this naked truth – was revealed in all its powerful simplicity, no amount of subsequent propaganda – perpetrated by some to this day! – was able to reestablish the grotesque wall of Orwellian lies trying to define war as peace, oppression as freedom, defensive patriotism as belligerent nationalism, Revolution as coun-terrevolution. We learned the truth and demonstrated it to the world, that what defines a country, what qualifies a society is not any ideology, but the presence or absence of freedom. All ideologies, all doctrines, whether they be called fascism or anti-fascism, communism, or anti-communism, racism, capitalism, socialism, ethnicism or religious fanaticism, can be used in attempts to justify violence and legitimize oppression.

Truth was an effect, just as the elemental need of truth was a cause, of the Revolution. As the United Nations’ Special Committee recorded it: “We wanted freedom, and not a good comfortable life,” an eighteen year-old girl student told the Committee. Even though we might lack bread and other necessities of life, we wanted freedom. We, the young people were particularly hampered because we were brought up amidst lies. We continually had to lie. We could not have a healthy idea, because everything was choked in us. We wanted freedom of thought... It seemed to the Committee that this young student’s words expressed as concisely as any the ideal which made possible a great uprising. (United Nations Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary, General Assembly, Official Records: Eleventh Session, Supplement No 18. A/3592; New York, 1957 p. 68.)

We wanted freedom and freedom means sovereignty, autonomy, self-determination. To realize these goals, instruments of self-governance had to be created. Spontaneously and yet almost simultaneously within a few days Revolutionary Councils, National Councils, Workers’ Councils were organized in the entire country. Many considered those Councils the singularly most remarkable, most significant achievement of the Revolution. As Hannah Arendt noted in her milestone book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: “When we ponder the lesson of the Hungarian Revolution, we find that there was no chaos, no looting, and no trespassing of property. There were no crimes against life either, for the few instances of public hanging of ÁVH officers were conducted with remarkable restraint and discrimination. Instead of the mob rule which might have been expected, there appeared immediately, almost simultaneously with the uprising itself the Revolutionary and Workers’ Councils. The rise of the councils was the clear sign of a true upsurge of democracy against dictatorship, of freedom against tyranny. One of the most striking aspects of the Hungarian Revolution is not only that this principle of the council system reemerged, but that in twelve short days a good deal of its range of potentialities could emerge with it...” (in: Király, Op. Cit. pp. 151-156.)

The Hungarian people’s emphasis on the revolutionary councils also represented the fact that the overwhelming will of the nation was not only negation but affirmation, not only destruction but construction. The elimination

of all inhuman structures was to be the prerequisite for the creation of humane structures and functions of a new society.

Twelve days are, of course, not enough to achieve democracy. But twelve days, indeed, the first few days of the Revolution, proved to be enough to establish one of the most important preconditions for democracy: a state of self-confidence, a state of no longer having to be afraid. The state of paralyzing, constant and omnipresent fear was lifted from our hearts. And with that, the construction of democracy began. As one of the great Hungarian political theorists, István Bibó observed: "Being a democrat means, primarily, not to be afraid." (Bibó, István: Democracy, Revolution, Self-Determination, Selected Writings, edited by Károly Nagy; Social Science Monographs, and Atlantic Research and Publications, NJ 1991, p. 42.)

It was this same István Bibó, whose personal courage became symbolic when the Soviet forces crushed the Revolution. As the sole member of the new revolutionary government of Imre Nagy present in the Parliament building on November 4th, Sunday morning, when Soviet artillery, tanks and airplanes unleashed their firepower against Budapest, Bibó sat down at a desk to type a proclamation. A typewriter confronting tanks. Reason facing treacherous terror. Words and thoughts battling bullets...

Wrote Bibó that morning: "Hungary's fullest intention is to live in the community of those free Eastern European nations which want to organize their societies on the principles of liberty, justice, and freedom from exploitation. The people of Hungary have sacrificed enough of their blood to show the world their devotion for freedom and truth." (Bibó, Op. Cit., pp. 325-326.)

Amidst the roar and rattle of guns he finished typing his proclamation with this foreboding sentence: "May God protect Hungary!"

So: what is the legacy of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution? Among other possible important elements, perhaps that legacy is the significance of the fundamental human need for truth, for self-determination, for freedom from fear, for democracy, for the achievement of which no sacrifice seems to be too great.

And this legacy, this message is certainly not just Hungarian and, of course, no mere museum-piece, relevant only to a frozen moment in the distant past. This legacy is not just there and then, but here and now, and let us hope, everywhere and tomorrow as well. As, again, István Bibó expressed it in 1957, just before his imprisonment: "It is the Hungarian people's task to honor and safeguard— against slander, forgetting and fading – the banner of their Revolution, which is also the banner of a freer future for mankind." (Bibó, Op. Cit., p. 352.)

*In Károly Nagy and Peter Pastor, eds., The Legacy of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, Five Participants forty Years Later (New Brunswick, NJ 1996), pp. 31-36.



Károly Nagy

Károly Nagy was elected president of a revolutionary council in Erdősmecke in 1956, and consequently fled to the United States. Trained as a sociologist at Rutgers and the New School, he currently teaches at the college level in New Jersey. He has published extensively in both English and Hungarian, and is extremely active both in the New Brunswick, NJ Hungarian community as well as in Hungarian linguistic circles.

Edit Martha Novák

AS I REMEMBER



Novák in 1956

How October 23rd started I can't recall, but I imagine it must have been like any other day. At the time I was employed by the Small Engine and Machinery Factory (Kismotor és Gépgyár) located in Buda. I must have put in a regular day of work there operating a drill.

Following my daily routine, after work I went on to József Attila High School to attend an evening lecture in pursuit of my high school diploma. As soon as I reached school, I became aware of a flurry of excitement. It was there that all of us students were informed that demonstrations were in progress on both sides of the city.

We heard that there were a number of points or demands that had been drafted by the university students and presented to the government. It was upon these points that the demonstrations were based. Among the points was the demand that the Soviet troops leave our country, and that Imre Nagy be reinstated as our prime minister.

Classes cancelled

There was an announcement that classes were cancelled, and we were told that a group was being formed to join up with the people who were demonstrating. We eagerly went to show our solidarity to the cause. We all started to walk across the Margaret Bridge. As we proceeded, our numbers kept growing as more and more people joined up. I most distinctly remember an incident that took place in front of the Parliament. As we stood there our numbers kept swelling, and all of a sudden, we started to demand in unison that Imre Nagy present himself and talk to us. We started to chant: "We want Imre Nagy!" "To hell with Gerő!"

At first it was an unknown person who came to the balcony and tried to reason with our group, but since we didn't let up on our demand, Imre Nagy finally did appear on the balcony to address us.

As we stood there listening to his speech, a rumor broke out about some shooting taking place in front of the Radio building. At this point I felt somewhat drained, and decided to start on my long walk home. Of course, neither the streetcars nor the buses were running.

On that day – October 23rd – a bloody Hungarian Revolution started, and at first it seemed that we would win our freedom from the Russians. This freedom was regretfully short-lived, however. It lasted only approximately seven days. But during this time even many of the Russian soldiers who were stationed in Hungary sided with the revolutionaries. Imre Nagy became our prime minister as freedom reigned. Unfortunately, the Soviets under the leadership of Khrushchev sent over several divisions to defeat the Revolution. Its soldiers were told that they were to crush the bourgeois Revolution, when in reality they were killing the workers and students of the country.

Imre Balassa



Damaged streetcars on the tracks became a common site in Budapest during the Revolution

While the fighting took place, the workers stopped working everywhere. Of course the factory where I worked was also closed. At this time my family lived in Budaörs. We could not regain our right to live in Budapest even though our 1951 deportation ended in 1953 shortly after Imre Nagy became prime minister for the first time. Regretfully, he was soon removed from office by the Stalinist-oriented group of Hungarian communists. On November 4th, with the onslaught of a second wave of Russian troops, the fate of the Revolution was sealed. On the previous evening, General Pál Maléter, the head of the Hungarian Army, was invited to Russian headquarters for a discussion, but was arrested during the course of the night.

Stay or go?

Now that everybody realized that the freedom fighters would lose against the tremendous odds, people began to think of leaving the country. My oldest brother Ferenc was working at the time in a mine at Komló, in a forced labor battalion. As the Revolution was being overturned, he too decided to flee the country, but not before coming back with a couple of his friends, so each could take others with them. In Ferenc's case it was Peter, the oldest of his three younger brothers. When I heard of their escape plans, I too wanted to leave with them. Ferenc, on the other hand, did not want to take on the responsibility for young girls, as my sister and I were even younger than Peter. He said we should stay: "Just think what might happen if the Russian soldiers were to catch you at the border!"

So there I was, temporarily resigned to my fate, but not for long. About five days later a neighbor's daughter, nine years old, came over in the morning to tell my sister that by eleven a.m. that morning she was leaving her home with the intent to escape. Her companions were four young men. Now it was my sister Klára's turn to declare that she was going to join the group and escape, whereupon I said to my Mother that, of course, I must also join them. Now our poor Mother was beside herself since our Father was stuck in Buda in the stable with his horses to look after and could have no say in the matter. She realized that our future would be better served if we were to leave, yet she also realized that should we fail, all the blame would rest on her shoulders. She tried to persuade us to stay because of the danger involved, but seeing our determination, she was powerless. Thus the saga of our escape began.

Escape to Austria

At the Budaörs train station we hopped on the platform of a freight train carrying frozen meat. We were exposed to the rigid winter climate. As the sun set, one stop before the Győr station our train came to a halt. Our companions found out that the carriages wouldn't go any further, but the engine itself would go on to Győr. Its engineer agreed to let us ride in the caboose by sharing the space with the coal. During this time the railroad personnel were doing everything they could to help escapees reach the border.

At Győr we boarded a regular train. Now we had a different challenge ahead of us. We were afraid to buy tickets since it would give away our intended destination, yet not having them was also risky. Therefore, we ended up dodging the conductor by going from one car to the other. In the meantime, the men from our group obtained valuable information on how we should proceed in our escape. They befriended a self-appointed guide who advised us to get off the train at Levél, one stop before Hegyeshalom, and offered to be our personal guide from there on. He told us that the Russians were especially active at the Hegyeshalom train station. They regularly met the incoming trains looking for would-be escapees to catch.

Onward

Once we left the train station of Levél, our guide led us into a barn filled with cows where we hid for a while, since even here the Russians did searches. About a half an hour later our guide returned for us. The first part of our journey took us through some cornfields. As we passed among their dry stalks the crunching noise took an additional heavy toll on our nerves. We also passed through open fields with haystacks, where we kept worrying that tanks might be hiding on the other side. Now and then we would stop by these haystacks for cover. We were always ready to hit the ground at a moment's notice in case of danger. As we walked on and on in the moonlit night, our guide suddenly turned to us and said that he could not go any farther with us. He told us that from now on we should just aim for the huge reflector lights far in the distance. He said that once we reached them, we would be in Austria. We continued on with our cautious trudging until suddenly we heard a voice. Now we were sure that we had been caught! Luckily, one of our companions spoke German, and soon our despair gave way to tremendous joy: we were finally in Austria!

We stayed in refugee camps for a couple of months, first near the border and then in Innsbruck. On January 15th we were able to fly over to the United States via a U.S. Army plane, under the established special visas that were granted to Hungarian refugees.

Looking back now I cannot help wondering at times if it would not have been better if we could have stayed in Hungary. If the West could only have helped us achieve our goal, so much bloodshed and terror could have been avoided that awaited our compatriots for another thirty three years.

Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection



A makeshift rice distribution center

**Edit Martha Novák**

Edit Martha Novák arrived in the United States on January 15, 1957, and later received her high school diploma in Schenectady, New York. She earned her B.S. in Pharmacy from Southwestern State University in Oklahoma, and her M.S. in Institutional Pharmacy Practice from St. John's University in New York. She is married to a fellow '56-er, Charles Farkas. They have four children: Evelyn, Miklós, Elizabeth, and Maria.

Edit Martha Novák is the sister of Ferenc Novák whose story can be found on page 126. She is the wife of Charles Farkas, whose story can be found on page 12.

Ferenc Novák

CLASS-ALIEN WORK BATTALION



Novák in uniform in 1956

The autumn air in October, 1956 was filled with anticipation in the barracks of Unit 4055 of the work battalion in Komló. We had nearly completed our two years of compulsory military service in the coal mines, and were eagerly looking forward to returning to civilian life. There were changes on the outside too; a process of fermentation that started after Stalin's death was accelerating with calls for radical reforms in the communist regime, voiced by intellectuals inside as well as outside the party. Overall, a sense of excitement pervaded the place.

Our unit was largely made up of "class alien" elements: we were the sons of former government officials, military officers, well-to-do farmers and other middle-class families, who were deemed unreliable in the eyes of the communist regime and therefore not to be trusted with weapons. Some of us had already personally known the heavy hand of the regime, having been imprisoned or, as in my own case, deported. Being of similar background, there was a sense of real camaraderie that made our life there bearable.

Changes in the air

By the year 1956 our treatment by our officers had markedly improved. The sometimes brutal treatment of earlier years gave way to a more civilized, almost respectful attitude, as if they sensed that their power was eroding. No longer did they call us enemies of the working class. The emphasis was now on our contribution to the building of socialism.

By and large, we were aware of the changes in the political atmosphere in the country. Those of us who were able to visit our families brought back news when we returned from leave.

On the 17th or 18th of October one member of our unit – named Szegedi, who happened to be from Szeged – brought back news of an extraordinary meeting of students at the university, who were demanding, among other things, the right to form a new student organization independent of communist party control. The answer to that was a midnight raid on the dormitories by the Secret Police, during which several students were badly beaten up.

There were also rumors of a planned march of students in Budapest on Monday, October 22, demanding that Parliament pass laws aimed at economic and political reforms. The idea of an unauthorized march seemed so absurd, I decided that I had to witness it. I got a three-day pass and traveled to Budapest on Saturday.

Monday afternoon I took my Soviet-made Zorkij camera and went to the Parliament building, waiting for the historic event. The hours passed and nothing happened. When darkness fell, I rushed to the railroad terminal to catch my overnight train back to Komló.

Listening to the radio

The next day, on the 23rd, I was on guard duty at the camp gate. In the evening we were listening to the radio broadcasting the speech of Ernő Gerő, the new party chief just back from Yugoslavia where he met Tito, trying to patch up differences between the two communist countries. We expected him to sound a conciliatory note regarding the political and economic reforms demanded by party members and intellectuals. Instead, he strongly denounced the reformers, and called for closer alignment with the Soviet Union.

Not much later we heard in the radio that "hooligan elements" started shooting at various points in the city. A curfew was announced. We were not sure what happened, but were rooting for the insurgents. Each day thereafter, we followed the events as broadcast in the radio.

In the camp, the days passed uneventfully. In the town the newly formed revolutionary councils took over control after the communist functionaries and secret police ran away or went into hiding. There was a general strike, so the mines were idle. Our officers were clueless, not knowing which side to take. One day a group of armed students from the University of Pécs showed up and disarmed the officers. Each company selected one officer to lead us into battle if necessary – and if we were supplied with arms – and we sent the rest home.

Bored of being idle during those tumultuous times, we sent a delegation to General Maléter who was in charge of the working battalions, requesting that he either authorize us to disband or send us arms and direct us to where we may be needed. His answer was for us to stay put and await further orders.

At dawn on November 4, we awoke at the distress call broadcast by Imre Nagy over the radio announcing that the Soviet troops had attacked Budapest. We could hardly believe our ears. That meant the collapse of all our dreams. Our despair knew no bounds.

Csepel truck

Our first thought was to go home, to find out if our families were safe, then to leave the country, because we couldn't face the prospect of the return of a regime we thought was gone forever. One of us, who knew how to drive, got hold of a Csepel truck, into which about 20 of us piled and took off heading north, toward where most of us lived. We were careful to avoid the main roads where we might have encountered Russian troops. One by one we dropped off our companions as we reached the vicinity of their hometowns, until we reached Lipót, our northernmost point, the home of our driver.

At that point there were only two of us left, László Bitó (later famous eye specialist and medical researcher in the USA, and eventually noted writer and publicist in Hungary), and myself. Of the two of us, I had driven a tractor once, so I became the driver. Someone helped me put the shift in third gear while others gave the truck a push, since the starter didn't work. We started with a lurch and I managed to keep the truck going in the same gear, afraid to do anything that might cause the engine to stall. Burning the clutch all the way, we started on our way toward Budapest.

At Győr, our luck ran out. As we reached the crest of a high bridge, we saw a group of Russian soldiers at the other end. With difficulty I managed to stop the truck, and we were waved off. In halting Russian, we tried to explain that we were unarmed and trying to get home, not to fight. They were apparently fresh troops unfamiliar with the location and were clearly under the impression that they were at the Suez Canal, expecting to encounter American troops. Shortly, they transported us to the local headquarters of the Hungarian Secret Police, and locked us up in the basement jail. There were already several other servicemen in neighboring cells. We were sure that our next destination would be somewhere in Siberia.

Negotiated release

Luckily, an officer from the local Hungarian barracks appeared who somehow negotiated the release of his men. At this point we started shaking our cell door demanding that we, too, should be released. The officer at first didn't believe that we were also soldiers because our uniform was different from that of the regular units. Eventually he understood and took us with him also. We were relieved to be able to sleep in the relative safety of a Hungarian barracks.

Our release demonstrated a strange situation in those days. While some Hungarian army units were effectively fighting the Russians, others were locked up in their barracks and maintained a state of neutrality with the tacit or express understanding of the Russians. Perhaps the latter was the situation in Győr at the time of our little adventure.

Next day we managed to get on one of the sporadically running trains and got as far as Komárom. There, learning from our earlier experience, we took no chance and went directly to the local garrison to spend the night. The following morning we caught a train that took us all the way to Budapest. This time we were traveling by day, and were able to observe Russian soldiers dug in along the railroad tracks, apparently in combat readiness.

Exactly a week after I started out for home, I arrived in Budaörs. I found everyone safe and sound. My parents' joy didn't last long when I told them about my decision to leave Hungary. Next morning, my brother Péter and I trekked to the Kelenföld railroad station where we met László Bitó, his brother József, his fiancée and her parents and together boarded a train bound for western Hungary. We rode that train as far as we dared, then continued on foot, reaching Austria by way of the bridge at Andau, made famous in James Michener's novel. The time was 10 p.m. on November 12, 1956.

On December 15, the seven of us arrived at the Camp Kilmer refugee camp in New Jersey.



Ferenc Novák

Born in 1934, Ferenc Novák was deported with his family in 1951 and served in a work battalion from 1954 to 1956. In the United States he attended Princeton University, receiving a BSE degree in Electrical Engineering in 1961. In 1996 he retired after a 33-year career with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. He is married, has four children and lives in Short Hills, New Jersey.

Ferenc Novák is the brother of Edit Márta Novák whose story can be found on page 117.

Károly G. Oláh

UNWAVERING

I remember it as if it were happening today. On October 23, I was on my way home from work at Budapest's Central Physics Research Institute. From the window of the tram I saw many people hurrying along the streets carrying posters and flyers, pasting them up on walls and kiosks. As soon as I got off the tram, I read one of them: it was the demands of the Hungarian nation, summarized in 16 points.

I couldn't believe my eyes. Oh my heavens, I thought, if even half of those demands were to come true, how great that would be. Occupied by these thoughts, I walked home toward my rented room on Puskin Street. Then I caught sight of the crowds on Rákóczi Avenue, making their way toward the Parliament. I joined them. We chanted in unison – 4,000 of us at the top of our lungs – “Whoever is Hungarian is with us!” “Russians go home!” and so forth. The crowd kept growing. Once we reached the Parliament, I saw that more demonstrators were joining us from different directions, all calling out the same slogans. By nightfall, there were more than 100,000 of us on the square.

Imre Nagy

One group of demonstrators was demanding that Imre Nagy come out and speak to us. Imre Nagy did appear and addressed the crowd over the loudspeakers in that resounding microphone voice of his. He began his speech: “Comrades!” At this, the crowd booed – we were not comrades! He tried saying “comrades” twice more, but we didn't let him continue. Finally he changed his tack: “My esteemed Hungarian fellow citizens!” This we accepted with great delight. As he spoke, we felt that his words were heartfelt, and gave us hope that we might be liberated from the system of communist terror.

Suddenly, about a hundred people called out that we should go at once to the Radio building, because Ernő Gerő was speaking, and we had to stop him. Together with the crowd, I proceeded to the Hungarian Radio, where the events sped up. A Secret Policeman fired into the crowd. By the time we got there, several people were dead and more were injured. Soldiers on a military truck at the corner of Bródy Street were passing out weapons. I got a 9mm-s Frommer revolver, which I then put in my pocket, because I was asked to help transport the wounded. Thus I ended up at the freedom fighter unit at the Péterfy Sándor Street Hospital, where I held out until I was injured on November 6.

Getting hold of a car

I became good friends with a 23-year-old architect named Karcsi Bede. He lived right next door to the hospital, but he never went home because we were so busy transporting the wounded. With the first lull in the fighting, a group came over to me and asked whether I knew anything about cars. Not much, I said, but a little. They told me they'd found a few hundred brand-new Russian passenger cars, the “Pobeda” model, but they couldn't start them – could I help? Of course, I replied, and off we went in an old black American Buick to the lot. I determined that the distributor of each car was missing the so-called “pipe” and that's why there was no ignition. They fetched the warehouse supervisor and I drew a picture of the missing part. He led us to a box that was filled with the missing parts. That very day we took five cars to the hospital. Two days later, not a single Pobjeda car remained on the lot. I got one too – naturally for hospital purposes. We used it to run official errands; we used it to take captured secret police to the former Népszava newspaper building for interrogation by József Dudás and his associates.

One night I was asked to take a group of journalists out to the northern part of Budapest, and as I turned onto the boulevard leading out of the city center, we were suddenly attacked by a volley of gunfire. I pulled over and stopped, then – revolver in hand – walked over to the nearby square to find out who was shooting at us. I was wearing a tricolor armband. In the dim light I made out about eight shadowy figures. I asked them: “Why did you shoot, boys?” They replied: “Because you didn't stop. You have to understand: if you don't stop, we'll shoot your eyes out.” Then I countered: “There are plenty of you guys, yet you didn't even hit the car.” As it turned out, on earlier occasions, when the freedom fighters stopped cars for identification, some of the passengers were Secret Police, who then proceeded to shoot them. That's why the freedom fighters were stopping cars by yelling at them – but I hadn't heard them. The next morning I noticed three bullets in the rear bumper on the driver's side, but no one had been hurt.

Transporting the wounded

One day I was sent to Mária Street to retrieve the wounded. We proceeded amid gunfire all around. Suddenly, two Russian soldiers jumped in front of us, aimed their machine guns and ordered us to stop. They forced us out of the car and into a doorway.

Well, Karcsi, I told my friend, this is it. These guys are going to shoot us. My pistol was in my belt, hidden under my coat. Luckily, the soldiers did not search us. About eight Russian soldiers, who had been shot, lay in the courtyard;

two were still alive. The Russian indicated with his machine gun that we were to take the two wounded soldiers. I was suddenly relieved, realizing that our lives were safe, and could soon return to the hospital. However, in the meantime freedom fighters had started taking up cobblestones from the street to make barricades, and so we could not drive out to Üllői Street. The freedom fighters approached us and asked what we were up to. I explained that we were out on the orders of the Péterfy Hospital and taking in the wounded. But you have Russian soldiers, they said; why is that? I said that I had no choice in the matter; two Russians had blocked our way and forced us... Yes, we saw all that, said one freedom fighter. So what happens now? There are Hungarian wounded here too. Well, what else – I replied – we'll unload the Russians and take the Hungarians in. And that's what we did. We managed to roll our way out to Üllői Street on planks laid out over the ditches, and so returned to the hospital.

A few days later, when the guns were quiet and the fighting over, we were ordered to gather up the bodies of the Russian soldiers killed on Üllői Street. Some of these Russians had been shot so intensively that when we tried to toss their bodies up onto the truck, they literally fell apart, and we were slipping and falling in the puddles of blood on the blood-soaked street.

Attack on party headquarters

I was there, on Köztársaság Square, at the attack on the communist party headquarters. The treacherous Secret Police let the freedom fighters close to the building. When there were about 200 of the demonstrators standing about 50 meters from the building, the Secret Police let loose with a volley of gunfire. There were many dead and wounded. One of my colleagues was shot dead here, even though he was carrying a stretcher and wearing a white coat with a red cross. The Secret Police repeated this base maneuver three times. But it did not last, because two more tanks joined the first one, which started firing into the windows of the headquarters. At this, the Secret Police surrendered. The rightfully outraged crowd, however, began literally taking apart the Secret Police emerging from the building, who had outfitted themselves in new blue police uniforms and army boots. Three such dead "policemen" were hung upside down on trees and spat at. The crowd had indeed lost its head – this was because the Secret Police, those criminals, had lured our freedom fighters into a deathtrap. And so the people brought down their judgment...

Géza Kisvarsányi



Honoring a fallen freedom fighter

spilled out among us. He died immediately. The reason I had insisted that we interrogate him was the following: we had learned that arrested college students were being held underground, beneath the headquarters building. The party denied this and continues to deny it to this day! I will never forget standing in front of the headquarters on November 3 and feeling a strong pounding coming from underground. We did not know what it could be. Apparently the arrested students and revolutionaries were being held there. They were trying to break out and were probably hitting the ceiling with some heavy object. This was a question worth pursuing! At the time, a bulldozer was brought in, but began digging in the wrong place. The next day they would have continued digging, but by then it was no longer possible – the Red hordes had returned. This issue remains a mystery to this day. Many people have talked about the underground labyrinth and the fact that truckloads of cement were brought in after the Revolution and poured into a hole. What could have been there underneath? This should be investigated, for our sakes and for the sake of history.

At dawn on November 4, I awoke to the sound of thundering cannons. I suspected the worst. The Russians had returned to attack Budapest. The fighting flared up; there were many wounded; and we had no respite. We transported the injured day and night, surrounded by shooting on all sides.

Wounded

On November 6, the hospital asked me to take a Mother and her newborn baby home to the "House of Lords," which was actually a poorhouse. Driving along Dohány Street, I suddenly heard a volley of gunfire. "Drop down!" I shouted, and I ducked underneath the steering wheel, keeping my left hand on the wheel and pressing the brake

pedal with my right. Then came the second round of gunfire. The car stopped. I waited to see what would happen next. Then I felt something dripping down my face. I touched it and then saw it was blood. They shot me, I thought. Then I wondered if I were alive. I started pinching myself to see if I felt anything, and I did. Then I looked at my partner, Karcsi Bede, who was pouring blood. It was his blood on my face. I pushed the door open with my foot, jumped out and ran into a building entrance where about 15 young freedom fighters were standing. I glanced back at the car, but no one was moving there. I asked the boys to bring my bleeding friend inside. No way, they say, they'll shoot us! At this I ran over to the car and tried to open the door with my left hand, but couldn't because my left arm hurt so much I was incapable of opening the door. I looked at my left arm and saw that the sleeve of my sweater was ragged and covered with blood. (I still have this sweater, a cherished memento.) So I too had been shot, but had felt nothing more than two light taps as the bullet and 18 pieces of shrapnel entered my arm. The boys saw that the shooting had stopped, so they came over to help remove the wounded Karcsi from the car. They pulled him out and brought both of us into a nearby apartment. They brought me a large mug of hot tea: Drink up! they said. As I swallowed the last gulp, I realized it was rum, not tea. I soon fell asleep and awoke in the Péterfy Hospital. Karcsi lay beside me, his head bandaged. His parents were at his bedside, talking to him, but he remained silent. I told his parents what had happened; a while later they went home. Then Karcsi, who could not speak and was paralyzed on his left side, turned to me with what seemed to me a slight smile at the corner of his mouth. I asked the doctor why he had not responded to his parents, yet had seemed to smile at me. Yes, replied the doctor, his injury affected the part of his brain with memories of long ago, but I was a recent friend, so he remembered me.

Karcsi took three bullets – two in the shoulder and one in the back of his skull. After three brain surgeries he died. Karcsi (Károly) Bede died a hero of our Revolution. May he rest in peace! His brother László Bede was imprisoned for 15 years for his part in the Revolution. I was one of the lucky ones. When I picked up something with my left hand, I could not let it go, but the doctor said this was due to a radial nerve having been severed by a piece of shrapnel. He said that in time, the nerve endings would reconnect themselves. After six months, this came to pass, but to this day I still have 18 pieces of shrapnel in my arm, causing me various problems from time to time.

Flight

After a few days, we were informed that the Russians, together with the Secret Police, were rounding up the wounded and taking them away in tanks, and that we should immediately go into hiding. I left the hospital and went to the countryside. I did not dare return to my parents' home in the village of Ukk, because I'd received word that the authorities had been there looking for me. One night after Christmas I went home, but my parents asked me to go away immediately, because the postman had told them that the authorities were still searching for me.

I went to the town of Dudár and from there I started on my journey West. I crossed the border in the first week of January 1957. Once I reached Austria, the Red Cross took me to Vienna for medical treatment, then to the refugee camp run by the Austrian Ministry for the Interior. I came to America in 1959. I worked at Rutgers University as associate head of the engineering staff, retiring in 1995. In 1996, I had a heart operation. In 1998, I enrolled in the New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. I was ordained a minister on May 11, 2004, but by the grace of God I have served the congregation at the Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Wharton, NJ, since 2000.

I never regretted my actions. I was no hero, because the heroes are those who gave their lives for their country. If I had to serve the Revolution today, I'd do the same again for my country. It pains me to think of my country of birth, which I can only visit now as a tourist, but cannot return home for good. I suffer from homesickness, but my wife Ágnes' work ties her to the United States, and it would be difficult for me to establish myself all over again in Hungary now, at the age of 76. My heart aches for my abandoned homeland. I cannot change my heart. The wise old proverb is indeed true: "He who changes homelands should change his heart!"

If I reflect upon everything that has happened, it comforts me to realize that those of us who participated in the 1956 Revolution and Freedom Fight can rightfully say: We did what our country demanded of us. God be with you, Hungary, my dear Motherland.

I don't know how much longer I will be able to hum the old folk song, but I will do it as long as I am alive:

We left our beautiful country,
Famous little Hungary,
Then turned back for just one more look
And the tears came to our eyes.

Preface and postscript

It is a difficult task, after 49 years, to talk about the glorious Hungarian Revolution of 1956. Countless writings on this topic have already been published. It is difficult indeed to write or say anything new and worthwhile. As even the fingers of our own hands are unique, so the experiences and tragedies of the individuals who participated in the Revolution are all different from each other. So I can write only that which I saw with my own eyes, that which happened to me and around me, in 1956 and thereafter.

I was just an ordinary participant in the Revolution. I did what was asked of me, as long as I could and as long as I had to.

Each year in October a strange feeling comes over me, and grows stronger as October 23 approaches... I become sad on these October anniversaries, I cry when I think of past events... for decades now I am very often reminded of a beautiful Hungarian folk song, and feel as though I am humming it together with everyone who was with me during the fighting, with whom I had to leave my homeland, who rejoiced in our victory and who died a heroic death by my side, a smile on their faces, for they knew they were giving their lives for the freedom of Hungary.

Now, too, I hear the song in my head... once again, I am there, we are all there, on the streets of Budapest. I am 27 years old and going off to save the lives of Hungarians... then it is all over... it is over, and we have to flee.

Sometimes, at night, tears come to my eyes because I see the fallen warriors, the blood of my comrades, as they die in my arms, smiling in the belief that victory is ours, and their heart beats for the last time.

Then we're off toward the border, we had to leave, we had to come, we had to flee for our lives from the ruthless Red hordes and their servants intent on crushing our freedom with their tanks. Two hundred thousand of us fled to the West.

I ask myself, and many of today's young people ask: How did all this begin? I recall the events in my mind, and I can tell the story.

As with the Treaty of Trianon after the First World War, the Great Powers convened after the Second World War to sentence Hungary, once again, to death and to the loss of its freedom. At first, the Bolsheviks, under the aegis of communism, began their advance using the tactic of two steps forward – one step back. The political show trials began, innocent Hungarian leaders were executed, the best of our citizens were imprisoned on false charges. Cardinal Mindszenty was imprisoned. ... the sound of the doorbell struck terror into our hearts, as we waited for them to come and get us. The ruthless terror of the Secret Police was decimating the Hungarian nation. And the discontent in the country grew ever greater, for the Hungarian nation has always been – and hopefully will always be – a freedom-loving, God-fearing nation of patriots.

The oppression continued until the nation's patience finally ran out in October 1956. Hungarians old and young participated. In those days, I felt that something would happen, but did not dare believe that it would be a Revolution and fight for freedom.

I remember it as if it were happening today. On October 23, I was on my way home from work...



Károly Oláh

After fleeing Hungary, Károly Oláh lived for a few years in Austria, then immigrated to the United States and settled in New Jersey, in 1959. At Rutgers University he worked as an engineer, then – after retirement – completed a degree in Theology. Since 2000, Oláh has been a minister of the Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Wharton, New Jersey

Tibor Ország

MY FATHER AND GRANDFATHER WERE BOTH GENDARMES



Ország in 1956

It started like any other ordinary weekday. Tuesday we awoke to a cool autumn morning in the 8th district of Budapest, when I started to walk to school on Prater Street, which was next to the Corvin Theater. We lived on Üllői Street in the direction of Kálvin Square. I didn't have the slightest idea how this day would end.

In the preceding days, my classmates and teachers discussed the evolving conditions in unusual tones. They were freely discussing ideas such as the removal of the Soviet occupation forces, free elections, and freedom of the press—those topics that in the not too distant past would have resulted in serious consequences. I was almost 13 years old, but I was fearful hearing such conversations. The regime's brutality was still fresh in my memory. Only three years before, the agents of the National Security Authority (ÁVH) in Zalaegerszeg beat my Father to death, and to this day I still don't know where his grave is. This occurred only because he was a gendarme (provincial police) prior to and during WWII. Similarly in 1954-55, when I lived with maternal Grandparents, our home, which took an entire lifetime to accumulate, was confiscated. This, too, because my Grandfather was also a gendarme, although he was retired without a

pension, as that, too, was confiscated.

Chestnut puree never bought

After school around two o'clock, my Mother sent me down to the pastry shop on Múzeum Boulevard for chestnut puree, which was seldom available. When I stepped out of the building, I was greatly surprised at the sight of a seemingly endless crowd marching down in the middle of Üllői Street toward Kálvin Square from the direction of József Boulevard, stopping all traffic. At first I thought it was some kind of celebration or the usual self-praising communist party event which had no interest for me. However, from within the ranks, two or three protesters ran to the front of the procession with a large green wreath, and the steady peaceful march continued.

I got excited at this sight especially because I did not hear the usual speeches of over-achiever worker accomplishments, praise of Stakhanovite (an effective Soviet worker) results or other similar party propaganda. They were mostly young people, but also older workers, white collar professionals, and people of all ages marched along. I went along with them to Kálvin Square, where additional crowds merged from many other directions, their numbers growing. Climbing onto electric poles in various locations on the square, young orators loudly announced that the destination was the József Bem monument, where they intended to proclaim their solidarity and support of the Polish university and labor movement of the recent past, which was silenced by the Polish communist authorities. In reaction to this, the demonstrators also had demands to announce, and they passed them out on fliers to the people. From somewhere in the crowd a few national flags appeared complete with the regime's hammer and sickle crest, which were soon cut out of the flags, and the crowds proudly waved the flags with holes.

As the march started again toward the city center, I realized that there was no chance for the pastry shop and chestnut puree, since practically all shops and offices were closed because their employees were on the streets. Surely my Mother must have been wondering what was keeping me this long, and I thought it best to hurry home.

I explained what I saw on the streets. She could hardly believe it possible with no intervention by the police or the ÁVH (national security authority). Then she directed me to do my homework, regardless of a protest march here and there. The next day there would be school, and the homework must be done.

Foreign and domestic radio broadcasts

Naturally, I couldn't concentrate on my studies. The afternoon's events occupied my mind. As I was thinking about them, I thought about the prohibited short wave radio broadcasts from the West which, for many years until recently, people huddled around and quietly tuned into behind closed windows. Those that I knew who listened took those transmissions for gospel truth. My favorite was the scout program because I was still in the seventh grade, and we had no scouting there. I was also keenly interested in political issues. To this day, the transmitted encouragements still ring in my ear: "...don't tolerate the tyrannical communist oppression...stand up against the oppressors...if you take the first step, we'll be there to help you..." etc.

As the neighbors and other tenants of the building started arriving home from work at various times, they constantly brought news of new developments. By this time we had turned on the local radio, but the transmissions we heard did not coincide with the neighbors' reports. The radio talked of counter-revolutionaries, scoundrels, and

system disrupters, but we knew things were completely different. Now the people were speaking in unison against the regime. The radio gave directives for the people to return home from the streets and for all to remain at home.

On this first evening, out on the balcony after dark, I heard what sounded like shots. I wasn't sure, but it could have been small arms fire. I remember wondering...Is it the police? The ÁVH? Later during the night the frequency of these sounds increased. I didn't know it then, but these first sounds probably came from the Radio building, which was only few blocks from us, on the street next to the Museum.

The next morning

On the morning of the 24th, the continual rumblings of heavy armored vehicles and the sound of steady gunfire and explosions filled the air in the neighborhood. Under no circumstances was it possible to go out on Üllői Street. Well, I thought, to the delight of all children there is no school today, although my homework was more or less complete. Above all, a strange feeling of excitement that I had never felt before came over me. Is this possible? The people stood up against the regime? They actually took up arms?

Some of the bravest of the neighbors sneaked in and out and brought fresh news which immediately spread through the apartment building. There was a full blown Revolution raging throughout the city. People were dying in large numbers. Last night they fired into the protesting crowd by the Radio building and in front of the Parliament. The military had been activated along with other armed authorities. We didn't know then, and only learned later, that Russian occupation forces were also called out. The radio constantly directed the freedom fighters to lay down their arms and told them they would receive amnesty. The government reassured the public that order has been virtually restored, but no one should go out on the street. The radio played the Hungarian National Anthem periodically. I heard this for days. The days blended into each other. The constant sounds of weapons blasting, the fragmented series of automatic machine gun fire, and the whistling sounds of bullets and projectiles as they sliced through the air around our house, are forever etched in my memory. We heard tanks as they frequently rumbled past our house, stopping every so often, and with earth shaking thunder, fired on some target.

Illustration by Ferenc Bitó



Freedom fighters shooting around the corner at an approaching tank

My Mother implored me not to set foot out on the street because if I got killed in the gunfire she was going to give me a beating that I would never forget. I didn't need to be frightened by her because there was plenty around me to be afraid of. But curiosity is also a strong motivator, and periodically I dared to stick my head out the main gate of the building to see "what the thunder is going on." I peeked out to get a better look at the tanks approaching from the Kálvin Square. As they passed our house, they stopped for a moment and each fired a shot in the direction of the Boulevard. But almost in the same moment I saw smoke trailing like fiery rain come down on the tanks from the upper windows of the houses. And then the freedom fighters who could, immediately escaped into the side streets while others ran out of my sight into the smoke filled, foggy mist.

I even heard some armed freedom fighters passing our gate as they planned their next tank encounters.

Potato and cabbage rations

After about three days our food supply started to dwindle. We had only purchased enough for a day or two, because at this point we had only heard of refrigerators but had never seen one. Now we had to carefully ration our supplies since it was uncertain how long we would have to be without shopping. On the fourth day, one of the residents got word that in the neighboring street a truck had arrived from the farming regions with some food that was being passed out to the people. The sounds of battle were not in the immediate neighborhood but rather came from some distance, so I ran down to the street with a little satchel and I found the TE-FU truck from which I received a little cabbage or potatoes – I am not so sure anymore what it was, but whatever it was, we were all very

grateful. Everyone expressed their gratitude for whatever they received. The farmers cheerfully passed the supplies with kindness, and did not take any money for it. I had never experienced anything like that in the past.

Promises from the West

One of the tenants in our building was a colonel prior to WWII. He was the most vocal declaring that “the armed conflicts would soon be over because the armed forces from western nations were due to arrive any time now... because we all heard their radio messages from the West, didn't we... and they said that they will be here if we only start it... the Westerners are not like the communists... they don't lie, we can trust in them...we can be confident we'll see them soon.” It would be ridiculous to think that little Hungary could effectively take on the Soviet Union, and no one could expect that a small country would rise up against such overwhelming power – that would be pure suicide. Hungarians knew that the Soviet Union would never tolerate any so-called Soviet ally trying to use its muscle, to rebel, and to take up arms in the interest of separating from them. Hungarians knew the Soviet methods well, having been introduced to them in WWII and the years after. Hungarians knew that this kind of armed opposition could only be conceivable with foreign assistance. And they promised... and we waited... but no one came.

That no one came to Hungary's aid is not spoken out loud anymore. Some say it is impolite to bring up accusations against a nation which gave Hungarian refugees asylum and whose bread we ate. They say that no matter how much we bring up these issues it will not change the past. I could understand that no help arrived, but then why was help promised not only prior to the start of the Revolution but even during the battles? Freedom fighters were encouraged to hold out for only one or two more days because help was on the way. That those radio broadcasts were not made by official representatives of the governments which they represented is a lame explanation, because those same governments provided the financial support for the radio stations.

I didn't know then, and most likely no one in Hungary did, that during those excruciating days the American administration had officially conveyed to Moscow that America had no intention of intervening in the Hungarian conflict and that America does not consider any nation rebelling against Moscow its friend. Is it possible that this is the reason that the departing Soviet occupation forces turned around and came back with reinforcements? Would the last fallen freedom fighter throw his life away in the hopeless knowledge that the western incitement to hold out was nothing but lies? Now there is silence about this. Are we the ones again who have to be ashamed for mentioning this?

Remnants of the battles

It must have been around October 28-29, when the heavy thunder of the battle seemed to subside, so my Mother and I went down to the street. We started in the direction of the Great Boulevard (József and Ferenc Körút). At the intersection of Üllői Street and the Boulevard, and in all directions we came upon the remains of such destruction that I am unable to describe it. The endless junkyard of destroyed tanks, armored vehicles, ammunition carriers, and a great variety of war machinery – all were scattered like broken toys revealing bitter but glorious battles. Some of the corpses had not yet been removed. Some, probably Soviet soldiers, lay burned black and shriveled under tanks and armored vehicles, with disproportionately large steel helmets next to their small shriveled up heads. Ammunition and expended shells were scattered by the thousands throughout the city. Rows of once substantial six-story residential and administrative buildings had been demolished from the roof to the ground, not only in one place but throughout the city, wherever we walked. In some places, corpses, dusted with white lime to prevent the spread of disease, lay on sidewalks or in the street, a few in military uniforms but more in civilian garments. In a shot-up trolley, an unfortunate passenger's body lay across the aisle covered with lime and flowers. We had to step over the body, since it was impossible to go back due to the line of curious people following from behind. We walked the city for a day or two, and could not believe how such a beautiful city could be laid to ruin. One day in the vicinity of Köztársaság Square, we were alerted by yelling that some ÁVH agents were hiding out nearby. Some shots could also be heard and people were yelling to stay down to keep from getting hit. We thought it better to completely back away from Köztársaság Square in order to stay out of a possible crossfire.

Next to a wall, passers-by were tossing money into an unguarded box to benefit the needy. No one asked who would receive the money and no one took any out. At one place, pieces of wood were assembled in a shape of a human and dressed in Soviet uniform, complete with canteen and an unusually dark piece of bread in a mess kit. True to the reputation of Soviet soldiers, several stolen wrist watches were on its arm, and I noticed that some were still working. On the buildings I saw only the imprints of the torn-off, despised red star and hammer and sickle symbols. I saw painted slogans such as “Russians go home,” and “Gerő where are you hiding... come out now,” and many others on walls everywhere. All the faces we saw radiated flames of joy and jubilant attitudes. Everyone saw the dawn of freedom, since apparently the tyrannical regime was broken. The word on the street was that the Russian troops had started to pull out.

The days seemed to melt together. I am not sure exactly when, but a day or two later in the evening someone knocked on our door. It was my Grandfather. He had come from Somogy County, traveling with the most unconventional modes of vehicles – on trucks, tractors, motorcycles... any way possible since the normal methods were not operational. He was thrilled to see us unharmed, and announced right away that this is not over yet. He said to gather the most important belongings and start back to the safety of our home town, Segesd. The next day we

viewed all that could be seen of the city for the last time. Then from Móricz Zsigmond Square, we started our journey toward Somogy County, chasing after and jumping on trucks and using all available forms of transportation.

Journey to the country

It was already late into the night when we arrived in the vicinity of Székesfehérvár when the small convoy of trucks we were traveling on came to a halt. It turned out before we were allowed to continue, we had to wait for a column of Russian heavy armor to pass, traveling in the direction of Budapest. When we were able to continue, we made our arduous way until we reached Marcali. There we could no longer use our resourcefulness, and resorted to telephoning for a farm tractor and trailer to take us the rest of the way.

In earlier times I went to school in Segesd. When my old schoolmates saw me, they surrounded me for firsthand news about Budapest. I told my impassioned story, but I didn't stop there. I got the whole school frenzied and we made our protest march through the village with flags and passing out handwritten flyers – the way I had seen it in Budapest. The march culminated at the Town Hall where the police unsuccessfully tried to quiet us down. By the time the news of police involvement reached the end of the village, it was distorted to imply that the police were gathering the children and turning them over to Russian captivity. The panicked parents rushed to the rescue, some with farm tools still in their hands, saying 'nobody is gonna touch my kid.' Each grabbed his own by the hand and, with gratified joy, dragged them home.

Not much later we got news that on November 4th there was renewed fighting in Budapest against fresh Soviet troops and things were not looking good. We started to seriously look at our options for the future. For two months we deliberated. Finally after Christmas, we sadly came to the conclusion that we should depart the country for the West. The plan evolved that my Mother, Grandmother, and I would escape. My Grandfather would stay behind to transfer real estate and other property to one of his nephews. Due to his age, the state would later allow him to leave since he would be viewed as a burden to the nation.

Forbidden border crossing

My Grandfather established contact with a resident near the Austrian border who volunteered to act as our guide. At this late point, it was not advisable to attempt an escape without help due to the newly reestablished and reinforced border security. We didn't say anything to anyone, and on the evening of January 12th, the three of us took a train to Zalaegerszeg where, according to the plan, sometime at dawn we were to meet my Grandfather and our guide. But the border patrol pegged us. At the moment my Grandfather entered the waiting room with our guide, they surrounded us and announced that we were suspected of forbidden attempted border crossing. They ordered us at gunpoint onto a truck. We were transported to police/ÁVH headquarters, most likely to the building where the trail of my Father's body vanished three years before. They separated us from the two adult men, and after some interrogation ordered us to leave with the parting words, "let us not meet again." In this we were in total agreement. Outside, we said goodbye to Grandfather, not knowing if we would ever see him again. The four of us took a taxi to our guide's village to await the darkness.

On the 13th, after darkness settled on the hills, we started our hike through the fields, woods, and valleys, avoid-ing residential areas in the dark. At one point, an acquaintance of our guide allowed us into his house to get a couple hours of sleep. Before dawn, we continued on in a snowstorm and over plowed fields. Anytime we saw what appeared to be patrolling activity, we hid beneath the bushes. Closer to the border we met other escapees. When they learned how long we hiked the fields and woods without rest, some advised us against continuing since the border crossing was still a long and grueling journey. They felt it was unlikely that we would survive. But we were not deterred. If we made it this far, come hell or high water, we would not quit at this point. After darkness settled on the land once again and with our last exertion of our depleted energy, we attempted the last segment. Next to a small ditch along the path, a small Hungarian and Austrian flag marked the border. I glanced back for the last time, with a tear in my eye, and with a sigh pushed onward on that cold and snowy January night... and we arrived half dead on the morning of the 15th, in a small Austrian village, a free land.



Tibor Ország

In 1956, Tibor Ország attended the Práter Street School, next to the Corvin Theater. He is a descendent of a gendarme family. At the age of 13 he escaped from Hungary in 1957, and settled in the Cleveland area. In the 1960s, Ország worked at a GE research and development facility. In the 1970s, he established and operated a sky diving center. In the 1980s, he worked on the U.S. Space Shuttle program in quality systems. Since the 1990s, he has been an industrial management consultant. His wife is American and his daughters read and write Hungarian

László Papp

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

“Remembrance of the Cold War”

a speech given on Veterans’ Day, November 11, 2005, at Rutgers University

By the time the Radio had broadcast at two o’clock on October 23 the Government’s decree forbidding any demonstrations, the column of marching students from the Technical University had already passed the Freedom Bridge and Calvin Square. Groups of students from the Eötvös University also joined in. As the crowd reached the Museum Ring-road, the rows of marchers were wide abreast.

Our office, the Design Institute for Residential and Urban Development, was at Madách Square, above the large brick arch that was intended to be the beginning of a never-completed major boulevard through the slums of the 7th district. The secretaries of the office were cranking out leaflets of the demands, the 16 Points that were passed to us from the students. The secretaries worked tirelessly on the usually restricted copy machines without any interference from the authorities.

Naturally, many of the office workers joined the march. The marchers chanted slogans for freedom, independence, and removal of the Soviet military from our land. People showed support for the marchers, waving to them both from the sidewalks and from the windows. One of the greatest moments came when we reached Bem Square and saw the first Hungarian flag without the hated emblem of the communist regime.

16 Points and bloody conflict

Later in the evening, after having heard Imre Nagy at the Parliament, I was one of a delegation chosen to present the “16 Points of the students” at the “white house,” the communist party headquarters near the Margaret Bridge. The people there accepted the leaflet without comment and our crowd left satisfied, believing that we succeeded. As I returned home to be with my pregnant wife, I left with a sense of hope and jubilation, but my joy proved to be short-lived.

In the meantime, others brought the 16 Points to the Radio station to be broadcast around the country, but the situation there did not proceed as peacefully as at the “white house.” The Secret Police received the people’s request with bullets, then the Russian troops were called in, and the peaceful demonstration turned into a bloody conflict. My wife and I were understandably shocked and confused when we woke up the next morning hearing the sound of gunfire from the radio.

It was past 11 o’clock in the morning by the time I crossed the river to Calvin Square. By that time the combat at the nearby radio station had subsided; however, occasional gunfire continued to burst through the air. Several people were injured and a few of us pulled them back into a nearby house entrance. For a moment the street appeared quiet and normal (except, of course, for the burned-out streetcars).

Then we saw a Russian armored car with a young Russian soldier lumped forward in the driver seat. It appeared that he was hit through the car door and apparently died instantly. “Poor boy, you had to come here to die,” murmured an older man in the crowd.

The Revolutionary Council

As I arrived at the office, we were all so eager and excited to talk about what was happening, that no one worked all day. Suddenly there was a call for assembly in the large dining hall that accommodated all 600 workers. Someone suggested that we form a “Revolutionary Council” to replace the office’s former “triumvirate” management: the principal, the communist party secretary and the personnel director. Each section of the office elected a delegate to the Council, and then much to my surprise, I was elected to be the chairman of the entire Council.

The Council’s first order of business was to distribute the hated “dossiers” kept by the personnel office on each of us. This was symbolically significant because the Council wanted to express that the old regime no longer had power. Ours was not the only such council. Spontaneously and without any direction similar “Revolutionary Workers’ Councils” were formed throughout the City. We sent a delegation to the Greater Budapest Workers’ Assembly. In addition, since we had architects and engineers, we created an advisory group to assist reconstruction work once the fighting and destruction subsided. Finally, we also established a schedule for providing security for our building. All in all, we felt good about our progress, and hoped that freedom and order would soon prevail.

The following day, however, turned out to be the notorious “bloody Thursday,” when Soviet tanks and secret police were firing on the crowd at Parliament Square. Fortunately, I was somewhat behind the crowd so the sortie hitting the nearby Ministry of Agriculture building area missed me. The entire plaza was covered with wounded and dead people. My best friend, Ferenc Callmeyer, was right up front, but luckily, he also got away without injury. Later he placed bronze balls in each of the bullet holes of the building as a memorial for the fallen heroes.

Fears from the past

Two days later hysteria took over the crowd that assembled by the central headquarters of the communist party at Köztársaság (Republic) Square. The Secret Police guard resisted demands to yield to the Revolutionary Council. This resulted in the bloody lynching of four ÁVO officers that received so much publicity in the world media. Even though many reporters noted with awe the absence of looting or violence, this is what was put on the pages of LIFE Magazine.

The assembled crowd started to imagine things. They thought they heard sounds from buried prisoners in secret cellars of the party headquarters. Bulldozers were summoned and they started to dig up the square.

Not finding anything, a broadcast was sent through the radio, asking anyone who may have knowledge about the building to come forward. A former member of our firm called in with the information that the building had been designed by us. Then a soldier was sent to Madách Square asking for information. I was on watch in our office at the time, and responded to the request by reviewing the building plans. I found nothing, so I called the architect and structural engineer; they confirmed that there was no secret jail or cellar.

Actually, I myself had experience with secret construction which was directed by the Internal Ministry's design division. While I did not work on the party headquarters, I was part of the team designing the three residences for the top party officials at the Béla Király (King Béla) Road. There we did get the profiles connecting to the secret areas, as it was directed by the Ministry's staff. No such connections were given at the party building. The whole thing proved to be nothing but mass hysteria.

It is interesting to note, that while I, as an untrustworthy "class alien" had an opportunity to work on one of the most sensitive secret projects for the party leaders in Hungary, only a few years later, I also had the assignment to design the CIA director's office, as a refugee architect working for the most prestigious architectural firm in New York.

The seeds of the Revolution

Even though the Revolution was spontaneous and surprising to the world, its seeds were planted a decade earlier. After the war, as the "old world" collapsed and the fascist dictatorship was defeated, there was an expectation of a free and democratic future for Hungary. This was not to be. While the first post-war democratic election brought a ray of hope in 1946, the "year of the turn" in 1948 marshaled in the most brutal and oppressive communist dictatorship.

The youth of the country who believed in the promise of the "shining waves" found bitter disillusionment. Even those communists who idealistically hoped for a just system of socialism found only betrayal. Actually they became the most vocal critics of the Rákosi regime. However paradoxical this may seem, the communist-dominated Hungarian Writers' Union became a state within a state. Their audience had been continually increasing, and the Literary Gazette reached a circulation of 450,000 in a country of only 10 million. The Petőfi Circle's debates, voicing

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



"Enough of 10 years of lies! We want a free Hungarian homeland!"

critical opinion, pulled together most of the leading intelligentsia.

The truth of the matter is that the collapse of Stalinism had created a political vacuum in Hungary. When the ruling classes were no longer able to govern, and the oppressed classes were unwilling to live as before, the recipe for the Revolution was written. Within three days the dictatorial system collapsed; even most of the privileged party members sided with the Revolution.

The will of the people and the attack of Soviet forces

For four days – from October 31 to November 3, 1956 – Hungary was free. Although Soviet forces were still in the country, they had withdrawn from the cities and the fighting had stopped. A reformist politician, Imre Nagy, was called to form the new government. The entire nation immediately recognized the Imre Nagy government, which, knowing it had no other alternative was ready to carry out the will of the people. And the Hungarians showed clearly what they wanted.

In his address of November 1, Imre Nagy was only repeating the desire of the people: “The revolutionary struggle fought by the Hungarian people and its heroes has at last carried the cause of freedom and independence to victory,” he said. In the spontaneously formed Revolutionary Workers’ Councils and national committees people started to develop the process of democratic self-determination. When we in the American Hungarian Student Association (ÉMEFESZ) polled our members in 1958 about their aspirations during the Revolution, seventy percent agreed: “Our aim was threefold – national independence, a Hungarian socialist structure instead of communism, and democracy.”

The glorious days of victory ended in deceit and a brutal attack by overwhelming Soviet forces. Imre Nagy’s call to arms was heard at the wee hours of November 4. The next day a few of us, mostly students from the nearby Technical University, kept vigil in a third floor apartment facing one of Budapest’s major thoroughfares, Móricz Zsigmond Plaza, in the building that now houses McDonald’s. It was a mild fall day; all windows were open. “Molotov cocktails” were lined up on the windowsills. And we waited...

We were waiting for the Russians and for the Americans: Russian tanks and American diplomats. While watching the streets, our ears were glued to the shortwave radio broadcast of the Voice of America transmitting directly from the U.N. headquarters in New York. The debate of the “Hungarian situation” was going on.

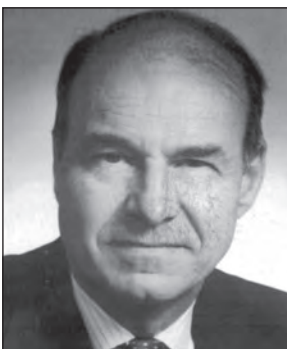
We were convinced that if we could delay the Soviets’ “final solution” for a few days, the international community would prevent the destruction of our newly gained freedom. However, help did not come. The Russians did come, and our building, along with most of the city, was destroyed. I am still in awe when I think of those people who lived in that apartment. They let us set up our post there even though they must have known that their home could become a target of Russian shells. As it indeed did...

Consequences

The defeat of the Revolution had tragic long-term consequences. The “compromise” which was forced by the post-revolutionary Kádár regime upon a beaten society created the often quoted “Gulyás Communism”: we let you live a little if you behave and stop resistance. Instead of national solidarity, society began to show signs of alienation, disorientation, corruption and selfishness.

Failed Revolutions can, however, become historically potent forces. The Hungarian Revolution proved to be the first nail in the Soviets’ coffin. It took 35 years, but the decline of the Soviet Union, a deepening economic crisis and increasing pressure by reformist groups demanding freedom, democracy and national autonomy finally prevailed. In 1990, Hungary held free elections. The last occupying Soviet troops left Hungary on June 19, 1991.

“The blood of the Hungarians has re-emerged too precious to Europe and to freedom for us not to be jealous of it to the last drop,” wrote the French writer, Albert Camus. The thirteen days that shook the Kremlin finally triumphed.



László Papp

After earning a degree in architectural engineering in Hungary in 1955, László Papp worked at the Design Institute for Residential and Urban Development. During the Revolution he was elected president of its Revolutionary Workers’ Council. In the United States he earned first a Master’s, then a Doctor of Liberal Arts degree. He founded and was the first president of the United Federation of Hungarian Students, an international refugee organization. Upon retirement from his architectural firm, he became the executive director of the Urban Development Commission for Stamford, Connecticut. He has been published in numerous professional journals, and has written for Hungarian-American publications.

András Pongrátz

TOPPLING OF THE STALIN STATUE

As a student of steel mechanics in my final year at the Eötvös Lóránt Technical High School, I was not interested in politics. I knew what we could and could not say outside the home, and adhering to these rules, I became the school's cultural attaché. I was focused on the theater and the film world and spent all my free time buying theater tickets and distributing them to the students and teachers at the school. Often I took the entire school, all twelve classes at once, (during school hours, of course) to the Tátra Movie house for special films. The theater was only a few hundred meters from the school. School itself did not interest me, but that was the only school that accepted me since my Father had been an intellectual.

I hadn't heard of any plans ahead of time; neither had any of my brothers. At home everything was fine and I kept busy with school and the theater. On October 23rd, I went to school and the day passed without incident. In the afternoon I went to the Opera House to account for some tickets and pick up new ones. When I came out of the opera's administrative office, at about four o'clock, I saw a paper pasted on the exterior wall of the Opera House and stopped to see what it said. To my great surprise, it was the typewritten 12 (that's how I remember it) demands of the students. Several times I looked around to see who might catch me reading these words. I was overwhelmed by wonder, something like this can happen in this country? I read it four, five times and just shook my head, almost in fear. I started toward home in Soroksár, and on the outer Ring Road I climbed onto the back step of the streetcar, balancing on one leg. When the trolley passed the National Theater, I saw a gathering of people in the square behind it and quickly jumped off the streetcar as it was moving to see what was happening.

In the midst of the crowd

In the small square in front of the department store there stood a statue. From that statue's pedestal college students were reciting patriotic poems and reading aloud the same 12 Points that I had read on the Opera wall. At this point I, too, got mixed in with the growing crowd. I listened and cheered the proceedings. There, in those minutes, we decided to go and topple Stalin's statue. The statue was the symbol of the hatred of the Russians and the communists; we believed then that its toppling would be communism's toppling (it's possible that this same idea occurred to others elsewhere.) Arm in arm with complete strangers and with a great clamor, we started toward the inner Ring Road, from there onto Kossuth Lajos Street toward the Heroes' Square. Because there were so many of us, and the crowd was increasing minute by minute, we had to walk in the street because the sidewalks were too narrow. Since we were blocking the trucks from getting through, the drivers asked us with great curiosity what was going on. When we told them our mission, they joined in the spirit and immediately offered to drive us in their trucks. In many, many trucks, loaded with people, we arrived at Heroes' Square. There the crowd just kept growing. It was as if people all over the city had the same idea.

By truck

Our plan sounded good, but making it happen was not child's play. Just climbing onto the giant hulk of a statue was hard enough, let alone moving it. But we were a young, clever, determined crowd and we did not know the word impossible. We needed a method to carry out our plan. It turned out to be good that all the trucks that had brought us here were there, so that we could use them in place of our hands. Hanging on the back of one truck was a long length of cable, which seemed ideal. Since the statue was so big that it was impossible to climb to its shoulder, we had to throw a lasso onto his head, and climb up that rope in order to tie the cable around his neck. And that is how it happened. Then we tied those cables to several different trucks and tried to pull him off his pedestal, but the statue did not budge. Four, five trucks still could not move him; their wheels just spun. Next, we all tried climbing onto the trucks for weight, but that yielded no results, plus it was too dangerous and we didn't want to cause bodily harm to anyone. One of our biggest problems was how to keep the crowd at a distance, out of harm's way. There were so many people and everyone wanted to help, but we could only accomplish something if we proceeded thoughtfully and carefully.

So the wheels were spinning, but we were getting nowhere. One boy said that there was a road construction site nearby with lots of cobblestones. In minutes they loaded up four trucks, but we feared that the rubber would strip off the tires under the huge weight. We began to tie the cables behind the loaded trucks. Our biggest problem was still persuading the crowd to stand back, so that there would be room for the trucks to move, and if the cable snapped, someone would not be killed. Finally, somehow we made enough room and the truck engaged on our signal. "And now!" Pull down the despised, hulking portrait, strangled with metal cable. Over and over, "Now! Pull! Watch out!" But the statue did not even shudder. The cables snapped one after the other and we, in our anger and powerlessness stood on the verge of tears. We encouraged each other, "man has put it there, so man can take it down." We had to be smarter. One of the boys who went to Technical School, like me, said his school was relatively close by and they had some cutting torches. Immediately he left with five other boys and in a short time returned with the equipment. The crowd was excited that we were persevering, and instead of thinning out, it just kept growing. Much help was offered, there were many of us with substantial knowledge either from school or factory work, so within minutes we had cut the statue under his knees and again the greatest problem was holding back



Freedom fighters display pieces of the Stalin statue that was torn down

the eager crowd. No one there was foreman or line- worker, student or teacher. Everyone was equal and everyone wanted to help. That's how it happened; we succeeded in getting the crowd backed up and then the trucks finally pulled down the now-weakened statue amidst a great roar of crunching and snapping.

Perhaps the greatest moment of joy in my life, up to that point at least, was when that universally hated symbol fell with a tremendous clamor and then lay there as if dead. Ritualistically we climbed on top of it; feeling as if we had just toppled all of communism. We swam in joy and embraced one another. I turned to a uniformed policeman, whose pistol was hanging, holstered, at his side and asked perhaps cynically, but really more amicably "What do you think of this?" If you think about it, he could have pulled out his pistol and there would have been a bloodbath, with his own blood included. But far from that, he said "Well, son, it's about time that bandit came down from there. And besides, even if I wanted to, what could I do against all these people?"

To the Radio

Time was passing quickly. Since four o'clock when I jumped off the streetcar, I felt as if I had lived an entire lifetime there at Heroes' Square. It could have been close to ten o'clock when we heard the news that the AVO was firing on the crowd at the Radio. This meant that there was 'trouble' there as well, and that matters were taking a serious turn in ways I couldn't have dreamed of a few hours before. We all agreed to go to the Radio and see what was happening.

The crowd took up the entire width of Andrassy Avenue and there I met one of my teachers from the technical school (he was the shop teacher; if only he knew how his teaching had come in handy during the last few hours). I said to him "Sir, what are you doing here?" He said, "Son, things here are getting serious. Since the AVO is shooting at the Radio, we must respond." To my great surprise he said, "Before going to the Radio, I have to stop at home and get something that I'll be needing." He didn't say it but I understood he was going home to get a weapon to

take to the Radio. That's when I saw him last; I don't know what happened to him. What he told me filled me with fear, since I knew what a serious crime it was in our "people's democracy" for someone to own a weapon.

I remembered that my job in the family as youngest and smallest boy was hiding my brothers' yearly-cleaned and oiled guns underneath the eaves of the hay loft. No grown adult could fit in there and thus would not be found in the event of a house search. So I thought to myself, things are definitely getting serious. I was moving with the big crowd toward the Radio, and when I got there I heard the gunshots and saw that there were already some dead. We had no weapons, we just stood by and shouted angrily that the rat secret police were hiding behind walls as they shot into the crowd. I went out to the Muzeum Street and saw that they had called out the army, and young soldiers were marching with bayonets at the ends of their guns.

We ran to them in disbelief and said, "What are you doing, surely you can't think of firing at your brothers and parents here?" One young soldier replied, "Of course we're not firing; they drove us out here to scare the people. We don't even have ammunition, and besides, if you find me some civilian clothes I'll come and join you." I took off my sweater and gave it to him. He took off his uniform jacket, threw it into the bushes in the garden of the National Museum, put on my sweater and joined our group.

It was getting very late and I remembered how much my poor Mother worried about me, especially since I was supposed to be home between five and six. I found a phone and called home, and just as I suspected, I got a long lecture from my Mother, and she ordered me to go home immediately. It took a long time, but by the middle of the night I made it home.

The tanks are coming

On October 24th, I awoke to the news that the Russian troops were heading for Budapest and that they were advancing right through our neighborhood of Soroksár on their way to the city. Somehow, we had to stop them. Several of us got together in the main square, and brainstormed about how we could stop the Russian troops from entering the city, at least through Soroksár. Thinking about it now and for some time, I realize how naive we were, but at that time we felt that whatever it was, we had to do anything we could.

We decided to build a barricade in the middle of the street, but one so big that even tanks couldn't cross. We started grabbing anything we could find in the homes in the neighborhood, piling it in the middle of the street. There were stones, bricks, sofas, sewing machines, doorjambs, wagons (some in working condition, some not) and anything else you can imagine finding in a house in Soroksár. We thought that since there was a ditch on one side of the street and the rail tracks on the other, we could stop the Russians. We were proud of ourselves when we looked at the mountain that we had built in a couple of hours.

And the Russians did come, with such a rumbling from the tank tracks that we heard them long before we saw them. We hid in the bushes and ditches and waited. "Dear Lord, what would happen next?" As they came closer and closer, our ears could hardly stand the noise. We watched as the trucks that were leading the convoy stopped at our barricade, but then the tanks came from behind and went around our barricade by going onto the train tracks and simply returning to the road on the other side and creating a road for the trucks. In our anger and humiliation we jumped out from our hiding places and threw whatever we could get our hands on at the tanks. We had no weapons, but even if we had any, they wouldn't have made a mark on those tanks.

Firing on the people

As soon as the tank convoy passed, the soldiers began to pass by the truckful. We started pelting them with half bricks and fist-sized rocks. We had broken several windshields before the soldiers started firing at us and didn't stop firing until they crossed the main square of Soroksár. We all tried to take cover wherever we could. I lay flat by the sidewalk and just prayed that I would make it through alive. A half a meter away there was a small tree and I inched myself to it so that I could put my head behind it, thinking that if my body is shot up at least my head won't be. The 15-20 minutes I spent there were the longest of my life. When the Russians left and we got up, sadly we found lots of dead among us. In the gate of the house right next to me, I found the body of one of my classmates' 11 or 12 year old little brother. He had been shot in the head by a bullet and the poor little kid's brain was splattered all over the gateway. I went home very sad that we could not hold back the Russians, and instead they killed and wounded our neighbors. These were among the first Russian troops to enter the city and perhaps these were among the ones that perished, burned in their tanks or shot at the Corvin Köz, because they were the Russian troops over whom we, "Kids of Pest," were victorious in October 1956.

May 27, 1996 – Tucson, Arizona

András Pongráz

Youngest of the renowned six Pongráz brothers who fought in Corvin Köz, András Pongráz was 17 when he left Hungary. He currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona, and is blessed with four sons, a daughter, and nine grandchildren. He was a businessman while he raised his family, but in the last ten years has been sponsoring performers and artists from Hungary. He has organized over a hundred concerts for American, Canadian, and Australian Hungarians; he enjoys the company of Hungarians worldwide.

Tamás Rátoni Nagy

I FOUGHT THEM IN VIETNAM, BECAUSE I WAS TOO YOUNG IN BUDAPEST



Nagy in 1956

My Father tried to escape to the West through the Iron Curtain in 1950, but he was shot on the Austrian border. After treatment in the hospital, the ÁVO (Secret Police) put him in solitary confinement in a narrow cell with ice water dripping down all four walls, where he was forced to stand with his feet in cold water for 72 hours. All of this was done without food, of course, which culminated in him signing a forced confession about crimes against the people. He received a prison sentence of 3-1/2 years and spent part of his incarceration in Szombathely and at a forced-labor sawmill. He escaped, however, along with seven prisonmates, and went into hiding. During the ÁVO's monthly visits, they would hit my Mother and me and ask my Father's whereabouts. At that time I did not know that he was hiding in our furniture store. Later, after our store was seized by the state, he came home one night and I finally saw him. Afterwards, my family tried to tell me that I had dreamt it, but I didn't believe them, and finally they had to explain that he was, in fact, at home.

I learned to alert my Father when I was coming home with someone by rattling the keys on the stairway railing, so he could return to his hiding space. Of course, I was not allowed to tell anyone that he was home.

We lived in an apartment building in Budafok, and my Father tried to work during the day making furniture, working quietly using his hand tools. Later he turned himself in to the police, served the remainder of his 3 1/2 year prison sentence, and was freed the summer of 1956.

During this time, I can clearly remember my Mother decorating an Easter egg with a traditional Hungarian motif instead of with a hammer and sickle or a red star. In school, however, I had to say I received an Easter egg with a red star. So early on I was taught to lie, because if I hadn't, they might have arrested my Mother.

October 1956

During the Revolution, my Father fought in Pest at the ÁVO Barracks. Later, when the Soviets returned in November, he organized his former gymnastics students from Budafok and fought in the outskirts of Budafok and Kamara forest.

I was a youngster and could not really do much fighting, but one day I decided I could protest against the mandatory Russian taught in schools from fifth grade on. So I hand-printed some fliers and posted them on the doors of the school. That was my contribution to the freedom fight.

Another distinct memory I have is when the Soviet tanks returned on November 4th. My Mother sent me to stand in line for bread, and as I stepped outside the gate, I felt the earth tremble beneath my feet. I looked up and saw a Soviet tank coming down our street. My feet froze in fear, and I could not move. Luckily, the Russian had enough humanity to go in another direction, turning off of our street. This incident was the scariest yet for me.

Another memory I have is when the Soviets were shelling from the banks of the Danube. We could hear the shells whistling through the air above us in Budafok. People were talking about shrapnel raining down, and I remember being in the basement with my Mother and being scared that something like that might hit me. My Father was not with us because he was off fighting

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



"The workers' most effective weapon is to strike."

somewhere. He had to leave Budafok, because his name was the first on the list to get hanged if caught. Later I learned that he left Hungary through Yugoslavia because of his earlier experience in 1950 at the Austrian border. My Mother and I left 2-3 weeks later than my Father, riding on a milk truck from the Keleti train station. Getting to the train station, my last memories of Budapest were of Soviet tanks on street corners, and streetcar tracks mangled by tank treads on the Móricz Zsigmond square. The fighting had mostly subsided by then.

A milk-truck driver from Sopron took us to the Austrian border, and an old man guided us across. My last memory of Hungary was seeing a dry flower sticking up through the 20 cm deep snow. I leaned over and plucked it, and to this day I still have it pressed between the pages of my journal. As I looked back toward my homeland and left it forever, it was as though a twenty-ton boulder had fallen from my shoulders; it was as if the cruelty of communism and the hardships it had caused my family had just been released.

I have yet to return to Hungary.

We arrived in Camp Kilmer on March 28, 1957, and I spent my eleventh birthday there. We came by train to Cleveland, and I remember remarking how much empty land and open space there was between New Jersey and Ohio.

Vietnam

My parents had divorced, so I grew up without a Father. Things were pretty tough financially, and since I was rather wild and unruly, and I needed some discipline, I enlisted in the Marine Corps. After completing basic training, I met up with a Hungarian friend, Joe Dezső, and ended up in the same battalion at Camp Pendleton.

Our unit was sent to Vietnam in May of 1965. Crossing the Pacific Ocean, Joe and I, two Hungarian kids, had a conversation on the ship. Our discussion centered on going to Vietnam and how it was an opportunity to return the slap in the face the communists had given us in Hungary in 1956. We were not fighting against the Soviets, to be sure, but they were communists nonetheless. So we went willingly to Vietnam. I spent 13 months there, then came back and served the remainder of the military tour training Marine officers, FBI, and Secret Service members how to shoot on the rifle range at Quantico, VA. After I left the Marine Corps, I returned to Cleveland.

The significance of 1956

The 1956 Revolution personally gave me a chance to start a new life in America. From a world perspective, however, what caused this tiny nation to rise up against the Soviet superpower, armed to the teeth? We Hungarians were lucky if we had a 22 or an air gun, against their tanks. Yet the people still rebelled. We had had enough, and this freedom fight was the first crack in the armor of the great Soviet Union, precisely because it was not an ordinary riot. The people who rebelled were the factory workers from the industrial areas, those same people who were glorified in the communist worker propaganda. Our freedom fight stopped the communist movements in Italy and France dead in their tracks, because it revealed the true nature of communism. And later, in 1989, when Hungary opened its borders to the West, that brought down the Berlin Wall, because East Germans went to freedom through Hungary.

I spent most of my life in Cleveland. One important thing about the Hungarian émigré community is that they continued to commemorate the events of 1956, even when it was forbidden to do so in Hungary, from 1956 to 1989. But now things have changed: on October 23, 1989, a free Hungary was proclaimed a republic, so that date is now doubly etched in Hungarian history.

I owe thanks to Hungary for giving me life, and I owe thanks to the United States, my new country, for allowing me to start over and live a life of freedom and prosperity. I am now an American citizen and live my life in America, but my heart remains first and foremost Hungarian, and will always be so.



Tamás Rátoni Nagy

Tamás Rátoni Nagy was 10 years old when he experienced the events of the freedom fight and fled to the West with his Mother. A veteran of the United States Marine Corps and of the Vietnam War, he returned to Cleveland and worked in the art framing and industrial drafting fields. Nagy is an avid Boy Scout leader in Troop 414, and also volunteers in the Cleveland Hungarian School on Monday evenings. He is currently employed as a construction inspector.

Tom Rogers

DRIVING HOME FROM THE U.S. LEGATION



Rogers in 1956

It was the afternoon of Friday the 26th or Saturday the 27th of October – dates are a little unclear – and a dark, cloudy, almost foggy afternoon. Anton and I left the Legation as dusk was falling, so as to be home before dark, and drove slowly through “Russian” Budapest. That was the defense circle in which the Soviets had dug themselves in most tightly; it included the Parliament, the Defense Ministry, the Ministry of Interior, all the bridgeheads on the Pest side of the river, and the area in which the Legation was situated. This section was relatively clean, as I now remember it, with little rubble on the streets, but no people either except for the constant patrols of armored cars. We circumnavigated the tightest area, bristling with tanks, and drove down Bajcsy Zsilinszki út to the Nyugati Train Station and then down the “Boulevard” to the Danube. We were practically the only civilian traffic.

Face of the enemy

At the bridge we eased between the two tanks facing the opposite side of the river, after the Russian and Hungarian army patrols had checked our papers and permitted us, as diplomats, to pass. I suppose it is easy at such a time to describe the face and feel of the enemy – they are usually called “glowering” or “threatening” – and it is true these soldiers certainly did not give any evidence of camaraderie. But who can describe another’s inner feelings at such a time? Some Russians defected during the Revolution. Perhaps our “threatening Mongol” was one. Did he think he was standing on a Nile Bridge, or in Berlin, instead of over the Danube? What did the Hungarian do the day before, or the day after? How did he come, that day, to find himself patrolling the bridge with the hated enemy that his countrymen, with a unity unknown in their entire history, had just risen against? On the other hand, I suppose one has to give his momentary impressions of the enemy, subjective though these be, and not the ultimate truth of his make-up. I never saw a pro-Soviet force during the Revolution – man or tank – which struck me as anything but hostile and threatening.

We left the bridge, unguarded on the Buda side, and drove, always slowly, into Mártírok utca, “Street of the Martyrs.” As soon as we turned the corner after leaving the bridge approach, the difference was noticeable: people were moving about in the streets. No armored cars, no tanks. The people were at ease, and friendly, though there were not many of them. We were now in no-man’s-land, where no Russian could come by day with impunity, but neither completely under insurgent control. This was the beginning of free Hungary.

The children

At the small square, Széna tér, by the subway excavation, there was a road block, manned by the free Hungarian “army” of the Széna tér, the “gyermekek” or the “children,” later so damned and hunted by the Soviet puppet regime. The “children,” three teenagers with submachine guns, stopped us. They were tired, dirty and tense. Well might they be, since some of their group had died the night before and more were to die that night when the Soviet tanks left their daytime havens and came over in force. The “children” looked at our identification, and for the only time during the Revolution, examined our overnight bags for weapons. And as always, they and the people who crowded near asked for news, both from the other side of the river and from the world outside.

We passed on through the blockade of paving stones and three overturned railway coaches, pushed up the night before on streetcar tracks, and into the large adjoining square: Szél Kálmán tér. Who now would have dared to use its communist name of Moszkva tér? This was free Hungary in reality. The crowds were thicker, as on a spring Sunday afternoon. But how was one to know then whether it was spring?

Along the Várfok út leading up to the Vár (Castle) where Anton lived, people stood by to let us pass and a few waved as we went by. We had an American flag draped over the hood of the car, although whether it was ever of any value as a safety measure I don’t know.

Flag of freedom, hope, and the future

I dropped Anton at his home, later completely destroyed by Soviet mortars, and retraced my way

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



A diplomatic car covered in the American flag

back down the Várfok út. As I did so – it was now almost dark – the crowds stood aside on the steep street, but this time began to clap as I drove by. We were accustomed during these days to getting nods and shouts of friendship from people on the streets, but as days passed these were already beginning to give way to such questions as: “What are you doing?” “When is America going to help?” “What is happening in the UN?” “When is Hammarskjöld coming?” This was the only time I had seen hundreds of people stand aside and applaud the flag, which to them represented freedom and hope and the future. The tears welled up.

People were clustered at the corner near our house, just a few blocks away. Marika, our children’s young nursemaid, was standing at our door. She said there was a young man there who had been shot in the leg when Soviet tanks had tried a rare daylight foray that afternoon. Just then someone came up and asked if I would drive the wounded boy to the home of a friend a mile away. The crowd helped him into the car. He smelled of brandy; it was our brandy, I later discovered. Marika and her sister had been carrying coffee and sheets for bandages to the Széna tér “children,” and had been asked to get a shot of something stronger for him.

The trip to his refuge was in silence; what could I say; what would he want to say? It was almost completely dark when we reached there, but a crowd gathered as I helped him out, and carried him into the house.

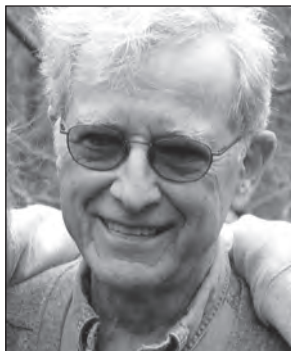
NOTE: My 8 year old daughter, Elinor, wrote the following unsolicited letter to President Eisenhower: [original spelling maintained. - ed]

Letter from abroad

Dear Mr. Isehower:

I am Elinor Rogers, 8. My Father Is a diplomat and we live in Budapest, Hungary, Europe. On Oct. 31 we were having our hallow’een party in the American Legation (you know, there is a war in Hungary) when suddenly a band of Hungarians gathered in front of the Legation and began crying something. Mr. Clark said they were singing their national anthem and asking us for help, but Daddy said we couldn’t because our army was in America. I am ashamed of you. Europe is our fellow country and you should help her if she is in danger. Even if you came half across the country and then lost, you would at least have glory. I wish America wasn’t so rich. It’s getting badder every year. If I were the President, I would change a lot of things in America. I wish I could give some of America’s richness to Europe, so they would be even. Europe will never be freinds with America, if you don’t help now. Please do. If you don’t, I’ll never like you again.

Elinor



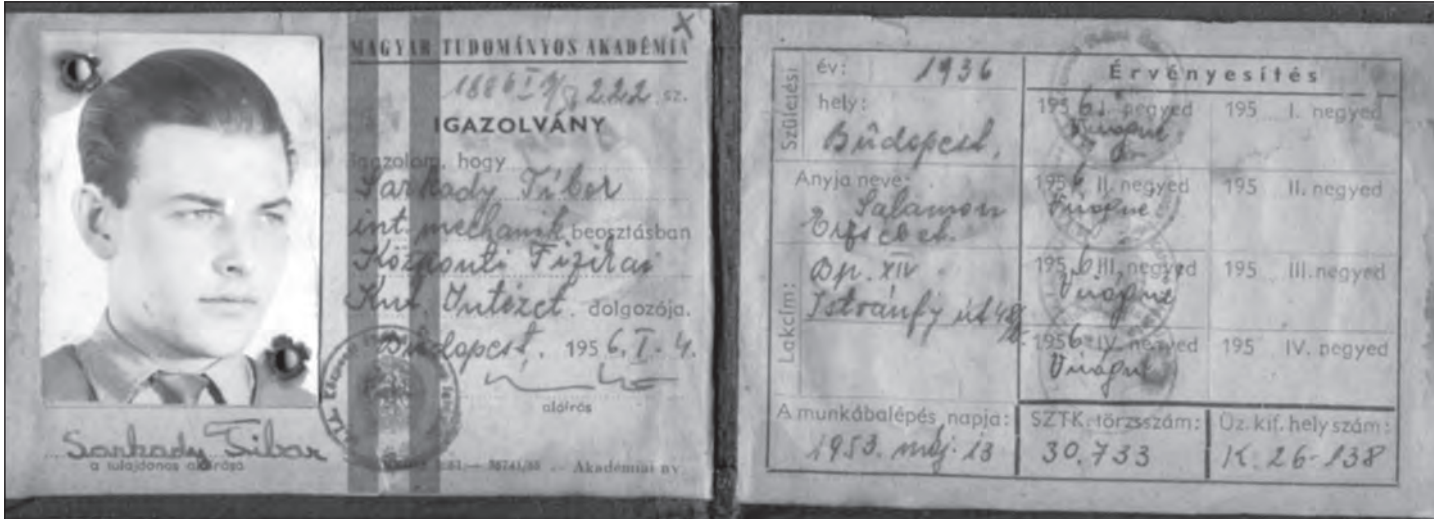
Tom Rogers

Originally from South Carolina, Tom Rogers graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1942 with a degree in physics, hoping to be a meteorologist. He attended M.I.T. as an Air Corps cadet and served as a weather forecaster in the North Atlantic. After the war he worked for the Foreign Service, serving in Germany during the Berlin Blockade. He was in the US Legation in Budapest from 1953 to 1957, serving as its First Secretary. He later served in Argentina, Ecuador, and Pakistan. He has 4 grown daughters and still maintains yearly contact with other former members of the 1956 Budapest US Legation. He currently lives in Mechanicsburg, PA, and hopes to spend the 50th anniversary in Hungary.

His daughter Elinor grew up to be a bilingual English-Spanish reading teacher and currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin. Even now she vividly remembers the events that moved her to write the letter, and still recalls a Hungarian song from her childhood, “Mennyből az angyal.” She never received a reply to her letter.

Tibor Sárkány

WHO WAS A FREEDOM FIGHTER?



Sárkány's identification card from 1956

My name is Tibor Sárkány, or if you wish, Sárkány Tibor. I was born in 1936, and as we near the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, I am approaching my 70th birthday.

As I was growing up in Budapest, my Father always told me, "My son, we are here for just a short time, but every human being has a purpose in his or her life. But more importantly, there is a moment in your life, like a shooting star in the sky that represents your moment in history. You might not know it at the time, but by the end of your life you will."

I now know that October 23rd through early November 1956 was my shooting-star moment in history. How young we were – full of life, dreams, ambitions and patriotism.

Yes, I was there, from day one to the very end of the fighting. Yes, I was, and still am a Freedom Fighter.

But, let us stop for a moment. Who was a Freedom Fighter? Yes, I was, with a weapon in my hand (and for this and other reasons, I was sentenced to death by hanging in absente reo in July, 1957).

But so was that Hungarian policeman who was directing traffic three blocks from the radio station where we were killed by the hundreds on the night of October 23rd when I had nothing to fight with. I went to him with tears in my eyes and said, "What are you doing? Don't you know we are being slaughtered and here you are with a weapon by your side. What kind of Hungarian are you?" He told me that he was married with two children and couldn't risk being part of the fighting. So I told him, "If you are not going to use your gun then give it to me!" He looked me in the eyes and said, "Here it is, my son," and handed me his weapon. He was a Freedom Fighter.

But so was the old lady who gave me a cup of hot chocolate to keep me warm. She was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the gentleman who told us, "Boys, don't go that way. There are Russians coming." He was a Freedom Fighter.

Or my friend and schoolmate who died in my place, by virtue of the fact that we had just changed places operating a machine gun ten seconds earlier. He was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the Hungarian tank commander and his crew who refused to kill us on the night of October 23rd, 1956, and paid with their lives for disobeying a direct order. They were all Freedom Fighters.

Or the Ukranian soldiers who were stationed next to the Astoria Hotel with their guns pointing towards the sky saying, "If you don't shoot us, we won't shoot you." They were Freedom Fighters.

Or the citizens of Budapest, who on the evening of November 1st, All Saints Day, lit over 100,000 candles and placed them on every window sill and street corner in memory of fallen heroes and loved ones. I was on patrol that night and it was the most mystical sight I ever beheld. My friends, that night, everyone in the whole city of Budapest and indeed, the entire country, was a Freedom Fighter.

Or the Hungarian border guards who told us which way to go so we could escape. They were Freedom Fighters.

Or later on, after we managed to make it to Vienna, a lady who saw that we had nothing but canvas sneakers on our feet, bought new boots for the three of us and paid for them saying, "Magyar is free." She was a Freedom Fighter.

Or when, as 4,000 of us were leaving Bremerhaven in January 1957, aboard a troop carrier bound for the United States, every ship in port blasted its horn and dock workers stood at attention and saluted as a band played the Hungarian National Anthem. Yes, they too were Freedom Fighters.

Or when during the 12 long miserable days that it took to cross the North Atlantic, with most of us suffering varying degrees of seasickness, that black sailor who came to us every day saying the only Hungarian he knew, "Enni menni" which means "Go to eat." He was my first contact with America and his care and concern was like a warm welcome hug to our new home. Yes, he was a Freedom Fighter.

So, my friends, as you can see, I have been blessed by many whom I choose to call Freedom Fighters, and they have enriched my life, one and all.

Later generations may ask, "Why did you do it?" So much loss of life. 25,000 died. So much sacrifice and destruction. The answer is simple. On that one day, the entire nation, young and old alike, stood together as one and said, "By my God Almighty, we have had enough."

This year is the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. My wife and I will be there as we are most every year. I will take back the little Hungarian flag that I brought out in 1956. After 50 years, I will place it on the gravesite of my fallen friends and comrades and tell them, "Until we meet again."

Isten, áldd meg a Magyarat. God Bless the Magyars.



Tibor Sárkány

Tibor Sárkány, born in 1936, is an electrical engineer and the owner and founder of Elmeco Engineering, a 35 year old company. He has been married to his wife Linda for 42 years and is the proud Father of 3 children – Steven, Darren and Kim – and Grandfather to Amanda and Katie. He currently resides in Rockville, Maryland.

William S. Shepard

REFLECTIONS OF AN AMERICAN DIPLOMAT

I was in my senior year at Wesleyan University when the Hungarian Revolution broke out. We students were transfixed by the news, and professors who knew about Hungary were in great demand, to give impromptu teaching seminars, years before the “teach-in” became an accepted feature of American academic protest. Feeling powerless to help directly, as we all did, and outraged at the turn taken by events, I organized a Hungarian Relief drive on campus, and sent money to a refugee organization in Vienna. Also, full scholarships and free room and board were arranged for two Hungarian refugee students.

And that began a lifetime’s fascination with Hungary, her people and history. In the Foreign Service, following language training, I was assigned to Budapest as Consul and then Political Officer in 1970-1973, and then served as Hungarian Desk Officer from 1973 to 1975. It was a tumultuous time to live in Budapest. Cardinal Mindszenty was still in residence at the Embassy, and I spoke with him often, accompanying him on his late afternoon walks around the Embassy’s interior courtyard. Later, it was my privilege to offer testimony for his Canonization proceedings. Walking with the Cardinal was an education in Hungarian history and national character. My experiences with the Cardinal are set forth in my memoir, “Diplomatic Tales.”

During that period, of course the Hungarian Revolution was officially viewed as a counter-Revolution, and proper research on the heroic sites was impossible. It was afterwards that I returned to Hungary, and completed the research necessary for my book, “Murder On The Danube,” which is set against the backdrop of the Revolution, and follows the events as they took place from day to day. I was privileged to meet with experts on the period at the 1956 Historical Institute, and to give a seminar there. Many years later, I felt as privileged to give the annual address on the Hungarian Revolution at the Hungarian Embassy reception in Washington, D.C.

During my research, I discovered some little known facts about 1956. From an officer who served at the then American Legation, I found out that at no time did the Legation ask Washington for permission to give refuge to the Cardinal. Instead, the cable authorizing that refuge came “out of the blue” from Washington. And according to Monsignor Turcsenyi, that morning (November 4) as security deteriorated, the Cardinal had merely asked where a “Western legation” was located. He did not specifically ask for the American Legation. Monsignor Turcsenyi knew that the American Legation was in nearby Szabadság Tér, and steered them both that way.

I also found some little known background to the massacre in Kossuth Square outside Parliament on October 25, 1956, which began with firing from the roof of the Agriculture Building across the square. There had been an explosion near the Széchenyi Rakpart just before that. According to an American eyewitness (the building contained American diplomatic apartments), it was an ordnance charge dropped from the apartment building roof, onto Russian tanks below. This explosion set in motion a sequence of events, resulting in the Kossuth Square massacre.

Nobody knows who dropped the ordnance. It could have been anyone, for “at that point, everyone wanted the Russians out.” An American Marine, G.J. Bolick, tried to get onto the Széchenyi roof, but it was bolted from above. And so we will never know exactly who set off the explosion. But it does seem possible that the initial firing in response may have been directed towards Széchenyi, setting off in turn uncontrolled firing at the gathered crowds in Kossuth Square. We may never know for certain. But this is why my book refers to “gunfire, or a muffled explosion” before the shooting began at Kossuth Square.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution was an event of epochal importance, not just as a determining incident of the Cold War, although that was the immediate context. Before 1956, building on its capital as an ally in the fight against Hitler, the Soviet Russian empire could claim some moral legitimacy. After that, such claims were ludicrous. I hope that new generations of those who value freedom will long reflect on the courage shown by ordinary Hungarian citizens during those tumultuous days. My wife and I will be in Budapest for the 50th anniversary, and we look forward to walking the route that began the struggle on October 23rd, 2006.



William S. Shepard

A retired diplomat, William S. Shepard was the Republican nominee for Governor of Maryland in 1990. During his diplomatic career, he served in Singapore, Saigon, Athens, Budapest (as Consul and Political Officer), and retired as Consul General at Bordeaux. A Fulbright grantee and Harvard Law School graduate, he and Mrs. Shepard live in Oxford, Maryland. His novel dealing with the Hungarian Revolution, “Murder On The Danube,” and his memoir “Diplomatic Tales,” with personal memories of Cardinal Mindszenty, are available from www.amazon.com.

Péter A. Soltész

THEY NEVER GAVE UP THE SHOOTER

I had my summer vacation in the Tokaj region at my Uncle's farm in the summer of 1956, with nary a thought or whisper of anything brewing in the country. Coming back to the city in September, I was getting settled in to restart my studies in Budapest. On October 23rd, 1956, however, even to a young 10-year-old observer, it became very obvious that something significant was taking place. We lived across from Eötvös Loránd Science University in Budapest located on the Pest side. A large group of university students and others congregated at the university plaza that evening, with Hungarian flags and placards stating some protest messages. Things were definitely fermenting. I heard that they were all walking down to the Kossuth Radio station several blocks away from us to ask their basic demands, "points of rights," be broadcast on the radio station.

By the next day, there were more and more people with Hungarian flags that had the red star and the hammer and sickle cut out. By then, the Hungarian flag contained nothing but the horizontal red, white, and green stripes with a big hole in the middle. The people demanded basic freedoms, the removal of the current government, and the departure of the occupying Soviet troops.

On one of the side streets adjacent to the university was an army barracks with Hungarian troops, many of whom were also university students. They were convinced that they needed to join the movement, and guns and ammunition were apparently obtained there as well as from other sources.

Things got pretty noisy after a few days with a lot of gunfire. Most people who were not directly involved were "laying low." Soon I heard that Imre Nagy was selected as the new head of the party and that Rákosi had to step down. Things appeared to quiet down during the next days... People started to show the new flags and pins with the Kossuth címer (emblem). There were periodic gunfights in the streets, one close to my home in which a man (he was drunk) started shooting randomly at anyone moving and someone killed him. They found documents on him indicating that he was a member of the Secret Police (ÁVO), and a paper from the Interior Ministry indicating that the ÁVO would receive very significant special bonuses if they put down the "uprising."

Looking for Berlin and the Elbe River

Demands by the new government for political recognition went unheeded in the West. On November 4th, all hell broke loose in Budapest. Heavy artillery fire, airplanes flying by, bombing in certain areas, and the extremely loud reverberation of cannon fire from the top of Szabadság Hegy (Freedom Hill) located on the Buda side, could be heard. I found out that the Russians had claimed to withdraw their troops, but just the opposite happened. I heard that about 10 Russian armored divisions were let loose on Hungary to crush the Revolution. They took over Budapest and other areas of the country.

Several of the invading troops were engaged in conversation, and I overheard that some came from the far-eastern sections of Russia and barely spoke Russian. Surprisingly, they were looking for Berlin. They told us that they were in Germany, that what we knew to be the Danube River was the Elbe River, and that they were here to fight the Germans. Many of them seemed to be Mongolians rather than the "white" Russians. (In fact, most of the "white Russians" who were stationed in Hungary did not fight the Hungarians once they understood what was going on.) It took some explaining and a map to convince some of them that they were in fact in Hungary and not in Germany, and that we were Hungarians, not Germans. After that they seemed to become a bit more civil and perhaps appeased.

By now, there were many tanks on the streets of Budapest. Because many of the buildings in Budapest were made of very large blocks of stone on the outside, many shots had to be fired to do serious damage to a building. The Molotov cocktail became quite a popular "weapon," and the older students and others with the resources periodically threw one against a tank. Complete war zones were set up, with Russians and communist guards on one side and revolutionaries on the other. I often saw makeshift ambulances with large white sheets and a painted red cross on them whizzing by and taking the wounded.

Things got pretty difficult for many of us in the city because most of the food was brought in from the country and none was really coming in. Some food aid did arrive from the Austrians and the Danes (and I am sure others), and I even got a few cans of milk concentrate and some chocolates. The magnitude of the problems still facing Hungary did not yet fully register with me.

The West did start to respond a bit by calling on the Russians to withdraw. But with the Suez Canal crisis also going on, the United States and the West failed to act properly and come to the aid of the Hungarians. The Russians, upon hearing that a U.N. inspection team would be coming to Budapest, imported tons of plate glass to replace the broken windows from all the machine gun and tank firings. I never saw so much glass in my life. There was a cease-fire called, and the Russians in the tank turrets were all white from fear, because while they were "officially" not allowed to fire their guns, the freedom fighters often took potshots at them.

Nevertheless, after Imre Nagy was abducted, the overwhelming odds forced many Hungarians to reconsider their situation. During the early part of the Revolution, many folks had their Grundig short wave radios tuned to Western radio stations like the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe (RFE). It was, of course, still illegal to listen to those stations, so it had to be done in secret. They egged the Hungarians on that help was coming, but none came. I am still bitter about American foreign policy then that failed to support the Nagy government. Had they helped, communist Hungary and the Iron Curtain would have fallen that much sooner.

Initially, many of the communists escaped by going to the West where they were welcomed as “freedom fighters.” It took the western governments many weeks to catch on, after which they started to filter the people coming from Hungary.

Passive resistance at home

Things got tough for many Hungarians after the Revolution was defeated. With the additional Russians firmly in control of the country, anyone even remotely associated with the Revolution got threatened... or worse. Resistance was still there. There was a building on Kálvin Tér where someone managed to write in big, bold, highly visible letters, “Ruszki Go Home!” The response was that several tanks came and tried to erase the slogan by shooting at the building. They were obviously angry. They came to their senses and stopped after they were told that people lived in that building. Luckily the building survived... as did most of the slogan.

Military convoys and armed soldiers with machine guns walked in pairs on the streets, especially in “troubled areas,” to keep the peace. Such was the case in early December at University Plaza. One afternoon, some students tried to blow up one of those convoys by throwing some explosives at them. However, the explosives misfired. Soon many large tanks showed up, surrounded the university, and a real firefight erupted. We all had to go into the basement for protection. This firefight lasted for hours, as I recall.

I was in the fifth grade at the time, and the study of two languages was a requirement. One language, Russian, was mandatory, while the other was a matter of choice. I happened to make whole sets of Cyrillic alphabet flash cards to help with my Russian. For some unknown reason, I decided to place both Russian and Hungarian flags with my Cyrillic alphabet cards that said “Welcome” in my room.

Searching for a shooter

After the firefight was over, the Russians banged on the main gate, and the superintendent of our building had to open the gate. The Russians came in quite angry and demanded to see who was in charge of the school in our building. We had a “Typing and Shorthand school” in the building not related to the university. The Russians were yelling “skola skola” (school – in Hungarian it is “iskola”). They kept asking who was in charge and who had the keys. Well, my Mother was the person in charge, and so was forcibly yanked out of the basement. Luckily there were several people there who spoke fluent Russian. They learned that one of the Russian lieutenants was shot dead and the shot had come from our building. We kept explaining that everyone from the building was in the basement, scared, and that no one was elsewhere in the building.

They stuck a machine gun in my Mother’s back... I was terrified, as was she, and as were our neighbors. The soldiers forced her to open all the school doors and they searched all of the premises. The Russian captain was explaining that the tables and the chairs in the school were moved close to the window and that someone was shooting from within through the windows during the firefight. He was not going to leave until he found the shooter or someone who could shed light on the subject. We all knew what that meant! They continued to press the machine gun into my Mother’s back while questions were raised and answered. Meanwhile one of the neighbors held me back as much as he could because I was really worried and crying about my Mother. Having found no one to blame, they eventually got to our apartment. They went into my room and saw the little Russian and Hungarian flags with the Cyrillic word “Welcome.” One soldier pointed it out to the Mongol who was pointing the machine gun into my Mother’s side and said something to him. This was the first time that the machine gun was taken out of her back. This episode was very traumatic for me, but thank God, it passed without any serious consequences.

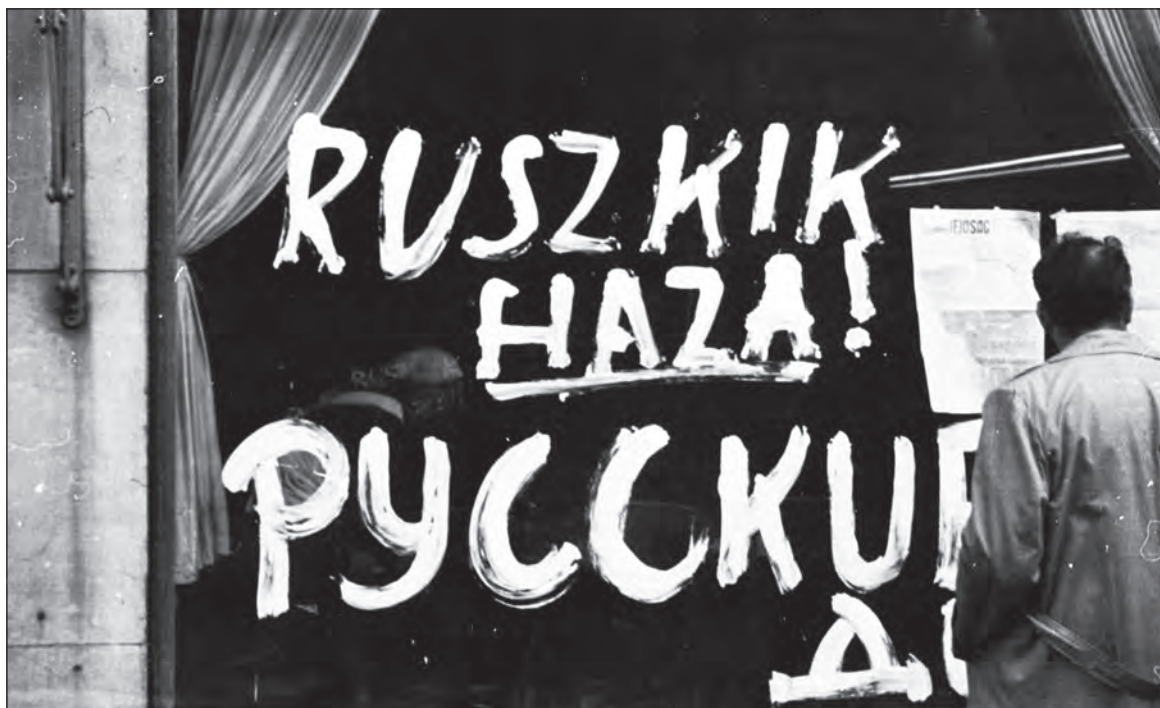
A few days later, when things calmed down, kids being kids, we played outside on the street as much as possible. Across the street, we happened to see one of our neighbors, an old lady in her 70s, walking close to a garbage container. Apparently, it had a stash of unexploded bullets in it. Just as she happened to be walking by, it ignited from a tossed cigarette butt. The bullets exploded, making a lot noise and flying every which way. The old lady had no clue which direction to run and hide, and she almost died. We, of course, thought this was really funny, and laughed quite loudly at this scene from behind the big wooden doors of our building.

Shortly thereafter, the Secret Police arrived demanding to see us by name. Apparently, one of the students in our school, with whom we refused to play, had reported that he had seen us laughing. The ÁVO wanted to take us “downtown,” but the neighbors surrounded them and insisted that they leave us alone. They left, but stated that their investigation was not over and that they would be back.

Decision to go

Meanwhile, one of my Uncles came to us late one evening, and said he had managed to go to Austria and leave his son there. He had come back for his wife and daughter in-law. He explained that he would take us across the border if we were interested. The decision was made to go. We gave certain items to a special friend, the

Imre Balassa



"Russians go home!"

kind you could trust with your life, and I recall taking my good violin to his house. A letter was written to indicate to my Mother's workplace that we had gone to a wedding in the western part of Hungary, and that she would be a few days late getting back. Another letter was to be delivered in a week if our friend did not hear from us, saying that my Mother had broken her leg and could not come back to work for another week. We thought this would cover our collective "behinds" so no one would look for us.

During this time, everyone had to carry identification cards at all times, known as the "passport." They contained your name, workplace, birthplace, etc. At any point, any police or soldier could demand to see where you belonged. On the big day in December, we went to the Déli Pályaudvar (Southern Railway Station) to take a train to Sopron, a major city closest to the Austrian border. My Uncle showed up at the station and told us that his wife had a nervous breakdown, so he was not coming. However, he insisted that his daughter-in-law come with us and that he would follow us in a week or so.

My Uncle also suggested that we meet up with his friend, who already knew the way, and he would guide us. We stayed in a hotel overnight and we were going to leave early in the morning. Unbeknown to us at that time, my Uncle's friend and wife did not want to risk taking everyone, so they left us. We knew that by taking the trolley line to the end, the Austrian border was only a few kilometers away, so we decided to continue on our own. While we were walking, a horse and buggy with two men came up next to us. The driver said, "Hey, you guys leaving the country?" "Who, us? No, we are just out for an afternoon stroll," we said. "Yeah sure," he said. "Well in about another kilometer that way you will run into the Russian camp and they will surely catch you." He told us his friend could take us across. We realized that there was no other choice, so we accepted the offer. We started to go into the woods. Soon it was dusk. After a while, he said that this was as far as he could take us, because if they caught him here, he would be shot. We could surely claim that we were really lost.

He now wanted to collect his fee. We gave him lots of cash and some gold jewelry. He gave us directions, indicating that we were only about 1 to 1.5 kilometers from the border and that we could go across an unguarded wooden bridge and would be in Austria. It was getting late and it was really cold. We were walking on a very hard (frozen) surface. There were woods on one side and a clearing on the other. All of a sudden, I heard what sounded like a car. I told the adults that I heard something, but they did not listen to me. I had to start crying before my Mother believed me. By this time I could see lights coming toward us. We had only a few seconds to throw ourselves in the bushes next to the road as an all-terrain military vehicle zipped past us. Wow, that was close! We then decided to go into the woods for safety, as it was a moonlit night. Again, I heard some sounds, and we quickly ducked and held our breath. We heard Russian soldiers talking, and they were smoking their cigarettes. One of them threw his cigarette butt in our direction. Now we were terrified. Luckily, they left. We finally figured out that our "guide" was either sending us to the Russian barracks or he was dyslexic. We decided to reverse his lefts with rights and continued on our way. It must have been midnight when we found a road-like section that was unpaved yet freshly raked, and we wondered what anyone would be planting in the middle of December.

Red, white and red flags

We walked on this path for maybe another half an hour. On our right were some stacked railroad ties. We were so exhausted and so cold that we decided to climb on top of one to rest and perhaps sleep a bit. My Mother gave

me some rum, as I was really very cold, and threw all kinds of clothes and coats and sweaters on top of me. Next, I remember being awakened by “Shhhhh!” I opened my eyes and I saw a light on top of us. The light then moved and was later turned off. I went back to sleep. I was again awakened by one of the friends, “Hey, I found some flags just down there... red-white-red... we must be at the border.” But which side were we on? No one remembered going over a bridge. One of the women suggested that we walk parallel to the flags until we figured out where we were. Someone else said, “Yeah, but they can shoot at us from either side, so what do we do then?” We decided to go across and see what there was to see. We went up a hill for a few hundred yards. Dawn was just breaking. I noticed an electric utility pole with “Achtung Hoch Spannung” (Warning – High Voltage). I said, “Well, we must be in Austria ‘cause that is in German!”

A few seconds later, a man with a horse drawn carriage happened to come by. He addressed us in Hungarian, “It’s all right, you are on the good side, you are in Austria.” He asked where we had come from and we told him back there, behind us. By now there was enough light to see as he pointed out to us, that there was a guardhouse only a few hundred yards from where we had been sleeping on the railroad ties. There was a changing of the guards just taking place. They would have surely seen us! He offered to take us to the nearest post office where they picked up refugees. Soon, a postal bus arrived and we were told to get on. I was somewhat nauseous and threw up my food from my earlier attempts at eating. The bus driver was really nice about it. He actually stopped the bus and cleaned it up. He then ran into a store and got me a bar of chocolate. I felt so sick, it was just what I didn’t need, but I will never forget that nice gesture. We wound up in a large castle in Eisenstadt that had been converted into a camp and staging area for Hungarian refugees. Soon, the other kids became my instant friends, and we went to explore this great castle.

We were there for about a week when we were sorted into groups. Families with and without children and single people were sent on to different camps. It took us two years in various camps and schools before we finally got our visas for the big trip to fly over the ocean to come to America. I still remember the “old” propeller- driven 4-engine DC-6B airplane that took us from Munich, Germany, to Shannon, Ireland, then over to Gander, Newfoundland, and on to New York. The flight was very bumpy arriving into New York. My Mother was at the window and kept saying, “Oh look, Peter. Those houses look like little matchboxes!” It took us 18 hours of flying to get across to the States.

After we were safely out of Hungary, I found out that there had indeed been a person in the attic of our apartment house who had fired the shot that killed the Russian lieutenant. But no one would give him up.



Péter A. Soltész

Péter A. Soltész is President of PAS-COM, Inc., a company which consults for international clients in telecommunications, computers, and high technology matters, including related litigation consulting. He has held several senior executive positions with various high tech and wireless communications companies. He holds degrees in electrical engineering from New York University and the City University of New York. Soltész is currently the Secretary and member of the Board of Directors of the Hungarian American Coalition in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Balázs Somogyi

A NATION ASCENDING

The summer and fall of 1956 were full of excitement and expectations in Hungary. Mátyás Rákosi, “Stalin’s Best Disciple,” resigned from the Central Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party, euphemistically named the “Hungarian Workers’ Party,” in July. The month of August was hot and sunny, and it was relatively unproductive of significant news.

During September, on the other hand, we experienced the renewal of exciting political developments. The press began to expose the crimes and atrocities of the Rákosi regime.

Gyula Házy, a well-known and popular writer, had written a widely circulated article. It enumerated the “natural” rights of the literary creator, including the responsibility of telling the truth, the right of criticizing anybody or anything, to be sad or ecstatically in love, to believe in God or to deny God’s existence, among others.

The Petőfi Kör (Petőfi Circle) initiated a movement of establishing intellectual forums throughout Hungary. With increasing openness, these examined the problems the country and the nation had faced. On the 6th of October, the remains of László Rajk, György Pálffy, Tibor Szőnyi and András Szalai were reinterred, with military pomp and circumstance. In the middle of October, Imre Nagy’s membership in the party (MDP) was restored. On the 16th of October, the demands, voiced during a well-attended meeting of university students of Szeged, included the elimination of the compulsory teaching of the Russian language and significant reforms of university life. The students declared DISZ (Democratic Youth Society) to be irrelevant and re-established MEFESZ (Union of Hungarian University and Academy Students). Within days, the student bodies of Pécs, Miskolc and Sopron followed suit; finally, on October 22nd, the university students of Budapest joined in the movement and voiced their grave dissatisfaction with life in the universities. These were exciting, heady times, indeed, – only an incendiary spark was needed!

Students on the 23rd

The 23rd of October in 1956 fell on a Tuesday, with warm, unusually pleasant and mild weather. The excitement was palpable throughout Budapest; students, workers, office employees openly discussed the developments in groups. The assembly at the Polytechnic Faculty (Műegyetem) produced the famous 14 Points – these contained significant demands of reforms, related to the establishment of a system of human rights, national independence and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. The medical students of the Semmelweis University of Budapest (I was in my first year at that time) were definitely not in the forefront of activities and decision-making on that fateful day, but our enthusiasm and willingness to join in the demands for reforms was unquestionable.

A well-organized and enthusiastic demonstration started at the statue of Petőfi; from here the demonstrators marched to the statue of Bem on the Buda side of the capital; here they listened to a speech by Péter Veres, writer and one-time Minister of Defense, sang the Hungarian anthem, the “Marseilles” and the “Kossuth Song.” One of the students read the “Fourteen Points.”

Later, Imre Nagy spoke to the crowd at the Parliament. His address, recommending calm, restoration of the peace and return to home, was a source of disappointment. When he started to sing the Hungarian anthem, however, the crowd started to disperse. But many of those in the square did not return to their homes immediately. Instead, they walked to Dózsa György út in order to participate in or, at least, witness the toppling of the statue of Stalin. Others proceeded to the building of the Hungarian Radio at Bródy Sándor Street. The demonstrators demanded access to the airwaves, in order to broadcast their demands, including a reading of the “Fourteen Points.” A military force of 300-350, members of the ÁVO (the infamous State Security Authority) and soldiers had occupied the building in order to defend it. The standoff soon developed into a siege: the demonstrators hurled pieces of materials from a nearby construction site, while the defenders used teargas canisters or their bayonets. Finally, after the use of preliminary warning shots, rounds of live volleys rang out repeatedly, and a number of demonstrators were wounded or killed. The Revolution of October 23rd had become a historical fact.

Ernő Gerő, the newly and hastily appointed Secretary General of MDP, requested the military intervention of the Soviet Army, and the leadership in Moscow promptly complied. Contingents of the Soviet army reached Budapest in the early hours of October 24th; as a result, the Hungarian capital had become a war zone.

Glorious days

Twelve glorious days followed: Hungarians, students, workers, children – poorly armed and only occasionally reinforced – participated in a fierce combat in the streets of Budapest. They consistently exhibited remarkable heroism against overwhelming military odds, against a superior military force, and, at the end, miraculously, they were victorious.

In scenes reminiscent of the battle of Budapest during World War II the streets and squares of the capital were littered with derailed and disabled streetcars, burned-out tanks and other military vehicles. The victims of combat – Hungarian fighters and Russian soldiers – were lying dead and, frequently, unattended for days. The stench at Nagykörút was overwhelming in those days. I saw when Stalin's metallic head (previously part of the fallen statue in Városliget) was hacked apart by angrily dedicated Hungarians at the corner of Rákóczi út and Nagykörút. I also had the pleasure of warming my hands at the bonfire built from Soviet periodicals that had been heaved out of the Russian language bookstore, close to Oktogon.

As a medical student, I was called upon to work in a hospital, administering to the wounded; we were providing care to Hungarians and Russians alike. Using our rudimentary knowledge of Russian, we had repeatedly attempted to obtain information from the wounded Russian soldiers regarding their conceived role in the fighting. The soldiers, most of them merely young boys, were frightened and confused. Some of them believed that they had been in battle at the Suez Canal.

The misery the military conflict had caused in human lives was frequently heart-rending. I shall never forget the sense of devastated horror of a beautiful sixteen-year old girl upon learning that her left leg had to be amputated above her knee.

Political parties were organized within a few days. As the practical result of the newly instituted freedom of the press, newspapers were printed and widely circulated; they presented a bewildering variety of opinions. We were overwhelmed, excited, almost intoxicated by the prospects of democratic change, independence and neutrality!

The Central Committee in Moscow appeared to have agreed to the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungarian soil – it appeared that the Revolution was victorious and our country was to become free and independent. A completely stunning historical development indeed!

November 4th

In the early hours of November 4th, five Soviet divisions attacked the Hungarian fighting force, and the cruel reality of a tragically unavoidable defeat became much too apparent. Imre Nagy, Prime Minister of Hungary, informed the nation and the world: Hungary was being attacked by an overwhelming military force. The last message by Free Kossuth Radio was, unfortunately, quite futile in its tragic eloquence: "Help Hungary! Provide help for the Hungarian nation! Help the Hungarian writers, scientists, workers, peasants and intellectuals! Help! Help! Help!"

Conclusions

If attempting to evaluate the significance of the Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956, my conclusions are unequivocal. The events and developments of October-November 1956 have proved to be the most significant defining experiences of my lifetime. I am truly grateful to my fate for the gift of witnessing a heroic nation fighting for liberty and independence. I find it is inescapable to conclude that the Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956 were triumphant historical events in their true context. They elevated Hungary's image in the eyes of the civilized world, and the nation had truly "ascended" as the result of those glorious twelve days. The Hungarian Revolution did provide an early and significant impetus for the eventual break-up of the Soviet Empire and it had proved conclusively that the Soviet power was not invincible; as a matter of fact, it had become obvious that the Empire was highly vulnerable. I am convinced that those of us who lived in Hungary and had the opportunity to experience the miracle of 1956, had witnessed a remarkable historical moment during a most auspicious period in the life of 20th century Hungary.



Dr. Balázs Somogyi

Currently an orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Balázs Somogyi left Hungary in December of 1956, settling in the United States in 1958. He was co-founder and director of the Hungarian Folk Ensemble of New York. He has served two terms as president of the Hungarian Community of Friends (MBK), and is also president of the Hungarian Cultural Society of Connecticut (HCSC). He is the proud husband of Csilla and Father of Zsuzsanna, Ilona and Judit, all three of whom are bilingual.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



Young boys play with a Soviet weapon

Helen M. Szablya

ONE FAMILY'S ESCAPE TO FREEDOM



The Szablya family in 1957 after arriving to Austria

A burst of gunfire shook the windows. It was midnight in Hungary, December, 1956. "Good God, curfew time lasts till seven in the morning. What am I going to do?"

I shook my husband, John. Startled from his dream, he reached for the phone. We were lucky. It still worked. The doctor's advice was to try to wait. In case of emergency he would give us directions over the phone. The ambulance refused to come since it was a perfect target for the Soviets stationed right across from us, on the hillside – no cover whatsoever.

We held each other very close. The warmth of my husband comforted me as, with the passing of time, the cramps started coming.

The two children slept quietly in their cribs, not even occasional machine-gun bursts startled them. They were used to it by now. It was ten days after the Revolution was crushed; the fighting still was going on.

I could vividly remember now the morning when I was awakened by cannon fire after our four wonderful days of freedom.

"No, it can't be. Hungary has a constitutional government, which declared the country neutral. We are out of the Warsaw Pact, and the Soviets must leave the

country according to the U.N. decision," my husband tried to comfort me. But he, too, knew it was cannon fire. He turned on the radio and we heard the message of the government: "The Soviet troops are coming back into the country. Our prime minister asked for help from the U.N. and we are fighting." The Writers' Association asked for the help of all people in the world. The message came in German, French, English, Russian and Hungarian. This went on for 90 minutes – and after that – everything was lost.

Now, ten days later, I was going to have my baby. I clung to my husband as the pains drew closer. Finally the first rays of the sun colored the sky pink, and the light gave me new hope as I tried to fight back the arrival of the baby.

At 7 a.m. we started running toward the hospital. Five long blocks of pain, cramps, blood and water, a few staring faces, distant machine-gun fire and more cramps melting into one incessant feeling of rupture.

When I arrived at the hospital, the only midwife there, who had worked alone for 48 hours, had no relief in sight. My doctor was not there yet. Several workmen were repairing the windows of the delivery room, which were shot out during the night. Two women were giving birth.

Then cramps and cramps again, unstopping, merciless cramps till the beautiful, happy cry of my son brought the long awaited relief from the suffering and fear. I saw my doctor lift him and put him on my stomach. He felt so soft, so sweet. And even the windows were repaired.

Remembering it all

Another ten days passed, and by that time we were determined to leave our homeland. Even though my husband was one of the promising young scientists who had every allowable privilege under the Soviet system, it seemed to us that if we wanted to bring up our children according to our beliefs, we had to leave.

All our belongings we hoped to take with us were packed into a small suitcase. Forty of us scrambled into a pickup truck in the freezing rain, and under a canvas held up by a broom.

As we left Budapest, we remembered the many beautiful concerts, operas, balls of former years, the 50-day Siege during World War II, the hopes for freedom while trying to rebuild the country, then, the 1948 take-over by the communists with but 17 percent of the popular vote. The desperation, trials and tribulations every individual, every family had to go through. Our glorious Revolution with its four days of freedom – and the 20,000 fresh graves in the city.

The truck was already on the highway making good time, when all of a sudden we stopped with a jerk. An officer waved his arms in the middle of the road.

The driver handed him his documents. He was supposed to go to the border with some help to pick up a truck left there by refugees.

"With some help? Do you call 40 people 'some help'?" he yelled at our driver. "See that you get back home!"

We turned around and I understood why he had no time to read papers, to check on people. There were so many would-be refugees that he simply sent them home.

On another route we ran at night, our truck came to a halt in front of a Soviet tank.

A Mongolian colonel approached; we were caught. He radioed for the Hungarian police, who arrived in a short time.

The police station was crowded with refugees.

"Everybody with children, here, into this room! The only one we can heat."

We were shoved into a dark place, lit by a sole lightbulb in one corner of the room. While we settled down, the muffled storytelling went on and on:

"I swam across an icy river three times before I got caught, thinking every time that Austria was just on the other side..."

"We were sinking in the swamp, holding our children above our heads with our last strength..."

"My child is over there... he ran across to Austria when we were captured. We were already so near... so near..." The usual sentence for illegal border crossing was two to three years of hard labor.

But in the morning they put us all on a bus and sent us to Budapest.

When the bus broke down, our police escort said, "You know your duties. I will be back in an hour and a half... of course, nobody can hold me responsible for whatever you do while I am away."

We did not feel strong enough to walk to the border 20 miles away, with three small children, Louis being only ten days old. We started home. The train reached Győr by curfew and did not go farther. Everybody had to find a place in a hurry.

We saw a Red Cross building across the depot and ran. We found ourselves in the company of 600 people. There were beds, food and even medicine. We felt grateful and happy as we talked to the Red Cross lady, who, in an unguarded moment whispered in my ear:

"We are occupied by the police. We may give you whatever you need, but you cannot move out of this building. You are under arrest."

Ata Kandó



A pregnant refugee waits at a Red Cross Station on the border

The bus on which we were transported to Budapest the next day was supposed to go to another Red Cross building there, but they took us instead to police headquarters.

"Men should go inside the building, women and children can go home!" came the order. We dared not move. We heard of men being captured and taken to Siberia for no reason at all. All the women stayed and waited.

I pretended that I had to go to the bathroom. The stern guard still would not let me go inside, so I ran to an apartment building. I begged to make a phone call, and contacted the chairman of the Revolutionary Committee at the university who understood instantly what happened and what could be done.

"I am right now negotiating with the Justice Department about kidnappings which are taking place in the streets. Why, this is just such a case. From a Red Cross building... to police headquarters..."

Ten minutes later, his imposing figure pushed the machine gun-bearing guards aside and he stepped into police head-quarters. Through the glass door we could hear voices:

"Yes, it was the Red Cross building... " "They have taken us..." "Kidnapped is the word."

Once more we felt the beauty of even limited freedom. We were allowed to walk home with our baggage, to come out from behind the bars... We were happy, yet depressed, as we felt that there was absolutely no way out of Hungary.

A passage to freedom

"Translate these papers into Russian for me, please!" my husband waved some documents at me while I was deep in thought about how in the world we could reach the border town of Sopron.

My sister had escaped to Vienna. She sent us word that we, too, could reach freedom, if we could get to friends in Sopron.

I was not much interested in my husband's papers until I saw what they were. In less than an hour we had our counterfeit documents that would, hopefully, get us out of Hungary. My husband, as deputy chairman of the department at the university assigned himself to go to Sopron to resume teaching because their professor had escaped.

As the early darkness of the winter afternoon crept into our train compartment the next day, we noticed that the lights did not go on in our coach. We considered moving to another part of the train but decided to stay because the children were snoozing comfortably.

At the next station we felt "Providence" at work. The train stopped and Russian soldiers made everybody get off who did not have the No. 2 border-zone permit stamped into his passport. But when our door opened, it was a Hungarian soldier who appeared behind the flashlight. The Russians, it was said, were afraid of being murdered in the dark compartments.

"Where are you going?" he asked us.

"To Sopron."

He did not know what he should think of us. If we were high officials, he'd better not argue with us, but if not... well, our papers looked official enough, he always had his excuse, and... a twinkle in his eye showed that he was thinking of the other possibility also. He really did not seem to mind if we wanted to escape...

"Thank you, professor, what a nice baby." He slammed the door shut.

A near-fatal mishap

In Sopron came two days of silent waiting until our friends arranged for reliable guides. The children had to hold their cries, even their breaths, in order not to betray us. The house we stayed in was a house for retired people, and any noise from a child would have been suspicious.

Finally, an old guide led us out into the hills to reach the Austrian border on foot. When he stopped to wave his cane we also stopped! It meant danger. When he wiped the sweat off his bald head, it meant that we could go on. Behind him went our daughter, Helen, with a young couple. We were next with the two boys, the baby in the basket, and our two-year-old walking and looking for mushrooms, as we all pretended to be out only for a walk. After a while his small legs could not carry him any longer. He crawled into his Father's knapsack and fell asleep.

The stars shone quietly over us after a two-day rain. There was no moon in the sky. A perfect night to escape.

We were on the last leg of our journey. I slipped and started sliding slowly down the hillside, at least this is what I felt like. I wanted to stop, but I could not. Then a small tug on my coat caught me. I stood up and smoothed my coat. There was a small hole. I looked back, and a barbed-wire fence stopped me from falling into a ravine-like terrace with stalks on the bottom of it, put there to hold up the vines.

If it had not caught me I would be dead. But there was no time to stop and reflect. In 45 minutes we would have to run two-and-a-half miles on the muddy lakeshore, after all that rain, to make it across the border.

The baby was whimpering, despite the sleeping pills we had given him. Janos slept in his Father's knapsack; he too was drugged.

Only Helen, our 4-year-old, walked on her own little feet, looking straight ahead, then at us, with her huge, terrified, blue eyes.

She knew something was happening but could not comprehend it. She was trying to be good.

"Do you see those pear trees?" our guide pointed to some trees not too far way. "Three hundred feet beyond those is the Austrian border!"

How I wished he had not said it! Again, like the first time, when we were stopped by the Soviet tank, we had

seen the lights of Austria. What if they would capture us again! I could no longer think. My mind, my legs, my whole body grew numb from fear, from desperation. But I heard a firm voice within:

"This time you are going to make it!"

I ran as fast as I could and pulled myself up from the ground for the fifth time, when all of a sudden I felt the softness of the "no-man's-land" under my feet.

Then a small flag touched my hand.

As I looked, my husband's radiant face and outstretched arms were greeting me. I fell into his embrace and started crying. We were in Austria.

This story first appeared in LADY'S CIRCLE magazine in September 1979.



Helen M. Szablya

Honorary Consul of Hungary for WA, OR, and ID, Helen M. Szablya is an award-winning author, columnist, translator, and lecturer. Based in Seattle, she has two university degrees, speaks six languages, and many of her more than 700 publications have won awards. Szablya co-authored "Hungary Remembered," an award-winning oral history drama/lecture series for the 30th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution. "The Fall of the Red Star," her award-winning book about an illegal Boy Scout troop during the 1956 uprising, was published for the 40th anniversary. Szablya recently received the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary for her consular and cultural work. She and her husband escaped in 1956 with two toddlers and a newborn. They have seven children and 16 grandchildren.

The story of Helen A. Szablya, the daughter of Helen M. Szablya, can be found on page 154.

Helen Alexandra Szablya

THE STRONG LEGACY OF 1956 IN THE SZABLYA FAMILY

It was frightening sitting in the back of the truck on the dark and rainy night. It was November, 1956, and I was four years old. I was balancing on a big green canvas knapsack. There were no seats on the back of the truck, so everyone was balancing and I didn't even know the people I was riding with. My Mother was sitting in the cab of the truck with the baby and my Father was way up front with my two-year old brother. I had been told not to say a word. The sound of the rain was deafening and the canvas that was draped over the metal frame of the truck was flapping in the wind, so I could see the muddy road running along the side. All I could think about was that we would hit a bump and I would fall out where the canvas was not tied down. Because I was not allowed to say anything, no one would know that I had fallen and I would be left behind.

That is one of many memories that I had as a four-year-old escaping with my parents and brothers in 1956. We tried it three times before we were successful. I remember when we spent the night in jail, after one of our captures. There were only eight beds for more than 100 people, but we got one because my Mother had just given birth and the others felt sorry for her.

The Revolution of 1956 was the single most significant life-changing event in my life. It was not my decision to escape: it was my parents' decision. And, they certainly didn't do it for themselves; they did it for their children – the ones already born and the ones that would follow. I owe everything to my parents because they had the courage to do what so many could not do. The terror of the escape, the fear of being caught, the fear of being separated, the fear of being sent to Siberia, of being tortured, of being killed, would live with my parents for years. Nightmares and insomnia were common.

Family values

When something this monumental happens to your family, when you are uprooted from everything you know and are thrown into unknown situations, it is very helpful to have parents who considered everything an adventure. You see, it was an exciting new world we were exploring and we children were being taken along for the ride. My Father and Mother loved each other so deeply and so romantically that everything we did was fun and educational and adventurous, even when it didn't deserve that kind of attention. Whether it was a Sunday family drive in the car or an evening at the opera, everything was to be extremely appreciated. And, if you didn't appreciate it, an attitude adjustment was in store!

Not all of my young Hungarian friends were so lucky. Some had parents who continued to be fearful of the unknown. Some were depressed. Some questioned their decision to leave their homeland.

My parents were very strict about many things. Education, church and faith were most important. Both were raised in high society and came from privileged backgrounds. This meant that they spoke several languages and were well-versed in history, culture, art and music. However, they both lost everything. The houses their families once owned were now properties of the Hungarian State and they lived in one or two rooms. And although my Father was a professor of Engineering, it took a while before they could afford to move into their own place, so they lived with my Grandmother and Great-Grandfather.

My parents wanted many children, which would have been prohibitive in Hungary during that time for many reasons, not the least of which was that there were no apartments available that would be big enough to accommodate a large family. The family of three children my parents escaped with was considered a big family in Hungary.

Canada

My Father's motto was "in Rome, do as the Romans do." So, when we first arrived in Vancouver, Canada, there were many new things to learn, including speaking English. Since both of my parents knew how to speak English, we never spoke it at home. So one day, one of the neighbors told my Mother that I had told her something and my Mother's reaction was: "Helen speaks English???" I had managed to pick it up in the neighborhood without my parents' help.

At home my parents spoke Hungarian and we were expected to do the same. Our traditions were Hungarian and Roman Catholic. My parents did, however, adopt Thanksgiving because they liked what it stood for. While living in Canada, we were a part of a very active Hungarian community that included scouting and church. I loved the scouts. Girls and boys were instructed together, not separately as with American scouting. I also thought that all churches had big halls where parties were regularly organized with a live band, dancing, drinks and food, and where babies and grandparents mixed with the young people. I was very surprised when we later moved to the US to a small university town that had a tiny Hungarian community, that those days were over.

Hungary was very far away. It was impossible to telephone and letters had to be carefully worded so as not to raise suspicion. The world felt huge: we were on one side of it and Hungary on the other side.

Nothing could be more illustrative of my parents embracing North America and the Northwest in particular than their many attempts at camping. Here were these two Budapest-raised sophisticated people with a big canvas tent and lots of camping gear, traveling through some of the most remote parts of Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and the Canadian plains. We knew the stories of Deadwood and Spearfish long before they were popular. We saw ghost towns that were real, not re-created. Both of my parents reveled in the romance of the adventure. As each of the seven children came along, we kept on going. We even camped for a week at a time in Idaho with no running water or outdoor plumbing, with all of us children and the baby in a playpen in the center of the tent. And we never missed mass on Sunday.

The legacy of 1956 has been a defining moment in my family's history, and my parents have told the story of their escape hundreds of times to schoolchildren, at conferences and seminars, in lectures and in articles.

Opportunities

Growing up in Canada and the United States definitely made me a different person than what I would have been like growing up in Hungary. The freedom I had to pursue the theater for more than 10 years would not have been possible had we stayed in Hungary. The freedom to listen to whatever music I wanted, read whatever author I wanted, to travel and explore different parts of the world would not have been afforded me. After I moved away from home, my parents took all six of their other children on two sabbaticals: one to Braunschweig, Germany; and the other to Trinidad & Tobago. One of my sisters even married a Trinidadian. A Hungarian girl would not likely have done that.

When asked to speak at a Leadership Seminar, I began by saying that while I was growing up, there were two things that I was absolutely positive about. One was that I would be married once and stay married for my whole life and the second was that the Iron Curtain would not fall within my lifetime. By the time I was 37 years old, both turned out to be wrong. I was a divorced Mother of two, and Hungary was free. I was also living 3,000 miles away from all of my family.

When I finally had the time and money to go to Hungary, it was 1992 and my Mother had already visited twice. She was interested in helping the government to flourish and get North American investments, so she was busy! She was soon to become the Honorary Consul for the northwest region of the United States.

Heritage

For the three weeks I was in Hungary, not a day went by that my parents and I didn't cry so hard it hurt and that we didn't laugh so hard that we cried. The emotions were so extreme. The deep sadness I felt that I had not grown up Hungarian in Hungary was acute. The fact was that growing up I had been denied my heritage of all

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



Waiting in line for bread

of the marvelous history, architecture, traditions, music, art and culture that are uniquely Hungarian. We visited all of the historic family sites all over Hungary. We visited family crypts and restaurants and houses and people. I imagined what I would be like had I grown up in a free Hungary, not a communist Hungary. I felt robbed!

It took a week or so after I returned to the United States to realize that I was very happy with the person I was, and that I had not been robbed, but rather, enriched. I had the benefit of my Hungarian, Canadian and American heritage. Both of my children, Anna and Alexander, were born and raised in the United States. It is the path we have taken.



Helen Alexandra Szablya

Helen A. Szablya has worked as a communications professional for the past 25 years including in key management positions at The Enterprise Foundation, The Fannie Mae Foundation, the Mayor's Office in Baltimore City; the State of Maryland and the U.S. Department of the Treasury, as well as in the private sector. She has also served on numerous nonprofit boards, as a volunteer and as a mentor to young people. For her professional work and civic involvement Szablya was named one of Maryland's Top 100 Women in 1996 and in 2001. Prior to her work in communications, she worked for 10 years in the theater, creating original theater pieces for multi-racial companies and touring the United States. For more than two years, she was a Rockefeller Fellow at the Center for New Performing Arts at the University of Iowa.

Helen was a refugee from Hungary with her family in 1956. She grew up in Vancouver, B.C. and Pullman, Washington, where her Father was a professor and her Mother a writer. She is married to E. Charles Dann, Jr., a partner in a law firm in Baltimore, MD, and has two children, Anna Meiners, 29, living in Hollywood, CA, and Alex Meiners, 24, living in Baltimore. Both are artists.

Helen A. Szablya is the daughter of Helen Szablya, whose story can be found on page 150.

Mária Szodfridt

THE STORY OF MY HUSBAND: THE TERRIBLE YEARS BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

“Szabadságunkat köszönjük nektek, 56-os hősök”

“For Our Freedom We Thank You, Heroes of 1956”

These are the words engraved on the stone monument on the grounds of the Philadelphia & Vicinity Hungarian Sports Club. The Club’s membership dedicated it on the 40th anniversary of the Revolution.

The Club was founded by Hungarian refugees from 1956. It is commonly referred to as the “Magyar Tanya,” or “Hungarian Farm.” It is located on a 120 acre-large piece of land that resembles the hilly, wooded regions of Dunántúl in Hungary. We purchased it for \$20,000, but its value has grown to several million dollars.

We built the Clubhouse out of a ramshackle, abandoned 125 year-old farm house. Next to the building that holds our ballroom and fully equipped kitchen we have a large swimming pool. Every July we hold a big Hungarian Day, which is an important event for East Coast Hungarians, and draws a thousand participants! We have spots for 30 camping trailers with hook-up for water, electricity and sewage. We built all this from sheer willpower, 95% of it with our own hands, and, without a dissenting voice in our midst.

A group of young Hungarians grew up here: we had a Hungarian Scout troupe, a Hungarian School, and a Hungarian dance group. We preserved our heritage. The commemoration of national holidays, March 15, the Heroes’ Day, the 1956 anniversary, etc. are still important and inspiring events for us.

One of the founders of the Magyar Tanya and its president for over 40 years was my husband, József Szodfridt (1922-2003). Through his leadership he played a major role in this organization from its origins in the 1960’s until his death in 2003. He saw this project as his life’s work in America,

One cannot fully appreciate the inspiring stories about the 1956 Revolution, without first learning about the tragic consequences of communist rule on individual lives in Hungary. That is why I would like to share a letter with you that my husband wrote to a good friend and former fellow prisoner who asked him to document his terrible experiences of time spent in Russian and Hungarian prisons between 1945 and 1956. His fate, along with those of thousands of others, was tragically typical of those years. It served as precursor to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, when even the youth shouted “Enough!”

Olivér Kiszely, Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



A crowd looks on as tanks maneuver in the street

József's letter to his friend:

My military rank: I was a 2nd lieutenant. I graduated from Ludovika Academy. On August 20, 1944, they promoted me to artillery lieutenant. I was assigned to a heavy gun artillery brigade, the Sopron #101, and sent to the front in the beginning of September, 1944, as chief officer. In a short time I became squadron commander.

In May, 1945, I was taken prisoner near Wratikau County (Czechoslovakia.) I served time in the Olmutz prisoner of war camp and was one of the few Christians held at Auschwitz. Among the people, it was said that the Germans demolished this place before they retreated. This is a misleading lie! Nothing was demolished there or set on fire. The Russians used it as a prisoner of war transit camp; fifty-three thousand of us were crowded together there, where before us nine thousand had "lived in inhuman conditions."

Both of the ditches lining the 3km road which led from station to camp were filled with bodies, shot in the head, because the people were so sick they couldn't keep up the pace. I was lucky, because two young men from my brigade dragged me the entire three kilometers, even though they, too, could barely walk from hunger and weakness.

I don't even have to tell you how miserable the conditions at the camp were: people were dropping like flies in autumn. I was able to get back on my feet after 12 days in the epidemic hospital, thanks to one of the soldiers from my squadron. At the risk of his life, he climbed up the lightning rod and saved my life with whatever charred bread and tea he could find.

At this epidemic hospital the conditions were indescribable. I was fortunate because they threw me on the highest (third) bunk, so nothing could drip down on me from above. For 12 days I soiled my bed. On the 12th day I got up to go to the latrine, and when the doctor saw me, he released me as healthy.

This is how I ended up in the same transport as the men from my squadron. On the car someone had just died waiting for the engine to arrive, and, as his replacement, I became the last Hungarian to be taken from Auschwitz to Russia.

1947 – Until the fall I was at the Akmolinsk #330 prison of war camp. On October 23rd I arrived in Debrecen.

1947 – In November I enrolled at the Technical College as a mechanical engineering major.

1949 – From February 3rd I was again in prison. I got involved with the Győr police as well as the AWO there. For 53 days I was held for questioning at the Military Police Branch on Bartók Béla Street in Buda. (They were particularly cruel under the bloody András Berkesi and his deputies: They knocked out 8 of my teeth, broke several of my ribs, kicked and destroyed my right kidney, broke my nose, pummeled my genitals, beat my palms and soles of my feet to shreds. They tried to extract a confession from me at any cost!)

After the investigation I spent time in the Margit Street military detention center, the Pest Regional Government detention center, and the Markó Street prison. After my conviction I was sent to the "gyűjtőfogház," a political detention center, where it was my job to "build democracy."

I was a plumber, an electrician, a Russian translator, a smith, a technical draftsman, a lock-smith, an engineer, a furnace stoker, a machinist, an electrical and flame welder, a stone mason and a typewriter repairman to name just a few of my jobs. (Knowledge of these skills has served me well to this day.)

1952 – on June 3rd I got in major trouble by being a ringleader in providing cover for the successful escape attempt of Szilárd Karácsony, who reached Austria safely. They kicked apart my sphincter muscles, and beat out my eye (among others). Fortunately, they took me into the ÁVO headquarters for an interrogation, as I probably owe my life to this.

Because of this escape attempt, they demoted the warden, Bánkúd, from major to captain. Out of total rage and retaliation, they beat one of our men (Ferenc Kurucz) to death in front of numerous witnesses from every work brigade. I can imagine that I could have met a similar fate had I not been taken away.

1953 – I ended up in the Csolnok coal mines. There I first worked on the coal wall, and later as an electrician. I gained some new skills, including electro-locksmith and mining equipment operation.

1953 – In December, because of strike organizing I was taken to the Márianosztra penal house, from where I was transported to Várpalota.

1956 – Once again I ended up at Csolnok as a skilled laborer. From there I was released on August 18th and was ordered to report again in February, 1957, to resume serving the rest of my sentence.

During the Revolution I was in Győr under police surveillance, planning my long-awaited wedding.

On November 13th I received the news that I was again on the list. After a brief conversation with my wife whom I had just married 3 weeks before, we decided to leave the country. We crossed the Andau Bridge on a November night, on a rainy, muddy road to the unknown, and we succeeded in making it to Austria.

Thinking back on it, fate is so unpredictable: we were most happy when we lost our homes, but won back our freedom!



Mária Szodfridt

Mária Szodfridt was also born in Győr, and attended the College of Physical Education in Budapest. After graduation she returned to Győr, where she taught physical education to high school students for 8 years.

After their arrival in the United States she worked as a quality control laboratory technician at Merck Pharmaceuticals. She taught in the Hungarian School, worked with the Hungarian Scouts, and supported her husband's work at the Magyar Tanya in every possible way. She and József have two children.



József Szodfridt †

József Szodfridt was born in Győr in 1922. His university studies in Budapest were interrupted by World War II. After serving 11 years in several communist prisons, in 1956 he escaped with his bride, Kiki, and three close friends and former prison-mates to Eisenstadt, Austria. In April, 1957, after they realized it was hopeless to wait to return to Hungary, the Szodfridts and the group of friends from Győr decided to immigrate to the United States. They started their American life together in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

József held many jobs, working his way up in each position, first as an electrician, vacuum plater, and plant manager, and finally, as a consultant. In the early 1960's along with others, he began decades of hard work actually building the facilities of the "Magyar Tanya," the "Hungarian Farm." He served as President of the Hungarian Sports Association of Philadelphia for 38 years, until his death in 2003.

Olga Vallay Szokolay

MY OCTOBER



Olga Szokolay and her husband Denis

1956 was a very special year.

In the first few days of January, an early morning streetcar derailed and plunged from the Margit Bridge into the Danube.

A few days later, Budapest was shaken awake at daybreak by the earthquake at the suburb Soroksár.

In February, on leap-year-day, I married Dr. Denis Szokolay. Circumstances of the times did not make it possible for us to have an apartment of our own. We lived separately in rented rooms, either one of them too small for two people. As a budding architect I was already working on the plans for subdividing a nook of a studio we could call our own, hoping we could build it in a year or two.

We both worked. But by fall our circumstances hadn't changed. We grabbed whatever time we could together. Sometimes it meant simply talking to each other from the office phones (we had none at home) or meeting and having dinner together at my parents' apartment. This was not what you would consider typical married life.

On the 23rd of October the news spread like wildfire: there was going to be a demonstration in front of the Parliament where the 16 Point petition, drawn up by students, for human rights and against the Soviet occupation, would be presented. Denis and I agreed to go to the scene with our respective colleagues, and we'd see what would happen.

Along with all the others, (several hundreds of thousands, as it turned out) we went to the Parliament, listened to the reading of the Petition, partook in the cutting out the communist symbols from the middle of the red-white-green Hungarian flag and sang the National Anthem with torches improvised from rolled-up newspapers. From there we went with the crowds to the Bem Memorial – a symbol of events commemorated and sung about by innumerable bards and historians.

I got home, with the unforgettable memory etched in my head, of having participated in the most civilized Revolution of history. Denis came over since we had no phones. We discussed the events of the evening, then he went home.

The next day we showed up at our respective offices but, of course, nobody worked that day. We exchanged news, weighed the events of the evening before, and shared our hopes for the future, just learning that there were already some shootings citywide. That evening, we got together at my place again. We listened to the Voice of America and the BBC in the bathroom, the only room which did not have walls adjacent to neighboring apartments. In order to share information and hope with others who had no means of getting it elsewhere, Denis, reviving his stenographic skills, took notes from the radio reports, as I muffled the typewriter sounds with pillows and typed as many copies with carbon paper as would fit into the machine. I then typed another batch, and then some more until our paper supply ran out.

By the next morning nobody was going to work anymore. I stashed the freshly typed news under my coat, "hiding them into my bosom." Every time I saw a child in the street, I pulled out a batch of the news for him to take home and distribute in his neighborhood. Strangers, who typically walked with heads down, now addressed me jubilantly on the Lánc hid: "Have you heard? The UN troops landed at the Dunántúl!"

Denis met with his friends at Pest. The Smallholders' Party had already started to get organized. They wanted him to run in expected elections on several (city, county, nationwide) tickets. Amidst the shootings and bloodshed the planning of the future had already begun. A Jewish friend of ours started to work on the founding of a new Christian Democratic Party. By the time the Revolution claimed victory, the interim government reported receipt of 120 applications to start new political parties... The longtime one-party-system had boiled down to a festering head.

The Rebirth of the Smallholder's Party

For the first time in my life, I felt I had a country. The irredentism during my childhood seemed affected, though the re-annexing of parts of historic Hungary, torn away by the post-WW I Trianon pact, brought some genuine hope. But soon that was followed by the German occupation and then, over the ruins, the Soviets took over. Now, in the last days of October, 1956, for the first time, was I a real Hungarian.

During one of the evenings of “victory” Denis brought the news that the Smallholders predicted three possible scenarios for the future:

- 1) The Soviets withdraw, we’ll hold free elections and establish a coalition government which, by geographic necessity, will be of pinkish hue.
- 2) The Soviet Union would not accept defeat and Hungary turns into a second Korea.
- 3) The West intervenes and a third world war starts over us.

At this point, the next step became crystal clear to me:

“There is only one conclusion from all this: we have to leave.”

The next day news of some withdrawal of Soviet troops started to circulate. Soon, however, the reported movement in the East turned out to be deployment of new troops.

Denis and I agreed: we must not stay in the country.

Yes, leave... But how? We had to find transportation.

That very evening, we visited our friend Tony who had a Jeep. It just so happened that his Austrian wife was on a visit in Vienna. We surmised that he would feel like trying to follow her and we might join him in the Jeep.

He certainly agreed, but only under the condition that both his little daughters could go with Austrian passports. One of the girls had a passport but Tony had to apply for the other daughter’s at the consulate the next morning.

At the crack of dawn we rode with him and the girls to the consulate at Rózsadomb.

Two Austrian vehicles were already lined up in front of the building, a pick-up truck and a VW mini-bus. They had delivered food and medications to Budapest and were now waiting for their return papers as well as some passengers. We expected to ride in the Jeep along with the other two vehicles but, considering the autumn chill and the fact that we were all heading to the same destination, I was allowed in the mini-bus along with the other women and children, while the men were directed to the pick-up truck. With the exception of one family and ourselves, all passengers had valid passports. The three-vehicle convoy was ready to leave, Tony’s two-year old little girl was sitting in my lap but back at the office, her six-year old sister was denied a passport by the consul! Tony accompanied us in the Jeep with his two little ones to the edge of the City, then, in tears, he turned back, not daring to take the risk.

His wife in Vienna cried hysterically hearing our account of the events. She returned to Hungary and it took the family several years to finally get to freedom together.

Encountering mixed fortune during our attempted escape, Denis and I only met up with each other in Vienna a few days later. Camouflaged as luggage in the mini-bus, I escaped safely over the border the same day we left. Denis was not so lucky. His feet were seen sticking out from under a tarp in the back of the truck. He was dragged out of the truck at the border, jailed overnight and released the next morning. No sooner had he been set loose than he took off for the fields running, never stopping until he reached safety in Austria.

On November 3rd, we thought we were among the last ones to cross the border. At the time we couldn’t possibly have dreamt that we were the beginning of the Hungarian mass migration of the twentieth century.

Postscript

Many years later, in the ‘90’s, the then commodore of our yacht club was trying to be friendly, and told me that he was born in Austria but had lived in Budapest in the ‘50’s.

His Father was the Austrian consul in Budapest... I never spoke to him again.



Olga Vallay Szokolay

Olga Vallay Szokolay is an architect and educator. She graduated from both the Polytechnical University of Budapest and the University of Bridgeport, CT, and served as Professor emerita at the Norwalk Community College. Since her retirement in 2003, she has focused solely on her architectural practice. Szokolay escaped from Hungary in 1956 with her husband, Dr. Denis T. Szokolay, who died in 2000. She currently resides in Redding, CT, and has two daughters and two grandchildren.

Martha & Kathy Takács

MEMORIES OF TWO SISTERS FLEEING THEIR HOMELAND



The Takács sisters in 1956

I was 9 years old and my sister Kathy was 8. We were doing our school homework on Oct. 23, 1956. My Mother came home from work, very excited, telling my Grandfather, who was babysitting us, to turn on the radio. She told us about the exciting march and happenings on the Buda side of the Danube that afternoon. She worked downtown on Dorottya Street, near the famous Gerbeaud Pastry Shop. She and her colleagues went to the top of the high office building to see university students from the "Műegyetem," (Technical University) marching with Hungarian flags, singing patriotic songs, and shouting for others to join in. They were marching to the statue of General Bem (a Polish national hero) to show sympathy for the recent striking marchers in Poland and to lay a wreath there.

My Father came home from his office and my Mother was trying to explain to him that something important had happened. He calmed her down and said, "Let's have dinner and then go downtown to the Madách Theatre." When the play started at 8 p.m., you could already notice some excitement in the crowd, but no one knew what was happening on the other side of the city. After an hour into the play, distant gunshots were heard outside. Suddenly, the play was stopped and an actor, György Bárdi, came out on stage and recited a poem by the famous Hungarian poet, Endre Ady. This was a surprise and certainly not part of the program. Everyone was told to go home. Outside, on the streets, people everywhere were shouting with excitement: "There is a Revolution! Let's go to Brody Sándor Street to take over Radio Budapest and announce to the country and to the world that the Revolution has begun!"

They also wanted to announce over the radio the demands of the Hungarian people, which had already been read aloud earlier that afternoon at the Bem statue. The university students had outlined 16 Points, including demands that the Soviet troops leave Hungary; a new government be formed; free elections be held; the red star and hammer and sickle be removed from the Hungarian flag and the Hungarian Kossuth emblem be brought back; the gigantic statue of Stalin from the City Park (Városliget) be removed; and March 15th be reinstated as a national holiday.

Walking down Rákóczi Street, which is parallel to Bródy Sándor Street, my parents could hear gunshots and people shouting "Let's go to the Stalin statue in the Városliget!" At this late hour there was no public transportation, so people had to walk. Trying to get home, my parents had to walk to the Keleti (Eastern) train station from where transportation was still available. Once they arrived home, they heard on the radio that the communists were calling this a counter-Revolution. In their eyes, a counter-Revolution was one that opposes the Soviet Revolution of 1918, which was to impose and spread communism in the world.

Glorious days of freedom crushed

During the few days of freedom, I remember going with my parents to visit my widowed Aunt and her two sons. We had to cross the Köztársaság Square, where the ÁVO (Hungarian Secret Police) headquarters was located. It was from here that the ÁVO had shot into the demonstrating crowds of innocent people, including the Red Cross rescuers. After the freedom fighters took over the ÁVO/Communist Party Headquarters, they were so angry at the ÁVO police that they hanged some of them outside, with heads facing down, from the limbs of trees. Walking across the square, we could see the aftereffects of this tragic fighting. Today, I can still see the hanging bodies of the ÁVO police from the trees and, the fallen bodies of the brave freedom fighters on the ground, covered with flowers and burning candles surrounding them. During our walk, I remember seeing broken shop windows, some of them displaying a box with the sign that read "Please contribute to the families of our dead heroes." It was striking and memorable that no one would think of removing even one paper bill from there, but just to donate.

We had no school during this time. My parents continued to go to work each day, on foot because public transportation had been disrupted. At work, not much was accomplished since everybody was exchanging news of the latest happenings and discussing what they heard on the Radio Free Europe, since not everyone had access. My parents strictly advised my Grandfather, who was our babysitter, not to take us outside because intermittent shots were heard on the streets and fighting could erupt at any time.

As days went by, the hope and spirit of the country was drastically diminishing. I remember seeing that hopelessness and sadness in the faces of my parents, relatives, and their friends. The most tragic moment came when on November 4th, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Imre Nagy, cried out to the western world on the radio, pleading for help – S.O.S. – for the last time. But no help came. We all knew that this was the end, and that revenge would follow.

The glorious days of freedom ended by November 4th, when Hungary realized that help from the Western nations, the United States, and the United Nations would not be forthcoming. Upon seeing this, the Soviets

took the opportunity to invade Hungary once again. Hundreds of Soviet tanks showed up in Budapest, and air strikes bombed the city. Both my sister and I distinctly remember the scary feeling we had seeing a huge Soviet tank parked underneath our first floor balcony. The turret of the tank was facing the district city hall across our street. When the shooting got heavier in the streets, I remember having to run down to the basement of our apartment building for safety. Even our living room window shattered. In the basement, we were prepared with cots, blankets, and food, in case we would have to spend days or nights there.

The Soviet and the Hungarian communist leaders started to arrest the high-ranking leaders of the Revolution (i.e., Imre Nagy, Pál Maléter). They were preparing lists of names of the sympathizers at all work locations. At the beginning of January of 1957, my Father received a warning at his work from a member of the communist party that his name was also on the list. This meant that the communists would question his actions during the days of the Revolution, question his political views, and the possibility of arrest could follow.

My Father worked for the Hungarian National Bank, dealing with authorization of foreign currencies. During the first days of the Revolution, he and his colleagues organized a committee to determine what they should do to stop any activity in foreign accounts of the Hungarian National Bank in foreign countries. Their goal was to prevent the possibility of the Soviets getting their hands on these accounts with the help of the Hungarian communists. My Father and one of his colleagues was able to accomplish this task, based on information received from the British Embassy in Budapest.

The turning point for us

The fact that my Father's name was on the list of sympathizers forced my parents to find a way to leave the country. By this time, strict rules were established by the government to stop the flow of refugees out of the country. During November and December of 1956, thousands of Hungarians had fled across the border with relative ease. By January and February of 1957, conditions were different. If one was caught attempting to leave the country, the sentence was 10 years in prison, without a trial. If anyone assisted someone else to leave the country, that person received the same sentence. My Father's sister, who lived in the apartment across the hall from ours, said that if she suspected we would attempt to leave the country, she would report us to the authorities herself. She was so worried and concerned about our safety.

It just so happened that a distant relative from Szombathely stopped by our apartment, bringing with him falsified I.D. documents for my Mother's brother. But, he said, because his 6 year-old son had suddenly come down with pneumonia, my Mother's brother could not use these documents to leave the country. So he asked my parents if they wanted to take this opportunity to escape. This came as an unexpected blessing, my parents thought. They agreed. Things happened very fast from then on. Within 24 hours, our relative had our falsified documents ready. The documents indicated that we had been residents of Szombathely since 1953. By mid-January, travel outside Budapest was limited to the city of Győr. One could travel further only if one was a resident of a town or city beyond Győr, or if one had special permission from the authorities.

Because the decision my parents made to leave the country came so suddenly, they requested a week off from work to go on their annual ski vacation. Since they had taken ski vacations every year, this request would not draw any suspicion. Without telling any relatives, except for my Grandmother, we packed a small suitcase and headed to the Keleti (Eastern) train station. My Father bought a sleeping coach train ticket to Szombathely. My sister and I were excited about sleeping quarters on the train, as we had never experienced this before. We did not completely understand why my Grandmother was crying as we were looking out the window of the train. We only remember my Mother asking her: "Please don't cry, because it can draw attention." But she could not help herself and just kept on crying, because she loved us so and could not stand the thought of not seeing us again. The train departed. My sister and I fell asleep. After a few hours, the train stopped in Győr, where soldiers boarded to check everyone's I.D. papers. When the soldier came to our compartment, my Father opened the door and showed the soldier that the family was sleeping and gave him our documents. The soldier was very cordial and left. After midnight, the train stopped in Szombathely, where our relative was waiting for us. We went to spend the night in his house. He already had plans for us on how we would reach the border the next day.

The plan and our first attempt

The next evening our relative walked us to the train station, where our guide would recognize us without any verbal contact. The guide, a friend of our relative, was a mailman. We were not supposed to talk to each other. In case there would be an inspection on the train, we should say that we were going to a funeral. We were wearing the black bands around our arms as was the custom. As soon as we boarded the train, we sat a short distance away from our guide just so that we could see each other. The plan was that we would get off where he gets off and follow him at a distance. The train stopped. When our guide got off, so did we. The station was unusually full with many soldiers. Our guide did not know the reason for this; neither did we. He panicked and disappeared.

My Father did not panic and had to make a quick decision as to what we ought to do without arousing suspicion. From nervousness and fear, he broke out in a sweat dripping from his face. This picture has remained in our memory for a lifetime. He noticed a road sign with the name of a village about 6 km. away. We headed on foot in that direction in the night. After a few kilometers, we had to cross a small bridge. Suddenly, two soldiers jumped out from underneath the bridge, flashing lights in our faces, yelling for us to stop and asking where we were going. My Father named the village, stating that the children were tired and sleepy and we had a funeral to attend the next day. They let us go.

Further along, we came upon a small wooded park close to the village. My Father decided that we should stay in the park and not try to enter anyone's house for fear that we may be reported. This village was close to the border, and therefore, not reporting non-resident folks was more seriously punished. We would stay there until daybreak, when the border guards would be changed by the bridge we had crossed. In the morning, we walked back to the train station, crossing the same bridge but without anyone stopping us this time, we were able to board the train back to Szombathely. Our relatives were shocked to see us, because our guide had already informed them that we had been captured. They were not expecting us, but the police to show up to arrest them. We had to take some time to rest. All of us had to calm our nerves. We were discussing the decision our guide had made to abandon us and his false assumption that we had been captured. Further discussions ensued about giving up the whole idea of leaving the country and returning to Budapest, because the danger and risks were too high. Meanwhile, we found out that the border had been closed; the so-called Iron Curtain was set up; and tighter controls were in place. The nearby villages were filled with Soviet tanks and soldiers.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery



Moscow Square renamed "Square of the Young Martyrs"

Our second attempt

Our relatives encouraged us to try again and they almost guaranteed our success. Two days later, in the early evening hours, our relative took us to the same train station as before. We boarded the train by ourselves. A short time later, we got off at Egyházaskér. We were to meet a woman standing next to the red-colored mailbox located on the exterior wall of the station building. She would then lead us to a nearby small house, where we had to wait for a farmer boy to take us to the border village of Kiskölked.

It was dark by the time the boy arrived on his bicycle. The date was February 17, 1957, and the rain outside was pouring in buckets. For this type of weather, the Hungarian saying goes, "One does not even let the dogs out." The boy instructed us not to talk as he walked ahead of us about 10 feet, pushing his bicycle by his side. To our surprise, he did not take the road but led us across the tilled farmland toward the border village. From the heavy rain, the ground was thoroughly soaked by now and the mud was knee deep. With our regular shoes, each step we took was extremely difficult. In fact, my Mother lost one of her shoes in the mud, but there was no time to stop. She was crying out "My homeland does not want me to leave, but is pulling me back." The farmer boy had no problems with his steps because he was wearing heavy rubber boots up to the knee. After trudging through the deep mud for about two hours, we arrived at the farmer boy's parents' farmhouse. Needless to say, we were soaking wet. They insisted that we remove all of our wet clothing and place them by the fire to dry. Meanwhile, my Father asked the farmer to sell a pair of boots to us for my Mother to use as she could not continue on with just one shoe. Then we went to bed. Barely getting an hour of sleep, we were awakened by the farmer that the Hungarian soldier, who was to lead us to the border, had arrived. He insisted that we leave right away to take advantage of the particularly dark night with thick clouds in the sky, implying that for a while there would be no moonlight. This would be to our advantage. We had to put our half-dried clothes back on. This was not a pleasant feeling. We started to walk, my

Father holding my hand, my Mother holding my sister's hand, and the soldier with his rifle in front of us. My sister remembers to this day how my Mother's hand was shaking. The soldier instructed us that if we saw flares light up the sky, we needed to drop down on the ground. If we were caught, the soldier would say that he found us trying to escape. We walked about 6-7 kilometers. At one point, we had to cross a ditch that was waist-deep with rainwater. I specifically remember the soldier having to raise his arm to keep his rifle out of the water. My Father carried me across, and the soldier helped carry my sister across.

After midnight, we could hear dogs barking in the distance from the direction of a lookout tower. Our soldier knew the exact schedule of the patrol guards between the two towers and the best time for us to cross. Between the Hungarian and Austrian border, the soil is tilled differently for about a 3-meter width, which is to indicate the border, called "határsáv." Here, the soldier shook hands with my Father and wished us good luck. He pointed toward a small light in the distance and a church steeple, indicating the nearest Austrian village. He also warned us that the border is wavy in this area, and it is easy to make the mistake of ending up back in Hungary. My Father gave him one of his shirt cufflinks to return to our relative, who had the other. This was our signal code that our escape was accomplished.

Though refugees, we were free at last

We crossed the border and continued walking a short distance. We had to take a rest, since my sister and I were very tired by now. We took a rest in the bushes so as not to be seen. My Father made us drink some schnapps to prevent the chance of pneumonia, as we were still in wet clothes on a cold February night. We started walking again and came upon a small wooden hut, probably used by the border patrol guards. Inside, there was barely enough room to fit two persons sitting on the bench next to a wood fire stove. My sister and I sat down on the bench and were asleep within minutes. My parents, however, had to stand. My Father lit the cigarette lighter and noticed that the inside walls of the hut were covered with German language newspapers from top to bottom. We positively knew, therefore, that we were in fact in Austria.

To dry our clothes, my Father collected a few branches from nearby, tore down the newspapers from the wall, and tried to start a fire. Since the branches were wet, this created more smoke than warmth. In a few hours daybreak came and my Father looked out of the small 5x7 inch window on the door. He noticed two border patrol soldiers in the distance, but could not distinguish whether they were Austrian or Hungarian. My Dad said that we have to give a sign no matter what happens. So he stepped outside the hut and started waving his arms. When the soldiers changed direction to head toward us and got closer, we thanked God that they were Austrians. When they reached us, both my parents started to cry. Since they both spoke German, they explained to the soldiers that we were refugees, asking for help. Very politely they led us to the village of Moschendorf, where we met with officials and the Red Cross. As we were walking through the village, we must have been an awful sight to behold as the villagers were staring at us, at our dried, muddy clothes, peasant boots, and smoky smell.

The officials registered us as refugees. At first they doubted us, because not many refugees made it over the border at this time in February, 1957, due to the strict border controls. Because both my parents spoke German, the officials suspected that we might be spies. We had to wait a few hours for a military officer, who asked information about our escape. What he wanted to know most was what we saw at the border villages, how many Soviet tanks, Soviet soldiers, and how we made our escape. This was important to them because they were worried that the Soviets could easily invade Austria again, as they did during World War II. My Father asked for information on how he could notify a friend, living in Vienna, of our escape. A memorable event occurred, when one of the Austrian border patrol soldiers gave him 20 schillings for a telegram, telling him "Go ahead and do it." We regretted years later that we could not repay him because we did not ask him for his name. The next day we were transferred to Wollendorf Lager (refugee camp), which was sponsored by the British.

Life in the refugee camps

After a month at the Wollendorf Lager, we were transferred again with the assistance of the Caritas organization to Klosterneuburg Lager, outside of Vienna. The organization, called Rettet das Kind, helped us by enrolling my sister and me in the Sacre Coeur School for Girls in Pressbaum, located in the Vienna Woods. This was about one and a half hours from Vienna.

My Grandmother in Hungary tried to help us out financially. We later found out that she sold all of the furniture that we left behind, donated some items to family members, and our washing machine was given to our relative in Szombathely. She exchanged the money into foreign currency (British pounds) on the black market. Then she had a seamstress sew the money into the shoulder of my Father's suit jacket. She gave the jacket to a mutual friend, who was on an official business trip to Austria. This friend delivered the jacket to us. Unbeknown to him, the message to us was to let her know if the shoulder of the jacket fit properly. This is how she got the money to us.

During our Lager life, we had mail contact with our Grandparents. The exception was my Dad's Father, who could never forgive us for leaving our homeland. He never wrote or signed his name on a letter to us. We did not realize his reason until many years later, when we were told of this by family members. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1958.

In the summer of 1958, my sister and I took a trip sponsored by the Rettet das Kind organization to Chelmsford, England, with a group of other refugee children. Each child was taken in by various British families for a period of two months. By this time, we spoke fluent German, but no English. Mind you, we were totally without our

parents at 9 and 10 years of age, in the home of a British family, and we could not speak or understand a word of the English language. My sister cried many times and wanted to go back to our parents.

Back in Austria, my parents had applied at the U.S. Embassy to immigrate to the United States. Our application was denied since the refugee quota was closed and we had no sponsors. The political atmosphere and instability in Europe and the Cold War frightened us, with the thought that the Soviets could invade Austria as they had done before. Therefore, we had to select from the countries that were still receiving a reduced number of refugees. These were England, Canada, Australia, and countries in South America. My Mother's brother was already living in Canada. While my family escaped from Hungary before them, they had made it to Canada (through Yugoslavia) before us. They insisted that we come to Canada as the country was taking two more groups of refugees. So we decided to apply and very quickly we were accepted. Our thoughts, hopes and dreams were that someday, somehow, we would make it to the United States.

After a 12-day boat trip across the ocean, we disembarked in Montreal, Canada. The Canadian government took care of our temporary accommodations and expenses by putting us up at the local jailhouse. This was an extremely disappointing and discouraging situation to us. My parents had to apply at the Immigration Office to select available employment possibilities. They suggested a job as a cook for my Mother and chauffeur for my Dad. My sister and I were placed into a boarding school in the city of Ottawa. Having seen our tearful faces caused by the separation of our family, my Dad came to get us after three days and took us back to Montreal. He argued with the immigration authorities about separating our family, when we had been together all this time. Both my parents found jobs, and after two weeks we left the jailhouse to start a life of our own. My sister and I were enrolled in school, though not in our proper grades but rather first grade, until we learned the English language. Eventually, my Dad became a draftsman and my Mother a bookkeeper. After five years, we received our Canadian citizenship.

The dream comes true

One day, my Dad noticed an advertisement in the newspaper of a U.S. company looking for technically experienced personnel. My Dad passed the application test with excellent results. The company representative shook my Father's hand and said to him, "Welcome to the United States." My Father was extremely happy, to say the least. Within 5-6 months, we received our first preference quotas to immigrate to the United States. The company moved us to Beloit, Wisconsin. This was a booming time in the U.S. for technically experienced people. After two years, my Father obtained a better job offer and promotion as design draftsman in Cleveland, Ohio. The new company moved our family to Cleveland in 1966. We were happy about coming to settle in Cleveland, because of its good location and its Hungarian ethnic population. This has been our home ever since. It was here that we had the memorable occasion of receiving our U.S. citizenship. By coincidence, that day happened to be the same day that we had crossed the Hungarian-Austrian border.

Every year the Cleveland Hungarians commemorate October 23, 1956. The Takács family participates to keep the memories alive and to never forget.



Martha Takács

Martha Takács graduated from Cleveland State University with a B.S. degree in chemistry. She began her career as a chemist at the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, and held various positions such as chemistry supervisor, licensing engineer/environmentalist, and QA auditor at the company's Pery Nuclear Plant. After 23 years of service, she took early retirement. Since then, she has continued working for chemical and pharmaceutical companies and has done other contracting work. In the 1970s, she took part in ethnic programs at the annual Cleveland Nationality Festivals as a folk dancer with a local Hungarian folk dancing group, and also performed as a solo pianist playing Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2.



Kathy Takács

Kathy Takács attended Cleveland State University and studied English and French literature. In 1969, she went to Paris, France, where she took a one-year course of French literature and civilization at the Alliance Française Ecole International. She married and has two daughters. She works for the City of Cleveland, at Hopkins International Airport, where she utilizes not only her knowledge of the French language, but also Hungarian. She has assisted many Hungarians, especially the elderly, who visit from Hungary and do not speak English.

Csaba Téglás

BUDAPEST EXIT



Téglás in 1956

"I wonder whether his entourage consists of his aides, or if they are secret police, to keep him under control," I remarked.

As the applause died down, Nagy started to speak. "Comrades!"

We booed so loudly that it convinced Nagy – or those with him – that the tone of the impromptu speech would have to be changed.

"My friends!"

We were overjoyed. The crowd went wild. After about eight years of communist rule, finally, we were addressed properly.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery, Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection



Hand-drawn red crosses mark volunteer ambulances

I do not remember anything memorable about the speech, but it seemed that by allowing Nagy to address the demonstrators, the Stalinist leaders accepted him as the future leader of the country. My jubilation turned into concern when the news spread on the square that fighting had broken out in the eighth district, near my home. While still listening to Imre Nagy, we learned that demonstrators at the Radio station requested that their demands be announced over the airwaves. At first, the communist authorities sent army troops to disperse the demonstrators. Instead, the soldiers sided with the people. Unable to control either the police or the armed forces, the Stalinists ordered the ÁVO, the Secret Police, to use force. Only they were willing to shoot at the unarmed demonstrators.

To me, the armed intervention of the ÁVO was a signal that the Hungarian Stalinists and the Russians would not give up Hungary. Standing in the square named after Lajos Kossuth, leader of the 1848 Revolution against the Habsburgs (a Revolution which was defeated by the Russian army), I was concerned that now, just as then, Hungary might again be at the mercy of great powers, without help. On one of the sculptures on the square were carved the words of the poet Sándor Petőfi, who described the nation's fight in that nineteenth-century Revolution:

From the mountain to the lower Danube,
In the storm with painful cries and no friends,
Covered with wounds and cuts in the midst of fight,
All by himself, the Hungarian stands.

Yes, in 1956, we Hungarians were all alone in our fight for freedom. Since then, not only Hungary, but also some of its neighbors have attained democratic political systems. In general, the national minorities also enjoy more rights than before, although contrary to democratic ideals, in some of these countries the Hungarian populated areas lost their autonomy that they enjoyed even under communist rule in the past.

We can only hope that in time the three million Hungarians living in the neighboring democracies will also enjoy the freedom and right to self-determination that their brethren fought to gain in 1956.

Excerpted from his book, "Budapest Exit: A Memoir of Fascism, Communism, and Freedom" (Texas A&M University Press), available at www.amazon.com.



Csaba Téglás

Born in 1930, Csaba Téglás took part in the Revolution, then fled Hungary and made his way first to Toronto, Canada, and ultimately to the United States. He is a semi-retired city planning consultant. For nearly forty years he has been living in White Plains, near New York City, where locals know him as a champion tennis player. He is married to Rowena, a Scottish lady, who speaks Hungarian. They have two sons, Nicholas and Gordon. He is a member of the Coordinating Committee for the Commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

Dr. Steven Julius Török

THE REVOLUTION IN DEBRECEN

I was a first year student in 1956 at Kossuth Lajos University of Science in Debrecen, studying nuclear physics. On October 21st, students from Szeged University came to us and reported their 16 Points for university autonomy and asked for our support. The next day there was a university-wide meeting and we made the decision to demonstrate. On October 23rd, we marched from the university to the city center, singing the Marseillaise! I sang it in French, since at age 10, I had studied in a Licee Francais in Gödöllő that was run by the Norbertine Fathers. That school was closed two years later and the buildings later became the Agricultural University. That was also where my Mother worked in 1956 as a laboratory assistant, and where I participated in gymnastics and skiing as a high school student at Petőfi Gimnázium in the village of Aszód. I graduated in June, 1956, and was admitted to the University of Debrecen, where I joined the new nuclear physics program, as one of 16 students admitted from over 200 applicants.

After the demonstration on the 23rd, news came that in Budapest there were shots fired that same evening. So we started to make preparations, to defend our university with the help of the armory and the ROTC corps to which we belonged. However, we had no ammunition, and certainly hoped that our attackers would not realize this! At the same time, the student council contacted the Hungarian Army barracks in the city and they decided to support us. News came that in Budapest the Revolution was succeeding. But as I wrote on a postcard to my parents, at that time we thought we were the only ones having a Revolution! (They never received the postcard!)

Town meetings

I volunteered to join the student council with a friend from the same dormitory, Zoltán Bódy. (He died about 10 years ago after becoming a professor at our alma mater in Debrecen where I visited him; may he rest in peace!) A bus picked us up in the morning at the student dorm. At each village around Debrecen, we dropped off two students and a soldier. These were volunteers with official Hungarian Army approval, and their tasks were: to organize a town meeting, inform the people of events in Budapest, disarm the police, and, with the townspeople's help, organize the National Guard. As young and enthusiastic 18-year-olds, we did this without hesitation and even without feeling any sense of danger. We ended up with the whole village singing the Hungarian National anthem! The other 11 teams of soldiers and students were in the surrounding villages of the district, and they were similarly successful. At our village we were even invited to a wedding. Finally, all 36 of us were picked up by the bus, and taken back to Debrecen late at night.

The village I worked in was Görbeháza, where I visited again last year after 49 years. I hardly recognized the town. The church and the Cultural Hall where I held the meetings were still there, but the deep mud was gone; all the roads were paved; and there were many new buildings.

Gdye Suez?

The next day (Thursday) I decided to hitch-hike to Budapest to find my parents in Gödöllő. As I rode on food-trucks carrying pigs and wheat to feed people in the capital city, convoys of Russian Army trucks passed us at night. Someone shouted at us: "GDYE SUEZ?" [Where is the Suez Canal?] And this was supposed to be the withdrawal of the Soviet troops as agreed to with the new Hungarian Government?

I arrived about 10 o'clock at night to Budapest to Üllői Street where the food was offloaded. As I started to walk, I heard some shots in the distance. A patrol stopped me: "Who are you?" they asked. "A student from Debrecen," I replied. I showed them my student ID. They were revolutionaries patrolling the streets, trying to capture any Secret Police who were in hiding or trying to escape. This happened to me about three times in the dark streets before I reached my cousin's house near Kálvin Square. My pants were completely wet when I climbed the stairs to the third floor and they let me in.

The next day was the 1st of November and I took the train to Gödöllő, picking up all the free newspapers on the way to the Keleti (Eastern) train station. It was euphoric to read them... we had finally won! My Mother and Father were happy to see me. In fact, my Father had gone by motorcycle to my dorm to try to pick me up, only to be told that I had left! At least he was able to bring back my clothes and books! I could not, however, forget the ominous Russian convoys coming towards Budapest that passed us. Will this last? Prime Minister Imre Nagy had just declared Hungary's neutrality, but I thought to myself, will they respect it?

The Revolution really threw me into the world at 18 to fend for myself. I believe it is perhaps the single most important event in the 20th century that turned the tide on communism.

Walking to Austria

After the Russian invasion on November 4th, a high school friend and I decided to go into hiding at Balatonfenyves, the state farm where my Father worked. Around the 10th of November, when we saw that no help was

forthcoming, we feared for our safety. Then, on the 23rd, we started walking toward the border after my Father went there on a motorcycle the day before to see if it was still possible to cross. From Keszthely, it was a walk of some 120 km, but we hitched some bus rides as far as Zalaegerszeg. There the driver told us to get out and walk around the hills towards Zalalövő since Zalaegerszeg was already controlled by the Russians. In the evening, we arrived to a house where my Father had been the previous day, and they put us up for the night. There was a wedding feast that night; we drank and danced. The people who knew where we were going told us "Go and tell them: we are very disappointed!" I still remember the face of the little old lady, who could have been my Grandmother, who told me this.

Early the next day, we started walking through the fields, and in the afternoon we reached the river Mura that we had to cross to get to the border. There was fresh snow and fog and we got lost. My Father thought we could only cross over towards Yugoslavia, but we wound up by the river, highway, forest, and railway line near the Austrian border. There was a patrol on the bridge, so we walked a bit downriver where a man with a boat took us across and hid us in a barn. The highway and rail line were already guarded, so he suggested we wait until night when he would try to take us across. By the time midnight came, instead of two of us, there were a dozen of us hiding in the barn, all similarly picked up by the man with the boat during the day as they were coming across the fields. Some were Hungarian soldiers, some students, some whole families.

At midnight, we walked in a single file towards the border. First, a patrol vehicle passed by on the highway and we rushed across after it left. On the railway, two Russian soldiers were patrolling on foot. However, there were 12 of us and they did not know whether we were armed (we were not), so they turned back and let us pass. Then through the snowy forest we walked towards the border. Our guide turned back and we gave him all the Hungarian currency we had with us to show our gratitude. He warned us to turn west and not north, so we wouldn't cross back to Hungary. We crossed the border at Deutschbillings near Csáktornya on the night of the 24th of November. When we reached an Austrian border post, I greeted them in German, and they took us to a schoolhouse where there were already about a hundred people they had gathered during the night. I still remember the movie they showed us: "Ferien in Tyrol." They then took us to makeshift quarters at the school, where I started eating the cheese my Father had packed for me... I was finally safe!



Dr. Steven Julius Török

Born in 1938, Dr. Török took part in the 1956 events in Debrecen and Budapest. After escaping to the West via Austria, he lived in Japan, where this story was published in his 1963 high school magazine, "Koni Course." Dr. Török also lived in the United States, attending Stanford University in California and earning a PhD from Columbia University in 1976. After his retirement from the United Nations in 1998, he repatriated to Hungary, where he now lives in his ancestral home.

Julius Várallyay

RECOLLECTIONS FROM 1956

In October 1956, I was a second year student of civil engineering at the Technical University in Budapest. Coming from one of the country's eastern cities, I lived in a dormitory available to our university's students on nearby Bartók Béla Street.

After all college students returned from summer vacation, the mood in Budapest was changing fast. At the reburial of a communist hero, László Rajk, who became a victim of the purges in 1949-1953, things were getting out of control. Many students participated in the 100,000-strong crowd in the cemetery.

After the MEFESZ – a democratic student organization, set up in 1946 – was re-established at the Szeged University on October 16, 1956, a large meeting was called by DISZ, the official communist youth organization, at our university on October 22. This meeting, one could say with hindsight, became a fateful event among several developments in those days which had led inevitably to the outbreak of the Revolution. I was in attendance in the Aula (Atrium) at this mass meeting, together with a couple of thousands in attendance.

Meeting at the Technical University

Three very significant things happened at that assembly, which ran from 2:30 pm to nearly midnight. It was the first meeting in memory, where questions were not pre-arranged slogans glorifying the regime, but where – because of the insistence of the crowd – everyone was allowed to speak, and raise questions. As a result, the two students from Szeged who came to share their thoughts with us about their new initiative, were able to address the audience freely – by then, the party secretary and staff of the Marxism-Leninism Department long left the place, because they could not stomach the “anarchy” they had never expected to face and did not know how to deal with. The meeting decided by acclamation that the Technical University, too, would set up a chapter of MEFESZ.

During the questions, a stuttering colleague raised a very daring question: “Why are Soviet troops still stationed in the country?” He lived in my dorm, and was a fourth year student of civil engineering: András Bálint. In the stunned silence, everyone was looking at their neighbor with the customary suspicion: what does he or she think? Will I be denounced? But then, in a couple of seconds, as a groundswell, the whole audience started to chant with full force: “Ruszkik, hazal!” – “Russians, go home!” This phrase that had not been uttered in public for eleven years, now reverberated in the most prestigious halls of the university, and of the capital. From such a radical manifestation of the demands, there was no return to the DISZ-days.

In the remainder of the night, the famous 16 Points, summarizing the students' demands, were adopted, and it was decided that the next day we would all march in a silent demonstration to the statue of General Bem, a Polish hero of the 1948 freedom fight in Hungary against the Habsburg dynasty – to show our sympathy with the workers of Poznan, in Poland. There was also serious unrest there, and the news had reached all neighboring countries rather quickly.

Posting flyers

We all left the Aula dead tired, but went back to our dorm to type dozens of copies of the 16 Points for distribution on the streets next morning. The director of the dorm, a party member, was helpful in allowing us to use the typewriter, providing paper and carbon papers for the late night shift...

Next morning, we went down to the street and posted the 16 Points on trees, with thumbtacks. I got on the streetcar on Bartók Béla street, and the conductor said: please, don't pay, just give me a copy of the students' declaration... the city was becoming a bee hive, with excitement and expectations.

In the afternoon of that fateful day, October 23rd, I marched to the Bem statue with thousands of others. From there, we went to the Parliament building, where the crowd demanded Imre Nagy – perhaps the only genuinely popular communist in the country. Well over 100,000 people assembled there, and some of us were burning the party daily, the Szabad Nép – Free People on the square, until he showed up. But he was too timid, addressed us as “comrades,” and people hissed and booed. He then said: “My fellow compatriots,” and while we were not fully satisfied with what he had to say, we left the square with a sense of hope.

But it did not last long. Later that night, fighting broke out, first at the radio, where students wanted to have the 16 Points broadcast, but were rejected. Then the giant Stalin statue was brought down, and fighting began to spread to other locations in town. I got as close to the radio as the corner of the National Museum, where people were already ducking from strafing by Secret Police, trying to keep out everyone from the radio. The Revolution was born before our eyes.

Under fire

Two days into the fighting in town, I was going to the Pest side with the head of the Revolutionary Student Committee of our dorm. We took the Petőfi Bridge, the only one the Russians allowed civilians to use. We were heading for another dorm on Szentkirályi Street, to get in touch with other students, with whom further coordination on our positions was essential. Making our way on the streets, we arrived at Bakáts square, and saw a Soviet tank in front of the church. We tried to cross the square, when a sudden thunder scared us stiff, and down we went to the ground: the tank shot into one of the church towers. We ran for dear life, reached the corner of the closest side street, and because we heard the tank moving, we kept running. Typical of the black humor of those days, as we ran by a large gate, a young fellow screamed with full voice: "Don't shoot, you have people here!" We stopped only at Boráros square, at the bridge we came from.

As we were passing by one of the buildings on the square, a middle aged man turned to us and asked: "Are you students? Have you eaten anything today? Please come in the building to safety, and I will give you some food. You know, I am the caretaker of the building." I was more stunned than by the firing of the tank. It had been well known that most of the dreaded caretakers (házmester) of buildings in Budapest were informers of the Hungarian Nazi party in 1944, and after the war they switched their allegiance to their new communist bosses.

Solidarity

This story, to me, is only one of many examples, but an excellent one, of the solidarity that was born among Hungarians in 1956, in the capital, in rural villages, and cities all over the country; in the streets, at workplaces, in shops, in hospitals, bakeries, and I could go on listing every venue, where more than a couple of persons congregated. Solidarity with everyone, none of whom we knew.

Like high voltage electricity, something nearly supernatural stirred people's hearts, minds and consciousness. And we were all aware of it. I have known nothing more uplifting in my life than those shared feelings with strangers.

Revolutionary Student Committee and National Guard

By the fourth day, fighting still continued, and I started to work with the Revolutionary Student Committee in the dorm. Care shipments were arriving from the West, and some reached the Kelenföld railway station in Buda, which is not far from our university. The national railways called the Student Committee to fix the problem – take the supplies from the wagons and help distribute the contents among the population.

Well, the first thing we needed was a truck. I went down to the street in front of our dorm, and stopped a truck. The middle aged driver nodded, when I asked him, "Do you want to work for the Revolutionary Student

Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



Freedom fighters rushing to hattie

Committee?” He was a jovial man, with a free expression on his face. He seemed happy to be able to do something, though he cautioned, “Kids, without gasoline, we won’t be able to do a thing.” With the head of our Committee, I went over to the military barracks across the street, and we asked them for fuel: on behalf of the revolutionary students. The commander agreed. Our driver got gasoline daily, but one morning, when he was on his way to the city of Győr in western Hungary to bring back a shipment of aid, they refused to fill up his tank. I rushed across the street, asked for the commandant, and reminded him of our agreement, and that the fuel was needed to keep the revolutionary students going, to enable them to discharge their duty. They said fine, but from then on, I had to sign a receipt every time we tanked. And we tanked more often, because in the next couple of days, I got the Committee a small bus, a sedan and ten new motorbikes – the latter from a nearby police station, where we requisitioned the bikes in the name of the Revolutionary Student Committee, and I proudly signed papers acknowledging their patriotic assistance by giving us the brand new bikes. To put it more simply, I signed a receipt for the new motorbikes and gave it to the police chief.

Our motorized Committee became more efficient in assisting the newly formed National Guards, and responding to requests from the population. One day, when we were already armed by members of the National Guard, our Committee got a call at night from a family on Sasadi street, to help make peace between two neighbors, one of whom was suspected to have been a member of the Secret Police and a man to fear. We got into our car and out we went to the scene, it turned out, none of them was a Secret Police, but they had a nasty relationship as neighbors, and luckily they trusted the admonitions of the Revolutionary students to bring their issues to closure in such difficult times, when everyone had to focus on greater causes. Both thanked us.

While I felt proud of my modest contributions to the Committee’s work, after November 4, it wasn’t lost on me that I had to assess the potential consequences of my activities undertaken as an enthusiastic revolutionary.

Fighting with words

By mid-November, it became evident, the Revolution was lost. Not only the street fights, but also the lengthy demands of the students, which were fully supported by the whole society, were not going to be met. Instead, we heard more and more of reprisals and arrests, and an air of bitter disillusionment began to replace the heady days of the victorious Revolution. Yet, there were still a great number of people, including students, who were ready fight with words, to uphold the ideals of the Revolution.

Those of us, who left the country in November, as I did, were proven right, if not by the end of that month, then in January. At the latest, we knew in April 1957, when the MEFESZ was absorbed in the new state apparatus, and KISZ – the Young Communist League took over, under the watchful eyes of the party. By then, a few students were executed, and the jails were filling up.

Congress of Hungarian Students in the United States

I arrived in the United States on January 17, in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Soon I was up in Boston, and started washing dishes in an exclusive place on Commonwealth Avenue: the Algonquin Club. It still stands there today, a well kept grey building, with its old pristine atmosphere. After I was interviewed for a scholarship to Harvard College in April 1957, I did not last much longer at the club – to the chagrin of the Hungarian boss of the pantry department, who had been a postal clerk since the days of the Monarchy until the end of WW II. I left for an English course, so I could enter and stay in school in the fall semester.

But, while washing dishes, I had time to work with Béla Lipták, Mártha Szacsavay, Ede Némethi and others in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to prepare the first congress of Hungarian students in the United States, to be held at the University of Chicago in June. I became an incorporating founder of the Association of Hungarian Students in the United States, and the next year, they elected Gyula Nyíri as vice president of the organization – who happened to be myself, under an alias, not to provoke the “authorities” back in Hungary.

Work for the student association was almost a full time activity: going to the office late nights to dictate letters, write circular notes to members, fix the mailing list, stencil copies for distribution, etc. How we did it is beyond me. But, we made things happen, with an unfailing dedication. We were not interested in getting a car or spending time with roommates and college colleagues. We continued to work for the ideals of 1956. One of my best friends who is no longer with us, posed a question: “How do you, students live? It was also answered with a question in jest: “Is this life?” But, we had our convictions, and did our own thing.

In the 1958-1959 school year, when I was acting president of the association, together with György Olgyay, we ran day-to-day affairs over the whole year, and then with many others organized our annual congress in Athens, Ohio in June. A delegation to our congress from the Union of Free Hungarian Students that was the apex of all 56 student organizations in fourteen countries asked me if I wanted to run for president in the fall. After consulting about a leave of absence with my Senior Tutor at Kirkland House, Professor St. Claire, I told János Szokolóczy, that I would accept.

The next year and a half was one of the most fascinating periods of my life – seen not only then, but even from today. I was elected president of the UFHS, with the full backing of my predecessor, Géza Mihályi, in

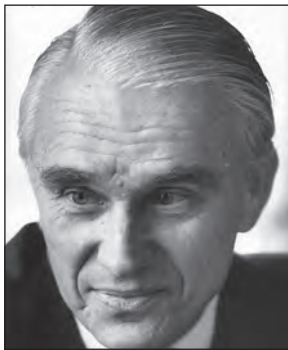
Donaueschingen, a small town at the source of the Danube river, on October 21, 1959. It would be difficult even to sum up here, how much the Hungarian refugee students achieved through their organizations in three continents in 1957-1966, and beyond then as individuals. My book on the history of the Hungarian student movement abroad fills 240 pages ("Tanulmányúton" – az emigráns magyar diákmozgalom 1956 után," published in Hungarian by Századvég and 56 Institute in 1992), and it does not even touch in detail on all the activities carried out in the various member organizations. It is the account of a witness, but written as a study rather than a personal recollection, in narrative style for light reading.

The UFHS later took the name MEFESZ, and represented the main demands of 1956: withdrawal of Soviet troops, free elections, democracy and social justice for all. We helped unmask the bloody reprisals after November 4, and the harsh Soviet occupation of the country. Our organization, representing some 7,000 students, was repeatedly invited as a fraternal observer to the International Student Conferences between 1957-1965, where national student unions from up to 70 countries were represented. In pressing for a resolution on the plight of Hungarian students, I cautioned some skeptic student leaders from third world countries at the 1960 International Student Conference in Klosters, Switzerland, that "Hungarian students had known more than one form of dictatorship in the 20th century, and were committed democrats." We were not only recognized as such, but the Conference sent a cable to Hungary's leaders, demanding to free the ailing István Bibó from prison.

Our aim was also to represent the interests of refugee students at all kinds of forums, where decisions were made about scholarships and student aid. The paramount goal was to ensure that as many students as possible complete their education, as soon as possible. We owed this to ourselves and Hungary. Having arrived in the west with a serious intellectual deficit, we promoted gatherings of fellow students in many countries to listen to outstanding Hungarian and local intellectuals on current topics, and Hungarian history and culture – to fill the gap, left by our one-sided education back home in the 50s.

Looking back

Looking back from a distance of fifty years, I savor the fruits of a privileged destiny: I belong, together with thousands of other Hungarians, to a generation, the ardent wishes of whose youth have been fulfilled: Hungary is a sovereign, democratic country. Now we just need to help those who can improve the quality of Hungarian democracy, to reap the full benefits of the country's integration in western structures.



Julius Várallyay

After leaving Hungary in 1956, Julius Várallyay completed his studies at Harvard College and MIT. He served as president of the worldwide organization of Hungarian émigré students and later supported a number of Hungarian-American organizations. He spent eight years in developing countries with an international consulting firm, and worked at the World Bank for over 29 years. Várallyay has been a board member of the Hungarian American Coalition, continues international consulting, and writes on public issues in Hungary. He divides his time between Budapest and Washington, D.C.

Gábor Varsa

FATE

*Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?*

Shakespeare — Hamlet



Varsa in 1956

They had heard that the borders were closed; no one was allowed in or out. Naturally, everyone in the group was worried because it was not at all certain that their attempted return would be successful. No one among them spoke Russian. Foreign language broadcasts were very faint and were almost impossible to understand because of the interference. They were only able to comprehend well-known words commonly used in many languages and reflect upon them. Words such as “Revolution” captured their attention. From the direction of the Soviet Union, it was impossible to enter Hungary via rail. At someone’s suggestion, they boarded another train heading toward Prague. Through Czechoslovakia, they were able to enter the country and arrive in Budapest. These events took place on the first day of November, 1956.

My Father was the chief (mechanical) engineer of Danuvia, a large well-known tool and machine parts factory. At the beginning of October, he and several of his co-workers were sent to the Soviet Union for a work-study trip. They visited Kiev and Sverdlovsk, among other cities. They were attempting to come back to Pest from that trip. The prevailing humor about the work-study program, to put it in the perspective of the times, was: “Who learned what, from whom, how much, and for that matter, what on earth for?”

While my Father and the others were away, the historically well-known and well-publicized events took place in Budapest and other parts of the country. I was ten years old.

My family lived in Budapest across the street from Népstadion (now Ferenc Puskás Stadium The – the largest soccer stadium in Hungary) on Vorosilov Street (formerly, and now again, known as Stefánia Street). We were well aware of the fighting. There were individuals in our building who took part in the uprising. Across the street on the pitch of the stadium, anti-aircraft artillery was operating. This unit was also taking fire from Buda and occasionally they missed their target and hit our building instead. For just about three weeks, the entire population of the house used the basement as an air-raid shelter, an area generally used for storage and firewood. What a messy affair that was.

Unbelievably eerie

A day or two after his arrival, my Father, brother, and I took a walk to the railway station to pick up my Father’s suitcase left there upon his arrival. Since the streetcars were not operating at all, we walked all the way from our house on the Körút (Ring). This was an incredibly strange and unbelievably eerie excursion. Many buildings were hit; one in particular, at an intersection, had a huge hole in it. You could see the furniture and the kitchens of some apartments in detail. It gave the Impression of a patient in discomfort sitting in the dentist chair with mouth wide open and several random teeth missing. It looked as though the souls of the people living in the house had exited through the gaping hole for good. The street also had a very peculiar smell. It did not smell like the “old Budapest,” but rather had a strange country odor to it. This was because the roads were all torn up, the stone pavers stacked up high for barricades, wires cut and all tangled looking like yarn that zealous cats had played with. All this gave the city a metallic, earthy, oily odor. It was also suspiciously quiet. Because there was no electricity, no transportation services, and no automobiles running, everything was rather silent. There were people on the streets but they were generally alone, speaking to no one, and hurrying to do their chores. We could only hear our footsteps, louder than usual, touching and scraping the ground which was dirty and coarse from debris. The next time I even came close to seeing this kind of desolate isolation was years later in the US, watching an episode of a TV show which showed a street scene in which aliens came to invade the earth in human form. It was Rod Serling’s *The Twilight Zone*.

Shortly thereafter, my brother and I noticed that there were discussions going on behind our backs, sometimes louder and sometimes whispered so that we would not hear them. Occasionally my parents’ discussions were conducted in German thinking that we would not understand it that way. Little did they know that by that time

we were well in command of the more important German words and expressions. "Wir müssen jetzt zusammen Weggehen!" – "We now have to leave and leave together." Should we go, or not? In his absence, my Father was elected to the new workers council at work. What made his situation even more interesting and unique was that in spite of his high level position in the factory, my Father was never a member of the communist party. He now had no other choice: he had to leave the country. The next question for my parents: with or without children?

In the meantime, we observed with great interest that a family, our friends, left the country but also returned in the span of three weeks. Unfortunately, I do not know the details, but this event was the one which convinced my Mother not to leave Hungary at all with her children in tow. I suspect that she was a bit apprehensive about leaving and its consequences. Additionally, the year was running out of calendar days; it was beginning to get very cold; and the news spread that the Western borders were closed.

Life without my Father

My Father departed without us and headed for the border on the 12th of December. An Austrian woman brought us the news that he had arrived in Vienna. Although he was detained at the border by two mounted guards (one Hungarian, one Russian), we heard that he was somehow able to obtain his freedom in exchange for a bottle of vodka. In Vienna, just by chance, an Austrian couple found him in a refugee camp and offered to give him shelter at their residence. The woman thought that my Father reminded her of their son who had perished during World War II. This is how my Father ended up at Ausstellung Strasse 1, next to Prater.

After six months of waiting for his papers, my Father arrived in the United States, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, at the house of my great Aunt (my Mother's side) and her husband. Naturally, we got this information through an intermediary, a very kind Austrian woman who on occasion appeared at our house for a quick update and a chat. My brother and I were well quizzed and prepared to say that we knew nothing about our Father and nothing about his whereabouts.

My Mother had no choice but to take on employment and try to raise two teenage sons who had seemingly insatiable appetites. We continued attending school and working hard, with good results. The good results were not only apparent in our schoolwork, but both of us became members of Úttörő (Pioneers) in leading roles in our school. Later, we also became members of KISZ (Young Communist Organization). At the time, we never thought we would ever leave Hungary and we wanted to somehow secure the possibility of continuing our education at a higher level.

Lacking any better ideas, my Mother filled out the necessary papers and submitted our request to leave Hungary legally. Our request was naturally rejected. After each rejection, one had to wait six months before the application could be resubmitted. My Mother worked tirelessly to come up with ingenious ways to find a way out of Hungary. Friends and acquaintances were mobilized toward this effort, as well. I know that she even wrote to János Kádár (then premier and first communist party secretary of Hungary) personally and asked for a meeting, although I do not believe that event ever came to fruition.

Years were flying by, one after another. My brother and I had hardly noticed the passing of time. We were much too involved with our own school affairs, playing soccer, and studies. What we had not known, but which came to light during this time, was that our Father was our Mother's second husband. Her first husband, László Onráti, left Hungary around 1947 and was living in Caracas, Venezuela. Their marriage lasted just a very short time, only a matter of months. Well, now... young lads can find out fantastic things about their parents if and when fate governs!

First and third husband

Sometime around late 1958, my Mother reestablished communication with her former husband. At that time, he was again single. During the summer of 1959, Onráti attended a conference in Moscow and on his way back landed in Budapest. He had a 24-hour visa to stay in town. They again wed. Three words... what a simple solution! But, for this simple solution to have come about, some kind of miracle had to happen, and incredible preparatory work and arrangements had to be made.

How did my Mother manage this miracle? I had some classmates with whom I spent some time; we played together and became friends. Naturally, my Mother knew their parents, especially their Mothers. Rather than go into detail here, which would be extremely lengthy and difficult at best, suffice it to say that these were the ladies whose relentless help and efforts enabled my Mother to arrange the divorce from my Father without him being present and arrange for the new marriage to take place. The next step was to arrange for my Mother's now 1st and 3rd husband to adopt my brother and me, which also happened on that very same day. We received the final adoption papers around June, 1960. My Father only found out about this miracle/caper later in America.

My Mother again submitted our papers and documents to leave the country legally, now as the wife of a citizen of Venezuela, and for us as his adopted children. I know that we paid the sum of \$8,000 to an individual, to this day still unidentified, to prepare some very important documents as my brother and I were getting very close to the mandatory military service age. This was a large sum of money at that time, especially for my Father who was working as a draftsman for a firm which manufactured window frames. It was a loan we had to pay back for many years.

Emigration

In September of 1961, we received our passports and other official papers to leave the country. We had a two-week timeframe to depart. Leaving behind all our furniture and larger items, although we did pack our books, we took off from the East railway station at midnight on October 16. We had to disembark from the train at the border, and they took apart all our suitcases and bags. They confiscated all my Mother's jewelry, they opened every single one of her cigarette packs; they made us disrobe, and they patted her down in a separate room. The train stood and waited for us for an hour. Perhaps we were the first family to legally emigrate after the Revolution?

Upon arriving in Vienna, my Mother immediately went to the police station and asked for political asylum from the Austrians so that we would not have to travel further to Caracas. Our passports and papers were designated in that direction, of course. We spent six months in Vienna while my Mother obtained a divorce from Onráti and for my Father to come to Vienna to remarry my Mother. By that time, he was a citizen of the United States. My brother and I were the official witnesses at our parents' wedding. My Father thus became my Mother's 2nd and 4th husband.

I would also like to mention here, just as a point of interest, that during our stay in Vienna we also resided at Auss-tellung Strasse 1, next to Prater. The very kind and good-hearted Austrian couple who took my Father in five years prior, took us in as well. In order to make the time pass more quickly, we saw a lot of movies. Most notable among them were "Gone with the Wind" and "Ben Hur" (which we saw four times).

We landed at Kennedy Airport on May 1, 1962, and traveled together to Bridgeport, all the while admiring the colorful azaleas in full bloom.

With a bit of consoling wine,

My life I quickly devour,

With a bit of consoling wine,

Fate, I smile at your power.

Petőfi – The Tippler



Gabor Varsa

Gabor Varsa and his brother attended the Ungarisches Realgymnasium in Burg Kastl, then West Germany, between 1962 and 1964, spending the summers in the United States. His brother started working for the Voice of America, Hungarian desk, starting in 1968 as a correspondent, editor, and then editor-in-chief. The U.S. government did away with the Hungarian language broadcast at the VO A in 2004 and his brother subsequently retired, now residing with his family in Washington, D. C.

Onráti moved to the United States during the 1960s and taught philosophy and Greek mythology at various universities. They did meet at that time on several occasions. Around 1990, Onráti returned to live in Hungary. Varsa's parents went through some very trying times and later divorced. His Mother died of a massive

heart attack in January 1975 in Washington, DC. She was 56 years old. His Father, who was always active in Hungarian circles and organizations, remarried and later passed away in 2001.

Varsa is currently employed at Verizon, one of America's largest telephone and internet service providers as the manager/supervisor for all civil-engineering related activities for Washington, DC, and the surrounding suburban Maryland area. His wife Edina, who also left Hungary in 1956, and he have petitioned the Hungarian Government to regain their Hungarian citizenship along with their son, Krisztián and daughter, Nikolett. They just received their papers in July, 2006.

Bulcsú Veress

YOUNG FOOT SOLDIER OF THE REVOLUTION



Veress in 1958, when he was arrested for "anti-communist" activities

In the fall of 1956, I was a second-year student at the Petőfi High School of Buda. In those days we did not talk much about politics. It was maybe because we brought our political views from home and the politics beyond that – even in school – was just communist junk that we were trying to ignore. The Writers' Association and the Petőfi Circle were far beyond our interest. The only place I noticed some changes was the newspaper called Free Youth (Szabad Ifjúság). This was the weekly of the communist youth association (DISZ). It was the only newspaper we could read on issues teenagers were interested in. In the fall of 1956, the newspaper was definitely opening toward Western culture. At that time I had already been an enthusiastic jazz fan. Every evening I listened to the 45-minute jazz program of the Voice of America. I was happy to suddenly read positive articles on Louis Armstrong and the rather new rock-and roll, e.g. Elvis Presley, which was also my interest at that time.

So the Revolution was totally unexpected for me. Hereinafter I am not going much into the details of the events of October and November of 1956. On the one hand, they have already been told by many, more competently and authentically. On the other hand, because my role in the events was scarcely more than "a face in the crowd." So, I am going to deal mostly with those events that are of some special individual or general interest.

On the afternoon of 23 October, 1956, I sat down with a big sigh to do my homework in the apartment of our family on Attila Street (it had a view of the Vörösmarty park, opposite the Déli railway station). I was a smart kid, so the school, set to the average (or low) intelligence, made me immensely bored. Although I was reading books voraciously – good literature but trash as well – I did not feel any challenge to excel at school. As I was writing my homework, I looked up and saw that a group of 20-30 people with our national flags was marching through the Vörösmarty from left to right, namely towards Széll Kálmán Square. I was surprised, although I had already known that some kind of a peaceful demonstration had been planned. In those days I could get distracted from homework even by a sparrow flying by the window, so I quickly jumped up and ran downstairs to see what was going on. I wasn't suspecting that by the time I would return home, I would become a (tiny) part of world history.

The gathering storm

We were heading toward Bem Square. Somewhere on our way I came across my classmate, Béla Leisz and we spent a few hours together. On Bem Square there was already a large crowd. What happened there has been told by many. When the soldiers displayed the Hungarian flag on the barracks behind the Bem statue (the building served as the MDF headquarters in the early 90's), people broke out in a huge cheer. And now a side comment: I think, usually there is not enough awareness about how splendidly the Hungarian Army and the common, so called "blue-uniformed" police performed during the Revolution. The peasant boys of the Army did not hesitate even for a moment which side to join in this fight. The same applied to the regular police. They were mainly prole bumpkins who kept intimidating the civilians as it was expected of them. But when they had to make this decision, they knew exactly where to stand. I saw blue-uniformed policemen patrolling in the streets as members of the National Guard many times during the Revolution, but no one gave them a dirty look.

One more thing about Bem Square: sometimes there is confusion about who recited the poem "Nemzeti dal" (National Song) there. It was Ferenc Bessenyei. Our other great actor, Imre Sinkovits, later an unforgettable friend of mine, wrote his name – not the last time – into the glorious pages of Hungarian history at the Petőfi statue.

At the Parliament

From here we went to the Parliament. This is a well-known story, too. What I remember clearly is how astonished I was that when the crowd was already repeatedly shouting: "Russkies, go home!", "Out with the Russians!", and Imre Nagy appeared on the balcony of the Parliament, calling us "Comrades!" Then the crowd, as if it had been trained to do it, shouted back as one: "We are not comrades!" So I thought: "Is he really that dumb? Doesn't he understand what this is all about?" Of course Imre Nagy has to be put in his place. There was no one else. The least beastly Moscovite was demanded by the crowd, because they did not know of anyone else. And Imre Nagy was not prepared at all to lead such a revolutionary movement; he was swept along by the events. As a matter of fact, in this situation even a Winston Churchill would not have been able to avert the predictable brutal Soviet retribution. To the end of his life Imre Nagy identified with the Revolution. If he had behaved in a cowardly fashion, like others, very likely he could have saved his neck. He chose otherwise. Although I do not think much of his life, as a good Christian, I believe that he redeemed himself with his martyrdom, and I bow deeply before his memory.

One more thing I remember from Kossuth Square: at some point the ÁVH goons, or someone else, turned off the street lights supposing that we would be frightened in the darkness. We enjoyed an early October evening. The people in the crowd set fire to their newspapers almost simultaneously and these lit up the square for a few minutes. It was heartwarming to see so many issues of the communist daily burning.

To the Radio!

In the meanwhile the “red” working class got in motion. When somebody issued the call: “To the Radio!” dozens of the then-standard Csepel trucks appeared. (It must have been the evil CIA who organized it so well!) I was sitting on the front right fender of one of the first Csepels and kept holding hands tightly with the guy sitting on the left fender. Otherwise we would have fallen off, maybe under the wheels. People were sitting on the top of the driving cab as well, and I remember the driver shouting at them to keep their feet apart because he could not see the road.

One of the most memorable moments to me, albeit very small, happened during this drive. We were driving along today's Károly Boulevard toward the Radio. I think the Csepel I was sitting on was close to the front of the procession. Ahead of us, there was an old couple standing at a streetcar stop. By their appearance and their attitude they looked to me like old style gentlefolk, to the communists they were probably just old “reactionaries.” As we were approaching them, a truckful of howling beasts, the man was looking at us with open disgust. “What is this damned communist circus again?” – he probably thought. Then, as we got closer, the old gentleman realized that we were shouting: “Russians go home!” and “We want freedom!” etc., and in a second a heavenly joy spread over his face. He almost started to jump up and down as he was waving to us with both hands. This small highlight is one of the most important memories that I have of 1956, showing what it was all about.

When we arrived to the Radio, there was already a huge crowd there. From the Múzeum Boulevard we could hardly get into Bródy Sándor Street. By that time the ÁVH soldiers had already been shooting tear-gas grenades. It was the first time of my life that I tasted tear gas. The second time occurred at Columbia University in 1971-72, during the anti-Vietnam demonstrations. Then, of course, I had fights only with the Ho-Ho-Ho-Shi-Minh-type hippies. At the Radio, even the Army joined in. Dozens of young soldiers were arriving, probably from the nearby Kilián barracks. They were hugging stacks of rifles, like brushwood, 6-8 together. I thought I would take one home for later use, but on second thought, I realized that it would have given the willies to my Mother. Then the bullets started their odd patter. I was holed up in a streetcar on Múzeum Boulevard opposite Bródy Sándor Street, and we were definitely taking incoming fire.

I started to feel terribly guilty because of my Mother. My parents were divorced by then and I lived with my Mother and my little sister. I knew that my Mother was in a fright. She was convinced that where the biggest mess in the city was, that's where her little son would be. And she was right. By that time the shooting could be heard all over the town, even on the other side of the Danube, in Buda. I also thought that to die a hero's death would be a bit premature. This battle is not going to end here, at the Radio. One more thing: according to my Christian belief, the heroes killed there, such as István Hegedűs, the great pentathlete, are sitting at the right of the Lord. May their memory be blessed!

So I went home to reassure my Mother, but I was pushing her to let me go back. She agreed only if she came with me. We did reach Kálvin Square, but there was no going further from that point, unless I wanted to drag my Mother into the middle of the shootings.

Grounded for a day, then roaming all over town

For October 23, I got my reward: I was ordered not to leave our apartment. I could have snuck out, but my Mother, besides all her love and tenderness, knew exactly how to use an iron fist with her beloved son, if needed. By the 25th, the fights stopped so after a long begging my Mother let me out to look around in town. I was strictly ordered to be back at a specific hour of early afternoon. This may have saved my life.

In my curiosity I covered enormous distances that day. Of course, there was no public transportation. I visited my Father who then lived in Visegrádi Street. At that time, opposite the Nyugati railway station - at the place of the underpass that is in front of the present department store, there was a row of bazaar shops with the notorious Illkovics bar at the end – I saw dead corpses for the first time in my life. One of them was that of an elderly gentleman who even had his hat on and was shot in the middle of his forehead. The other was a young soldier who was sitting peacefully on the entrance stair of a shop, leaning to the wall. The bullet went through his chin and then his throat. I hope it does not sound too morbid, but I could not tear myself away from the sight of this young soldier. I couldn't possibly understand that this good-looking, presumably peasant boy who must have lived, hoped and loved and certainly risked his life 1 or 2 days ago could just pass away so easily. It was extremely hard to leave that place, though I said my prayers for both of them.

Downtown I passed the Gorkij bookstore. The store, which had been promoting the Soviet culture, was now burnt out. Books and records were thrown in the street. I am not a fan of burning books and records at all, but the “Sovietskaya cultura” much deserved this. I think the same of the lynching of the ÁVH's murderous thugs that was committed on Köztársaság Square. My guiding principle on this is that in a Revolution, the system being

Imre Balassa



A tank disabled by freedom fighters

overthrown reaps the fruits of its own bestiality. They've asked for it! Nothing happened on Köztársaság Square that came close to the brutality of the previous Rákosi regime. I accept the lynching that happened there, approve of them even today. I was not there, though.

On my way home I joined a peaceful demonstration near Károly Boulevard. It was an unarmed procession to the Parliament. I walked with them a few hundred meters, but then I remembered my Mother's strict order, so I headed home. Once again, this was Thursday, the 25th. Later on Kossuth Square this demonstration was strafed with machine guns by the ÁVH, killing some 110 people. If I had stayed with them, I might have gotten a bullet in my butt, not to mention worse places.

About Radio Free Europe

Then almost 10 days passed without any fights and we thought that everything would be all right. We were listening to the broadcasts of Radio Free Europe and hoped. Now I would like to dispute a rather generally accepted lie. Radio Free Europe never instigated anyone to fight with weapons. They gave advice, encouragement, but only to the effect that we should not be fooled by the communists, and should not give up what we already achieved that far. Anybody who says otherwise is either ignorant, or a liar. What else could they have said then from Munich? "People, don't be silly. Go home and lay down the arms. The nice Soviets will come back and everything will be all right?" Who would have believed this bunk? In my opinion it is a profound disesteem of the heroes of '56 to state that the reason they took up arms was that they were fooled by Radio Free Europe. Well, one more thing is that I naively believed, together with many others, in a possible U.S. intervention. The fact that it did not occur doesn't show how cynical and deceptive the U.S. was. It only shows how ignorant and uninformed we were.

During my 12-year service in the U.S. Senate, one of my most difficult tasks was to explain to my homeland compatriots what a small spot Hungary is on the map of world politics. To expect the United States to risk another world war for this small "real estate" was nonsense. The Red Army stayed in the country all along, although there was a temporary ceasefire. After the Revolution the United States sent us tons of aid, tinned food, cheese, chocolate, even chewing gum and cigarettes (I smoked Chesterfields and Camels for the first time in my life, although

later I wisely gave that up). I could get dressed partly from the clothes they sent. The United States welcomed the tens of thousands of refugees from Hungary with love, jobs, and scholarships. Anyone who expected more than that, e.g. a U.S. invasion, had no idea of the realities of world politics.

The battle of Vérmező

Early Sunday morning, November 4th, we were awakened by cannon fire. Although we had heard the dramatic radio address of Imre Nagy, (replayed a hundred times since then), we soon realized that we had to seek shelter in the basement of our building. Vérmező turned into a battlefield. Some 8-10 Soviet tanks camped out there. There was infantry too; they were cowering behind the tanks. Their presence had two reasons. In the huge postal service building over Széll Kálmán Square freedom fighters had taken up positions. On the other side, the Soviets streaming in from Alkotás Street received a drastic welcome from the ramparts of the Castle Hill, above us. Two of my friends excelled at this fight, Öcsi and Dodi Kolompár. They were sons of a gypsy family who a few years before had moved to a flat in Logodi Street, above Attila Street on the hill. They had 4-5 brothers or sisters. Öcsi and Dodi were 2-3 years older than me. This is a big gap at this age, so we weren't really close. Anyway, they were extremely friendly fellows who never made their apparent physical power felt. They fought heroically among the freedom fighters of the Castle Hill area, which taught me a new lesson. Namely, that the trustworthy and honest patriotic gypsy is just as good a Hungarian brother of mine as anybody else meeting this description. The Kolompár brothers were given heavy prison sentences. The last time I saw their Mother was in 1957, when we were in line in the yard of the prison of Markó Street to pass in "cleaning packages." I was there for my Father, who was also jailed there at that time.

During the battle of Vérmező, the "liberating" Red Army set our clothing closet on fire by a phosphorous incendiary bullet, shooting through the apartment next to ours. I always wanted to ask Nikita Sergejevich Khrushchev why that was necessary, but I never had a chance. Fortunately, we were regularly patrolling in the house so the fire was soon noticed and put out. By then all of our winter clothes, coats, scarves, and hats had been burnt and become useless. The burnt smell had been biting our noses for months, even after cleaning up the ruins. Also at night, when the gunfire largely ceased, we were peeking out at the Russkies. We saw that this rabble called the Red Army broke into all the shops around Alkotás Street, on the other side of Vérmező. They broke into the sweet-shop (liqueurs), the flower shop, the bar (of course!) and even the stationery store. The one shop they did not touch was selling watches and jewelry. Obviously they couldn't read the sign-board and the employees had previously taken out every giveaway item from the store windows, so the place looked rather poor and shoddy. Also it may have had better locks.

Ceasefire and breadline

On the morning of November 7th, we woke up to total silence. The Soviets seemed to have ordered a ceasefire in honor of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Along with 2-3 men we decided to get some bread. Somehow we learned that the bakery at the corner of Kékgyöly and Schwartz Ferenc Streets was working. I did not dare to tell my Mother that I was leaving; I just sent word to her to the basement that I left for bread. We did not dare to cross Vérmező because of the Soviets. We rather got around it toward Krisztina Boulevard.

I was really scared that we would get shot, but fortunately we managed to reach the bakery. There was already a very long line standing there, almost half of Buda. We had to stand in line for almost 8 hours, but we passed the time talking. I went home triumphantly carrying two loaves of bread, 2-kilo each, still warm, under my arms. Actually, I think my Mother was much happier to see me than the bread. I gave a half kilo each to two friendly families, but I did not even think of sharing the rest. "Just let your stomachs rumble. I was the one risking my skin, and waiting for 8 hours," I thought.

Lastly, I want to recall one more episode. In the days of November, the city was still occupied physically by the Soviets. By the Nyugati railway station at a street identity check a Soviet soldier gave my Father a giant kick with his boot, where it hurts the most. Though he did not live far from there, he could hardly drag himself home, almost crawling. After that, for several days I went to his place in Visegrádi Street by bicycle to start the fire in his stove, to get him food, etc. One day I was riding home along Szent István Boulevard toward the Margaret Bridge. By that time a few of the buses were running, but not the streetcars because the rails had been torn up. I was passing by a crowded bus, on the back stair of which the actor Imre Sinkovits was standing. At that time the back platforms of the buses were still open. One could travel on the steps if the bus was too crowded. At both sides of the bridgehead Soviet tanks were posted. On our side a Soviet soldier was standing in front of the tank. As the bus got there – I was about 5 meters behind them – Imre delivered a huge spit to the Russki's feet. The Russki never batted an eyelid. He might have thought that in Hungary too, this was the way of greeting each other. Of course, at that time I did not know Imre personally, but many years later I shared this story with him at his great pleasure.

In 1957, in my high school, I joined an anti-communist conspiracy, and later I spent time in prison. I hesitated whether to write up that story or the one above, and I chose the latter. That's because the previous one had already been written several times, e.g. in an excellent, long interview with me and five of my co-conspirators in the March 11, 2006 issue of Magyar Nemzet. The interview entitled "A Népköztársaság nevében" ("In the name of the Republic") can be found in Hungarian on the Internet. It was written by István Stefka. I cannot add much to that.



Bulcsú Veress

Dr. Bulcsú Veress was born in 1941 in Budapest into a middle class family. Seven of his eight Great-Grandparents were of Transylvanian origin. After the 1956 Revolution he joined an anti-communist student conspiracy in the Petőfi High School of Buda. The group was betrayed and its members arrested in 1958. In 1959 Veress was sentenced for 8 months imprisonment, as a minor, part of which was suspended on probation. He spent close to 4 years as a manual laborer, while earning a license as an automobile electrician.

Keeping his prison past hidden, he applied to and was admitted to the School of Law of the Eötvös Lóránd University in 1962. In 1965 the Secret Police discovered him there and pressured the school to dismiss him. This was flatly refused by the council of professors, in part because Veress was a straight-A student and

was awarded the honorary Scholarship of the People's Republic. After graduation he worked in the Ministry of Construction as a lawyer, then in the Institute for Legal and Administrative Sciences of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences as a legal scholar.

He was sent for post-graduate studies in comparative and international law to the University of Strasbourg, and in 1970, he decided not to return to Hungary. After 8 months in Switzerland and Austria, he emigrated to the United States early in 1971. In the same year he was admitted to the Graduate School of Columbia University in New York City where he received his third diploma in political science – international relations in 1976.

In the same year he joined the founders of Committee for Human Rights in Rumania, that still operates as the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation. For years Veress regularly traveled to Washington, D.C. to lobby for the Hungarian minority of Rumania at the Congress. He became an American citizen in 1977. In 1980 Veress joined the senatorial campaign of Christopher Dodd of Connecticut, then a member of the House of Representatives. After Dodd's election Veress worked for the Senator till the end of 1991, in part on the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. His responsibilities included national defense, foreign policy, international law and human rights.

At the end of 1991 Veress returned to Hungary within a US government program and served as an advisor in the newly democratic parliament. Later he worked as an advisor to Hungary's foreign minister, then as an editor/producer at Duna Television. During the spring of 1999 Veress moved back to Washington. He first worked as a political consultant, then on the staff of the congressional Helsinki Commission, at the latter for Senator Dodd again. In 2005 he moved back again to Budapest and at present works again at Duna Television as professional advisor.

In 1992, during the Antall government, at the initiative of the Prime Minister, Veress was awarded the "1956 Memorial Medal" – a state award. In 1995 the Horn government honored him and his fellow human rights activists with the "For the Minorities" award.

Katalin Vörös

AT LEAST THE CHILDREN WILL HAVE A FUTURE



Now that the 50th anniversary of the Revolution and Freedom Fight of 1956 approaches, I reread the relevant books that through the years have found their way onto my bookshelves. I consider myself lucky to have lived to see the regime change in 1989, and am glad to see that Hungary finally has a chance to control its own destiny.

Unfortunately, my Father was not able to have rejoiced in this historic change. In 1986, as he lay gravely ill with dementia in a Pennsylvania hospital, during my visit he pointed outside the window, where he could just see a small, red weather flag fluttering in the wind. "Commies," he said disgustedly. I was shocked to realize how deeply etched the hurt and humiliation he suffered under communism was.

I thought of the time in Mosonmagyaróvár where I was born, when, in 1956 the Russian tanks ground the asphalt with their monotone rumbling in the streets around the city block where we lived. When my Father came home from work he said to my Mother, "Ibi, pack the children's things; we're going to the West." "Lajos, have you gone mad? With three children, no language skills, no useful profession, what are we going to do there?" replied my Mother.

"I don't care, I am doomed to manual labor for the rest of my life anyway, but at least the children will have a future." We children, who were 15, 13, and 11 at the time, understood what he was talking about. Our Father had been a teacher for 35 years, but he steadfastly refused to become a member of the communist party. As a result, he was reduced to earning our living as a rubble-cleaner, road worker, and warehouse loader.

And so it happened. Our path led to America, where nothing stood in the way of our ambitions; we could go in any direction we desired. It just needed some hard work and perseverance. And my Father retired, and died, – as he had predicted – a factory worker, but with the knowledge that he did the best he was able to for his family.

A flood of memories bursts forth, not only in me, but in anyone who lived through the events of 1956. A couple days ago a representative of the local Hungarian Engineers, Scholars and Technicians Friendship Society asked me to help organize the 1956 commemoration here in Berkeley.

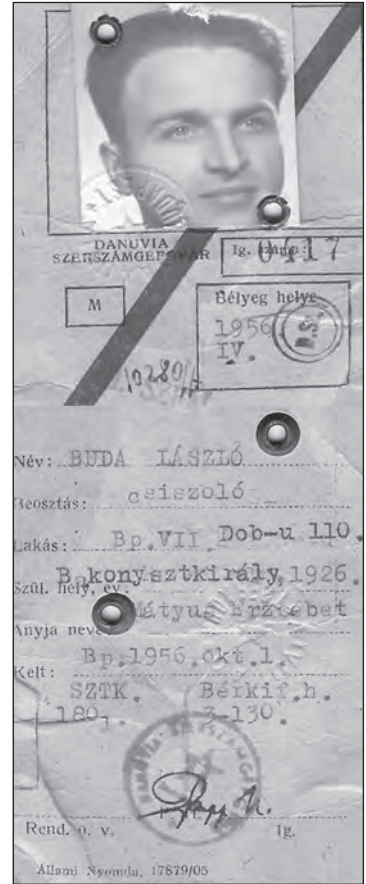
The University of California at Berkeley excelled in helping refugee students at the time. The University provided opportunities for study for over 120 young refugees, mostly in engineering and science, and these graduates went on to become successful builders and contributors to the American economy. They value and appreciate Berkeley's help at the beginning, and it is for this reason that we will commemorate the events of 1956 with an academic colloquium here. We want to convey to today's students that in 1956, students of similar ages were willing to sacrifice their lives for those ideals and freedoms that we so often take for granted here in the United States.



Katalin Vörös

After fleeing Hungary, Katalin Vörös's family lived in Switzerland, and she attended the Hungarian secondary school in Burg Kastl, Germany. The family moved to the United States in 1960, and settled in Pennsylvania. She studied at Drexel University in Philadelphia, and worked as an electrical engineer at Philco-Ford and at RCA. She and her husband took leading roles in the Philadelphia Hungarian community, and both became scout troop leaders. She moved to California in 1982, and continued her studies at UC Berkeley. Vörös is currently the manager of the micro fabrication research laboratory at the University, and in her spare time coordinates a list serve for the Hungarian community of the San Francisco Bay Area. All six of her grandchildren speak Hungarian.

The stories of Katalin's two daughters, Réka and Eszti Pigniczky, can be found on p. 201 and p. 198 respectively.



Pictured above (clockwise): the Halász family, László Buda, Sr., László Pigniczky, the Kiss family and friends

56 Stories

Personal accounts from families of '56-ers

Katica Avvakumovits

THINGS HAVE COME FULL CIRCLE

The fact that my Father was a '56-er - he escaped Hungary in November of that year, at age 21 - is part and parcel of the story of our family and how we got to the United States. My Mother's family left Hungary after the Second World War; they were married in San Francisco.

One of my parents' central principles was to raise us, their three California-born children, to be Hungarians. Of course, we were Americans, too – that was fine, but making us Americans required no effort on their part. Raising us to speak Hungarian and to feel connected to our Grandmother and cousins living behind the Iron Curtain – now THAT took a lot of effort.

As part of that effort, both my parents volunteered as leaders in the Hungarian Scout troop of the San Francisco Bay Area. The scouts, at that time, were all children of '56-ers, all “forced” to speak Hungarian at home. We all learned to read and write Hungarian, and some basic history and literature. (This peer group at scouts made it easier for me to acknowledge our roots at our Catholic parochial school, where 98 percent of the kids were either Irish or Italian, and no one knew where Eastern Europe was, much less Hungary.)

However, it would be wrong to assume that my brothers and I grew up in a hothouse of anti-communist fervor and Hungarian nationalist feeling. For one thing, my parents were still young when they left Hungary (my Mother only a child), and while it never occurred to them that they might be anything other than Hungarian, they were perfectly open to embracing the English language, getting to know their friendly American neighbors, and appreciating the advantages of American society. And so we children didn't (usually) view our parents as relics from the Old Country.

My parents' continued connection to their homeland did not let our family's image of Hungary recede into a picture of nostalgia or bitterness. As children, we were raised to know the names of our Budapest relatives, to write Christmas cards to aging Aunts and to know the street names where our parents grew up, and where our relatives still lived. A family trip to Hungary during the summer of my 7th year made these connections real and lasting. As children, we knew from experience that Hungarians were not just an oppressed nation groaning under the Soviet yoke; Hungary also meant yellow streetcars, exotic ice cream flavors, zebra-striped crosswalks, and friendly cousins who sported the same outlandish last name as ours.

And yet – we knew perfectly clearly, from attending (long and boring) October 23 commemorations in San Francisco, from learning about the plight of Hungarians in Transylvania, from gentle warnings about what “not to talk about” while visiting Hungary – that things were not okay in Hungary, and that we, as Hungarian-Americans in the free world, had an obligation to somehow “carry the torch,” because if we didn't, something would be lost. I could not have defined the obligation more concretely, but the sense of obligation was real – conveyed to us most effectively by our parents and other adult scout leaders who were proud of their Hungarian heritage and able to impart its values in concrete and positive terms. This sense of vague responsibility was real enough that in 1989 and 1990, already an adult, I was literally relieved that now we – Hungarian- Americans in the West – were off the hook; Hungary was a democracy, the crimes of the past 40 years would be uncovered, historical distortions corrected, and 1956 celebrated and remembered: not (just) in church basements and community centers in the West, but in Hungary, publicly, officially and with dignity.

Now I am 39 years old; for the past 6 years, I have lived with my husband and two sons in Budapest, just one block away from where my Father grew up, in the same city he fled exactly 50 years ago. At least for our family, things have come full circle.

While I am well aware that, in many respects, Hungary is still a post-communist country, is not yet a “normal” European country, and Hungarians on both sides of the Atlantic get terribly exercised (often justifiably) about distortions that remain and atrocities still hushed up – I believe that these things are settling into place. I am still a Hungarian-American. I am not a “native” here; being an American is an important segment of my dual identity, and I refuse to split hairs over which one I “really” am. But I look forward to the 50th anniversary commemorations in October; we'll be on-site in Budapest with our sons, and will tell them (without having to whisper) about their Grandfather's role in history.



Katica Avvakumovits

Katica was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, where her parents and brothers still live. After college she spent four years with the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation in New York and Washington, D.C., working on behalf of Hungarian minorities in Central Europe. Since 2000, she has been living in Budapest with her husband Zsolt (a German-born Hungarian raised in Argentina) and their two sons.

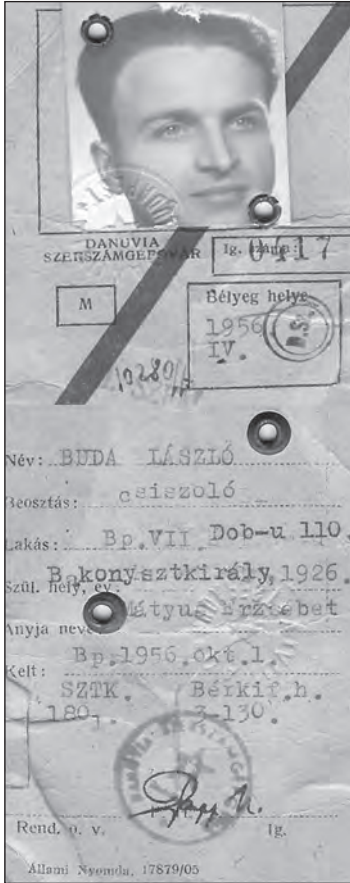
Imre Balassa



Damaged church

László Imre Buda

DREAMS FULFILLED



The 1956 identification card of László Buda Sr.

The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and freedom fight is the most important event of my life. I did not state “lifetime,” because it occurred 10 years before I was born in Cleveland, Ohio. How could something that occurred 10 years before I was born be the most important event of my life? Had the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and freedom fight not taken place, my late Father, László Buda, probably would not have been able to make the incredible sacrifice of leaving his homeland so that I would be born and raised in the United States and have the freedoms and opportunities that he could only dream about. Moreover, had I grown up in Hungary, I wonder if I would have had as much pride about being a Hungarian as I do having grown up in America.

To put 1956 in context, I would like to provide a brief background on my Father. Born and raised in the small village of Bakony-szentkirály in Veszprém county, my Father had a difficult childhood growing up in a peasant family. He dreamed of playing the accordion, but was forced by his Father to give up school after 6th grade to tend to farming. Things became worse with the outbreak of World War II. At the age of 18, my Father, his brother, and many of his friends were conscripted to join the German Army as the Germans retreated from the Eastern Front. He survived bombings in Germany, nearly starved to death in a French holding camp, and was forced to dig up Allied corpses from the D-Day invasion in Normandy, France. Despite all of these hardships, he held on to his dreams.

Passing up an opportunity to stay in the West, he returned to Bakony-szentkirály in late 1945. He decided to leave farming behind forever and moved to Budapest in 1949, to attend a technical training school where he learned to become a polisher (csiszoló). Things were looking up for my Father – he was even able to pursue his dream of playing the accordion – but then on October 23, 1956, just 2 days before his 30th birthday, the Revolution broke out. Though he didn’t take up arms, I consider my Father a ‘56er, because he repeatedly risked his life to get food and water to his friends’ older relatives who were shut-ins.

My Father turned 30 on what became known as “Bloody Thursday” – October 25, 1956 – when innocent protesters were massacred as bullets sprayed down from atop buildings nearby Parliament. Fortunately, my Father chose not to be near Parliament that day.

Pursuing a dream of freedom

When thousands of Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest on November 4, 1956, my Father knew that his life in Hungary would soon be over. After experiencing the horrors of fascism, he could not and would not spend the rest of his life living under communism. Given a second chance to pursue his dream of freedom, he chose to leave Hungary and head to America. After a few weeks in Austria, my Father arrived in New York City on January 7, 1957. He was processed through Camp Kilmer as part of “Operation Mercy,” and then took a train to Cleveland to be with his Grandfather. He arrived with a suitcase and nothing more.

My Father, like thousands like him, was truly “a man in search of a new beginning.” This was the title of a biographical sketch I wrote about my Father when I was in high school. I concluded that piece in 1984 with the following words: “Even after he dies, I’ll still remember how hard my Father’s life was and how lucky I’ve been. His struggles and victories will always give me incentive to do my best and take advantage of what I have.”

Though the Soviets won the battle, the 1956 freedom fighters won the war. People like my Father found the freedom that they dreamed of having. They further strengthened the already strong Hungarian communities around the world outside Hungary, maintaining their cultural identity and language, and also contributing to their communities in their new home. Their bravery, heroism, and courage formed the first crack in the foundation of communism leading to its eventual fall in 1989.

Learning from his example

When faced with various challenges in my life, from sports to academics to business, I have repeatedly reflected on my Father to draw strength. If he could risk his life to help others during the Revolution; if he could leave his

hometown for another country thousands of miles away; if he could learn a new language at the age of 30; if he could start a family at the age of 40; if he could fulfill his dream of playing the accordion; if he could “make it” in America with only a 6th grade education; what would prevent me from doing ANYTHING that I set out to do?!

I participated in my first 1956 commemoration in 1989 when I moved to St. Louis after completing college. I proudly recited Gyula Stubner’s moving poem called “Magyar (Hungarian) October” and have continued this personal tradition here in Cleveland.

In 2003, I fulfilled one of my Father’s dreams – that of living and working in a free and democratic Hungary when I relocated there for a career opportunity. I was able to experience the October 23rd commemoration that year – something that I will never forget. Parliament was draped in giant panoramic photos of scenes from the Revolution. I joined a crowd of 75,000 people in Széna tér to commemorate the events of 1956. I never felt more proud to have Hungarian blood flowing in my veins. And I cried when I saw the commemorative plaque and large spheres representing the bullets shot at those massacred on October 25, 1956, my Father’s 30th birthday.

In 2004, I formally continued my Father’s legacy of helping those in need in Hungary by founding “Friends of United Way-Hungary” to promote and financially support United Way-Hungary, which is led by fellow Hungarian-Americans in Budapest.

These were the closing words of my eulogy at my Father’s funeral in 2001: “My dear Father, I am proud to be Hungarian, to be your only son, and to carry your name forward. Drága Édesapám, büszke vagyok, hogy magyar származású vagyok, hogy az egyszülött fiad vagyok, és hogy a te nevedet továbbra viszem.”

It is in his memory and the memory of the heroes and victims of 1956, that I personally will never forget my peasant roots, never forget my heritage, never forget how to communicate in Hungarian, and never let the Spirit of 1956 die.



László Imre Buda

Born in Cleveland in 1966, László Imre Buda learned Hungarian from his parents. He studied mechanical engineering at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh (1989), continuing with a graduate degree in mechanical engineering (1992) and also an MBA (1998) at Washington University in St. Louis. He lived and worked in St. Louis, Kaposvár, and Cleveland, where he is currently a Six Sigma Black Belt (Project Manager) at Avery Dennison. Buda often performs public recitals of Hungarian poetry at Hungarian-American events. He is honoring the 50th anniversary of 1956 by riding his bicycle a total of 1956 miles (3148 km) by October 23, 2006, to benefit United Way-Hungary and to build awareness of 1956 in the American community.

Elizabeth Halász

THE HOPES OF 1956



Elizabeth Halász and her Father, 1956

I followed the happenings of the 1956 uprising from New Jersey with great expectations and even greater hopes. After immigrating to the United States in 1952, I only found out in the summer of 1953, that my Father was still alive. He had survived five years as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union, three years in a concentration camp in Hungary, and was living in Balatonfüred.

Because he had been a carrier hussar officer years before, I was convinced that he was fighting alongside the freedom fighters in 1956.

In the United States, we tried to persuade our politicians not to abandon the Hungarians again. After the Russians crushed the Revolution on November 4, I could only hope that my Father was still alive and could somehow escape to Austria.

But, as time went by, I began to lose hope. Then, in late November, our phone rang. It was my Father. He had arrived in Vienna and was staying at my Grandmother's. As he later related to us, he had indeed offered his services to a group of freedom fighters, but was turned down because they did not want to associate with a former officer of the Horthy era.

My husband and I picked him up in the middle of December at Camp Kilmer. He had last seen me as a girl of eleven. I was now a young woman of 22.

It was the happiest and saddest Christmas of my life.

When I later requested and received my Father's indictment and trial documents from the official archives in 2004, I did not know whether to laugh or cry. My Father's only crime: being a military officer and an aristocrat.



Elizabeth Halász

Born in Sopron, Elizabeth Halász ended up in Austria at the end of World War II as a Displaced Person. She immigrated to the United States in 1952. She worked at first in a factory, then completed an accounting course and found employment as a bookkeeper. She raised three children, helped in the St. Stephen Hungarian church of Passaic, New Jersey as well as with the scouts, and was PTA president in her daughter's and sons' school.

Elizabeth Halász is the wife of Sándor Halász, whose story can be found on page 46.

Erika G. Kisvarsányi

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

I am an ancient Hungarian pagan
 Thundering along on horseback, with my sword held high
 With intense devotion to forgiving Mother Earth, Mother Sun
 I praise the spirit of the Universe

I am a disciple of Istvan
 Thundering along on horseback, with my sword at my side
 Building a nation
 I carve out my place in the arms of the Carpathian Mountains

I am a woman from Eger
 With my sword in my hand
 Fighting against
 Turkish invaders I endure for one-hundred and fifty years

I am a freedom fighter of '48
 Protecting the Hungarian crown with my sword
 My enemy was once my friend
 I stand alone in the vast world

I am the vanquished of World War I
 My sword is shattered
 My ancient homeland is dismembered
 Two thirds of my spirit flows away in blood

I am a Hungarian of '45
 My sword is useless
 I see my country mutilated
 Nearly swept away by Fate

I am a refugee of '56
 My sword is now mind and energy
 Scattering across new worlds
 I live lives in new lands

Now, today, I am an ancient Hungarian pagan
 in spirit, I am thundering along on horseback with my sword raised
 I was born in a foreign land but in my blood, the blood of the ancients' flow
 And together we dance beneath the Moon

NOTE: In the Light of the Moon was translated from the original Hungarian by the author.



Erika Kisvarsányi

Erika G. Kisvarsányi was born in Rolla, Missouri, in 1964. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics from the University of Missouri-Rolla, and two Master's degrees from the University of Florida, one in physics and the other in science education. She is currently teaching physics and mathematics at a local community college in Gainesville, Florida. Her hobbies include languages, travel, sports, and attending performing arts events.

Erika Kisvarsányi is the daughter of Éva Kisvarsányi whose story can be found on page 72.

Photographs from her Father, Géza Kisvarsányi, can also be found throughout "56 Stories."

Andrea Lauer Rice

PASSING ON THE LEGACY OF 1956

Although I always knew that I was Hungarian – my family traveled back to Hungary every two years or so after I was born – I only really came into my Hungarian identity, the true spirit of it, much later in life. It is the same with the legacy of 1956. While I cannot recall the first time I heard the story of 1956, I always remember being aware of it and proud of my family's role in it. But it is only within the past decade or so that I began to dig deeper into the details of that fateful time in the country's history and how it influenced my family's life. Now, in retrospect, I not only see the signs of what my family members went through then and how it affected them, but I can also see how their life lessons from '56 have had a profound effect on me.

I now recognize many things in my childhood that made my family different from the families of my friends. Nothing was ever wasted. Everything we had was savored and appreciated. For example, we were always required to clean our plate, not because of the common refrain "there are starving children in Africa," but because my Mother knew what it was like to exist on bread, lard, and cream of wheat for weeks at a time.

My Grandparents were adamant that we finish not just college but have advanced degrees, because they knew the power and freedom an education could provide throughout one's life. It was due to their education that they were able to start new lives when they arrived in the United States, in their late forties. Awareness of world affairs was another expectation in my home. And, when we came of age, it was understood that voting was a sacred duty, because they knew what it was like when your vote made no difference at all. My Aunt always inspired creativity and artistic expression in us, because as an artist who grew up under the repressive communist system, she knew all too well what stifling these freedoms meant to a creative soul.

My Grandparents, who lost everything they owned, not once but twice, now hold onto everything. It is a running joke that we need to do spring cleaning at their apartment, but are afraid what we will find from Christmases past. And finally, my Mother, who is extremely conservative in spending, will always say after a large purchase, "do you know we could restore a Hungarian church with this amount?" or "do you know how many scholarships for Hungarian students could be funded with this in Transylvania?"

Over the years, as I grew closer to my Hungarian friends and learned the stories of my extended family members, I saw firsthand the injustice and untold suffering caused by communism. One of the most poignant stories is from a distant relative who in 1945, was babysitting her young niece when some Soviet soldiers got drunk and began to rampage through the town where she lived. They soon came to her house looking for "the little girl." My relative quickly hid the girl in a kitchen cabinet and bravely met the soldiers at the door. One can only imagine what happened afterwards, but the girl was left untouched...

After moving to Budapest in 1990, I began to delve into the story and legacy of the Revolution of 1956. As I learned the details, I suddenly understood much more about my family's role, their reason for leaving Hungary, and the historical significance of the Revolution. In 1991, when I attended the second ever, free commemoration of October 23, 1956, I was unbelievably moved. I remember vividly the large tricolor flag with a gaping hole cut out, draped across the Parliament steps, the hundreds of candles people lit and the small flags they held. I remember hearing bits and pieces of stories being told as I passed through the crowd. And most of all, I remember one elderly gentleman sitting on the steps with his grandson in his lap, quietly telling him the story of 1956 with tears streaming down his face. I recall a feeling of deep pride at being a part of this nation, of what Hungarians stood for, and the small but significant role my family played in the 1956 events. As I lit candles in honor of each family member who participated in the 1956 Revolution, I made a solemn promise to myself to do my part in making sure this story was never forgotten. And now, 15 years later, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary, I feel that Hungarian-Americans have the opportunity and indeed the obligation to ensure that the story of 1956 continues to be widely shared. This is the inspiration behind the creation of the FreedomFighter56.com website and oral history project.

The Revolution

At its core, the Revolution was started by university students, who had had enough of communist oppression and demanded certain freedoms and reforms. Soon, the entire country responded to their call, including factory workers, who were expected to stay loyal to the communist leadership. Everyone was involved, from children to the elderly, and every possible tool was employed by the largely unarmed and unprepared Hungarian people. There are wonderful stories of resourceful children spreading jam on the windows of tanks or turning soup bowls over in the street to look like mines. Apparently, the soup bowl trick would lure tank commanders out to take a look and the kids, who were waiting in the doorways framing the road, would throw a Molotov cocktail into the tank to disable it. I just recently learned that the Russians sent in 2,000 tanks to reclaim Budapest on November 4th. This was the same number of tanks Hitler sent into France (a country seven times the size) to take the entire country. Imagine, at its most dramatic moment, tanks fighting against kids with jam and soup bowls!

Yet somehow, Hungary managed to bring the Soviet Union to its knees for nearly two weeks... 13 days of freedom. When the Revolution was crushed, it was ended with such brutal force that it laid bare the lie of communism and pulled back the curtain on what the Soviets were trying to present to the world as a desirable political system for the people. Communist sympathizers all over then Western Europe - in France, Italy and England – finally saw the true face of communism with its cruelties and injustices. Years later the world would realize that this was the first nail in the coffin of communism in the region. It was the beginning of the end.

Hungarian-American pride/passing the story on...

My Mother has told me on several occasions that Hungarian émigrés who settled in the United States didn't necessarily want to talk about the Revolution; they had to talk about it, to discuss what they had gone through, and its effect on their new life in a new country. While Hungarian-Americans who left in '56 held the flame of freedom high, it was quite a different situation for those who stayed in Hungary. There were years of reprisals – trials, imprisonment and executions – against those who were identified as freedom fighters. There was also silence imposed on the subject so that people could not talk about it, be taught about it, or commemorate it under the communist system. This is one of the main reasons, I believe, that Hungarian-Americans are so proud of what Hungarians accomplished 50 years ago, while Hungarians in Hungary seem ambivalent and much less certain how and what to commemorate this year.

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal stated, "A sense of family history is linked to self-esteem and resiliency in kids... stories of grappling with sad or difficult events may give children the wisdom and perspective they need to thrive." It went on to say that, "children gain a sense of self in relation to other family members and to the past, building confidence." I would also add that this builds pride and helps create identity.

The Freedom Fighter 56 oral history project and website is about passing on not only the stories, but also the very spirit of the Revolution to future generations. It is about providing an apolitical forum for people to share their stories and talk about how the Revolution influenced them 50 years later. It is a place to feel proud of all that '56-ers accomplished. It is a place to encourage family members to add their individual stories to be part of the great tapestry of history, so we can begin to understand how the lessons of '56 have been passed on to the children, grandchildren and spouses of freedom fighters. It is a place to answer the question 50 years after the fact; "What is the legacy of 1956 in the Hungarian-American community?"

My family story of 1956

My Grandmother (Nagymami) worked in a pharmacy on Móricz Zsigmond Körtér. My Grandfather (Nagyap) worked at the Nemzeti (National) Bank. My Mother was 14, my Aunt 17, and they all lived just off the Körtér. On October 23, 1956, my Mother and Aunt were walking home from school when, like so many others, they were suddenly swept up in the demonstrations, which ended in the huge crowd in front of the Parliament. It was the beginning of the Revolution. In a few days, as the Revolution intensified throughout the country, my

Hungarian National Museum – Historical Photographic Collection



Barricade on Móricz Zsigmond Square – Éva Horváth Kiss, Lauer Rice's Grandmother, worked in the pharmacy on the corner and her family members helped build the barricade

Mother and Aunt took on a more active role by gathering papers and groceries for the neighborhood, and digging up cobblestones to make barricades for the tanks, delivering messages, gathering news and collecting bottles and alcohol from the pharmacy supply to help freedom fighters make Molotov cocktails.

My Grandfather always told me that when he heard the first reports of the Revolution, he tipped his hat to his co-workers and walked home to the Körtér, where he joined others to build barricades of cobblestones, high enough to stop or at least slow down the Russian tanks. My Grandmother continued to work at the pharmacy, even though she was the only one who remained and most of the store windows had been shattered by fighting. She later set up a makeshift hospital room in the back of the pharmacy to tend to wounded freedom fighters.

Hearing these stories and Imagining my Grandmother and Grandfather being in the center of the conflict shaped my commitment to keeping the memory of this extraordinary event alive. These are my images of the Revolution, along with the familiar photos we have all seen. But there are other stories that I have heard that also left an indelible mark on me. For example, one afternoon, my Grandmother watched a young farmer walk across the Körtér through the blown out windows in her pharmacy. The young man carried farm tools over his shoulder and without any fanfare, walked straight to the district administration building on the Körtér that held the hated communist red star. Using his tools, he climbed up the side of the building and worked diligently to free the supports of the star. By the time he had finished, a crowd was gathered and shouting their support. As the star finally came free, the young man became entangled in one of the support wires, and was dragged to his death along with the symbol he so despised.

In late November 1956, after the Russians crushed the Revolution, my family made the wrenching decision to leave Hungary. Following a frightening escape and stays at several refugee camps, they settled in Maryland, close to Washington, D.C. I have often heard the stories of what it was like to start their new life here, not speaking the language and having very limited resources.

My Grandfather, who held a law degree, got a job at Sears as a lamp salesman. My Grandmother, a fully trained pharmacist, found a job washing test-tubes at a local medical lab and was later promoted to prepping monkey brains for lab work. My Mother, who knew very little English, went to high school where she was teased for wearing the same two outfits over and over again. My Aunt married the man who helped my family escape.

Not only did the Kiss family survive, they lived the true American dream, while at the same time honoring and never forgetting their Hungarian roots. In doing so, they passed on the lessons of history – of their proud Hungarian heritage, of the hardships endured during communism, and of the spirit of 1956 – to their children and grandchildren. I pledge to continue the tradition they set in motion, by passing on these same lessons and stories to my own children. If all children and grandchildren of '56-ers commit to this, the legacy of the Revolution will live on: the courage and sacrifices of the freedom fighters of Hungary will never be forgotten.



Andrea Lauer Rice

Andrea Lauer Rice is the founder and CEO of Lauer Learning, a multimedia educational company that creates innovative ways to teach kids about foreign languages, historic events and culture. It is also the sponsoring organization behind the FreedomFighter56.com oral history project, publisher of the "56 Stories" book and developer of the "FF56!" educational computer game for teens about the Revolution of 1956. She is a proud Hungarian-American and an even prouder child and grandchild of '56-ers. The Mother of a 3-year-old, she is also working on ways to help parents raise their children bilingually. She lives with her husband Barton in Roswell, Georgia.

Andrea Lauer Rice is the daughter of Edith Lauer whose story can be found on page 90.

Kathy A. Megyeri

THE EFFECTS OF '56 ON AN AMERICAN SPOUSE

As the wife of a Hungarian freedom fighter, 1956 has had a profound impact on my own life. Since Budapest has been our yearly destination for as long as I can remember, I've become more immersed in that event than many others. Two things always strike me when we return. First, there's a commonality established when we are introduced to others, and they ask my husband, "So, are you a '56-er?" Right away, he is identified as (a) one of those Hungarian political activists who no doubt had to flee the country, and (b) in his mid-60's now, which he is. With the planned celebrations scheduled for this year to commemorate the event, it seems as though many are ready to jump on the bandwagon and claim they were in Budapest in '56 or were closely aligned with someone who was. In other words, it's truly a badge of honor now to be a '56-er.

Then too, I'm always reminded of my age when I hear others speak of the event. Recently, I heard Hungarian Ambassador to the United States, András Simonyi, speak of the debt the country owes to the '56 freedom fighters. The passion with which he spoke of the event brought an enthusiastic applause from the Capitol Hill crowd whom he was addressing. I had to remind myself, however, that he was only four years old in 1956, and still, that pivotal event meant as much to him as to most of the many listeners who felt such gratitude for his thanks and praise.

My husband

Granted, my husband's story is probably not all that different from so many others. After experiencing the events of 1956 as a 15-year-old, he came to America and found freedom and happiness, still remaining bound to Hungarian language, culture, and traditions. Even though almost fifty years have elapsed, that Hungarian freedom fighter, my husband, is still alive and strong. His commitment to freedom has grown after serving thirty years in the U.S. Army, where he attained the rank of Colonel, and after working most of his career in the U.S. House of Representatives as an attorney for the Judiciary Committee.

Our yearly trek back to Hungary and particularly Budapest really commemorates in some small way my husband's early years and his reason for leaving the country he so loves. But my own story needs to be told as well, especially the reasons why 1956 means something to me, an American spouse. First, I'd read James A. Michener's "The Bridge at Andau," an engrossing tale of that pivotal time. The book relates, it's four o'clock on the morning of Sunday, November 4th, 1956, when the city of Budapest is awakened by the sounds of invading Russian tanks, and their previous ten brief, glorious days of freedom that might have yielded a different future has abruptly ended. However, some people know that if they can reach the bridge at Andau, on the Austrian border, they might escape to freedom. This book is a documentary account of that Hungarian revolt against the communists in 1956, and is virulently anti-Russian. Some consider this true story by Michener to be his finest work, and in a New York Times book review, John MacCormac wrote, "Insofar as he has limited himself to describing actual events, Michener has performed a service for which today's historians may be grateful, but today's readers will be even more grateful now." This book was my first introduction to a far-away event that I would someday view more intimately.

After meeting and marrying my husband, we began our regular trips to Budapest to visit family and friends. Invariably, we walked past the Kilián Barracks, where major fighting occurred, and where Pál Maléter, the first Deputy of Defense and later Brigadier General was commander. He, along with Imre Nagy, was executed in 1958. On one visit, my husband's Mother produced his old red kerchief, a remnant of his days as a Pioneer, when as a youth he played chess and constructed model airplanes while he and his little friends were being indoctrinated about the "benefits" of communism. His Mother also produced an old worn copy of Szabad Nép, the communist political daily, and in 1956, the party's central newspaper. My husband's Father had to attend "the Szabad Nép half hours," where important articles were discussed for propaganda purposes. The only other little souvenir which my husband brought with him out of the country is the Hungarian flag he carried while demonstrating; it now hangs over the door in his office at the Kossuth House in Washington, D.C. On still another visit, we traveled to Debrecen to see where the Secret Police first opened lethal fire on unarmed demonstrators.

Personally, I can also remember from my early visits to Hungary in the late '60's that people so frequently whispered to each other, a hold-over habit from the days when citizens were forced to celebrate November 7th, the day of the Bolshevik take-over, and April 4th, the "Day of Liberation." Those who did not show sufficient enthusiasm were promptly denounced by the informers; so people whispered because they lived in constant fear that their conversations were being intercepted. One of the joys of my more recent visits is that instead of whispering to each other, normal conversations can take place as confidence and optimism replaces fear and suspicion.

Visiting historic sites of 1956

A couple of years ago, at a Hungarian dinner in Cleveland, I was pleased to be seated next to Gergely Pongráz, a name many remember from his leadership of the armed insurgent group at Corvin Cinema during the Revolution. He left the country in November of '56 but returned to live in Hungary in 1991, where he passed away on May 18th of this year. Meeting him made an impact on me because I remember walking down Üllői út, the street leading to Kispest and passing the Corvin Cinema.

My husband and I have repeatedly toured Parliament, and he always shows me the place where the Secret Police fired on him and other peaceful demonstrators, some of whom were killed. We also walk past the Radio building, where during the evening of October 23 students demanded that their declaration of 16 Points be read, and where police fired upon the crowd. As we continue walking on the Pest side of the Danube, close to the New York Café, we usually tour the National Museum where I vividly remember seeing the Hungarian crown on display before it was moved to the Parliament building. And then we cross to the Buda side to see the Bem Statute of the Polish General from 1848. At this point, my husband recalls that he and other Hungarian students went there to show their support for the Polish freedom movement. One of my favorite sites lies outside Budapest in Statuary Park which is a graveyard for the old communist statues that used to line the city streets. The old Stalin statue which was pulled down from Heroes' Square during the Revolution now stands lonely, damaged, and abandoned in Statuary Park, a fitting end for such a feared and hated symbol.

Of course, no visit is complete without traveling to Esztergom to see the Basilica where Cardinal Mindszenty is buried. Last December, we visited the U.S. Embassy and were escorted into then-U.S. Ambassador Walker's main office in the Szabadság Square building. It was important for us both to see this room, since for 15 years, Cardinal Mindszenty took refuge here in self-imposed confinement. In 1971, under pressure from the Holy See and the Hungarian government, Cardinal Mindszenty consented to leave Hungary. During that time, he visited St. Stephen's church in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and my husband drove to see and hear him at a special mass. Four years later, he died, and his ashes lie in the Esztergom Basilica. However, it wasn't until August of 1991, when Pope John Paul II visited Hungary, that the real end of forty years of religious persecution was symbolized.

I recall two other special moments that affected me and rekindled an affirmation of the impact of 1956. When we visited the Reagan Library one year, I noted a large portrait at the bottom of the central stairwell that depicted the Hungarian Revolution. In the center of that painting is pictured László Pásztor, a political prisoner who was freed in '56, who came to America and served in the Nixon White House. On another such visit to Hungary, we had dinner at the Biarritz Restaurant, next to Parliament, and seated next to us, with only one security person, was then Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. When I approached his table to personally thank him for his support of the Terror Háza Museum, he was gracious enough to allow me to photograph him. My access to a Prime Minister seated in a public restaurant and available to speak to an inquisitive tourist like me, I found particularly notable since I'm used to the intense, high level security of Washington, D.C.

During my last visit to Hungary, I spent three days discovering and photographing the finest cemetery art and statuary I've ever seen. Section 21 of the Kerepesi Cemetery holds the remains of Pál Maléter and János Kádár, Hungary's Prime Minister. Parcel 21 reminds visitors of the impact of the Revolution in sheer numbers: 20,000 were wounded, 2,000 in Budapest alone; 200,000 left the country and the Soviets arrested 5,000, 860 of whom were carried off by the KGB to the Soviet Union as prisoners of war. Of those, a number were under-age boys and girls; 15,000 people were arrested, and 229 were executed with the help of Soviet advisors. Also not to be missed on the cemetery grounds is a fine museum dedicated to preserving the funerary traditions of Hungary.

A memorial museum

But without a doubt, it is the Terror Háza (House of Terror) at Andrássy út 60 that most draws us back each visit and holds our attention. Formerly the headquarters of both the Nazi and, later, the communist Secret Police, the museum commemorates the victims and reminds us of the dreadful acts of terror that occurred in twentieth century Hungary. In these days of worldwide terrorism and fear the museum sends a truly important message to the rest of the world. In the cellar of the Terror Háza is the reconstructed subterranean prison that includes detention cells for solitary confinement, wet cells where detainees were forced to sit in water, foxholes where prisoners could not straighten up, treatment rooms that contain instruments of torture, and pictures of those who died in the gallows from fatal beatings and, more often, suicide. The guard rooms hold ventilation equipment which ensured air-flow through conduits that traversed the cells, but individual cells were cut off from the airflow as a means of punishment. People's hands and feet were bound with chains and weights that were attached to their feet. Electric currents, burnings with cigarettes, and pliers were instruments of torture. Prisoners were forced to lie on the bare floors with no toilet facilities. What is remarkable is that during every visit, we witness young people who stand there and weep, not only for relatives they may have lost, but because they feel the horror of a part of their nation's history and have come to appreciate those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their freedom.

Interestingly, also in the museum is a tribute to the Hungarian Reformed Church. Since that church does not belong to any international church bodies, it is considered a “nation-based, Hungarian church.” The two most respected Calvinist bishops of the past, László Ravasz and Imre Révész, raised their voices against the atrocities of the fledgling communist dictatorship as early as in 1945. The village pastors and priests were treated as enemies, and by July, 1945, already 30 cases were recorded of detained parish pastors in the diocese east of the Tisza River. Bishop Ravasz declared, “Right-wing fascism has been replaced by left-wing fascism.”

Conclusion

By recounting all these highlights I wish to stress the universal significance of 1956: the Hungarian Revolution doesn't just belong to Hungarians. It holds meaning for the rest of us who know, love and consider Hungarians so integral to our lives. And there's a lesson here for all – that no people can be subjugated forever, and that one can and must fight against a power thought to be invincible when oppression and terror become so unbearable that a nation's identity and its very existence are in danger. In October of 1956, the Hungarian people proved to themselves and the world that there are no small nations, only helpless ones. With their courage and self-sacrifice, the Hungarian freedom fighters inflicted a mortal wound on the feared Soviet empire. My luck was that I married a freedom fighter and in so doing, I personally shared in the impact of the '56 Revolution.



Kathy Megyeri

Married to Leslie László Megyeri of the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America, Kathy Megyeri holds advanced degrees in English, and is a writer and consultant for an international education organization. She received the Outstanding Educator Award from the Washington Post in 1999 and currently writes for the Chicken Soup series. She and her husband reside in Washington, D.C.

The story of Kathy Megyeri's husband, László Megyeri, can be found on page 111.

Eszti Pigniczky

STORYLINE FOR SCOUTS

After the Second World War, the communist regime in Hungary banned, among many other institutions, the scouting movement. Hungarian Scouts reorganized in exile, first in Western Europe, then in other countries where Hungarians fled. Since 1951, Hungarian scout troops have been meeting and camping in the Cleveland area.

Scout meetings and campouts often feature a storyline, such as the story of King Stephen of Hungary, or the Turkish occupation of Hungary, to help the second- and third-generation Hungarian-American children better understand their heritage. (Role-playing, costumes, and active involvement by every scout makes history come alive.) The 1956 storyline detailed below was developed to help young Hungarian-American scouts to better fathom what many of their Grandparents experienced. Each scout meeting and outdoor activity planned for 2006 features a situation or game – detailed below – to help the scouts understand the oppression of everyday life in a communist country. — fed.]

Ilona Zrínyi Hungarian Girl Scout Troop 34

Cleveland, Ohio

1956 STORYLINE

February – October 2006

The goal is not for the scouts to learn every fact and detail about the Revolution, but rather for them to understand the causes. We will simulate some characteristics of living under oppression.

February 10

Zsuzsa Daróczy, who, it later turns out, will be the informant / party secretary, takes mug shot photos of each scout for their personal identity cards. She hands out a booklet about 1956 and in a boring fashion drones on about the events.

February 17

Continuation of photos, dry background historical info. Send an e-mail to parents and other adults warning them that we are experiencing the events in an unorthodox way and not to be surprised if they see some unscoutlike activities going on.

February 24

Indoor campfire. As each scout enters the room, they find a communist functionary (Andrea Mészáros) sitting at a table with a red-starred flag displayed prominently behind her. She stamps their identity cards and hands them over in a hostile manner. Zsuzsa Daróczy obediently helps and gives each scout a red star to pin on their uniforms. Scoutmaster Pigniczky expresses reservations but obeys. During the campfire the communist functionary tells the girls what they can and cannot sing, e.g. no songs mentioning God, church, or country, in short, nothing showing national pride.

The entire storyline does not apply to the younger age group (6-9 yr olds) because they are not yet mature enough to discern and comprehend.

Campfire topic: "What is a scout?" Sing patriotic songs so the communist functionary can interject with something like, "Comrades should not sing such songs because they don't fit the ideology of the international socialist movement." Campfire leader is surprised, looks at Scoutmaster, then obeys. Later, after being stopped multiple times, she starts a patriotic song and immediately stops it on her own. She looks over to the communist functionary, who nods approvingly. Shortly later the functionary leaves, saying that the campfire leader now knows and understands. The functionary then goes on to inspect a different scout activity, and the campfire is concluded. Afterwards, the Scoutmaster furtively signals for the scouts to gather in close, then, in tears, tells them what a horrible experience it is to find out that your best friend is an informant. She asks the scouts to be very careful about whom they talk to and what they talk about, because even innocent conversations can get them into big trouble.

After the campfire, the scouts return to the Scout Home to see a video about 1956, followed by informal discussion.

March 3

Before the meeting begins, a poster is placed outside the entrances of the Scout Home: "1956 Storyline In Progress."

At the end of the usual leaders' meeting, the party secretary takes out the official party ledger and demands that all comrades sign it. Anyone who does not sign will not be allowed to participate in any of the upcoming scout events (intramural scout competition, summer camp, leadership camp, European tour). The Scoutmaster, with a heavy heart, signs it, followed by the other leaders.

Meanwhile, the Scoutmaster whispers to each leader in turn that she does not like this at all.

March 10

Before the meeting begins, a poster is placed outside the entrances of the Scout Home: "1956 Storyline In Progress."



Hungarian Girl Scout Troop #34 of Cleveland "demonstrating."

The doorbell rings. Secret Police agents, in pairs, enter the patrol meeting rooms, demanding IDs. One or two scouts from each patrol are "arrested" and forcibly led onto the stage (where the curtain is drawn and it's dark), but they aren't told why. The rest of the patrol remains in their room. When all the detainees are on the stage, the party secretary announces that they are guilty by virtue of having parents who are landowners, and so they're being sent away for forced labor. The detainees are led away. The remaining scouts are told that they can stay put, because their parents are "reliable." Forced labor is cleaning the bathrooms in the church basement.

March 31

Meeting takes place outdoors, at Cottonwood Park. During the meeting, it is announced that private property is being nationalized. A party official (bearing the communist version of the Hungarian flag, with a red star in the middle) proceeds to confiscate the scouts' property – their neckerchiefs. The scout meeting continues, and includes a uniform inspection, whereby patrols receive demerits because their members are not wearing their neckerchiefs. Later, following the campfire, one scout leader will notice the confiscated pile of neckerchiefs and sneak them back to their owners, but no one puts them on again for the rest of the day.

April 7

In preparation for Easter, the scouts meet for a discussion with Reverend Eva Tamássy. Twenty minutes later, Secret Police agents "raid" the meeting, arrest the Pastor and take her away. Each scout receives a demerit in her ID passbook for violating regulations against organized religious activity.

April 14

Easter week – No meeting.

April 21

The party secretary is off on a state-sponsored spa holiday. The Scoutmaster announces quietly to the scouts that she has begun, in secret, to organize a strike. The scouts are asked to write letters (using their secret writing paper and envelopes should be on hand) to any scouts not present to alert them that a strike will occur on April 28. The Scoutmaster emphasizes that they are not to telephone their fellow scouts, because all telephone conversations are being taped.

April 28

Meeting and campfire at Cottonwood Park. Following the patrol meetings, all scouts take part in "active learning" activity familiarizing them with the events leading up to the Revolution (October 16-22, 1956). Each of the four learning stations represents a city (not Budapest) in which university students were organizing protest activities. Another game combines traditional knot-tying practice with the 16-Point demands of the Hungarian students of 1956, in which each of the demands is written onto two sticks, then mixed up; the scouts have to unscramble the phrases, then tie the sticks together using lashing knots.

The next activity is to construct signs and torches for the upcoming street demonstrations (need wood, hammer, nails, posterboard, paint). Each patrol must construct one sign and one torch (and demonstrate correct use of construction tools).

Campfire and demonstration: each patrol arrives at the campfire from a different direction, carrying their torch and sign. Patriotic poems, folk songs and patriotic slogans keep revolutionary spirits high. The campfire concludes with the Hungarian national anthem.

May 5

Scout leader meeting.

May 12

Reenactment of the students' gathering on October 23 in Budapest, at the statue of Joseph Bem.

During the scout meeting, the singing of the Hungarian Scout fight song is interrupted by the party secretary, who comes rushing in (bearing her usual red-star version of the Hungarian flag), demanding that the scouts never sing that song again, and they should now learn a new communist hymn. The party secretary starts to teach the new song, but the Scoutmaster can't take it, and dramatically tears the red star off of her uniform, then tells the party secretary to leave – she will not endure this persecution any longer. The Scoutmaster grabs the flag and, using her pocketknife, slashes the communist symbol out of the Hungarian flag. With that, the scouts all proceed to the Bem Statue (represented by a scout leader dressed as Bem and standing motionless), where others are already gathered. There, the scouts read the 16 Points/demands aloud.

May 19-20

(A two-day meeting begins at the Scout Home, and continues to a nearby campground for an overnigher.) Reenactment of the events of October 23, 9 p.m., when unarmed student protesters in Budapest proceed to the building of the Hungarian Radio to demand that the radio broadcast their 16-Point demands, whereupon the Secret Police fires upon them.

The Scoutmaster calls the scouts together, saying she has received word that many protesters have gone to the Radio building. The scouts all come out of their rooms, bearing their signs, and proceed to the "Radio headquarters" (the neighboring church garage), where they try to enter, but a Secret Police agent, from the roof of the garage, drops a smoke bomb onto the crowd. At the same time, a car drives up, screeches to a halt and disgorges additional Secret Policemen, who push and shove the protesters (scouts), trying to get them to leave. Two scout leaders courageously stand up to the Secret Police, who then proceed to "beat" them. A third scout leader is "shot," then stuffed into the car and driven away. The Scoutmaster tells the rest of the scouts to return to the Scout Home, where they hold a meeting and decide to go to the Csepel factory to get themselves some weapons. The scout troop leaves for Csepel (the campground).

May 26-28

Annual intramural scout competition at Hungarian Scout Camp in Fillmore, New York, with participation of Hungarian Scouts from Cleveland, Chicago, New York, Washington, Toronto and Montreal. At this competition, patrols compete with each other in using their teamwork, scouting skills and knowledge of Hungarian to react and resolve unexpected situations – all this in the context of an elaborate storyline, with plenty of costumes, physical and mental challenges. This year's storyline is the 1956 Revolution, and concludes with the emigration of thousands of Hungarian refugees after the Revolution is crushed.

June 3-4

End-of-year campout and picnic.

September – October

During the first meetings of the school year, scouts invite their Parents/Grandparents who are '56-ers to take part in oral history interviews. Based on these interviews, the scouts prepare poster presentations to be displayed at the Cleveland exhibit being organized for the 50th anniversary of 1956.

Scouts will learn about the aftermath of 1956: crackdown, executions, escape and flight.

Created by Zsuzsa Daróczy and Eszti Pigniczky

**Eszti Pigniczky**

Born in 1968 in Lansdaie, Pennsylvania, Eszti Pigniczky's parents left Hungary as refugees in 1956. She grew up in the Hungarian community near Philadelphia, then continued her Hungarian scouting activities in New Brunswick, New Jersey, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Since 1995, she has lived in the Cleveland area. In 2001, she organized and led 40 Hungarian-American teenagers from the Cleveland Hungarian Scout Folk Ensemble on a 3-week research tour of villages in Hungary and Transylvania. She researches and collects Hungarian folk songs and customs, and since 2005 has been Scoutmaster of the Ilona Zrínyi Hungarian Girl Scout Troop #34 of Cleveland. With her husband, Endre Szentkirályi (also an active scout leader), she has four children: Keve, Bendegúz, Vajk and Emese.

Eszti Pigniczky is the daughter of Katalin Vörös whose story can be found on page 183, the sister of Réka Pigniczky whose story is featured on page 199, and the wife of Endre Szentkirályi whose story is on page 201.

Réka Pigniczky

JOURNEY HOME: A FILM ABOUT MY FATHER

Whenever the kids at school teased us about our funny names and our parents' accents, we shot back: "Leave me alone, my Dad was a freedom fighter." That shut them up, at least for a while. My sister and I want our children to inherit this attitude and to know their Grandfather's story; but first I need to know what's fact and what's fiction.

The story of his past in Hungary is not a straightforward one, mainly because he was the only one telling it, at least while we were growing up in the United States. He also had quite a dramatic flair; he was known to exaggerate a story for effect, and his approach to names, dates and specific detail was liberal, to say the least. He was entertaining, and when you're funny, specifics bog you down. Children loved him, but as an adult you were never quite sure how much of the facts he was embellishing.

The painful reality behind our film project was just this: if you subtract the intriguing anecdotes and heroic slogans of my Father's '56 story, we had no idea what he did, exactly. Now that's pretty disturbing for a journalist who wants to write her Father's story. I mean, I've always believed him, and my sister has always believed him – in fact my Mother has always believed him even though she divorced him over 25 years ago – but that's not a reliable account to tell my own children, who are already asking questions, and the oldest is not even four.

While other '56-ers have written memoirs about what happened and what they did – all very heroic or tragic or both, my Dad, whom everyone respected as a legitimate '56-er in our community, never really spoke in detail (out of fear for those he left in Hungary and because it just wasn't his style), and never published a word. And by the time I became a journalist and realized one of the biggest stories lurking in my neighborhood could be my own Dad, he was diagnosed with cancer in 2002. He passed away within 6 months, not living long enough to see my second daughter and my sister Eszti's fourth being born – never mind getting his '56 story down on paper or film. He left this world so suddenly, and so early at age 73, that his personal belongings, his life, his thoughts, pictures, and his story were left in total disarray. And so were we.

Looking for answers

That is why I am making a film about my Father and his involvement in the events of 1956. Our goal is to find whatever threads of memory remain from the files, letters and photographs that turned up after his death and to find out what we can in Hungary, about what he might have done to have to flee his home so permanently. And what he, as a spontaneous participant in '56 history, might have seen that compelled him to reinforce that message in us throughout his life.



Pigniczky interviewing '56 veterans from Corvin Passage for her upcoming film about 1956, *Journey Home*

As for us, his daughters, our upbringing in the United States can be characterized as a Hungarian incubator: the idea was that once the Soviets pulled out of Hungary, we could move “back” and continue our lives with minimal upheaval. The ‘56 stories were part and parcel of a very determined and consistent effort by our parents, and by an entire like-minded emigré Hungarian community, to raise us as children of ‘56-ers, children of refugees, Hungarian boy and girl scouts living in the United States. My Father, Pige, was, of course, a key figure in our upbringing, together with my Mother, who also escaped Hungary as a teenager in 1956. They were leaders in the community.

So this journey of making a film can’t just be about our Father; it is also about us: those of us whose parents left Hungary in 1956, and who therefore grew up not in Hungary, but in some other country. After the tragic crushing of the Revolution, more than 200,000 people left Hungary, many of them – like our Father – with no other choice but to leave or face reprisal. Beginning in the 1990’s, many of our generation, young people in our 20’s and 30’s, “returned” to Hungary (where we had never lived). Many of us “commute,” but others have settled down in Hungary, some with a Hungarian spouse. Why are we coming “back,” why are we making a (second) home here? Who are we, and why is it that sometimes our own children speak only Hungarian? Why

do more of my Hungarian-American friends live in Hungary than in the United States? Are they here for economic reasons, or due to some unexplainable “homesickness?” And what does all this have to do with 1956?

If he were still here, I know what my Father would say about this documentary and about my musings in general: “Réka: if you listen to me, you’ll do whatever you please” – that’s what he always said. We always knew that he loved and supported us, but he wasn’t focused on his own legend, and ultimately, the follow-up and follow-through were not his style either. He was more dramatic in deeds than words, more action than armchair intellectualizing. He was the type who woke up in the middle of the night, mid-sleep, kneeling by the side of his bed, and shooting over his mattress at the enemy. He taught us to do the same, in real life, if and when necessary. His message, minus the details of his own role, was loud and clear: when someone takes your freedom away and humiliates your nation, you don’t sit by idly. You act.

Reconnecting

And as I have found in making this documentary film, the stories that Pige told us, his daughters, were not, in fact, embellished. When my sister and I searched for his name in the Secret Service Archives in Budapest and found people who knew him in those October days, we found verification for almost every single thing he told us. As it turns out, in fact, he was modest about his deeds and his fear of going back to Hungary was well-founded. He was, in fact, one of the leaders of a group of freedom fighters in Budapest’s 7th district – and that out of the seven or so leaders, three fled to the West after the Revolution and four were hanged in 1958.



Pigniczky's Father, Pige



Réka Pigniczky

Réka Pigniczky is a television journalist and producer who has worked for the Associated Press for nearly 8 years, mostly in New York City. Before moving to New York, she lived in Budapest from 1992-1996, working as a consultant for a Hungarian political party. She also helped organize and manage new women’s NGO’s (non-governmental organizations) that sprang to life after the political transition to democracy in the early 1990’s. Pigniczky has an M.A. in journalism and international relations from Columbia University and an M.A. in political science from the Central European University in Budapest. She’s currently based in Budapest, Hungary, where she freelances for the AP and other broadcasters, although making the film “Journey Home” is taking up most of her time. The film premieres in 2006. To read more about “Journey Home,” see www.56films.com.

The story of Réka’s Mother, Katalin Vörös, can be found on page 183.

The story of Réka’s sister, Eszti, can be found on page 196.

Endre Szentkirályi

MY PARENTS FLED IN 1956

When I was growing up, it seemed to me that all of my parents' friends had done time in prison in the Old Country. For political crimes, not theft or burglary. They didn't all do time, of course, it just seemed that way to me, but a majority of them did, and all were discriminated against by the communist authorities in one way or another. I can distinctly remember dinner parties (I must have been ten years old or so) where they discussed Hungarian politics and literature with inserted comments here and there about their own forced-labor camp experiences in Hungary.

My Dad, for example, had been a "second-class citizen" under the communist system because of his family background, and thus was banned from attending college. In fact, he did 15 months time for inciting a weekend work stoppage in his army unit. And my Mother told me about how her Father had spent a night at the police station, and was only released in the morning when he signed the bottom of a blank sheet of paper; that signature haunted him for years.

Growing up Hungarian in Cleveland

Having fled their homeland in 1956, my parents still maintained a close grip on their heritage, and did their best to give us, their children, a firm grounding in Hungarian-ness. We spoke only Hungarian at home, they sent us to Hungarian church, we attended Hungarian Scouts, and on Monday evenings we went to Hungarian school, just like in "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." Actually, that film has many parallels with what it was like growing up Hungarian in Cleveland. And later, when as a teenager I joined the Hungarian dance group, I met other Eastern Europeans at dance festivals and realized that I had much in common with the Ukrainians, Croats, Serbs, Polish, and other nationalities maintaining their heritage in the United States.

My Sunday-school teachers, scout leaders, and Hungarian school teachers all shared some common traits. Whether from the DP generation (Displaced Persons: refugees from World War II) or refugees from 1956, they didn't hold the Soviets in particularly high regard. I once asked my Dad why he didn't stay in Germany or

Hungarian National Museum - Historical Photographic Collection



Damage from the Revolution

Austria or France after he fled Hungary, and his matter-of-fact reply was something like, “son, those Russians overran my country twice in the 20th century; I’d rather have an ocean between us.” The people who formed my life, having lived under oppression, appreciated freedom and opportunity more than my American friends, it seemed to me. The literature they had us read and the personal recollections they told us were rife with tales of adversity: getting hauled off to Siberia, government collectivization of family businesses, incarceration for religious activities, these were the anecdotes I heard. My heroes became not so much American baseball players and movie stars, but rather Hungarians like Bishop Vilmos Apor, who helped save Jews during the war and then was killed protecting girls and women from the brutality of occupying Soviet soldiers, or Cardinal Joseph Mindszenty, who was jailed and tortured before 1956, but still maintained his dignity and peaceful resolve. I think the events of 1956 had a lot to do with the way I was raised.

My Aunt Klára

In fact, my Father’s younger sister, Klára, was killed in the fighting on November 4th, 1956. She was 20 at the time, studying to be a nurse, and had been part of a volunteer medical team treating and transporting wounded freedom fighters to hospitals. I later found out she had gotten engaged a day earlier, on November 3rd. Then vicious fighting erupted on Sunday the 4th, and she was tending to the wounded on Üllői Street, right near the Corvin movie and the military barracks where Colonel Pál Maléter had been headquartered, when machine gun fire from a tank hit her. The fighting was so fierce that she could not be buried for another three days, and even then only in a makeshift grave off Rádai Street. Then later in the springtime, when she was given a proper burial, the minister who gave her eulogy, as well as several others from the crowd were arrested going home from the funeral, according to a letter my Grandmother wrote from Budapest to my Dad. My parents never publicized this story, and only answered questions about it when asked, but I think that merely knowing that my Aunt had died in 1956, had given me an extremely personal connection to the Revolution and had made me study and appreciate the events that much more.

Conclusion

Growing up and seeing the grainy black and white photographs of the freedom fighters and Soviet tanks, hearing the experiences of my parents and their friends living in a totalitarian regime, knowing my parents had been there and that 1956 was the reason I was born in America, all these reasons made me consciously choose to keep my Hungarian identity, more so than had my parents come to America for economic reasons. Instead of assimilating into American society as many children of immigrants do, I, my wife, and many of our friends were able to completely fit into American society while nevertheless maintaining a very strong sense of Hungarian identity. We consider ourselves both 100% American and 100% Hungarian. Both cultures, including their historical pasts and everyday ways of thinking and acting, have influenced us and in fact are integral parts of our identity. I believe that the events of 1956 caused this strong tie, a bond so strong I wish to pass it on to my own children. And when events of fifty years ago cause someone to impart a certain set of values to people two generations removed, that adds significance to the events of 1956.



Endre Szentkirályi

Born and raised in and near Cleveland, Ohio, Endre Szentkirályi grew up speaking Hungarian in the household. He earned a BA from Cleveland State University, then an MA from the University of Akron. He teaches English and German at the middle school and high school level in the Nordonia Hills City Schools, but also taught a year at Pázmány University in Hungary. Also active in the Boy Scouts, he lives with his wife Eszti in the Cleveland area. All four of their children speak Hungarian.

The story of Endre’s wife, Eszti Pigniczky, can be found on page 198.

Imre Balassa



On the streets of Budapest

HISTORY TIMELINE

Hungary fell under Soviet control after the communist-rigged elections of 1947. The years that followed introduced a system of tyranny under which Hungarians suffered economic deprivation, mass arrests, and a systematically cruel oppression by the communist government. In 1953, following the death of Stalin, signs of economic crisis appeared, caused by a fatally misguided state-controlled agrarian policy. The Hungarian communist hard-liner, Mátyás Rákosi, was suddenly replaced by reformer Imre Nagy, also a communist, but one who believed in "communism with a human face."

This welcome "thaw" lasted for only 18 months, to be followed again by a period of repression first under Rákosi, then under his lieutenant, Ernő Gerő. But Khrushchev's famous speech given at the February 1956 Party Congress, in which he surprisingly criticized Stalin's personality cult and actions, opened the gate in Hungary to similar criticism against the morally bankrupt communist system. Dissatisfaction with the system grew: writers, university students and journalists pressed for major changes, until it all erupted in a mass demonstration of support for the striking workers of Poznan, Poland. On October 23, in a spontaneous demonstration approximately 200,000 Hungarians gathered in front of the Parliament. Thus, the Hungarian Revolution began.

The following timeline includes information on some of the most significant events of the Revolution...

OCTOBER 23

- Hungarian university students gathered and marched to the statue of József Bem, a Polish General who led Hungarian freedom fighters during the 1848 Revolution, to express solidarity for the Polish workers fighting against communism. The protest soon swelled to 200,000 Hungarians demanding independence in front of the Parliament.
- The thousands of protestors marched to Kossuth Radio Budapest to have their 16 demands read on air, but were denied access to the building by the hated ÁVH (Hungarian Secret Police, also referred to as ÁVO). When the students did not disperse, but instead began yelling slogans like, "Russians, go home!" The ÁVH fired on the crowd.
- Hungarian soldiers who did not agree with the troops shooting on unarmed student protestors quickly joined forces with the freedom fighters and provided them weapons to protect themselves.
- Stalin statue was toppled and dragged through the streets.
- An uprising broke out at the Szabad Nép newspaper, the mouthpiece of the communist party.

OCTOBER 24

- News of the events in Budapest spread across the country.
- Soviet and Hungarian military armored units entered Budapest.

OCTOBER 25

- The first Revolutionary newspaper, entitled Igazság (Truth) was published.
- Protestors again gathered in front of the Parliament and began calling for Imre Nagy. ÁVH troops stationed in buildings around the Parliament, opened fire and killed more than 100 (some sources estimate between 300-500) protestors.
- Workers Councils were formed at the Csepel Iron and Metal Works.

OCTOBER 26

- Revolutionary groups were formed in the Thököly út-Dózsa György út area (7th District) and at Széna Square (2nd District). Freedom fighters also occupied Móricz Zsigmond Square (11th District), and the Danubia Arms Factory.
- The Revolution spread to the countryside. In Mosonmagyaróvár, the ÁVH fired into a crowd of peaceful demonstrators, killing 85 men, women and children.

OCTOBER 27

- The army occupied Szabadság Bridge and Móricz Zsigmond Square.
- The Radio announced the composition of a new government.

OCTOBER 28

- The new government was sworn in.
- Imre Nagy reclaimed his position as Prime Minister and began negotiations with the Soviets to convince them to leave Hungary.
- In his radio address, Imre Nagy stated that the Soviet troops would withdraw from Hungary, the ÁVH would be dissolved, and the traditional Hungarian flag would be used, among other promises.

OCTOBER 29

- The most severely compromised communist leaders – such as: Ernő Gerő, András Hegedűs and István Kovács – fled overnight to Moscow.
- Israel invaded Egypt, beginning the Suez Canal crisis.

OCTOBER 30

- Cardinal József Mindszenty was freed.
- Soviet troops withdrew from Budapest to await further orders.
- Imre Nagy announced on the radio the end of the one-party system and the formation of a Coalition government.
- Szabad (Free) Kossuth Rádió began radio broadcasts.
- Freedom fighters stormed the Headquarters of the Hungarian Worker's Party (communist party) on Köztársaság Square. Some estimates claim that 23 ÁVH officers were killed, a handful of them lynched by protestors hungry for revenge.
- On Köztársaság Square, freedom fighters heard human cries coming from under the street. They began several days of digging to look for a secret underground ÁVH prison, but to no avail.
- Soviet leadership made the secret decision to crush the rebellion with military intervention.

OCTOBER 31

- Withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest was completed.

NOVEMBER 1

- Imre Nagy declared Hungary's neutrality and attempted to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, but no one responded.

NOVEMBER 2

- Soviet leaders Khrushchev and Malenkov met with Romanian, Czechoslovak and Bulgarian leaders in Bucharest, as they prepared for the Soviet military intervention in Hungary.

NOVEMBER 3

- General Pál Maléter agreed to meet with the Soviet leadership to sign an agreement to withdraw their troops from Hungary. Despite their promise of safe conduct, Maléter and his delegation were arrested, kidnapped and taken to Romania (they were later executed).

NOVEMBER 4

- At dawn, approximately 2,000 tanks rolled back into Budapest from Romania to crush the Revolution.
- The Kilián Barracks were captured by the Soviets after fierce fighting.
- Cardinal Mindszenty sought political asylum at the U.S. Embassy, where he remained for 15 years.
- SOS messages were repeatedly broadcast to the United Nations and the West, but no one responded.

After the Soviet Army crushed the Hungarian Revolution, sporadic arms resistance continued in various cities until mid-December. But it was the passive resistance, the silent political struggle, the calls for strikes that continued to

present a challenge to the puppet government of Soviet-picked János Kádár. His communist colleagues, especially the Soviets and Romanians, pressured him to hit the revolutionaries hard.

Reprisals began in late November with mass arrests, deportations to Ukraine, special courts and military trials, and the establishment of internment camps. More than 200,000 Hungarians escaped to the West, and of those, more than 35,000 to the United States. In order to gain legitimacy, Kádár had to destroy the Revolution's Prime Minister, Imre Nagy, and accordingly, his trial, secret execution and burial took place in June 1958. General amnesty for most prisoners took place only in 1963.

Although the governments of the free world watched the Hungarian Revolution with deep admiration, they never seriously considered providing military support, nor condemnation strong enough to stop the brutal actions of the Soviet Union.

However, the heroes of 1956 did not die or suffer in vain. They demonstrated such uncommon bravery, such a universal yearning for freedom from foreign tyranny, that the whole world was forced to see the true face of communism at last. The Revolution's spirit came full circle in June, 1989, when Imre Nagy and others were finally given the public burial by a grateful Hungarian nation that had waited 33 years to pay homage to their sacrifice.

The 1956 Revolution was the first step in the dissolution of communism to be followed by the Prague Spring in 1968, the founding of Solidarity in Poland in 1980, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The communist system, that received its first mortal blow in Hungary in 1956, disintegrated across the region in 1989. Soon thereafter the Warsaw Pact dissolved. The last Soviet soldiers left Hungarian soil in June 1991, and at long last Hungary was free

GLOSSARY

1848 Hungarian Revolution – on March 15th, 1848, Hungarians rose up in a Revolution to gain their independence from Austrian domination. There are many similarities between the 1848 and 1956 Revolutions, and the former was considered a great inspiration for the latter.

István Angyal – Angyal was the commander of the Tűzoltó utca freedom fighters. After the Revolution's defeat, Angyal continued to resist from the Péterfy Sándor Street Hospital, where he drafted, duplicated and distributed flyers and appeals. He was sentenced to death in 1958.

ÁVH – ÁVO – “State Defense Authority” - this force served as the Hungarian Secret Police or Secret Service using Hungarian communists to bribe, intimidate, inform, arrest, torture and even kill anyone who resisted the communist system.

Bem Statue – located in Buda, the statue of deeply respected Polish General József Bem, who was a great military leader of the 1848-49 Revolution against Austrian domination.

Bridge at Andau – small bridge between Hungary and Austria that was the route of escape for many Hungarians. It was made famous by James Michener's, book, “The Bridge at Andau”

Camp Kilmer – former U.S. military camp in New Jersey where all 1956 Hungarian refugees first arrived to have their papers processed.

Chain Bridge – built in 1849 by Count István Széchenyi, “the greatest Hungarian,” it was the first bridge over the Danube to connect Buda with Pest.

“Class alien” – communist designation for members of the former middle and upper classes, whose property was confiscated, work and educational opportunities were curtailed, and instead of performing military service they were assigned to “forced work battalions.”

Corvin Köz – Corvin Passage - on the corner of Üllői út and Nagy kőrút, Corvin Cinema is one of the oldest movie theaters in Budapest. It quickly became a base of operations for armed freedom fighters in 1956 because of the strategic nature of it's location. The passage was surrounded by taller and larger buildings which provided protection and was only accessible through alleyways and tunnels. It also faced the Kilián Barracks, had access to a gas pump in the back and was just down the street from the Prater School where the freedom fighters often slept and ate.

DISZ – Union of Working Youth, established in 1950, for ages 14-25 to gain control over young movement, and to supply new members to the communist party.

Gendarme – police force in small towns – provincial police.

Ernő Gerő (1898-1980) – powerful Hungarian communist politician, part of the triumvirate with Rákosi and Farkas whose hard-line policies and abuses of power contributed greatly to the breaking out of the Revolution.

Győr – the largest city of Northwest-Hungary, half way between Budapest and Vienna.

Internment – police detention without trial for a six month period that could be extended without legal procedure for six additional months. After World War II, internment camps were set up to provide a fast way to detain war criminals and people suspected of committing “crimes against the people.”

Miklós Horthy (1868-1957) – Regent of Hungary, he guided the country through the difficult years between the two world wars. Although Hungary was an ally of Germany, in March, 1944, Hitler ordered German troops to occupy Hungary, and put in a puppet Nazi government of Hungarians to carry out the deportation and death of the Hungarian Jewish population.

János Kádár (1912-1989) – installed by the Soviets as Hungarian Premier from November 4, 1956, and served until the collapse of the system in 1989. After the Revolution he carried out bloody reprisals against its participants. During 33 years in office, he introduced economic reforms, and by borrowing large sums from Western countries, he created what was referred to as a “soft dictatorship,” or “gulyás communism.” In an interesting twist of history, Kádár fell from power and died just as his old victim and enemy, Imre Nagy, was exonerated and reburied in a large public ceremony on June 16, 1989.

Kapuvár – a town in Győr-Moson-Sopron County, Hungary.

Kelenföld Train Station – located in Buda; many refugees took trains from this station to make their way to the border in their escape from Hungary.

Kilián Barracks – military barracks located at the corner of Üllői út and Ferenc körút, it was the site of some of the strongest fights during the Revolution. Col. Maléter took over its control on October 25th, defending it from attacks until November 4th, when along with the nearby Corvin Passage it was one of the major targets of Soviet forces.

Béla Király – born in 1912, imprisoned by the communists from 1951-1956; after his release, he became a member of the Imre Nagy government, and served as Commander of the National Guard. After the Revolution's

defeat, he immigrated to the United States. When he returned to Hungary in 1990, he served as a General, and from 1990 to 1994 he was a Member of Parliament.

KISZ – Communist Youth League, established in spring, 1957, to restore Soviet-style political organization after the Revolution.

Kitelepítés – “domestic resettlement or exile” – between 1951-53 “class aliens,” members of the former middle and upper middle class were forced to leave their apartments and belongings to be resettled in substandard living conditions in the countryside where most had to work in the fields to survive.

Komló Work Battalion – Komlói munkatábor – one of the “forced labor battalions,” or required service alternative to military service, for “class aliens,” those Hungarians deemed untrustworthy by the government to bear arms.

Sándor Kopácsi (1922-2001) – from 1952, Chief of Budapest Police; in 1956, he was Deputy Commander of the National Guard, and refused to fire on the freedom fighters. After 1956, Kopácsi was imprisoned, then released in the 1963 general amnesty. In 1975, he immigrated to Canada, and after his 1989 return to Hungary, he was rehabilitated.

Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) – leader and hero of the 1848-49 War of Independence against the Habsburgs, he became the symbol of freedom in Hungarian history. In 1852, he visited the United States, spoke to tens of thousands of enthusiastic Americans, and was only the second foreigner ever to address the Congress of the United States.

Köztársaság tér Republic Square – site of the Hungarian Workers Party headquarters in Budapest, where, on October 30, as the result of a bloody siege by freedom fighters against the communist occupants of the building, 23 people were killed. The gruesome photographs of the victims published in the world press were later presented by the communist authorities as proof of the violence practiced by revolutionaries.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870-1924) – Soviet Russian revolutionary, the leader of the Bolshevik party, the first Premier of the Soviet Union, and the main theorist of what has come to be called Leninism, which describes itself as an adaptation of Marxism to “the age of imperialism.”

Magyar Rádió – centrally controlled radio with two stations: Kossuth Rádió Budapest broadcast the communist-censored news and Petőfi Rádió broadcast cultural programs. During the Revolution Free Kossuth Rádió was established, and it provided uncensored news until November 4th.

Pál Maléter (1917-1958) – military leader, heroic defender of Budapest, and Minister of Defense in the Imre Nagy government, he was abducted by the Soviet military on November 3rd, taken to prison in Romania. He was tried and executed on June 16, 1958, along with Imre Nagy and others. On June 16, 1989, he was reburied in a public ceremony with those he died 31 years earlier.

MEFESZ – an independent organization formed by Szeged university students on October 16, 1956 (United Organization of Hungarian University and College Students), whose example was followed by universities all over Hungary. The Szeged students drafted the original 14 Points and presented them for approval on October 22 at the historic meeting of students at the Technical University in Budapest.

József Mindszenty, Cardinal (1892-1975) – the Roman Catholic primate of Hungary, and a heroic figure of resistance to both fascism and communism. Cardinal Mindszenty was imprisoned in 1949, after a show-trial and torture-induced confession of treasonous activities. He was freed from house arrest in the country during the 1956 Revolution, only to seek shelter on November 4th in the U.S. Embassy, which was to be his home until 1971. Afterwards he lived in Vienna until his death in 1975.

Móricz Zsigmond Square – transportation hub in Buda; site of major fighting and resistance by freedom fighters.

Mosonmagyaróvár – city in Western Hungary; on October 26 border ÁVO guards at Mosonmagyaróvár fired on demonstrators, killing 52 and wounding 86 including women and children.

Imre Nagy (1898-1958) – communist politician, who served his first term as Prime Minister with a reform agenda after Stalin's death, from 1953-1955. He was soon forced to resign and was expelled from the party by hardliners, including Mátyás Rákosi. He became Prime Minister again by popular demand on October 24, 1956. On October 31, he announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact. On November 1st, fearing that the Soviets would return to Hungary, he appealed through the United Nations to Western powers to recognize Hungary's neutrality. When the Russians attacked Hungary on November 4th, after appealing on the radio to the world for help, Nagy, along with others, sought sanctuary in the Yugoslav Embassy. But on November 23, he was arrested and with his family and associates was taken to Romania. In 1958 after a secret trial in Budapest, Nagy was hanged, and buried in an unmarked grave. On June 16, 1989, he and his associates were reburied in an emotional public ceremony.

Parliament – monumental Gothic building in Pest on the Danube; site of the initial large demonstration on October 23rd, then of the ÁVO slaughter on October 25 of 60 or 80 demonstrators.

Sándor Petőfi (1823-1849) – famous poet and hero of the 1848 Revolution; his poem, “National Song,” that called his contemporaries to rise up against the Habsburg rulers embodies the genuine desire of Hungarians for freedom, and it was also a rallying cry in 1956.

Petőfi Kör – the Petőfi Circle originally offered a forum for intellectual debate for young communists. By June 1956, however, speakers were exploring aspects of the free press and ideas of reform in front of crowds numbering 7000. The Hungarian Workers Party suspended the operation of the Petőfi Circle, charging it with anti-party activity. It resumed in September, however, and during the Revolution its leadership supported the Nagy government.

Pioneers – Úttörők – communist youth organization for the purpose of indoctrinating young children; it required the wearing of red kerchiefs, the learning of slogans, participating in “spontaneous demonstrations” on communist holidays, and the singing of “Pioneer songs.”

14 or 16 Points – drafted first by university students in Szeged, then adopted by the students at their historic meeting at the Budapest Technical University on October 22nd, it was a list of demands for Hungarian free-dom and independence from Soviet domination, that provided the basic program of the Hungarian Revolution.

Gergely Pongráz (1932-2005) – joined the Corvin köz group of armed insurgents on October 26, 1956, where he and his brothers soon won great respect and influence in the group leadership. Pongráz resigned his command after the Revolution’s defeat, and fled to the United States where he lived from 1957 to 1991, when he returned to Hungary. In 1999, he funded the establishment of a 56 Museum at Kiskunmajsa that is dedicated to the Revolution. He died in 2005.

Poznan (M) – Polish city, where the protests of 100,000 workers in June, 1956, were crushed by the Polish communist police, with many demonstrators killed. The October 23rd demonstrations in Budapest were planned by Hungarian students to express solidarity with the Poles.

Radio Free Europe – international news service supported by funding from the United States to provide valid information to the “captive nations” of Central and Eastern Europe.

László Rajk (1909-49) – Hungarian communist leader. He participated in the Hungarian underground movement during World War II, and was imprisoned by the Gestapo. After the communist takeover he was first Minister of the Interior, then Foreign Minister. In 1949, after being betrayed by Kádár, he was tried in one of the infamous “show-trials” for conspiring with Tito and others to overthrow the Hungarian government. He was tried, “confessed,” and was executed. In March of 1956, the Hungarian government reburied him, declaring his trial to have been in error.

Mátyás Rákosi (1892-1971) – was a hard-line Moscow loyalist and leader of the communist party from 1945 to 1956. He pursued an authoritarian rule, and built a personality cult around himself. Rákosi described himself as “Stalin’s best Hungarian disciple.” In 1952 he became Prime Minister of Hungary, to be replaced by the reformist Imre Nagy in 1953. Rákosi was removed as General Secretary of the Party under pressure from the Soviet Politburo in June 1956, and lived in the Soviet Union until his death in 1971.

Revolutionary Councils – bodies known as revolutionary or national councils or committees formed all over the country after October 23, 1956, to administer local communities.

Workers’ Councils – spontaneously organized bodies that began to appear all over the country as soon as October 24, 1956, to represent the political aspirations of the workers. Once established, the workers’ councils took over the running of the factories, functioning at once as an employer and a union and representing themselves in the new local political leadership. In many cases they set up an armed guard to protect the factory.

Siberia – a vast region of Russia, and the site of the infamous work/death camps of the Soviet Gulag, where among millions of others, Hungarians political prisoners suffered imprisonment, performed forced labor, and in many cases, died.

Joseph Vassarionovich Stalin (1878-1953) – Soviet communist dictator until his death in 1953, who master-minded the subjugation of East Central Europe, established the work-death camps of the Soviet Gulag, and caused the deaths of tens of millions of innocent people.

Stalin Statue – this huge statue, the hated symbol of Soviet power, was pulled down and taken apart by a crowd of demonstrators in the evening of October 23rd.

János Szabó/Szabó bácsi – “Uncle Szabó” (1897-1957) – legendary leader of resistance on Széna Square – Széna tér; among first to be tried and executed by the Kadar government in January, 1957.

Suez Canal – strategically important route between Europe and Asia without circumnavigation of Africa. The “Suez Crisis” began on October 29, 1956, when Britain, France and Israel decided to use force to regain control the Suez Canal that had been nationalized by President Nasser on July 26, 1956. This crisis distracted world attention from the Revolution in Hungary, as both had to be addressed at the same time by the U.N. General Assembly.

Tököl – Hungarian town on Csepel island. On November 3, 1956, Pál Maléter and his delegation were arrested by the Soviets on the military airport of Tököl.

U.S. Embassy – located on Szabadság tér – Freedom Square; it gave temporary shelter to U.S. citizens and some revolutionary leaders before they left for the West. Between 1956 and 1971, it became the residence of Cardinal József Mindszenty.

Warsaw Pact – the security alliance of communist countries, established in 1955 as a counterbalance to NATO, in which all satellite states were expected to be members.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF ARTISTS & PHOTOGRAPHERS

Ata Kandó

Ata Kandó was born in 1913 as Etelka Görög in Budapest. In 1932, she moved to Paris with her artist husband, Gyula Kandó, and they operated a portrait studio. She has lived and worked in many European countries as well as in the United States and South America.

She was living in Holland in 1956, and when she heard of the human exodus of Hungarian refugees to Austria, she immediately traveled there to photograph their tragic story, focusing especially on children. She took several hundred photographs and published a collection for Christmas, 1956. The book's title was "My Sweet Homeland, God Be with You," and the artist generously offered the considerable proceeds of the book for the benefit of the Hungarian refugees.

In the 1960's she visited South America, and documented in outstanding photo reports the destruction of the Amazon Indians and their culture. Kandó has had many exhibitions and publications to her name, and has been the recipient of several awards.

Imre Balassa

Imre Balassa, one of nine children, worked as a lathe operator in 1956. As a "politically unreliable" person, he was only allowed to attend university in night classes, and in October was about to receive his diploma.

During the 1956 Revolution, he fought in the Pál Street armed unit in the 8th district. His permit to carry arms and his National ID – both of which he still has – were signed by Sándor Kopácsi, Chief of Budapest Police. He left the capital city in the middle of November 1956, with a compass, briefcase and a handful of Hungarian soil.

In Germany, he earned his degree in electrical engineering, and in 1967, he became a German citizen. Since 1990, he has enjoyed the rights of Hungarian citizenship as well. He is highly regarded as an engineering consultant and continues to teach the young.

His wife, Margit Kaufmann, also left Hungary in 1956. While raising their three daughters, they considered it very important that they be just as proud of their Hungarian origin – the language and history – as they were of being a citizen of Europe. Today, the daughters live in Germany, England and Switzerland, where they all have professional careers.

Balassa received the 1956 Order of Merit and also became knighted for his role in the 1956 Revolution. Today, he lives in Schwalbachban, Germany.

Ferenc Bitó

Although the editors of "56 Stories" made every attempt possible, we were unable to track down Ferenc Bitó, who created these sketches. His sketchbook from 1956 was found, after 50 years, in the basement of friends, Nóra and Károly Szabó. Bitó escaped across the border to Austria with the Kiss family in November, 1956.

Géza Kisvarsányi

Géza Kisvarsányi was born in Tokaj and earned his diploma in Geology from the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest. He was a prisoner of war in the Caucasus from 1944 to 1947. He immigrated to the United States in 1956, earned a Ph.D. in Geology from the University of Missouri in 1964, and was a Professor of Geology at UM until his retirement to Florida in 1993. He is currently the Treasurer of the Kossuth Club of Sarasota.

Submissions from his wife, Éva Kisvarsányi, and his daughter, Erika Kisvarsányi, can be found in "56 Stories."

Károly Szabó

Károly Szabó was born in Transylvania, but received his diploma in chemical engineering in Budapest. At the outbreak of the Revolution in 1956 as head of the Chemical Department of the National Research Institute for Plant Protection. Szabó was elected to the revolutionary committee of the institute.

During the Revolution he repeatedly criss-crossed Budapest, photographing various scenes, buildings and people all over the city. After the tragic end of the heroic fight for freedom, Szabó immigrated to the United States, where in 1959, he married Nora Kiss. He continued his research activities which yielded approximately 100 patents. In 1970, Szabó joined the United Nations as a diplomat responsible for the global development of industries in the area of chemical engineering. He retired in 1983 and currently lives with his wife in Vienna, Austria and Budapest, Hungary. He has one son and two grandchildren, all of whom are fluent in Hungarian and live in the United States.

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery

Dr. Tibor Szentpétery, a descendant of an ancient Transylvanian family, was born in 1916 in Budapest, Hungary. After graduating from the Legal Faculty of the Pázmány Péter University in 1937, he was employed in the Ministry of Finance. Later he served as an artilleryman and a scout on horseback at the beginning of World War II. As a result of a photo-competition, Dr. Szentpétery became a war correspondent in 1942, thus beginning his lengthy career as a photographer. Around 1,200 photos of his mission to the Don-river (Ukraine) were exhibited in museums starting from 1992, receiving great public and media interest.

As a consequence of his "military career," he was fired from the Ministry of Finance. He then established the first Children's Photo Salon in 1948, which prospered until the nationalization of such private undertakings in 1950.

Dr. Szentpétery was labeled as a "reactionary clerical photo-correspondent" – and could not get a permanent job for years. During this period he moonlighted for several museums – until one of his friends found a job in a photo lab, where Dr. Szentpétery worked from 1953 until he retired in 1980.

In 1956, throughout October-December he systematically walked the streets of Budapest and secretly took around 230 photographs, creating the largest individual collection.

He died on February 20, 2005 in his home at the age of 89. Dr. Szentpétery married Piroska Scossa in 1950. They had three daughters: Márta (1953), Mónika (1955) and Melitta (1959).



Three young freedom fighters



Edith K. Lauer

Edith Lauer serves as Chair Emerita of the Hungarian American Coalition, the organization she helped found in 1991. She led the Coalition's efforts to promote NATO expansion, and has been a strong advocate for maintaining Hungarian education and culture as well as the human rights of 2.5 million Hungarians who live in historic national communities in countries bordering Hungary. After Lauer witnessed the 1956 Revolution, her family escaped to Austria and settled in the U.S. in 1957. She and her husband, John N. Lauer, frequently travel to Hungary, Slovakia and Romania, and provide funding for many educational and cultural programs in the region.

Andrea Lauer Rice

Andrea Lauer Rice is the founder and CEO of Lauer Learning, a multimedia educational company that creates innovative ways to teach children about foreign languages, historic events and culture. Lauer Rice earned an M.B.A. from the Goizueta Business School at Emory University and a B.A. from Lehigh University. Prior to launching Lauer Learning, she spent six years working in the fields of journalism and nonprofit management in Budapest, Hungary, and five years working at IBM in e-learning. She currently lives with her husband, C. Barton Rice, Jr., and son Nicholas, in Georgia.

The Hungarian American Coalition is a nationwide non-profit 501©3 organization founded in 1991 in Washington, D.C. Its mission is to mobilize and coordinate the talents and resources of its 20,000 individual and organizational members in promoting public understanding of Hungarian American issues. Through its Office in Washington, D.C. the Coalition has served as a credible, dependable source of information for the interest of Hungarians in the United States and around the world, (<http://www.hacusa.org>)

Lauer Learning creates engaging and innovative multimedia products to teach children of various ages about historic events, cultures and foreign languages. In 2006, the company helped sponsor the Freedom Fighter '56 oral history project and "56 Stories" books about the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In addition, Lauer Learning created and launched FF56!, an educational computer game for teens about the 1956 Revolution. Based in Roswell, Georgia, the company was founded in 2005. See www.LauerLearning.com for additional details.

56 Stories



The desire to be free causes ordinary people to perform extraordinary deeds. In "56 Stories" you will find compelling first-person accounts of Hungarian Americans who were participants in the unforgettable days of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. As we commemorate the Revolution's 50th anniversary, these stories of determination and courage inspire us still.

Laura Bush

The 1956 Hungarian uprising against Soviet occupation was the defining moment for Hungary in the 20th century and a defining event of the Cold War. The 1956 Revolution was one of the brightest moments in the long struggle of the Hungarian people for their freedom and independence. "56 Stories" is an extraordinary collection of personal accounts of average Hungarians who rallied against the Soviets, risked their lives, and faced incredible odds. By their exceptional heroism, these ordinary people made an indelible mark on the history of the last century.

Tom Lantos *U.S. Congressman*

"56 Stories" is a fascinating collection of testimonies of heroism, incredible courage and sacrifice made by Hungarians who later became Americans. On the 50th anniversary we must remember the historical significance of the 1956 Revolution that exposed the brutality and inhumanity of the Soviets, and led, in due course, to freedom for Hungary and an untold number of others.

George Herbert Walker III

Ambassador of the United States to Hungary 2003-2006

The Hungarian Revolution was one of those rare historic events written by ordinary people, not leaders. This is their story, in their own stirring, heartbreaking words. Read it and remember. Read it and weep, as I did, recalling my childhood memories and the bravery of my own parents.

Kati Marton *Author and Human Rights Activist*

History is made up of many stories of many people. It is the decisions of individuals that can turn the tides of history. That is why we can best learn and understand history through personal stories; that is exactly what the book "56 Stories" offers us about the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

Dr. János Rainer *Historian*

Director, 1956 Institute

Whoever does not recognize and use the language of the next generations, locks away his own and his community's history from the young. This book, "56 Stories," is the dynamic garland of fifty six stunning recollections, and sixty five destinies. While the dry, sober voice of scholars often scares off the reader, it's not the same with personal stories. If I pick up this book, there I am on the streets of Budapest. I am among those who lived through those days, who did not fear to fight or to live. From them I learn the meaning of freedom, and that there is no price we would not give for it.

Dr. Mária Schmidt *Historian*

Director, House of Terror Museum