The

Thiringer de Nagyszombat

Family Chronicles

(Updated)

As remembered by

László (Leslie) Thiringer

and

Tamás (Thomas) Thiringer

Crest of the Thiringer de Nagyszombat Family

A nagyszombati
Thiringer család
címere.

CONTENTS

PHOTOS

ATTACHMENTS

PREFACE

Small beginnings often outgrow their original scope. It happened to the story of the Thiringer family or, more specifically, one branch of the family. The project had started out modestly enough. We all knew that my father, Leslie, or Apu as he is called had a long, interesting and exciting life. He had witnessed and participated in several historic events in Europe during the first half of this century, including two world wars. Over the years he told us a number of anecdotes from that period but we never heard the whole story in a concise, chronological manner. Although I had been collecting our family records for some time it was Peter, our son, who approached his grandfather and urged him to jot down his recollections. Apu was reluctant at first but then warmed to the idea. During the winter of 1990, at the age of 90, he compiled his memories up to 1946. Upon his return from Florida in April 1991 he handed me a thick pad of handwritten Hungarian notes, saying that since I knew what happened to us since 1946 I may as well continue writing the "family saga" myself.

Translating Apu's story was a slow, tedious process with my wife, Erika, editing and Peter putting the manuscript on computer. We discussed the project several times; I decided to continue our story to the present and divide it into two parts, first in Europe then in the United States. Thus, by the time the manuscript was complete the original scope of the project was expanded considerably. In addition to Apu's life and the family's early history, we added my own story and several "bells and whistles" such as maps, documents and pictures to highlight the narrative. The resulting work, I hope, will be of interest to members outside of our immediate family and to our descendants who will carry on the Thiringer name and some day might continue to write the family's history.

Alexandria, Virginia, May 1993

When we finished the original eight chapters of our family's history over a decade ago we did not intend to continue this "saga" beyond the weddings of our children. However, after a relatively short time several events occurred in the family's life that seemed worthy of mentioning. Furthermore, also a number of pertinent new or revised facts came to light the inclusion of which, we felt, would improve context and understanding of the narrative. Thus we decided not only to continue the family's story after 1993 but also to update and revise the original text. Improved printing techniques helped us to include new pictures and documents as well. We hope the reader will overlook any inadvertent errors or omissions in the text, and still find the overall narrative of our family's history interesting.

Thomas P. Thiringer Sarasota, Florida, January 2004

PART I – THE THIRINGER FAMILY IN EUROPE

Chapter 1. Family History through the End of WW I (16th Century to 1918)

The Family's Early History

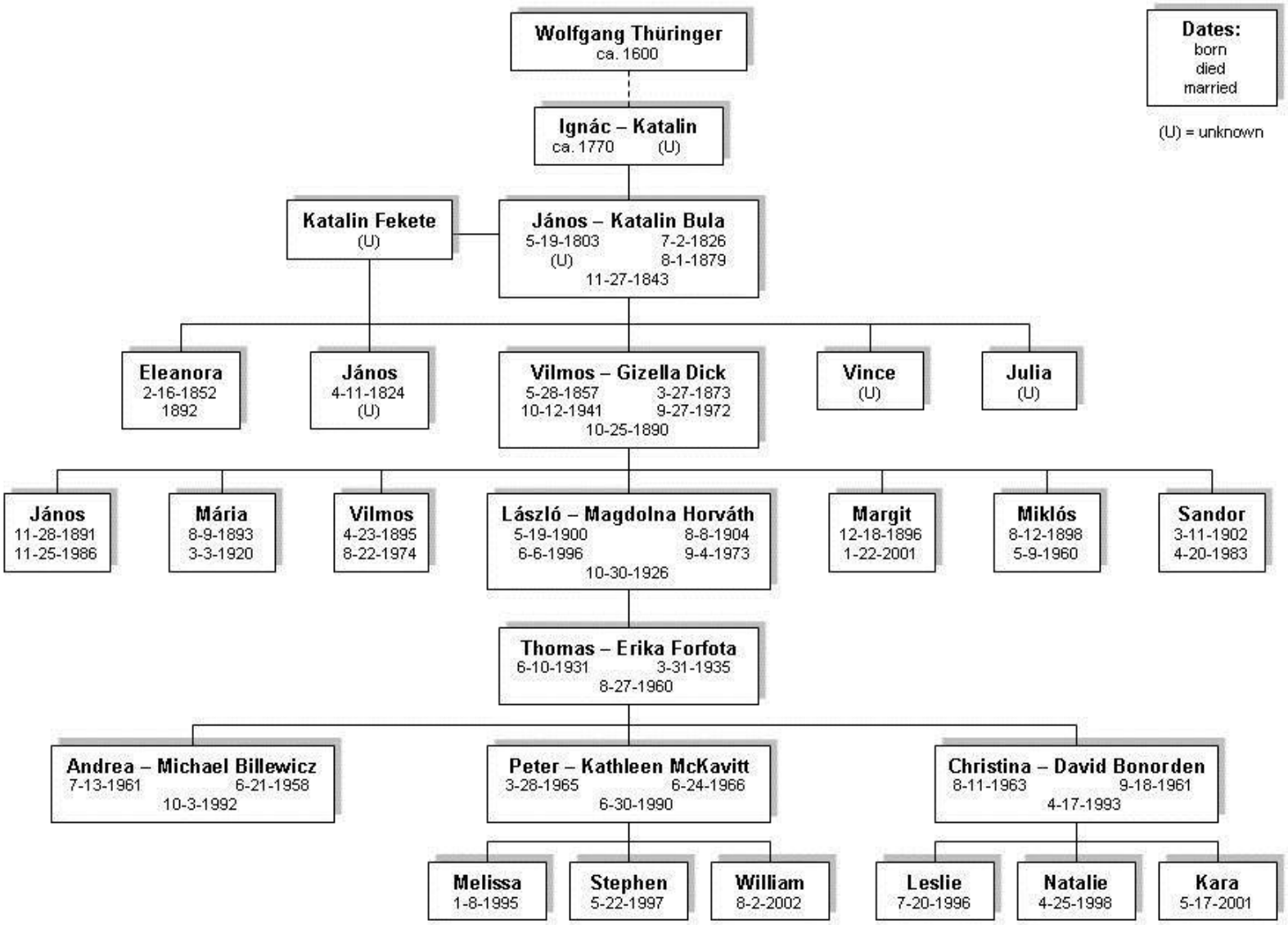
Unfortunately there is no reliable documentation concerning the early history of our family. According to anecdotal evidence around 1600 six German families (Koller, Kegel, Micheller, Keller, Bernrieder and Thüringer) immigrated into northwestern Hungary, most likely from the German state of Thüringen. These families, including ours, were Lutherans and the German religious wars that followed the Reformation were the main reasons for their seeking a less hostile country. In addition, there were probably better economic opportunities in that part of Hungary than in the warring German states.

The Thiringers (Thüringers) were sheep ranchers who brought with them the western Merino sheep, a breed apparently unknown in Hungary until then. Our ancestors fared well in Hungary. They leased large acreage of pasture land from the local aristocracy and their sheep soon numbered in many hundreds. Eventually they became quite wealthy by local standards, bought extensive properties and around 1640 one of our ancestors, Wolfgang Thüringer, even received the title and crest of lower nobility from the Habsburg emperor who was also the king of Hungary. This ancestor must have lived in or around the town of Nagyszombat at the time of the award because the pre-name "Nagyszombati" (de Nagyszombat) meaning "from Nagyszombat" was included with the family crest. Nagyszombat is now called Trnava and is located in Slovakia about 40 miles northeast of Bratislava. There are to this day in the local cemetery of Trnava some old tombstones with the names Thüringer/Thiringer. The earliest written record about the Thiringer family, however, comes from the county of Komárom in western Hungary where in 1667 four Thiringer brothers – Farkas, János (John), Pėter and Tamás (Thomas) – certified their status in the Hungarian nobility[1]. They must have moved to Komárom that year and applied for certification right away. Such certification was important in those days because the nobility received various privileges from the Crown, not the least of which was an exemption from taxation.

We have no further information about the four brothers in Komárom. One of them or his descendent is our direct ancestor who eventually moved to Fejér County, probably during the mid-1700s. My (Leslie's) great-grandfather Ignác (Ignatius) Thiringer was born around 1770 and lived in Mélykút, Fejér County, where my grandfather János (John) was born in 1803. It appears that by then the family was no longer prosperous. My grandfather was still in the "sheep business" because he was employed as the overseer of several sheep ranches on a large estate owned by the Cistercian monks at Nagyvenyim, Fejér County. Incidentally, the family by that time had converted to Catholicism.

[1] Dr. Alapi Gyula: Komáromvármegye Nemes Családai (Noble Families of Komárom County): 1911, Volume 2, p. 268 (Library of Congress)

The THIRINGER de Nagyszombat Family



My grandfather had a son also named János (John) by his first wife, Katalin (Katherine) Fekete. After her death my grandfather remarried in 1843 and had four more children, including my father Vilmos (William). He was born in 1857 at Nagyvenyim and married my mother, Gizella (Gisele) Dick, in 1890. He owned a small farm of about 200 acres located in Kéty, Tolna County, which he leased out soon after he got married and took a job as the manager of a 2,000-acre estate belonging to Count Sándor Apponyi at Lengyel, Tolna County. My mother's family lived in Bonyhád, Tolna County, at that time where they owned and operated a small hotel. My six siblings and I were all born at Lengyel.

During the winter of 1903 the Apponyi castle at Lengyel caught fire and my father, while directing the fire fighting effort, came down with a severe cold. The resulting lung infection and pneumonia weakened him so much that he was unable to continue his job. He resigned in 1904 and after selling the farm at Kéty moved the family to the city of Pécs where he bought a house from the proceeds. A year later he regained his health and was ready to look for employment to support his large family. He learned through an acquaintance about the possibility of leasing approximately 3,000 acres of prime land belonging to Count Antal Sigray at Iványc, Vas County. Negotiations with the count were successful and a 13-year lease was signed. My father sold their two houses in Pécs (one belonged to my mother) and invested the funds in modernizing the estate.

Farming the estate was quite profitable for a number of years so much so that in 1916 my father was able to purchase a 500-acre farm at Őrihodos in Zala County, southwest of the Sigray estate. He hoped to retire on that farm after the Iványc lease expired in 1918. Sadly, the plan did not materialize because of Austria-Hungary's defeat at the end of World War I (WW I). The lease expired shortly before the war ended and my father sold all of the farm equipment and livestock for cash and other investments. The subsequent economic disruption and enormous inflation, however, soon wiped out all of his funds much of which was invested in war bonds. He even lost his 500-acre farm which as a result of the Trianon peace treaty of 1920 became part of the newly established state of Yugoslavia. After this financial catastrophe my parents moved to Körmend, Vas County, and were supported by their children until my father's death in 1941. After WW II my mother moved in with my brother Miklós (Nicholas) and lived with his family outside Budapest until her death in 1972, just six months short of her 100th birthday.

Leslie's Childhood and Youth

Let me now turn to my personal story. I was born on May 19, 1900 at Lengyel and moved to Iványc with my parents in 1905. After attending the first two grades at the local elementary school my parents sent me to a boarding school in Budapest. The school was run by brothers of the French catholic religious order of Saint John de la Salle. The prior barely spoke Hungarian although the rest of the padres were all Hungarians. The school itself was run rather like a private juvenile correctional facility. We had to wear uniforms and had to attend a public hearing each Friday evening. At these hearings the teachers openly discussed the behavior and accomplishments (or lack thereof) of each student who was then rewarded or punished accordingly. The reward consisted of a medal which the student was allowed to wear on his uniform for a week. The punishment was either a verbal

reprimand or a whipping with a cane in front of the whole student body. The whipping consisted of three to ten leashes, depending on the severity of the offense. Frankly, sometimes we did deserve the punishment. My older brother Miklós who also attended this school two years ahead of me was a particularly mischievous boy. I recall one incident which resulted in a good whipping for both of us. It happened on a Sunday afternoon, a time usually reserved for local parents who wanted to visit their children. On that particular afternoon Miklós and I had been assigned the task of escorting the parents to the reception hall, seat them and bring their children to meet them. There was a metal collection box on the table in a corner of this hall with a sign asking donations for the construction of a new chapel. After visiting hours it was the job of the ushers, Miklós and I on that fateful afternoon, to take the collection box to the principal's office. I was all set to do that but Miklós had a different idea. With a piece of wire he skillfully opened the lock on the box, took out a silver 5 korona coin, snapped the lock in place and took the box to the office. Nobody would have discovered the misdeed had he not gone immediately to a nearby candy store, bought a large bag of candy and distributed among the students. The padres soon noticed the unusual candy-feast and it did not take them long to find the source of the goodies. The result was predictable: both of us received the customary whipping in front of the student assembly. Punishment of this nature contributed to my dislike of the school so much that after two years my parents took me back to Iványc and enrolled me in another school at the nearby city of Szombathely. That school was also operated by a religious order.

We spent most of our school vacations at Iványc on the Sigray estate. As we grew older all of us had to work either around the house or on the fields, particularly around harvest time. Despite these chores we still had plenty of time for play and mischief. Miklós and Vilmos (William, another brother) were always the ringleaders of whatever trouble we found ourselves in. Miklós loved to read detective and western stories which often supplied the ideas for escapades. During one summer day, for example, while our parents were visiting Körmend he stole my father's revolver which was kept on the top of a cabinet in their bedroom. The weapon actually belonged to the night watchman who picked it up in the evening and turned it over to my father in the morning. In any event, Miklós took the gun into the village, tied a handkerchief over his face and with the weapon in hand demanded money from the local storekeeper. The woman recognized Miklós right away and gave him a korona piece and a bag of candy. In true outlaw fashion Miklós backed out of the store with the gun still in hand but he did not have much time to enjoy his ill-gotten gains. The storekeeper related the incident to my mother who paid back the korona and gave her some money for the candy as well. When my father found out about the "holdup" Miklos got his due rewards. His bottom was tender for several days afterward. Ironically, Miklós joined the Budapest police after WW I and eventually became commander of the city's mounted police force.

Most of the mischief, however, was done by Vilmos. The Rába River in those days had plenty of fish in it, particularly carp and catfish. Our family had the fishing rights in that part of the river which crossed the estate. We did a lot of fishing off the banks; in fact we caught a catfish once that weighed almost 60 pounds, a near record for the county. We were not allowed to use a boat, however, because the

river was fast and deep with treacherous currents. Vilmos was never satisfied with the off-shore fishing so he decided one day to build a raft using a couple of old doors nailed together. Miklós and I helped him with the secret project. Our youngest brother Sándor (Alex) who was about six years old at the time tagged along as we carried the finished raft to the river. Vilmos wanted to be sure that his creation was "seaworthy" so we decided to put Sándor on it and held the raft in the water by a thin rope from the river bank. As we waited to see whether the raft would sink under Sándor's weight the rope somehow slipped out of Vilmos' hands. Within seconds the raft was gathering speed downstream with the terrified Sándor on it. All we could do was to run along the bank shouting encouragement to our brother who by then was yelling his head off. Finally the river slowed somewhat as the currents approached a water mill about a half mile downstream. With the help of a couple of fishermen we were able to pull the sinking raft and the thoroughly soaked Sándor to shore.

Another of Vilmos' infamous tricks took place during one of the Christmas vacations. The main building on the estate had a deep, cool, cellar used mainly to store the 10-12 cans of milk from the afternoon milking. These cans had an approximate capacity of about 20 gallons each. The first milking at sunrise was added to the cans from the previous afternoon, after which they were put on the morning train bound for Graz, Austria. We had a contract with a large milk processing plant in Graz for this daily delivery. There were also several wooden shelves in the cellar on which the winter apples were stored. Our cook, an elderly woman, used to go to the cellar about once a week to check the apples and throw out the ones beginning to rot. One day Vilmos noticed that one of the cellar window panes closest to the apple shelves was broken and a piece of glass missing from it. Never one to pass up an opportunity, he thought we should be able to get a few apples through the fist- sized hole in the window. He found a long thin pole, opened both blades of his pocket knife and stuck one of the blades into the end of the pole. This home made spear served its intended purpose quite well for several days. Every time Vilmos pushed it through the broken window he was able to hit an apple and pull it out. One day, however, disaster struck: it was an early winter evening as Vilmos started his usual apple hunting expedition. Miklós and I were kibitzing behind him as he pushed the pole through the dark cellar window. He did not realize, however, that the cook was in there and just about to light a candle for her usual apple culling session. As she stood in front of the shelves, Vilmos inadvertently stuck the open knife into her behind. Fortunately it was a cold day and, as most peasant women, she wore several layers of skirts which stopped the blade. We scattered in three different directions as she let out a loud scream. Needless to say, our apple hunting expeditions ended even though my father never found out how the cook's skirts got slashed.

The head of our household was my maternal grandmother, Mária Dick, who moved in with us after she had become a widow. Everybody, even my father I suspect, was afraid of her. She had a mean temper and had tangled with my parents on more than one occasion. I recall that one day as we sat down for lunch the maid brought in a pot of hot soup and, as usual, it was Grandmother who ladled out the soup for everyone. My father tasted a spoonful but it was too hot for him, so he spit it out. He got up without a word, took his plate and threw it out the open window. Then it was Grandmother's turn. She grabbed the whole pot, went to the

same window and threw it out as well. It all happened without anybody uttering a sound. My father took his hat and left the room, slamming the door behind him. Grandmother also marched out, through the door at the opposite end. We broke out in huge laughter once they had left and followed our mother to the kitchen to finish the meal. Grandmother died in 1916.

Our elderly Uncle János also lived in the house with us for some time. He was a bachelor and avid pipe smoker whom we did not like much; he was a grumpy old man who continually ordered us around. The dislike was mutual and Uncle János could hardly wait for us to leave the house at the end of the summer vacation. Actually, I could not blame him because we played several mean tricks on him over the years. One of the nastiest was when one day we found his long-stemmed pipe in the dining room while he was taking an afternoon nap. Vilmos decided immediately that this was an excellent opportunity to get even with him. He took some gunpowder out of an old shotgun cartridge, poured it into Uncle János' pipe and tamped it down with some tobacco. The rest of us were watching the unfolding scenario from the kitchen. After a while Uncle János came out of his room looking for his pipe. About a minute after he lit it the powder blew his pipe to pieces, much to our delight. For us the episode was worth the subsequent punishment. A few months later Uncle János decided to move into an apartment nearby, a wise decision which saved him (and us) from other potentially uncomfortable incidents.

Fighting in World War I

I had barely finished the 8th grade when World War I broke out in July 1914. The assassination of the Austrian archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Serbia, was the event that sparked the war and became a catalyst for the various nationalities within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Although several of these groups had their own agenda, initially most of them enthusiastically supported the emperor and his declaration of war on Serbia. The patriotic fervor was especially high in Hungary as young and old rallied around the cause. Many people believed that the war would be a short one and would result in an overwhelming victory for the monarchy. However, as other nations got involved it became increasingly apparent that a swift victory was not in the cards. People began to realize that Austria-Hungary and their ally, Germany, might in fact lose the war. Nevertheless, most Hungarians were confident in the eventual triumph of the empire. Victory still seemed possible, especially because the front lines were well beyond the borders of the country,

I was eager to contribute my share to the war effort. By September 1917, as I started the 12th grade, I was getting more and more concerned that the war might end before I had a chance to become a soldier and see combat. Incidentally, a year earlier the Austrian emperor, Francis Joseph I, who was also the king of Hungary had died after a reign of almost 70 years. His successor, Charles IV, was soon trying to sue for peace without much success. My concern about not being able to see combat was based partly on the subsequently deteriorating economic and political situation at home and also on my youthful enthusiasm fired by the example of my three older brothers who by that time were serving in the Army. János was somewhere around Odessa on the Russian front as a lieutenant in the

artillery, Vilmos a lieutenant in the newly organized air corps and Miklós, a gunnery lieutenant was in a military hospital with a severe leg wound. Though these family "heroes" had a strong influence on me I also had another incentive to volunteer: the fear that I might not pass the final comprehensive oral and written examinations required for high school graduation. I was especially concerned about the written tests and since I knew that soldiers on active duty were required to take only the orals for graduation, I finally persuaded my father to allow me to volunteer for the army. Thus, I enlisted in August 1917 and reported in October for duty in Innsbruck, Austria, to the Imperial Mountaineer Regiment. After six weeks of training I was sent back to Esztergom in Hungary to attend a two-month long officer candidate school. In February 1918 I went back to my high school in full officer-candidate uniform to take the comprehensive oral examination. I passed it and received my diploma, even though I had barely attended the 12th grade. This situation, by the way, was not unusual in 1918. The exhausted Austro-Hungarian military badly needed replacements at the front and all men born in 1900 were drafted by December 1917. As it turned out, I beat the draft by voluntarily enlisting four months earlier. Students drafted later were also allowed to take the oral examinations after the six-week basic training and, if passed, receive their diplomas.

After the examinations I went to Iványc for a 10-day leave before returning to Esztergom and from there to the regiment in Innsbruck. There were many new recruits in the unit and we all had to undergo several weeks of intensive training designed to familiarize everybody with the elements of mountain warfare.

In early April 1918 we were sent to the Italian front, the Dolomite Mountains of southern Tyrol. We ended up in the infamous "Doberdo" area along the headwaters of the Isonzo River, a site of many bloody battles. The front itself was stationary and the battle lines barely moved for months; nevertheless, the reconnaissance actions and frequent artillery barrages took many lives. Our arrival caused considerable jubilation among the troops, especially in those units which had suffered heavy casualties and were badly in need of reinforcement.

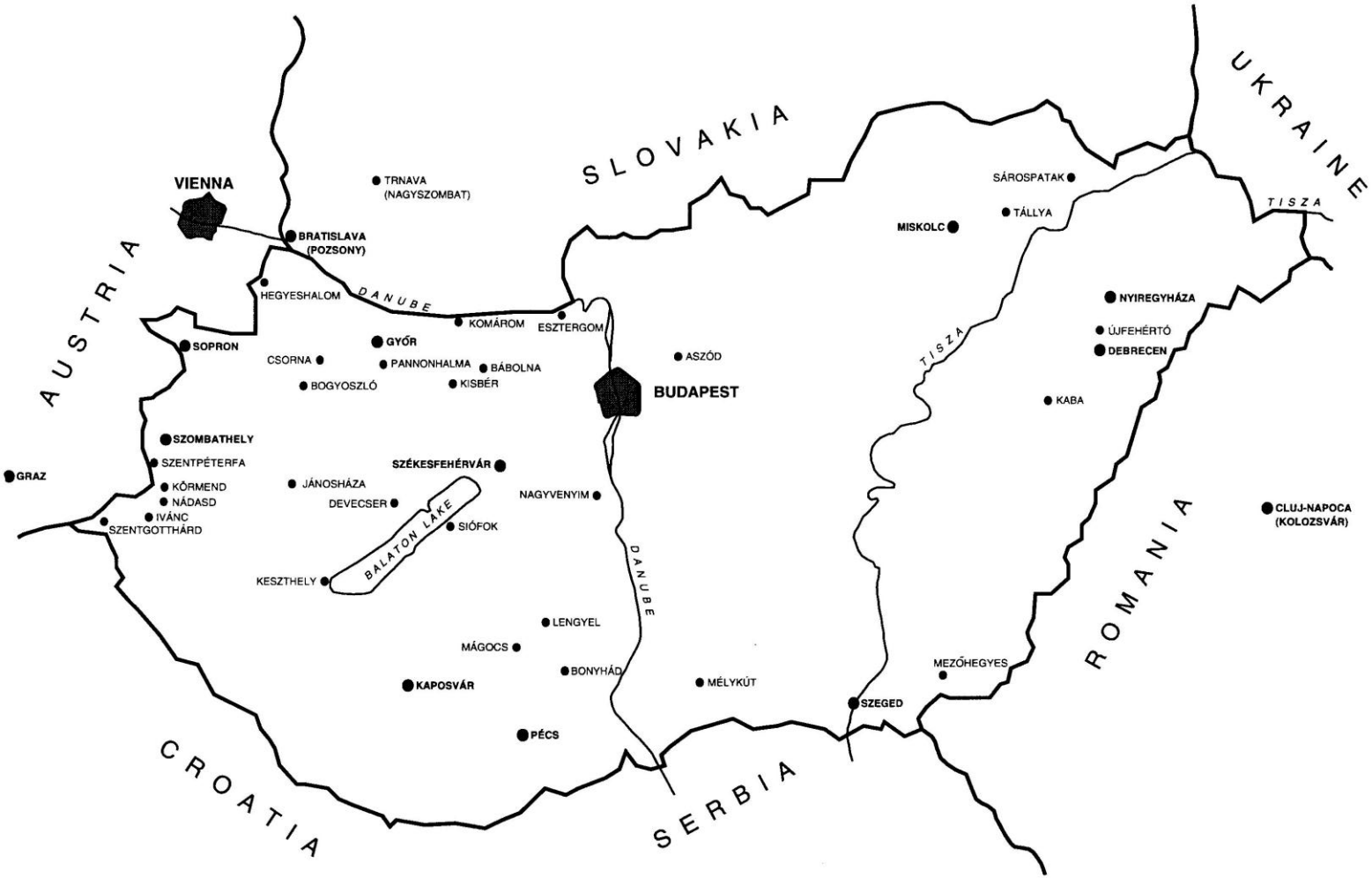
We lived in caves, most of which had been blasted out of sheer rock. The bare mountain sides were so exposed that all traffic, such as the re-supplying of ammunition and food, and taking back the wounded and dead, had to be done at night. The food consisted mainly of cooked beans with occasional meat mixed in, corn bread with jam and coffee. The meals, tasteless but adequate, were cooked behind the lines and were brought to us by mule caravans. Fatal accidents occurred in the dead of night more than once, as animals and their keepers tumbled down a precipice. Life in the caves was uncomfortable but not unbearable. It was crowded inside but at least we were reasonably safe. During the lull in the fighting we usually played cards, sang, read or wrote letters.

Attacks were usually preceded by a continuous artillery barrage, sometimes lasting three to four days. The effect was mostly psychological because we were safe in the caves and only the forward defenses, such as the rows of barbed wires, were blown away. Once the firing stopped the carnage began. Waves upon waves of Italians tried to reach our lines but were beaten back with enormous numbers of casualties. Once the Italians had retreated, our troops prepared for a

counterattack. The result was much the same: hundreds of casualties and nothing to show for it. This stalemate lasted for months and cost thousands of casualties on both sides.

During one night around the end of May a reconnaissance patrol under my command successfully ambushed and captured an Italian patrol. As a result of that operation I was promoted to sub-lieutenant. A couple of weeks later the infamous Piave offensive began and our regiment had to contribute several units to this battle. As a member of one of these units I ended up on the Italian plains along the Piave River. The immediate task of the offensive was to cross the Piave and regroup on the Italian side for further advance. This offensive, however, was unsuccessful and we had to retreat with heavy casualties. Part of our problem was that the weather suddenly turned quite warm and resulting snow runoff from the mountains caused extensive flooding downstream. These floods washed away the pontoon bridges we had built across the Piave, making it impossible for the troops and equipment to cross the swollen river.

After two weeks of rest and reorganization we were ordered back into the mountains. On the way back I met an ensign named József Hegyi from Transylvania and we became good friends. By the time we reached our old units they had evacuated the caves and were retreating in the face of a relentless Italian offensive. This was the 12th and last battle of Isonzo which forced us by the end of August to give up all occupied Italian territories. As the Italian front collapsed and the war finally came to an end in October 1918, my friend Hegyi and I started out together on a long and difficult journey home mostly on foot and occasionally by train. On the way to Austria we had no knowledge of the deteriorating situation in Hungary. It would not have made much difference anyway since we were determined to get home as soon as possible. After a difficult trek we reached Innsbruck, where we were officially demobilized, and then continued to Hungary. I persuaded Hegyi to come with me to Iványc which was much closer to Innsbruck than his home. I told him he could rest up at our home before the long and uncertain travel back to Transylvania.



Reference Map of Hungary

Chapter 2. Life During the Turbulent Post-WW I Years (1918-1923)

Resistance, Prison and Escape During Communism

Around mid-December 1918 we finally arrived home to Iványc where we learned from the newspapers that, taking advantage of the monarchy's collapse, the Romanians had invaded Transylvania. The only opposition facing them consisted of a hastily organized battalion manned mainly by recent returnees from the battlefields outside of Hungary. Understandably, my friend Hegyi wanted to leave immediately to join the battle against the Romanian invaders. I did not need much persuasion to accompany him, so we left together for Budapest and reported to the military authorities there. Our orders were to report to Kolozsvár in Transylvania where we arrived a few days before Christmas. Since we were assigned to different units Hegyi and I separated in Kolozsvár and I never saw him again. I joined a unit under the command of lst Lt. Béla Szilágyi and soon engaged the advancing Romanian troops along the Szamos River. During the next couple of months we fought several battles against the Romanians and succeeded in slowing their advance. On March 1, 1919 the platoon under my command pushed back the enemy and retook the village of Sikárló which was held by a Romanian unit. As a result of this engagement I was recommended for promotion to Ensign which took effect on March 15. During a subsequent engagement I received a leg wound and was taken to a hospital in Szatmárnémeti. Two weeks later, in mid-April, I was released and sent home to Körmend where my parents lived since their move from Iványc in January.

The immediate aftermath of WW I was devastating for Hungary. The monarchy collapsed, the emperor was forced to abdicate the throne and went into exile. A turbulent period of about 18 months followed. The economy lay in ruins, the money became worthless and many people were on the verge of starvation. The thousands of disorganized soldiers straggling home from the front lines only added to the overall chaos. During this time a number of political parties attempted to form a government, bring order to the chaos and try to resist the territorial encroachment by countries surrounding Hungary. Eventually the first post-war central government was established. Under some semblance of order Hungary was declared an independent republic which replaced the almost 900 year old kingdom. Unfortunately, the tragedy of a lost war created further massive internal dissents, political maneuverings and other problems which in turn prevented any attempt to establish a lasting stability in the country. Various party coalitions tried to form new governments but these lasted only for a few weeks. For example, just during the five months prior to my return to Körmend, Hungary had four different governments. Naturally, these chaotic times were ripe for communist agitators who took advantage of the situation and seized power in March 1919 from the Social Democrats. The communists, led by Béla Kun and supported by the socialists, established a nine-month long so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" which resulted in a nationwide Red terror.

By the time I arrived home many people in Körmend had enough of the communist government and its wide-spread atrocities. They had started to organize a clandestine, underground resistance group and asked me to be its leader. I accepted their trust without realizing the deadly consequences it set into motion.

Under the new communist regime May 1 had become an important holiday. As many other localities the neighboring small town of Nádasd also organized a celebration on that day. Since Nádasd produced excellent local wines many of its citizens became quite drunk during the festivities despite the nationwide prohibition against the sale of alcohol. A large group of people decided to vent their pent-up frustration against the local communist municipal leadership, the so-called Directorium. Fueled by the excellent wine the group broke into the town hall and beat up members of the Directorium who tried without success to curb the rapidly deteriorating festivities. Two days later, on May 3, the communist central government sent an armed unit of so-called "Worker Guards" or "Red Guards" from Szombathely to Nádasd in order to put down the "rebellion." They arrested about 50 people suspected of having participated in the melee. The prisoners were taken to Körmend and locked up in the basement of the Batthyány castle.

The same evening several men in our resistance group, myself included, were having dinner at the Zöldfa Inn, quite oblivious to what was going on at the nearby caste. We left the inn at about 11:00 p.m. and went home to sleep. My mother woke me three hours later saying that someone with a very important message wanted to see me. The fellow was from our group and told me about the Nádasd incident. He also said that all of our friends were at the Zöldfa, waiting for my arrival. I dressed, grabbed my Steier pistol and hurried to the inn. By the time I arrived the atmosphere was highly charged; the fellows were ready for action. A few minutes later someone came in and reported that a Red Guard truck was parked at the Korona Inn on the main square of the city. Apparently the driver was inside the Korona and according to the report the truck contained a machine gun and what appeared to be several crates of ammunition.

The opportunity was too good to pass up. We decided to capture the weapon with the ammunition and free the Nádasd prisoners, especially since we knew that they could expect no mercy from the brutal Red Guards. By the time we arrived to the Korona the driver had gone back into the cab of his vehicle and was half asleep when we knocked him out. As luck would have it, we found in the truck five Manlicher rifles and two full cases of hand grenades, in addition to the machine gun. Our group had grown to about 60 people by that time and several of the latecomers had their own rifles. I distributed the Manlichers and the hand grenades among them but kept the machine gun. I then split the group and sent about twenty of them to attack the castle from the rear, telling them not fire until they heard our frontal salvo. However, someone must have had an itchy finger because we barely got halfway across the town square when we heard gunfire behind the castle. Thus we lost the element of surprise and the Guards started to shoot at us from their posts around the castle. They also had a machine gun, and in spite of the darkness their firing pinned us down momentarily. Fortunately, there was a monument on a high concrete pedestal in the middle of the square which provided some protection while I set up the machine gun and began firing back. Three of our men died in the ensuing gun battle and several got wounded.

We heard later that the Reds lost five people, the rest escaped in a truck that was parked in the courtyard. A few minutes later we freed the men from Nádasd; they scattered after profusely thanking us for the rescue which, though costly for us, certainly saved most of them from the gallows. It was daybreak, and after taking care of our casualties and turning in the machine gun to city hall, we went back to the Zöldfa for a well deserved breakfast.

As it turned out, my troubles had just begun. At dawn the next day, on May 5, the young daughter of the railroad station master came running to our house to wake me up. She said that a special trainload of Red soldiers had arrived and were asking questions about me. I learned later that the train belonged to the infamous Peckai terrorist group which traveled around the country, hunting down and killing anti-communists. I dressed in a hurry, picked up a few of my belongings and tried to escape through the backyard garden fence. The Reds, however, were waiting for me. I was captured, taken to the castle and beaten bloody by several thugs. They wanted to hang me right there with several other prisoners but the fortunate arrival of a county judge from Szombathely prevented them from carrying out the execution. This judge, who arrived by car just as we were being led to the courtyard to be executed, happened to be an acquaintance of my brother-in-law, and he recognized me right away. He persuaded the guards to turn me over into his custody and, with an armed guard in the back seat, he took me to Szombathely. Since I was technically still a member of the military I was turned over to the military authorities there and put into the local military prison. Other than saving my life the new situation was, if anything, worse than what I had left behind in Körmend. During the four weeks that I was a prisoner there they interrogated me daily and beat me to a bloody pulp on several occasions. The beatings were so severe that when my sister Mária (Mici) was allowed a short visit she did not recognize me. In the meantime, the prison commander, an ex-sergeant, forced me to clean the prison toilet with my bare hands.

During the second week two new prisoners were put into my cell. I found out that these men were representatives and officers of the Hungarian Counterrevolutionary Committee, an organization based in Vienna, Austria, which coordinated the budding anti-communist uprisings throughout Hungary. The officers, lst Lt. Zsigmond Szombath and 2nd Lt. György Tichy, had been sent into Hungary to help organize some the counterrevolutionary groups but they were captured by the Reds during one of their nightly raids and thrown into my cell. The three of us soon decided that we must somehow escape to Austria.

Help came through a relative of my brother-in-law. This young man was in charge of the county library and knew many of the local civilian and military officials. Through his extensive connections he obtained permission to visit us and was able to smuggle in some hacksaw blades, a small map of western Hungary's border area and my German language identification card from the Österreichische Flottenverein (Austrian Naval Association). The reason for my becoming a member of this group, years earlier, was that as a child I had always wanted to be a sailor. This romantic desire persisted and, at the beginning of the war, I joined the Association as a student. This naval auxiliary group consisted of civilians of all ages and being a member was the closest I ever came to being a sailor. I was very proud of the sailor cap and jacket which I was authorized to wear on special

occasions as a member. I would never have been able to imagine that my membership picture I.D. card would one day become so handy and useful.

We kept the hacksaw blades, the map and the I.D. hidden under our mattresses. Whenever any of us had a chance to go to the only toilet in the prison, he would take one of the blades and cut away at the rusty iron bars in the window. It looked out over the high brick wall surrounding the prison buildings. It was a tedious process to slowly cut the bars without letting anyone find out what we were doing. Still, by the end of May the iron bars were almost cut through. Around this time a new prisoner was brought into our cell. His name was Németh and he wore an officer's uniform without any rank or other insignia. His story was quite desperate. He was from Vasvár, a teacher by profession, and a first lieutenant in the army reserve. He had spent three years at the front and still wore his uniform since he had no civilian clothing. A few days earlier he had gone to see a doctor in Nagykanizsa who had given him a prescription to fill. Németh had put the prescription behind the headband of his cap since his pockets were full of things he had bought in Nagykanizsa. Upon arriving home to Vasvár he stepped off the train and was immediately accosted by a group of half drunken Red soldiers waiting on the platform. They started to harass him because of the uniform he wore. One of them noticed the prescription sticking out from behind his headband. Inexplicably, the soldiers assumed that the man wearing an old uniform with a piece of white paper in his cap must be a counterrevolutionary. They jumped the poor man, tied his hands, brought him to Szombathely and threw him into our cell without any formal charge.

While we were getting acquainted with the new prisoner we noticed an unusually large and noisy commotion in the courtyard. We found out that on May 27 an uprising had taken place in the village of Gencsapáti, some fifteen miles from Szombathely. It was in response to the arbitrary and forcible collection of food from the people by the Reds. A group of Red Guards led by Tibor Szamuely, one of the most notorious communist terrorists at the time, had been traveling to Csorna that day. Szamuely had stopped at Gencsapáti with his troops to put an end to the uprising. He captured about 200 men whom he brought to the Szombathely military prison the next day. These people were being guarded in the prison yard around a big fire. Nearby, behind a line of guards, congregated the crying and wailing wives of these prisoners. The loud commotion lasted throughout the night.

On the morning of June 3 several guards came into our cell, handcuffed us and took us to the nearby county administration building. We were taken to a large room where Szamuely sat behind a table with two bodyguards. After a short questioning he said he would take us with him to Csorna tomorrow. Since we had never seen Szamuely in person before we did not know the identity of the interrogator or why he would want to take us to Csorna, though we suspected the worst. On the way back to the prison one of the guards told us who the questioner had been and that we had been sentenced to death. Szamuely's plan was to take us to Csorna where another counterrevolutionary uprising had been put down a few days earlier, and to hang us there with several other prisoners before the people of Csorna. After we heard this we immediately concluded that we had no choice but to try and escape during the night. Only Lt. Németh refused to come along, arguing that he was innocent and had nothing to fear. (We found out much

later that Szamuely had indeed carried out his intention. Lt. Németh, along with the mayor of Gencsapáti and several other people from the village were taken to Csorna and hanged in public).

Our prison was lightly guarded. Apart from the commander there were four armed soldiers: two in the corridor in front of the cells, one in the guard office and one at the front gate. The commander often was not there, spending his evenings in the city and returning only for the midnight change of the guards. There were several other soldiers in the courtyard but they were not part of the permanent guard force. Our guards served on four hour shifts; thus the evening changing of the guards took place at 8 p.m. Shortly after dinner we simulated diarrhea attacks and asked to go to the toilet about every half hour. By 10 p.m. the guards were visibly annoyed by the whole scenario. They took us one at a time – I was let out first. Before the guard opened the cell door I hid one of the metal legs of my bed under my jacket. As we reached the toilet I suddenly wheeled around and struck the guard with the metal bed leg. While pulling the unconscious guard into the toilet I heard the second guard opening the door of our cell to take Tichy out. He and Szombath ambushed the man and knocked him out. I caught up with them near the cell door and then we rushed into the guard office to take care of the third guard. He offered little resistance, so we ran into the toilet, broke the weakened iron bars and climbed through the narrow window. Once outside it was quite difficult to get across the high prison wall because we had no ropes. We managed without attracting any attention and then started to run toward the west.

We slowed down at the outskirts of the city and walked all night toward the Austrian border, avoiding all villages and hamlets. While still back in our cell I had marked the smuggled map, outlining a plan for crossing the border at Szentpéterfa just north of Körmend. I left this map under my blanket, hoping that it would send the pursuing guards in the wrong direction. It must have served its intended purpose; by morning we were able to reach the Austrian border at the edge of a hilltop forest. Below us was the small Laufnitz River which formed the border; it was swollen with snow run-off from the Austrian mountains.

Between us and the river was a farm house along a dirt road. We were very hungry, so I decided to ask for some food. It was risky to cross the exposed area between the forest and the farm house but we were desperate. It was afternoon and I went in alone. The farmer's wife was kind enough to give me a loaf of bread and some cottage cheese. She warned me, though, to get out of the house right away because she was expecting the communist border patrol soon. The patrol apparently passed by every day about that time and usually dropped in for a short rest. I ran back to the hilltop where Tichy and Szombath were eagerly, and hungrily, awaiting my return. We polished off the food in no time and stayed in our hiding place until nightfall. Under cover of darkness we swam across the deep and ice cold Laufnitz to the Austrian side. We found some bushes to hide under and tried to dry our clothes, with little success.

The next morning the Austrian border patrol found us shivering in the bushes. They took us to the local police station where we were interrogated by a police sergeant. Since I was the only one speaking German I interpreted for the three of us. He listened intently to our story but because we had no written identification

decided to return us to Hungary. In desperation I suddenly remembered the old Austrian Flottenverein I.D. card hidden in my cap. I pulled it out and showed it to him. Although still wet from the river crossing it did the trick. The sergeant read the personal data, looked me over and asked whether my birthplace of Lengyel was in the county of Tolna. When I acknowledged he left the room, returning few minutes later with a heavy set woman who embraced me joyously. As it turned out she had been employed at the Apponyi estate at the time I was born and had known our family quite well. The sergeant and this woman – who was his wife – fed us, gave us some money and an official travel permit to Vienna. Our common background was an unbelievable coincidence which served us well. By the way, a year later I had an opportunity to return their kindness while visiting a friend of mine, Count Tamás Erdödy, who had an estate near Szombathely. When I told him the story of our escape and the help we had received from the Austrian sergeant and his wife he suggested that we visit the kind couple. We loaded up a small horse-drawn carriage with flour, ham, lard, wine and other foods and headed for the border. The couple could not believe their eyes when we arrived and gave them all that food. I felt very good about being able to reciprocate their generosity.

After a fond farewell to the sergeant and his wife we headed for Vienna. Upon arrival we reported to the Hungarian Counterrevolutionary Committee. They were very glad to see Tichy and Szombath alive; they had heard about their arrest and were sure they had been killed. We were sent by the Committee leadership back to Hungary to report to the so-called "Hungarian National Army" which was being organized in the large southern city of Szeged. This army consisted of officers who had served in WW I combat and many other patriotic people who had become fed up with the brutal communist regime. Initially the high-ranking officers who organized the army could not agree on a single leader from among themselves. Eventually they compromised and invited Admiral Nicholas Horthy, a highly decorated member of the by then defunct Austro-Hungarian Navy, to become the supreme commander of the Hungarian National Army. Horthy accepted the position and came to Szeged from his family estate of Kenderes where he had lived since the end of the war.

Activities in the Hungarian National Army

To avoid the communist forces that controlled most of the western and central part of Hungary we traveled through Austria and Croatia until we reached the Hungarian border closest to Szeged. Once in Szeged we were assigned to a regiment commanded by Captain Pál Prónay. This regiment consisted entirely of officers as did two other regiments commanded by Captains Ostenburg and Máday. Most of the officers detailed to these regiments had been prisoners of the communists at one time or another and many had been tortured in captivity. Needless to say we were more than eager to move against the Reds. The units, however, were not yet at full strength and lacked sufficient equipment. We therefore had to mark time impatiently for a while.

After a short period of training I was assigned as liaison officer to a French brigade stationed at Horgos. This unit was part of a small international military force whose peacekeeping job was to keep an eye on both the communists and us. It consisted almost entirely of North African French colonial troops. While I was with

this French brigade I wore a French uniform and since I was quite tanned I fit well among the dark-skinned Arabs. In fact, I was given the nickname "Senegal" by my comrades from that period and many knew me only by that name. This assignment did not last long because I was soon ordered back to Szeged to become one of the bodyguards responsible for the personal safety of Adm. Horthy.

In July I was sent on a covert mission to southwestern Hungary, at that time occupied by the Serbs. My initial destination was Pécs, the largest city in the occupied area. The mission was potentially quite dangerous. I had to cross the Serbian lines and meet certain members of the Hungarian underground in Pécs. They were to provide me with some confidential documents and propaganda leaflets which had to be delivered to another underground cell at Baranyaszentlörinc. This small town was located south of Pécs on the Serbian border.

Before taking off for Pécs I obtained a travel authorization from the French brigade at Horgos. According to this document I was a student at the University of Pécs on my way back to school. I did not have much confidence traveling under false pretenses. Fortunately, I was able to pass through a couple of Serbian checkpoints and reach Pécs without much difficulty. We packed the documents and propaganda material in a backpack and then covered them with about 30 lbs. of salt. The next morning I left on foot for Baranyaszentlörinc and delivered the documents to our eagerly waiting compatriots. They seemed to be happier with the salt than with the documents which was not surprising since salt was quite difficult to obtain in that area. Mission accomplished – I headed back to Szeged. On the outskirts of Pécs I ran into a Serbian military patrol which forced me to explain that I had not been accepted at Pécs University and was returning home. The story did not seem to convince the man in charge but, luckily a French military truck happened to come by while the Serbs were considering my fate. I showed my travel authorization to the driver who waved aside the Serbs and gave me a ride all the way to Szeged.

On August 1, 1919 the communist regime collapsed. The Romanians, sensing an opportunity to take over most of Hungary, directed their military forces to move north toward Budapest. Our own military units at Szeged decided on a counter move. The Prónay regiment moved out during the night toward the northwest and the Ostenburg regiment was to follow two days later. The Máday regiment also departed north toward Budapest, aiming to help to defend the city and protect Archduke Joseph and his family. The archduke was the only member of the Habsburg royal family still in Hungary at that time and we believed that he would be elected regent for the exiled King Charles IV. As it turned out, the Hungarian Parliament restored the kingdom and elected Admiral Horthy as regent on March 1, 1920, just three months later.

First Lieutenant Thúry, Ensign Werner and I, with a few soldiers, were ordered to guard the rear of the advancing Prónay regiment. By daybreak the regiment had successfully moved through the village of Nagytelek which was under Romanian occupation. Unfortunately, as we followed the regiment the Romanians appeared and captured us. We were disarmed and locked up for the night. Before giving up our weapons I was able to hide my "nightstick" by tying it to my leg. This club was

made of a two-foot twisted steel cable with a lead ball on one end. The whole thing was covered with leather. The next morning the Romanians commandeered a horse-drawn wagon from the village and forced us at gunpoint to get in. They wanted to take us to their headquarters, located in a small town nearby. Two Romanian soldiers were assigned to guard us during the trip; one sat next to the Hungarian driver with his back to us, the other in the wagon facing us. We anticipated this sort of an arrangement and decided during the night to make our move as soon as were out of the village. Using my lead club I was supposed to knock out the solider in front while Thúry and Werner were to take care of the other fellow. It happened exactly as planned. At a pre-arranged signal we killed the two guards and buried them hastily in a sandy corn field along the dirt road. We then got back into the wagon and ordered the driver to take us back to Szeged, but to make sure to avoid any primary roads.

As soon as we arrived in Szeged we reported the whole incident to Admiral Horthy. He congratulated us and assigned us temporarily to the Ostenburg regiment which was to depart that night. After we had crossed the Danube we learned that our own regiment, the one under Prónay, had been ordered to stop at the village of Bárdibükk, near Kaposvár, and stay there until it could absorb a number of new recruits and volunteers. Since our permanent assignment was to the Prónay regiment we left Ostenburg and went to Bárdibükk. It took Prónay almost two months to beef up his regiment but in November we finally took off for Budapest.

When the regiment arrived there we set up temporary headquarters in the Gellért Hotel for Admiral Horthy and his staff. The admiral arrived several days later and the city received him with banners and jubilation. Our regiment lined up on both sides of the street leading to the hotel. I was posted at the main entrance, together with two of the most decorated first lieutenants: Arpád Taby and Lászlo Kúthy. I held a beautiful embroidered flag depicting the Hungarian Holy Crown on the head of the Virgin Mary. The flag was an outstanding work of art; the women of Szeged had worked on it for a long time. Across from us, behind the row of soldiers, stood many dignitaries with their families waiting for Horthy's arrival. Now and then a woman or girl broke through the soldiers' barricades, running across the street to kiss the flag I was holding. When a particularly pretty girl came to kiss the flag I could not resist saying to Lt. Kúthy: "Everybody kisses the flag but nobody cares about the poor, freezing ensign holding it!" The girl overheard my remark, threw her arms around my neck and gave me a big kiss. I never saw her again but the memory has stayed with me. A few minutes later Horthy arrived amid the cheers of thousands lining the streets. Our regiment was then released and we marched to our headquarters near the royal castle.

The following day Capt. Prónay ordered Lt. Szeghö and me to report to the district commandant at Szombathely. Our task was to go over to Austria from time to time, find the Hungarian communists hiding there, and try to get them back into Hungary to stand trial for the atrocities they had committed. We were also told that, if possible, we should try to obtain a few machine guns and bring them back with us. Since the district commandant, a colonel named Kohler, had served in the same capacity under the communist regime, his loyalty was somewhat in question. Prónay asked us to watch Kohler and report our observations back to him daily on a secure telephone line.

After the collapse of the communist regime Bėla Kun and several of his top cronies escaped into Austria. Since the Austrian government itself was heavily infiltrated by communists it was willing to give asylum to these Hungarian comrades. At first the Kun group was quartered in the buildings of an old mill close to the Hungarian border. Later they were moved to the castle of Karlstein since the Austrian government was afraid some Hungarians or right wing Austrians might abduct them from the exposed mill. The security at Karlstein was reinforced by a number of Austrian communists, so-called "worker guards." We learned this through some Austrian ex-officers who had been recruited by Prónay for the purpose of watching the communist exiles. Unfortunately, some gypsies who lived around the castle became suspicious of the strangers (the ex-officers) and reported them to the castle's commandant. Shortly thereafter Kun and his associated were moved again, this time to Stockerau where they were housed in one of the local hospital buildings. The Kun group occupied several rooms on the first floor. The commander lived in a smaller room, also on the first floor, while about a dozen guards stayed on the ground floor in what used to be a waiting room. In the upstairs corridor was an armed guard, on duty at all times.

The four young Austrian officers had observed all this and given detailed situation reports to Prónay. He decided to abduct the Kun group and bring them back to Hungary for trial. The attempt failed, even though we had a carefully prepared plan and an excellent group of people to implement it.

The group Prónay set up under Lt. Szentmiklósy's command included seven Hungarian and three Austrian officers. I was in the Hungarian contingent and left Szombathely with two other officers driving a 10-seater Puch automobile. We drove over the border and went directly to Stockerau where we met the rest of our group. Together we approached the hospital under the cover of darkness.

According to our plan one of our members, Lt. Fáber, was supposed to be the lookout on the street in front of the hospital. If any suspicious person or policeman approached he was supposed to get rid of him by whatever means. Another officer, Lt. Kolber, was to take six men and disarm the guards downstairs while I was to disarm the guard in the upstairs corridor. Lt. Lipthay was to get rid of the guard commander in his upstairs office. We were then to arrest Kun and his companions, take them to the car and drive them across the border into Hungary. After the operation was over the rest of our group was to make their way to Hungary individually or, in case of the Austrian officers, stay in Austria.

I was already halfway up the staircase when all hell broke loose. As we learned later, our lookout Lt. Fáber had made a stupid error which totally compromised the operation. His orders were clear: if a policeman approached he was supposed to disarm and tie him up. As we began the operation a policeman did appear on the scene and became suspicious after seeing some of our people around the building. At that point Fáber walked up to him and after a short conversation explained our mission to him. In addition, in order to strengthen his sympathy for our cause he gave the man a 1,000 krone banknote. The policeman pocketed the money, went home and immediately alerted the hospital by phone. One of the downstairs guars was on the phone with the policeman just as Lt. Kolber and several others entered the room with pistols drawn. The guards aimed their rifles at the surprised and

outnumbered intruders. Although no shots were fired in the ensuing confusion, the element of surprise we had counted on was no longer a factor. Kolber and his Austrians ran out of the building and jumped into the waiting car. Lt. Lipthay and I were stuck in the staircase and could not go up or down without attracting attention. Fortunately there was a window a few feet away. I opened it, we jumped to the ground and run toward the car, the driver of which was already gunning the engine. We hopped in and took off at full speed driving toward the southern border. We stopped only once to cut the telephone wires. Following a dirt road we were able to cross the border near Gyanafalva by early morning. The four Austrian officers who had an apartment in Vienna stayed behind. They were soon captured by the Austrian police and later Prónay had to pay a substantial ransom to get them released. Although we were quite disgusted with Fáber's performance we realized that if our report included what he had done he would be court-martialed. Because, in our view, he acted more out of stupidity than malice we decided to change our report to protect him.

While I was in Austria my poor sister, Mici, died of the Spanish flu, an epidemic that was sweeping through Europe and other continents at that time. She came down with the symptoms on March 1, 1920 and died within a few days at age 27, leaving behind two little girls. Gitta the younger emigrated to Brazil after WW II while Mária still lives with her four children and several grandchildren in Slovakia.

In the fall of 1920 I was placed in the military reserve and began attending the Academy of Agriculture at Keszthely. Even though I was in the reserve I was expected to be available for active duty anytime, anywhere. One of my paramilitary tasks while attending college was to observe any signs of clandestine communist activities and send reports to Captain Prónay.

The West-Hungarian Uprising

A year later, in August 1921, I spent the summer vacation at home in Körmend. One day I was called to the local police station and given a telegram from Prónay ordering me to report immediately to the police headquarters in Szentgotthárd, a city of about 20 miles southwest of Körmend. I took the next train to Szentgotthárd. Upon reaching the police headquarters I was surprised to see a group of senior Prónay officers in civilian clothing waiting for me. One of the officers, Iván Hėjjas, took me aside explaining that our task was to raid a nearby farm that night and "steal" the weapons and ammunition stored there. (Since the peace treaty after WW I allowed Hungary to keep only a small active military force the excess weapons and ammunition were being kept hidden at various farms owned by honest and trustworthy Hungarians). After obtaining the weapons, Hėjjas said, we would proceed immediately to Gyanafalva, a village occupied by the Austrian military, take it and capture the Austrians. We did exactly that. This action signaled the beginning of the so called "West-Hungarian Uprising." Before our departure Hėjjas insisted that all of us be in civilian clothing so that the uprising would appear to be a civilian undertaking. We found out that the remainder of Prónay's regiment, several hundred men also dressed as civilians, was on its way from Sopron to join us.

There are a number of erroneous theories about the causes and nature of the West-Hungarian Uprising. Since I am one of those very few still alive who personally participated in this historic event I can briefly set the record straight. The draft peace treaty of Trianon after WW I took away almost two-thirds of Hungary's territory. The westernmost part of the country, called Burgenland today, including the large city of Sopron was awarded to Austria. The handing over of this territory was to occur in three phases, by zones A, B and C. The Hungarian authorities, police and border guards first had to evacuate zones A and B which then were to be occupied by the Austrian military. Zone C was the last area to be turned over to Austria in a similar manner. The Hungarian government appointed Count Antal Sigray, whose estate my parents leased earlier, to oversee the evacuation effort. The maintenance of public order was assigned to Capt. Ostenburg who was stationed in Sopron at the time and commanded a unit of military police reservists. Another unit of reserve police in the area was under the command of Capt. Prónay and I was a member of that unit. These units actually consisted of regular military personnel but were designated as "police" because the peace treaty allowed a military force of only 30,000 for the whole country.

Seeing the disastrous effects of the peace treaty, Prónay decided that we would not hand over western Hungary to the Austrians. He developed a plan whereby western Hungary would secede from Hungary proper "on paper" and would declare itself an independent state called "Lajtabánság." Thus, as soon as zones A and B were evacuated Prónay moved his regiment into these areas, chased out the occupying Austrians and had the civil authorities of each village vote for an independent Lajtabánság. Elections to choose a head for the new "state" were postponed. For the time being we designated Prónay by acclamation as the supreme leader of Lajtabánság.

The uprising and declaration of independence confused the three major western signatories (England, France and Italy) of the peace treaty. As a result of a subsequent Italian initiative peace negotiations were held in Venice between Austria and Hungary. During these negotiations it was decided to hold a plebiscite in Sopron and its environs on the question whether they wanted to join Austria or remain part of Hungary. In return the Hungarian government asked Prónay to evacuate western Hungary (Lajtabánság). This request and the attempted return of King Charles to Hungary ended the uprising a short time later. I played a small part in that as well. So much for the background of the West-Hungarian Uprising.

At the beginning of the uprising I became the commander of strip of Burgenland, between Gyanafalva and the Yugoslavian border. Hėjjas assigned about thirty seasoned veterans to my unit. Later we almost doubled our size through a fortunate incident. Among the Yugoslavian border guards were a number of Bosnians, a group of excellent and fearless fighters. One night about 25 of them apparently got drunk and murdered some Serbian officers and noncoms. Then they fled across the border with all their weapons and volunteered to serve under my command. I was quite happy to have them. Soon we were regularly conducting armed incursions into Austria. On one such occasion we captured an Austrian military unit after forcing its retreat from the village of Velike. On another occasion we pushed the Austrians out of Hohenbrugg. I received a commendation for the success of these engagements. During the fight at Velike I was wounded on

my hand but ignored the pain and continued to lead my men until our mission was accomplished.

The West Hungarian Uprising and the Lajtabánság secession ended quite abruptly after the unexpected second appearance of King Charles IV in Hungary. The king who was also the emperor of Austria had been forced to abdicate at the end of WW I and had spent the subsequent three years in exile in Switzerland. Although he realized that he could never again become the emperor of Austria which became a republic after the war, he believed that he had a chance to reclaim the Hungarian throne. His belief was based upon the fact that Hungary remained nominally a kingdom with Horthy as its regent. Charles made two attempts to return to Hungary, first in March and again in October of 1921. Although Horthy was a loyalist he did not believe that the time was ripe for reinstatement of the last Habsburg king and therefore forced Charles to leave the country on both occasions. The western allies backed Horthy in this endeavor. Hungary itself, however, was divided on the issue of reinstating its last monarch. There were many loyalists particularly among the military who wanted to see Charles on the Hungarian throne. The majority though backed Horthy who had sufficient force at his disposal to block Charles' attempted coup d'ètat.

The second time King Charles arrived from Switzerland he flew to Sopron by a private plane. Upon his arrival the Ostenburg regiment swore allegiance to him. The commandant of Szombathely did the same and when Charles arrived to the city of Györ its commandant followed suite as well. These events happened quite quickly, actually within a few hours, and with very little publicity. We at Gyanafalva had no opportunity to learn about it while this was in progress. Incidentally, though Prónay was also a loyalist he did not favor the return of Charles at that time primarily because he feared that the resulting encounter might endanger his uprising. It turned out that he was right.

One day in Gyanafalva I received a telegram from Prónay ordering me to expropriate a railroad car on the next train and proceed immediately with my Bosnian troops and four machine guns to Györ. I obeyed the order though at the time I had no idea of the reasons behind it. Only when I found out about Charles' return did I suspect that the purpose of our trip to Györ may have been an effort to help Horthy to block Charles' return. In any event we never arrived to Györ. When our train reached Szombathely it suddenly stopped. A 1st Lieutenant named Molnár who was Prónay's adjutant stepped into our car. I was somewhat surprised to see him thinking he should be with Prónay at his headquarters in Pinkafö. Molnár demanded to know what my armed troops were doing on the train. Although it puzzled me that his adjutant was unaware of Prónay's own instructions, I said nothing and showed him Prónay's telegram. Molnár read it then without a word took me to the local military headquarters. There in a large room stood Prónay surrounded by a couple of dozen of his officers. He greeted me as we entered and said that the uprising was over. He then told the assembled officers that he had received a letter from the Regent himself and from Count Sigray. They informed him about the start of negotiations in Venice between Austria and Hungary under the auspices of England, France and Italy. As I indicated earlier these negotiations resulted in a plebiscite for Sopron and its environs. Prónay thus realized that he would not be able to continue the uprising

in opposition of Horthy and the three western powers who wanted him to evacuate the "Lajtabánság" in return for the guaranteed plebiscite. He told us, therefore, that he had decided to end the uprising and move the regiment back to its permanent headquarters in Budapest. I was formally discharged and the Bosnian troops were ordered to report to the local military barracks. In 1922 Prónay received an extraordinary promotion to lieutenant colonel as a reward for his outstanding service to Hungary. He continued to serve on active duty until his retirement in 1931 and died in 1945 during the Soviet siege of Budapest.

In retrospect this was a most interesting and exciting period in my life. Although Prónay ultimately did not succeed in keeping Burgenland as part of Hungary, he was at least indirectly responsible for the Sopron plebiscite which returned that part of the country to Hungary.

Academy Life in Keszthely

After my discharge I went home to Körmend to get some medical attention to my hand wound and eventually returned to Keszthely to continue my studies. The next two years were quite enjoyable and eventful, partly because I met my future wife, Magda Horváth, during this period. It was a chance meeting at a party given by her aunt during a hot summer evening in 1922. Several of us from the Academy had been invited, mostly to provide dance partners for the local "belles." Magda was a pretty 18-year old at the time and from that evening on we increasingly enjoyed each other's company. In other ways this was a sad period in her life; her father was already gravely ill with liver cancer which killed him a few months later.

In the late 1890s Magda's father, István (Stephen), had worked on a large estate of about 30,000 acres which belonged to Count Ferenc Erdödy. By the time Magda was born on August 8, 1904 her father had become the manager and lived with his family at Jánosháza in Vas County, the administrative center of the count's estate. In 1909 the family moved to Sári Puszta in Bács Bodrog County, where her father became the manager of Baron Richard Hammerstein's estate. The baron was an elderly bachelor who soon began to regard the Horváth family as his own and was particularly fond of Magda and her two brothers. The Horváths remained on the estate until 1921. During this period Magda completed her studies at the Notre Dame de Sion, a Catholic girls' preparatory school in Budapest.

After the end of WW I the Trianon peace treaty awarded a large part of southern Hungary, including the Hammerstein estate, to the newly formed state of Yugoslavia. The situation there soon became untenable for the Horváth family therefore in 1921 they decided to repatriate to Keszthely, the home town of Magda's mother. István, her father, was already ill by the time of repatriation because a few months earlier he was accidentally knocked over and his liver gored by a young bull. The injured liver soon became cancerous and it was during this tragic period in the family's life that I met Magda. In spite of her family's initial opposition we became engaged in 1923 and decided to get married as soon as I had a job and was able to support a family.

Our class at the Academy was a boisterous group of practical jokers and my going out with Magda did not exert much influence on my participation in their activities. The good citizens of Keszthely breathed a sigh of relief when we graduated. Some of our escapades became part of the local folklore. For example, there was the time when during the night before market day we went around the town and padlocked most of the storefronts. The next morning we were available, for a hefty fee, to cut off these locks so that the merchants could open their stores. Another long-remembered prank concerned an old lady who sold newspapers and cigarettes from a small wooden shack on the street in front of the academy administration building. On certain nights when she wanted to open early in the morning the old lady would stay in the shack and sleep there overnight. During one of these nights a group of us lifted up her shack and carefully carried it, with her sleeping inside, down to the Balaton lake shore about a third of a mile from the college. Once there we took the shack to the end of the pier and put it down facing the lake. We then hid behind the bushes on the shore and waited until she opened the shutters in the morning. She let out an enormous scream when she looked out and instead of the academy building she saw only a big expanse of water.

At the edge of town, on the road to Gyenesdiás, there was an ancient stone statue of Saint Florian surrounded by a small garden of flowers and bushes. Nearby was an inn whose patrons stopped habitually at the St. Florian garden to relieve themselves after having consumed plenty of beer and wine. Eventually the whole area around the statue reeked of urine. One night we decided to do something about it. With much effort we loosened the statue from its pedestal and turned it around so that it was facing away from Keszthely. We then painted a sign and hung it around the saint's neck. The sign read "Shit on you, I am going to Gyenesdiás because you always piss on me." It took several days until the town maintenance crew managed to turn the statue around and take the sign off its neck. In the meantime the story was written up in the local newspapers, tongue-in-cheek. However, from then on the situation around the statue definitely improved. Such was the life of college students at Keszthely in the early 1920s.

Chapter 3. Peace, War and Farewell to Hungary (1923-1944)

Leslie's Career and Hungary's Entry into World War II

I received my diploma in 1923 and was appointed as an intern without pay to a large state farm at Mezöhegyes. My older brother Vilmos was already employed with pay at this farm. After three years at Mezöhegyes I got a teaching position at Aszód, just east of Budapest, at a youth correctional institution. This school operated a farm for the purpose of teaching the inmates in all facets of agriculture. My income was still rather meager so I attempted to supplement it. I was able to find several part time jobs at various enterprises in the area either as a lecturer on agriculture or occasionally as a consultant to farmers. I also had a quite successful bee-keeping operation for several years with about 100 hives. Having an established position and feeling more secure financially, though not affluent by any means, enabled me finally to get married. The wedding took place in Keszthely on October 30, 1926. Magda's family on her mother's side was a well-established rich family, thus our large wedding was the outstanding social affair of that year. We settled down in Aszód where I worked for 12 years. During this time, in 1928, Magda had a late-term miscarriage so we were thrilled when in 1931 our only child Tamás (Thomas) was born.

During the late 1930s Hungary was gradually drawn into an informal alliance with a resurgent Germany. The uneasy alliance was fueled mainly by the resentment most Hungarians felt toward the victorious WW I allies. These countries had dictated a peace treaty in 1920 which dismembered Hungary by stripping away 71% of its territory and 63% of its population. As Germany began to rearm it used increasing pressure and implied threat to regain territories lost after WW I. Beginning in 1938 Germany also helped Hungary to recover some of its own lost territories. As a result Hungary was obliged to become an ally of the Hitler regime and an important source for Germany's agricultural needs.

Shortly before the first lost region was returned to Hungary in January 1938, I was transferred to Miskolc, a large city in northeast Hungary, and promoted to the position of agricultural inspector with the Ministry of Agriculture. This position, however, lasted for only two years. By 1940 new government agencies had been set up in the regained areas and the expanded civil service was badly in need of skilled technical and administrative people. Thus in January 1940 I was promoted again, this time to agricultural chief inspector and offered a position in Komárom, a city about halfway between Budapest and the Austrian border. The new position was quite lucrative. I became the director of all animal breeders' associations in western Hungary. My job was to coordinate activities of these independent associations and make sure that all farmers and estates adhered to the state guidelines for owning and breeding the best livestock bloodlines. Although the work was difficult and challenging it enabled me to become a recognized expert in the field and offered considerable visibility.

Experiences with the Germans During WW II

Soon after we moved to Komárom and I assumed the new position, the German Minister of Agriculture, Walter Darre, came to Hungary for an official visit. Because of my position I was assigned to be his technical escort. We hit it off quite well, so much so that on his request I was sent to Germany in October 1940 to study their agricultural innovations, particularly the newly organized agricultural cooperatives. The first three weeks of my tour was spent in Berlin at the Ministry of Agriculture. Then for the next seven weeks I worked with the agricultural organizations of various German states.

Earlier in 1940 an agricultural treaty had been signed between Hungary and Germany. This pact initiated a series of technical exchanges between the two countries. The first major Hungarian delegation led by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture came to Germany in October, a few days after my own arrival. Our paths, however, did not cross until late November while I was doing some research at the Württemberg state Ministry of Agriculture in Stuttgart. The Hungarian delegation arrived in Stuttgart and the Gauleiter (state leader of the Nazi central government) of Württemberg went to greet them. Since he knew that I was working in his ministry he decided to take me with him. Naturally, I knew everybody in the delegation and when the Deputy Minister asked if I would like to join them for the rest of their tour I gladly accepted. The group spent two days in Württemberg. We then went back to Berlin where after an all-day conference a banquet was held in our honor at the Hotel Adler. Quite unexpectedly, at the end of the dinner Adolph Hitler walked into the banquet room with his entourage and each member of our delegation was introduced to him. I was last to be introduced because I was not an official member of the delegation. Much to my surprise Hitler knew about the purpose of my visit to Germany and asked what I thought about the new farmers' cooperatives. Naturally I gave them high praise. This was the one and only occasion that I met Hitler and shook hands with him.

For each of the next three years I visited Germany in official capacity. My purpose was to study German farming methods and to buy thoroughbred breeding stock, mostly bulls, for Hungary. We paid for these purchases with German marks that were on deposit in Hungarian accounts. These were funds that Germany had paid for purchases in Hungary but because marks were not convertible to Hungarian currency we could only spend them in Germany.

During the summer of 1943 the Bavarian Minister of Agriculture, accompanied by four high officials, came to Hungary for an official visit. They went first to Budapest and later began a tour of the country. Because I knew them from an earlier visit I was assigned to be their escort. After touring Debrecen and Hortobágy we arrived to the Mezöhegyes state farm where I started my career some 20 years earlier. The next stop was Transylvania where, at Kalotaszeg, we went to see a unique herd of light gray water buffaloes on the estate of Baron Bánffy. The Germans had never seen water buffalo before, not even black ones, so this promised to be a very interesting event for them.

We arrived to the estate on a very hot day. After lunch we went out to the pasture where, according to the manager, the buffaloes were supposed to be. However, we

couldn't see a single animal because they were lying in a shallow lake at the far end of the pasture with only their noses sticking out of the water. An old cowhand was sitting at the edge of the lake. He told us that until sunset nothing would get these animals out of the cool water. The situation became quite embarrassing for me. After all I had brought these dignitaries from Budapest all the way to Transylvania just to see some unique water buffaloes and now all they could see were their noses. I explained the situation to the old cowhand and nervously persuaded him to try to bring at least one animal out of the water. He agreed reluctantly, rolled up his pants and waded through some reeds into deeper water. Then he bent down for a minute then turned around and came out, without a buffalo. When we asked him why he did not chase one of them out he simply smiled and told us to be patient. To our amazement a few minutes later one of the buffaloes lifted his head out of the water, stood up and came out onto the shore. When I asked the old man how he was able to prompt the huge animal he said that it was quite simple. He had cut a piece of reed and stuck it underwater into the buffalo's anus. As the water started to seep in through the reed the animal got scared and came out. When I translated the story to the Germans they loved it and showered the cowhand with plenty of money and cigarettes.

We went to several other farms and estates such as the thoroughbred stud farm at Kisbér and a large estate at Bábolna. I took pictures everywhere we went and prepared an album for each member of the delegation. We gave them these albums the last morning of their visit, during breakfast at our house in Komárom. Before they boarded the train for Germany I also gave each of them a food package full of Hungarian delicacies. The Minister was quite impressed with my hospitality. He knew that I was going to Germany in the autumn and asked what he could do for me. I said half-jokingly that I would like to see Hitler's farm and country home in Berchtesgaden. The Minister's reply was not encouraging. He said that it is not open to the public, especially to foreign visitors. We shook hands and they departed.

I went home, tried to catch up with the accumulated office work and forgot about my request. It was soon time for the October trip to Germany. When I arrived to Munich and reported to the Ministry of Agriculture the Minister greeted me personally and handed me a written invitation from Hitler's office to visit his Berchtesgaden estate. The next day a senior official from the Ministry and I took a train to Berchtesgaden. An SS officer was waiting at the station to take us by car to Hitler's estate some 4,000 feet high in the mountains. He took us first to the main building reception room with a huge picture window overlooking the entire valley below. In the room there were about a dozen arm chairs occupied by messengers who, as I was told, were waiting for sensitive communications that had to be carried to various parts of the Reich. The officer then showed us Hitler's office, a rather simple room with several bookcases full of books and periodicals, a few chairs and a sink in the corner. In the center there was a huge desk and a wall safe behind it. From the office we entered Hitler's bedroom, a Spartan place with a simple hospital bed, wash basin and shelves along the walls loaded with books. I was not allowed to see the rest of the building.

On the way out the SS officer returned my camera which he had taken from me as we got out of the car. We then went over to the farm manager's house for lunch.

Later the manager took us to see Hitler's prize winning herd of Pinzgau cattle. The manager was very proud of his animals so much so that that I felt obliged to buy a couple of young bulls from him. These animals eventually ended up as breeding stock in Transylvania.

Adjacent to the manager's house was a lush meadow sloping toward a mountain stream and a round stone gazebo. I was told that Hitler liked to work at night often until 4 or 5 in the morning, then sleep until 10 a.m. After his usual 3 p.m. lunch he often walked down to the gazebo for an afternoon tea. According to the manager Hitler's favorite drink was fresh carbonated apple cider which was prepared and bottled for him right on the estate.

After touring the estate we were taken up to the famous Adler's (Eagle's) Nest, Hitler's private residence which was on the top of the mountain about 1,500 feet above the estate and office complex. Direct access from Hitler's office building to the residence was by an elevator the shaft of which was cut out of solid rock. The view from the Adler's Nest over the mountains surrounding Berchtesgaden was absolutely spectacular. Near the residence which I was allowed to see only from the outside stood a small hotel normally used by visiting dignitaries. I was told that it was full of wounded soldiers who, because of their bravery, were allowed to recuperate there. In fact we met several of them as we walked around the observation area.

Since this visit was such a unique experience I was asked to write an article about it after my return to Hungary. I wrote the story in German first and sent it to our Ministry of Agriculture which in turn sent it over to the German embassy for pre-publication clearance. I also wrote a Hungarian version of the article and sent it to the Ministry for publication. As it turned out, someone in the Ministry decided to edit the manuscript and added a closing sentence which I remember verbatim to this day: "Hitler lives like he has stated in one of his Nürnberg speeches: 'I no longer have a private life, I only live for Germany and for the freedom of Europe.' "Long after its publication this newspaper article led to a rather undesirable consequence for me. After the war the communist regime in Hungary decided that I was a "war criminal." This charge was based in part on my activities immediately after WW I but also on this newspaper article and specifically on the last sentence inserted by the nameless Ministry bureaucrat. The communist court document stated that I was "Hitler's friend" and that I "glorified him and the national socialist regime in newspaper articles." Although the "war criminal" charge was harmless to me because I no longer resided in Hungary, it is one of the reasons why I never went back there after WW II.

The Soviet Invasion of Hungary

By 1941 Hungary was starting to pay a steep price for Germany's help in regaining some of its lost territories. In addition to supplying products needed by his country and its war machine Hitler insisted that Hungary help militarily with the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Germans were hard pressed to hold the ever-widening front there and needed the Hungarian military to back them up, mostly in the Ukraine. As a result Hungary had to send the ill-equipped 2nd Army and other units to the Ukrainian front. As the Soviets gained the upper hand in 1942

and 1943 they inflicted enormous losses on both the German and Hungarian military. By some accounts almost half of the Hungarian forces in the Ukraine were annihilated. The remaining units were forced to retreat under constant pursuit toward the Hungarian border.

By the spring of 1944 the advancing Soviet forces had broken through the Hungarian-German defenses in Transylvania and reached Hungary. I was eager to fight for my country even though my age and position in the government exempted me from military duty. After much pleading a good friend of ours, Colonel General Bajnóczy, the Army's deputy chief of staff, finally allowed me to volunteer for active duty. I was assigned to remaining units of the 2nd Hungarian Army as a liaison officer between them and the Germans. On my way to report to headquarters I had to change trains in Debrecen, a large city in eastern Hungary. Since I had to wait several hours for the next train I went to the city commandant's office to get the latest news from the front. After a short conversation I told them I was a liaison officer on my way to the 2nd Army. As it turned out I never returned to the railway station. The German 23rd Tank Division had just pulled into the area and there was an immediate need for liaison officers. The city commandant contacted 2nd Army headquarters by telephone and obtained my release. I was reassigned to the division and had to report to a German colonel who in turn sent me to his supply officer, a reserve captain named Kurt von Wakabart. In civilian life Capt. Wakabart was the owner of a large estate in Prussia. We soon became good friends especially since both of us were in the agriculture business. Our job was to obtain food and other supplies that were allocated by the Hungarian government for the German division. The supplies had to be picked up at various places such as farms, cooperatives or supply depots. We had 15 light trucks and an amphibious staff car at our disposal.

As the front line neared Debrecen it became apparent that both sides were preparing for a massive tank battle. German and Hungarian reinforcements arrived almost daily, among them the 23rd Tank Division. The ensuing battle was one of the largest on the eastern front during the entire war. The flat terrain around Debrecen was ideal for tank combat and at the height of the battle literally hundreds of tanks were engaged. There was no stable front line, the battle raged for several weeks with tanks advancing and retreating as much as 20-30 miles a day. Supplying our division was a difficult and dangerous task in the midst of such a constantly changing battle. The scenario would often change completely between the time an order was given and the time we could execute it. Sometimes we received orders to go to a certain town to pick up supplies only to find the place overrun by the Russians. Even though I attempted to check out each situation before leaving we were on several occasions the victims of circumstances. On one such occasion we were almost killed as we tried to obey orders to go to the village of Kaba, about 30 miles away, and pick up several tons of flour from the local mill. According to our latest intelligence Kaba was outside the immediate front line and still under Hungarian control. Just to be sure I called up the Kaba post office, told the operator that we had to go there to pick up the flour and asked where the mill was located. The operator responded in total panic, saying that we should not come to Kaba because Russian tanks were already in the village. My German colleague immediately reported the news to his colonel. The colonel, however, did not believe the report and ordered us to go ahead anyway. Our convoy consisted of

the 15 trucks, well stretched out so as to offer few concentrated targets. Capt. Wakabart and I usually drove in the staff car at the head of the convoy but this time we had several trucks ahead of us. This fact may have saved our lives. Not knowing what to expect we got off the main road as we approached Kaba and followed a winding dirt road toward the village. We were driving quite slowly when suddenly we encountered a single Russian tank which began firing at us. Our trucks were no match for the tank so they scattered off the road but not before the tank destroyed three of them. We escaped with two dead and three severely wounded soldiers. Actually it was fortunate that the Russian tank was also retreating, apparently to join its unit, otherwise we would have sustained even more casualties. The colonel was quite upset about our losses and never doubted me again.

By the end of September the Debrecen tank battle was almost over. The Russians were steadily bringing in reinforcements while our forces were unable to replace their enormous losses. At the battle's end the 23rd Tank Division had only about a dozen operational tanks left with a few servicing and supply vehicles. Faced with the overwhelming odds the Germans began to withdraw. As part of the withdrawal Capt. Wakabart and I were ordered to go with our supply vehicles to the village of Tállya in the Tokaj region where the Germans had a sizable stock of heavy ammunition stored in large wine cellars. This ammunition depot was located west of the Tisza River where the Germans hoped to stop the advancing Russians. We were ordered to pick up hand-held anti tank rockets, bazookas, as well as armor-piercing shells for our remaining tanks. We were to meet the division at Ujfehértó, some 40 miles northwest of Debrecen in two days.

We arrived to the depot by noon of the first day without any difficulty and loaded our trucks with the ammunition. Because we had more than a day until our rendezvous at Ujfehértó I decided to take the unit to the nearby town of Sárospatak to visit a good friend of mine, hoping for the first decent meal and rest in weeks. We found my friend's house and he was able to accommodate all of us. We left Sárospatak the next evening, crossed the Tisza on one of the few remaining bridges and arrived to Ujfehértó about 11:00 p.m. Some distance away we could already hear explosions. When we arrived at the railway station we found a German demolition team destroying rails and engine service buildings before the advancing Russians. The town was abandoned and the Germans had no idea where our tank division was. The nearest large town was Nyiregyháza, about 30 miles north of Ujfehértó, so we decided to go there hoping to get some information about the division's whereabouts.

By dawn we arrived to Nyiregyháza and found the whole town evacuated. Freshly dug foxholes and hastily erected barricades were everywhere but no military was in evidence. At the station we found a lone clerk who told us the Russians were just outside the town about two miles away in a patch of forest. From their positions they were firing sporadically into the town and the station. As a matter of fact while we were talking a shell landed nearby so we decided to get out of there posthaste. If any of out trucks, loaded with high explosives, had been hit we would have been in real trouble. We drove back to Debrecen which by then was also evacuated. Finally we decided to drive back to Tállya and return the ammunition because we had no idea where to deliver it. After the unloading I bid farewell to my

friend Capt. Wakabart and left for Miskolc, the second largest city in Hungary, hoping to get some information about the 2nd Army and report to its headquarters according to my original orders.

In Miskolc I was told that while I was with the German 23rd Tank Division the Hungarian 2nd Army had retreated from Transylvania and its remnants were integrated with the 1st Army, headquartered in Mágocs, Baranya County, in the southwestern part of Hungary. The disintegration of the 2nd Army did not really surprise me; it had been retreating under constant Russian attack all the way from the Ukraine. By the time it had reached Transylvania it was thoroughly beaten with only remnants of its original strength. I again picked up my backpack and headed for Mágocs.

The 1st Army was headed by Colonel General Eugene Major whom I happened to know from Aszód. He was a lieutenant colonel in those days and member of our hunting club during the early 1930s. When I arrived and reported to him he was quite surprised to see me. He has had an active military career during the past decade or so having risen to the highest military rank of the country whereas I, as a civilian, remained probably the oldest lieutenant in the reserve since the end of WW I. Nevertheless he happily embraced me and ordered his staff to give me a new assignment to translate the army's daily situation reports into German and deliver them to the German liaison group.

By early November 1944 most of the Hungarian military units were either fighting scattered rear guard actions in the remaining one third of the country still under Hungarian control or joined the German military trying to slow the relentless Russian advance. A few weeks earlier the Germans forced Horthy to abdicate and replaced his government. This new Hungarian government was preparing plans for moving itself and the remaining military forces into Germany as the Russian advance continued. There were still some hopes of reorganizing these military units into a viable fighting force. The task was assigned to Gen. Major who was appointed commander of the Hungarian military in Germany. He staffed his new command from members of the defunct 2nd Army and prepared to move the organization to Germany by late December. Because the general knew that I had been to Germany on several occasions he asked me what we should take with us. "Liquor, tobacco and smoked meat," was my answer. He agreed and gave orders for the purchase. A large amount of hard liquor was purchased from the Gschwindt distillery and we also bought cigarettes and tobacco from a cigarette factory in Pécs. Since my liaison function was no longer necessary I spent most of my time to prepare the necessary meat for shipment. We bought 150 hogs and slaughtered them using all available butchers and meat cutters from neighboring villages. The resulting bacon and sausages were given to local farmers for curing and smoking. Unfortunately this process could not be finished. The advancing Russian forces had broken through the German-Hungarian defenses, had occupied Pécs, and were slowly advancing toward Mágocs. As a result we had to pack the half-smoked meats into crates and move them with other supplies and the whole headquarters to Siófok, on the east coast of Lake Balaton. We stayed there only for a few days before moving to the western side of the lake, to Badacsonytomaj. It was from here that Gen. Major, accompanied by Lt. Col. Békeffy, left for Berlin to negotiate with the German high command for the establishment of his headquarters there and to

find accommodations for his staff. In his absence command was assumed by Brig. Gen. Eugene Ujlaky. The momentary lull in fighting did not last long. The Russians soon reached the Balaton and began firing across the lake. Our headquarters had to move again, this time to the village of Bogyoszló in Sopron County about 50 miles from the Austrian border.

In early December we were given orders to pick up all the staff dependents around the country who intended to go to Germany with their military spouses. My wife and son were still in Komárom and I rarely had a chance to let them know my whereabouts so I decided to take this opportunity. Since our gas supply was quite limited I had to resort to some fancy trading to secure sufficient fuel for a truck to go to Komárom and have them picked up. I met a lady in Bogyoszló whose husband was serving in Györ, some 35 miles west of Komárom. The couple owned a small vineyard at the Balaton and she said she would give us a couple of barrels of wine if we would take her to her husband in Györ. Coincidentally, the local innkeeper in Bogyoszló had about 50 gallons of gasoline but was running out of wine. I offered him an even trade: 50 gallons of wine for his gasoline. He accepted and the truck with a sergeant and the lady on board left for Györ. On the way they stopped in Komárom and gave a letter to my wife in which I urged her to pack all essentials and come with our son to Bogyoszló. The sergeant told them he would return the following day to pick them up and then continued the trip to Györ.

Early Childhood of Tom

At this point I (Thomas "Tamás") take over narration of our story from my father Leslie. However, before continuing the narrative of how we left Hungary and what happened afterward, I would like to interject briefly my own experiences up to this point. Incidentally, since the informal terms for "father" and "mother" in our family are "Apu" and "Anyu" henceforth I shall use these terms interchangeably.

I was born in Budapest on June 10, 1931. My early schooling followed my father's career: I attended the 1st grade at Aszód, the 2nd and 3rd grades at Miskolc and the 4th grade in Komárom. Because of our frequent moves it was difficult to establish and maintain lasting friendships with other kids of my age. As I started the 5th grade in 1941 I was enrolled in the newly established boarding school at the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma, a few miles south of Györ. Though the Benedictines had operated nine schools in Hungary, some of them for centuries, this one at Pannonhalma became their pride, their newest and most modern. It opened in 1939 among considerable political fanfare partly because the cost of building it was shared by the Italian government. Since the construction had lasted almost three years the new school was not ready for full occupancy until 1942.

The Italian involvement in establishing a school at Pannonhalma was the fruition of a 1938 Hungarian governmental initiative. By that time the cooperation that began in the 1920s between the two countries had become quite strong and the Hungarians felt that establishing an "Italian" school in Hungary would be a concrete demonstration of that friendship. The idea was eagerly endorsed by the Italian Count Ciano brothers, Galeazzo who was Mussolini's foreign minister and

son-in-law at the time and by Costanzo, his minister of education. They not only obtained funding from their government for this Hungarian project but also contributed a substantial amount of their own funds. As a sign of gratitude toward Italy and the Ciano brothers it was decided to name the new school the "Count Galeazzo and Costanzo Ciano Gymnasium of Pannonhalma" and have its curriculum emphasize the Italian language and culture.

The school provided education for boys from the 5th through 12th grades and accepted only about 30 new students for each incoming 5th grade. The first three starting 5th grades, including mine in 1941, were still housed in the huge 900-year old monastery, awaiting the completion of the adjacent new school. As I started the 6th grade in 1942 we moved over into the new complex.

I wasn't a particularly good student at Pannonhalma and the fact that I was often sick, missing many school days, did not help. In the 5th grade alone I missed a total of nearly ten weeks of instruction because of various ailments and it was very difficult to make up that much lost time. In the 7th grade I was doing so poorly academically that in January 1944 my parents decided to take me out of the school and arranged for private tutoring at home. After four months of intensive tutoring I went back to Pannonhalma and took the 7th grade final exams in April 1944. Incidentally, by the time I left Pannonhalma the school was no longer called "Count Galeazzo and Costanzo Ciano Gymnasium" but simply "Benedictine Catholic School" of Pannonhalma. During my four months of absence both Cianos and Mussolini himself had been executed thus the Italian connection was no longer politically correct and became history.

By the start of the new school year in September 1944 the war was going so badly that I stayed in Komárom and started the 8th grade in the Benedictine school there. The large, old school building had been converted into a temporary military hospital so classes were held wherever space was available. For the first couple of weeks our class met in a movie theater, by the end of October instruction stopped altogether.

Komárom, although a small town, was an important railroad center located on the main east-west military supply line. Practically all military trains going to the eastern front had to go through Komárom. In addition, Hungary's largest oil refinery was located just three miles outside of town, in Szöny on the Danube. Naturally our proximity to these highly strategic targets resulted in attacks by allied bombers with increasing frequency. Although the town itself was only lightly damaged, the two railroad stations, the refinery and surrounding areas suffered heavy damage. Initially our house had no air raid shelter. We dug one in our backyard, about six feet deep, with a huge mound of dirt on top. Although it was certainly a primitive structure we figured that short of a direct hit it would provide sufficient protection. As time went on it became almost like a second home for us, we sometimes spent hours crouching inside waiting for the "all clear" signal. Because our house was less than a mile from the main railway station several stray bombs impacted in our immediate area. I was only 13 years old when after one of these bombing runs I saw dead airmen the first time. Apparently one of the British bombers crash-landed nearby during the night. The next morning I went to see it.

Part of the fuselage was in one piece with three dead airmen still inside, a sight I shall never forget.

Farewell to Hungary

In November Anyu sent me to the large farm of a friend of ours to recuperate from the nerve-wrecking atmosphere in Komárom. Air attacks by then were almost daily occurrence; we often spent half the night in our wet and cold bunker. The farm was located about 50 miles from Komárom and it offered a welcome respite. I returned from there after about a month, only a few days before the arrival of the truck Apu sent for us. Since we had only a few hours to get ready Anyu and I packed all night. Our maid Borbála who had been with us ever since we hired her in Miskolc helped us pack. The first priority, of course, was food. We had slaughtered a hog just three days earlier, as we usually did every year about this time, and the resulting ham, sausages and lard were normally sufficient for most of the following year. Of course, this year we had no idea how soon if at all we would have to leave our home and, more importantly, how long we would stay away. As it turned out we had no time to cure and smoke the meat properly so we put it in several containers of melted lard which, once solidified, acted as preservative. We packed all kinds of other things such as flour, sugar, clothing and linen. We even took a 10-gallon container of vinegar with us; to this day I have no idea why.

At that time we still naively thought that the Germans would surely win the war and we would be able to come back to our home within a few weeks or months at the most. We gave Borbála some money and suggested that she go home to her village near Miskolc and await our return. We faced a dilemma, however, as to what to do with our dachshund Szundi who was like a member of the family. We considered taking him with us but reconsidered for fear that the Germans would not allow him into the country. Finally it was decided that Borbála would lock up the house and take the dog with her. Here was another naive assumption namely that locking the doors would be sufficient to assure the security of our house and its contents during our absence. As we learned later from friends and relatives the place was thoroughly ransacked shortly after Borbála left. First, some of our less reputable neighbors broke in and organized a big “yard sale” of everything they could cart away. They even sliced the leather off our sofas. Some weeks later a retreating German unit set up a command post in the house. Finally the Russians took possession of the empty shell.

As we finished packing we anxiously awaited the return of the sergeant and his truck. In retrospect, had we realized that we would never come back to our home we would have taken far more valuable things than linen and vinegar. For example, we left behind three small but valuable paintings hanging on the wall, one of which was attributed to the 16th century Italian master Correggio. These paintings were given to my parents as wedding presents by Baron Hammerstein from his personal collection. Any of these pictures surely could have been sold later for thousands of dollars but we felt certain they would remain safe until our return.

When the truck arrived in the morning we loaded our luggage and supplies, said a tearful good-bye to Borbála and Szundi and started the precarious journey toward

Bogyoszló. At that time some Russian units had already reached Szėkesfehėrvár, a city to our south. We drove mainly on secondary roads to avoid the battle zone but as we drove southwest the scene still became one of widespread devastation. Soldiers were moving around aimlessly in the midst of destroyed tanks, vehicles, dead horses and other signs of recent combat. We were glad to get out of this area and reach Devecser, beyond the western foothills of the Bakony Mountains, by late evening. Here we dropped off the lady from Bogyoszló at the house of her parents who were overjoyed to see her. They treated us to a nice dinner and helped load the agreed-upon casks of wine. After a short rest we set out again and arrived to Bogyoszló around midnight. After the reunion with Apu we were housed in a farmer's cottage for the next few days and had to share a dirt-floor room with the farmer's sick father. The only outhouse was about 50 feet from the cottage.

On December 23 our military group received orders to leave for Germany the day after Christmas from Csorna, a small town few miles to the north. At the Csorna station a train was assembled which included Pullman cars for the soldiers and their dependents, box cars for the luggage and supplies and flat cars for several vehicles. We even had a couple of cows on board to supply milk for the children. Lt. Col. Szabó was the train commander and Apu was his deputy. With an enormous effort they and their men were able to load the train in two days. In the meantime a small Christmas tree was set up in the local inn which served as the meeting place for the whole group consisting about 250 military and civilians. Under the circumstances very little Christmas cheer was felt by anyone except small children. The adults felt with increasing sorrow and fear that their existence as they knew it was coming to an end.

The trip to Germany was slow and relatively uneventful. We left Csorna during the night of December 26 and arrived to the Austrian border at Hegyeshalom in the morning. As soon as we pulled into the station an air raid siren began to blare. Sure enough, a few minutes later we could see huge bombers overhead. The engineer decided that we might be safer outside the station so he pulled the train onto a side rail and we all rushed to take cover. All around us were bomb craters from previous attacks. We crouched in one of them hoping that because "lightning never strikes the same place twice" we would be safe. It worked and we continued the trip a few hours later. It took us three days to reach Fürstenwalde/Spree, our destination, some 30 miles east of Berlin. We traveled north-west through the Sudetenland mainly at night in order to avoid the frequent air attacks. There were several delays lasting for hours at a time. Nothing seemed to help speed these delays even though we had two Hungarian generals on the train and traveled with a military priority order. We soon learned, however, that with liquor and cigarettes we could accomplish the impossible. On one occasion we were stopped just east of Frankfurt/Oder less than 50 miles from our destination. The stationmaster had our engine decoupled saying he had a high priority military cargo going to the eastern front and he needed an engine for it. Our senior officer, Major General Herditzky, talked to the man personally and threatened to call Hitler's headquarters but to no avail. After the fuming general got back on the train to contemplate our next move Col. Szabó and Apu went to see the stationmaster. After a short bargaining session, which cost them four bottles of brandy and a couple of cartons of cigarettes, we got our engine back and were on our way again.

At dawn on the 31st of December we arrived to Fürstenwalde, the first destination of what turned into a six-year stay in Germany. Our quarters were quite adequate. We stayed in the basement apartment of a small house that belonged to a rich cattle merchant who was a hard-boiled Nazi. Although we became quite friendly with him it became tiresome to listen to his oft-repeated propaganda statements about how Hitler was going to win the war. His tirades were particularly ironic, delivered at a time when we could already hear the bursting shells at night and see fires on the eastern horizon.

Reference Map of Germany

Chapter 4. Six Years as Refugees in Germany (1944-1950)

The Final Months of World War II

During our one-month stay in Fürstenwalde it was Apu who had to go to Berlin every other day as a liaison officer because he was the only one at the Hungarian command who had been to Berlin before. His routine was pretty much the same on each occasion. He left at 6:00 a.m. with several German officers in a military bus for the Reich Admiralty building on the Kurfürstendamm and returned at 1:00 p.m. with the same bus. The Admiralty's air raid shelter was covered by a ten-foot layer of reinforced concrete and it was the safest shelter around by far. After getting off the bus at the Admiralty Apu had to go to the Collegium Hungaricum which housed the Hungarian Embassy at the time to deliver and pick up official mail. His next stop was the German Chief Inspector's office for the Hungarian military located on Bentlerstrasse. The Chief Inspector was an SS colonel who lost a leg in the war. He was an obnoxious character who usually gave Apu a hard time. His secretary, however, was far more cooperative, especially after repeated gifts of brandy and cigarettes. Once she was won over she became quite helpful. The last stop was a nondescript office on Friedrichstrasse where food ration coupons were issued to us. After the usually nonproductive arguments there the remaining time was just about enough to get back to the Admiralty and catch the returning bus to Fürstenwalde. Apu was late on a couple of occasions and had to take the train home which was quite a complicated affair even though the two cities were only about 30 miles apart. The second time he missed the bus to Fürstenwalde an air raid alert sounded just as he reached the Admiralty. He had been busy looking for the bus and by the time he tried to get into the Admiralty's shelter it was locked. Because military personnel were not allowed into civilian shelters he ran into a side street, took shelter in the rubble heap of a destroyed building and waited there until the raid was over. The raid lasted about an hour as wave after wave of bombers unloaded their bomb bays over the city. The entire area around him was destroyed with fires burning out of control. Fortunately he escaped without a scratch and after several hours of walking was able to find a suburban train station which was still in operation. He stayed there until morning when he was able to catch a train to Fürstenwalde. Meanwhile Anyu and I had no idea what had happened to him. Upon seeing the flames of the burning city lighting up the horizon we feared the worst and were greatly relieved when he finally arrived.

We tried to live a normal life in Fürstenwalde insofar as circumstances permitted. I even enrolled in a local school and tried to resume my studies or at least improve my German. I attended this school for about two weeks when our military command decided to send all dependents to Wittenberg, about 60 miles southwest of Berlin because the Russian advance had already reached Frankfurt/Oder. We were allowed to take only a couple of suitcases per person, using a truck and two Budapest city buses brought along from Hungary. Upon arriving to Wittenberg we were quartered in an empty school building, the reinforced basement of which served as an air raid shelter. The city itself, called "Luther Stadt" because it was here that Martin Luther had nailed his principles against the Catholic Church on the door of the cathedral, was at that point relatively intact. Our vehicles were

parked in the school yard where a field kitchen was set up for cooking our meals. The school like most European schools in those days had no cafeteria facilities. We slept in the classrooms on hastily assembled folding cots whenever we were not in the shelter awaiting our fate during the increasingly frequent air raids.

We stayed four weeks in Wittenberg. By mid-February our military command decided to transfer to Bayreuth of Richard Wagner fame, even farther to the south, some 200 miles from Berlin. Bayreuth had a large military compound still pretty much undamaged at the time possibly because of a large allied POW camp nearby. The idea was to bring the dependents to Bayreuth as well once satisfactory accommodations could be found. Apu again had the thankless job of finding ten railroad wagons and an engine to transport the families' remaining luggage and the Command's supplies to Bayreuth. A German military travel order was needed for the trip which could be obtained only through the Chief Inspector in Berlin. At that point Apu's earlier contacts with the German colonel's secretary was our only hope since by then travel orders, especially authorization for rolling stock, were almost impossible to obtain. Again some brandy and cigarettes did the trick; the secretary forged her boss' signature on a travel authorization to Bayreuth. The Fürstenwalde stationmaster also cooperated (with the help of two bottles) and the train was soon ready to roll. All of the Command's supplies and luggage, including our remaining liquor and cigarettes, were loaded in one day. The train carrying Apu and a dozen soldiers left Fürstenwalde for Grafenwöhr, an intermediate stop not far from Bayreuth.

Grafenwöhr was and still is a huge military training base closed to all civilian traffic. The train had to go there since arrangements for our arrival in Bayreuth had not yet been completed. The trip lasted almost a week mainly because earlier air attacks had destroyed some of the rails ahead. The train itself was attacked twice during the journey fortunately resulting in minor damage only. Upon arrival Apu went immediately to the headquarters building to report to the base commander, a brigadier general named Hans Klein. As he entered the general's reception area a captain arose from behind a desk. Much to Apu's surprise and delight he turned out to be Kurt von Wakabart, his old friend from the Hungarian front. Capt. Wakabart told him that after they had unloaded the ammunition back at Tállya he and his trucks had been ordered to retreat all the way to Grafenwöhr where he eventually became adjutant to Gen. Klein. Wakabart presented Apu's travel authorization to his boss but returned a few minutes later with disappointing news. He said there was a problem with the authorization because the general was expecting another convoy with the same numbered document. Apparently the Chief Inspector's secretary in Berlin had mixed up the travel authorizations and had forged the colonel's signature on the wrong document. This was serious because the train could not remain at Grafenwöhr without a valid authorization. Apu did not know what to do at that point. Fortunately Wakabart had a suggestion. He told Apu that Gen. Klein loved the good life particularly good brandy and cigars. Apu immediately got the hint and rushed back to the train for a bottle of excellent Hungarian apricot brandy and a box of cigars. When he returned Wakabart took him in to see the general who appreciated the "token of German-Hungarian friendship." After a short conversation he instructed Wakabart to provide space for the baggage, supplies and the accompanying solders. Apu was given a room in the officers' quarters and some meal coupons for the soldiers. As it

turned out there were already a number of Hungarian soldiers and a few officers at Grafenwöhr, forming the nucleus of a proposed Hungarian SS division. A few days later Gen. Major arrived to inspect these troops. Apu reported to him on the status of the supply train and through his contacts he was able to provide the general with a few extra cans of gasoline.

The Hungarian supply train under Apu's command remained at Grafenwöhr for three weeks. During that time we and the other military dependents moved from Wittenberg to Bayreuth using our two buses and a truck. The convoy drove at night without headlights in order to avoid the increasingly frequent air attacks by allied fighter planes. When we arrived the Germans quartered us in a small village school about ten miles outside of Bayreuth. Our military men arrived a week later and were quartered in the Bayreuth military compound which was still relatively undamaged. Their assigned barracks were located at the far end of the huge compound next to a large empty barn. The barracks were inconvenient and full of lice but, as it turned out, their remote location probably saved the Hungarian Military Command. The staff settled down to work soon after Apu's supply train pulled into the compound. The vehicles and supplies were stored in the barn adjacent to the living quarters. On Easter Monday the Bayreuth military compound's luck finally run out. A daytime air attack wiped out practically the whole base and surrounding civilian area. Although our village was not bombed we could hear the explosions and see the heavy smoke on the horizon. All we could do was hope and prey that our men would somehow survive. Survive they did; the empty half of the barn collapsed without damaging our vehicles or supplies while their barracks only lost most of their windows.

General Major arrived the next day from his inspection tour and immediately called a staff meeting. In view of the near disaster and the fact that the advancing allied troops were within 50 miles of Bayreuth it was decided that the whole Command, including their families, should move to the southern Bavarian Alps. The rationale behind this decision was not clear but it was obvious that Gen. Major had cleared the move with the German high command before arriving to Bayreuth. The air raid, however, may have accelerated the time table. In any event it had become increasingly clear that the war was lost and the end was but a few weeks away.

Once again Apu's previous travel experiences in Germany came in handy for his next assignment. The general ordered him and a colonel to drive to the Allgäu Alps, some 200 miles south of Bayreuth, to prepare quarters for the staff and their dependents. As soon as Apu and the colonel had left two senior officers were put in charge of loading the Command's supplies, vehicles and the families' personal belongings into six box cars. These officers, in turn, reassigned the job to a young lieutenant and a dozen soldiers. Once the loading was complete the two officers took a staff car and headed south following Apu to the Alps and left the junior officer and his men to accompany the train. This was contrary to their instructions; they were supposed to stay with the train. As a result the shipment left Bayreuth but never arrived to its destination. It simply disappeared enroute along with its whole complement of military personnel, supplies and all of our personal belongings. We did not realize that we had lost everything until long after we had arrived to the mountains carrying nothing but a small suitcase.

Meanwhile Apu and the colonel arrived to the village of Bihlerdorf, just outside of Sonthofen, at the foothills of the Allgäu Alps. They were able to arrange quarters for the Command and its families without much difficulty. Our own family was given a room in a farmhouse on a hillside. Below us was a winding highway the only road going in or out of the valley.

The move from Bayreuth to Bihlerdorf consisted of two convoys. This time the military staff had gone down first while the families followed a couple of days later in the two Budapest city buses. Again we traveled mostly at night without headlights because Allied fighters were strafing the autobahns at will. The journey was slow; it took a day and a half to drive the 200 miles. A few hours before arriving to a scheduled rest stop in Augsburg the city received a heavy night air attack with incendiary bombs. Almost half of the city was in flames. Had we arrived earlier we would surely have become part of the enormous casualties. While approaching the suburbs, we could see the huge flames and were delayed for several hours by the German police as they tried to route us around the devastated areas.

On April 13 our convoy finally arrived to Bihlerdorf. We marched up the hillside to our assigned quarters where the farmer and his wife greeted us quite pleasantly under the circumstances. As I recall, they had two sons in the German military. One was killed a year earlier, the other taken prisoner by the Russians. We were not the only ones quartered in the house, however. There were a couple of Indian soldiers in German uniform living in a basement room. We became quite friendly with them. They said they had served in the British Indian army on the western front and were captured by the Germans a year earlier. Since many of these Indians hated the British and were willing to fight them the Germans had set up several armored units manned entirely by Indian volunteers. They wore German uniforms only their white turbans and the color of their skin distinguished them from German soldiers.

By the end of April French troops had reached Kempten, only about 20 miles from us. Gen. Major called the last officers' meeting on a Wednesday morning, described the military situation and said it was likely that the entire Hungarian command would be captured by the French army during the next two to three days. He then formally absolved all officers and enlisted men from their military oath, declaring that as of that moment they were free to go anywhere and could consider themselves civilians. As for himself, he said, he would continue to abide by his own oath and would formally surrender his command to the French. Of the approximately 70 officers and 100 enlisted men only two elected to leave the group. The rest, including Apu, decided to become POWs together as a unit. This display of camaraderie was particularly difficult for Apu. Being a reservist and fluent in German, he could easily have disappeared among the populace. He also had a valid passport which could have helped to prove that he was a civilian. Nevertheless, when he came up to the farmhouse after that meeting he told Anyu that the honorable thing to do was to remain with his comrades and share their fate. However, he was very concerned about us and decided to get rid of his beloved hunting weapons – two shotguns and a rifle – lest the French occupiers hold us responsible for them. He was certain that during the occupation any possession of weapons would be punished by imprisonment or even death but

because these guns had been his favorites he did not have the heart to destroy them. With my help, therefore, he wrapped each in oil-soaked cloth, put them in their leather cases and buried them during the night under a huge stack of hay in the barn behind the farmhouse.

The end came faster than we thought. The very next morning we could see from our window a long column of French tanks lumbering on the highway below us. Suddenly we heard machine gun fire from a patch of pine forest just a few hundred yards to our left. We found out later that a few kids, members of the Hitler Youth movement, had been hiding there armed with a single machine gun. When the French got closer they began to shoot at the tanks with totally ineffective volleys. They attracted the attention of the tank column, however. We watched as the tanks stopped, turned their gun turrets toward the hillside and began firing. Only a few minutes after we rushed to the basement for protection a shell hit the top our house and took off half the roof. By then the machine gun fire had stopped but the tanks continued shelling the houses on the hillside. Several houses were hit in addition to ours. We were quite scared, trying to figure out what to do, when one of the Indian soldiers came up with an idea. He took off his white turban, went up to the highest window of the house facing the highway, unrolled the turban and hung it out as a white flag. We knew it must have been quite a sacrifice for him to do that because Muslims never take off their turbans in public. When he came back he seemed very dejected and remarked that nothing mattered anymore. My mother tried to console him but he believed that they would surely be killed by the French anyway. In the meantime, however, the white flag must have done the trick because the shelling stopped.

The tank column left but a French unit remained in our village. On May 1, 1945 General Major formally surrendered to the French officer in charge. The soldiers, mostly colonial troops from French Morocco, appeared to be a ruthless bunch. They formed small patrols and rounded up at gunpoint all Hungarian soldiers who were in various farm houses. They picked up Apu and the Indian soldiers as well. The Indians' fear was well-founded; they were led to the same patch of woods from which the Hitler Youth kids had been firing earlier and were summarily executed. Their bodies were buried by the German farmers the next day. It was rumored that the Hitler Youth kids had also been killed.

Leslie in French POW Camp, Families Alone

I would like to interject here that a few days after my father's death in 1996 we found a small notebook among his belongings. He used it as a diary to jot down some notes about the first weeks of his captivity by the French military in 1945. Although these notes cover only certain days, some in more details than others, they reveal the miserable treatment these POWs, both German and Hungarian, had to endure at the hands of the French. According to Apu their cruelty was especially unexpected by the Hungarians because technically Hungary was not in a state of war with France during WW II. Consequently, the Hungarians reasoned, they shouldn't have been kept as POWs. This reasoning, however, meant absolutely nothing to the French who herded both German and Hungarian solders together indiscriminately. They often killed those who couldn't take the forced march to France and captured innocent German civilians to maintain the required headcount.

The last entry in Apu's diary is dated August 23, 1945 the day he was taken to the La Valle Bonne hospital's infectious disease ward near Lyon, France, with a second outbreak of typhoid fever. I have incorporated some of his notes up to that date into the revised text of the original Chronicles as follows.

After the French patrols assembled the Hungarian soldiers along the highway at the bottom of the hill they forced them to give up their watches and rings. Incidentally, this action by the "highly cultured" citizens of the French Republic was no different from that practiced by the backward soldiers of the Soviet Union. Apu saved his wedding ring by hiding it in his cap. The men were taken by bus to the nearby city of Immenstadt to be held overnight in the basement of the city hall. The next morning they joined a large group of German POWs and were herded mostly on foot toward the French city of Strasbourg. The trek to that city took about two weeks and during that period they were given almost no food other than what they received from German civilians who took pity on the large column as it staggered through the villages. Several German soldiers died during this forced march because most of them were in weaker condition than our men. Somewhere along the way another 100 or so Hungarian officer POWs were picked up and added to the original group from Bihlerdorf. Thus by the time they reached the railroad station in Strasbourg the Hungarian contingent numbered over 170 officers. The three generals, Major, Herditzky and Ujlaky, as well as the ten colonels on their staff had become separated from the rest of the officers in Immenstadt before the forced march began. They were not reunited with them until about a month later. The enlisted men were taken to France separately and were eventually shipped back to Hungary from a POW camp in southern France.

After the first week of marching they reached the small town of Waldsee. The Hungarian group was locked up for the night without dinner in the gym of a local school. The next day, May 8, started particularly cruelly. According to Apu's diary the French soldiers unlocked the gym early morning and started to beat and shove the Hungarian officers with rifle-butts toward a line-up in the school yard. Lt. Col. Bėkeffy was hit so hard that he stumbled down the staircase and passed out. Another officer, Capt. Kovács, was also beaten up as were several others. The large column started to march again without breakfast toward Biberach, some 40 miles away. The local people along the way tried to help the POWs by handing them some food and placing buckets of water at the side of the road but the French knocked the food out of their hands and kicked over the buckets. There was absolutely no discipline among the guards as they were chasing German civilians from the road by shooting at their feet or over their heads.

By May 12 the POWs reached Tuttlingen but they were getting progressively weaker because of the spotty and meager provisions. Also, many had huge blisters on their feet. Apu notes that his feet were covered with large blisters and some started to bleed. Another problem was that many soldiers had diarrhea which contributed to their weakened condition. A sentence in Apu's diary also indicates how demeaning it was to see senior officers having to defecate in their pants because they were not allowed to step out of the column. At the last village before Tuttlingen soldiers of a local French unit lined up on both sides of the road and were beating anyone they could reach. Several of the weak and sick prisoners who

collapsed were shot. Two of them died just in front of Apu. The French soldiers dragged them aside and divided their belongings among themselves. Because headcount had to be maintained the French replaced those who escaped or died with local German civilians they captured indiscriminately and forced into the dragging column.

The POW holding camp in Tuttlingen was a small area roughly 4-5 acres already full of German prisoners. Apu estimated there were at least 25,000 soldiers there including about 2,600 Indian troops. Apparently every day a truck convoy of POWs left from this camp and took the men to Kiehl along the Rhine River. From there they were herded with kicks, beatings and shouts onto a pontoon bridge across the river toward Strasbourg on the French side. Ironically, a sign over the bridge read: "Here Begins the Land of Freedom."

The Strasbourg railway station was full of POWs. In addition to the 170 Hungarian officers and the large number of German soldiers that came with them there were another 1,000 or so German POWs already present and awaiting transportation to various POW camps. Apu's group was supposed to have been shipped to an officers' POW camp in Larzach but the military detail to escort them never showed up because of some mix-up. As a result they were attached to a group of about 1,200 German prisoners and shipped by rail first to Marseilles and then to Toulon to a huge POW compound. By the time the group arrived on May 18, a full-blown typhoid epidemic had spread throughout the camp because of the crowded and unsanitary conditions. In addition, most prisoners were also quite weak because of the totally inadequate nutrition. The daily food ration, for example, consisted of two slices of bread, cabbage soup for lunch, warm brownish water for breakfast and supper. Of the 170 Hungarian officers Apu was the only one who had not been inoculated against typhoid fever because he joined the military in the last phases of the war. As a result on June 9 he came down with the disease. This oversight, i.e. lack of immunization, almost cost him his life. One sunny morning, a few days before he became ill, he was reading the camp bulletin when someone behind him spoke in Hungarian: "Mr. Thiringer, how did you get here?" Apu turned around and immediately recognized the short fellow in civilian clothing behind him. Years earlier this man, named Matyeka, had been a blacksmith in Balassagyarmat and Apu had been on quite friendly terms with him. He told Apu that he had immigrated to France in 1938 and worked in his brother-in-law's car repair shop in Toulon ever since. The brother-in-law had lived in Toulon since 1920. Mr. Matyeka was coming to the POW camp every morning to pick up German mechanics for work detail in their garage. During the following two weeks while Apu was ill and several German soldiers died around him every day Matyeka helped him to survive by bringing him food and medicine. As noted earlier, almost no food was given to the prisoners in the camp and the only available medicine was aspirin. The typhoid weakened Apu so much that he probably would have died had it not been for the fortuitous appearance of Mr. Matyeka.

On June 11 the Hungarian officers were loaded again onto a train and transported to a medieval castle in St. Priest which had been converted into a POW camp. The village of St. Priest was located about three miles outside of Lyon. Apu was still very sick so they carried him on a stretcher onto the train. When the train arrived to Lyon he was immediately taken to the isolation ward of a hospital there while

the rest of the group continued on foot to the camp in St. Priest. Since there were no antibiotics available at that time it took Apu almost five weeks to recover. To recover he did and in mid-July he was finally well enough to be discharged from the hospital and transferred to the rest of the group in St. Priest. He was transported to the castle in the back of a food truck. By that time the three generals and ten colonels had also arrived thus the original group of 70 officers were united again. The POW camp of St. Priest became their home for the next ten months. Unfortunately a month later Apu had a typhus relapse and by August 23 he was so sick that he had to be taken again to a hospital for treatment. This time the hospitalization was somewhat shorter and he was released after three weeks. Although during these two hospital confinements his weight dropped to 140 lbs he seemed to have recovered sufficiently to be returned to St. Priest. However, as it turned out later, he still wasn't completely cured and after his release from France it took several weeks of additional treatment and operations in a German hospital before he regained his health.

The families left behind in Bihlerdorf had no idea about the fate of their husbands and fathers. The first news we received from Apu came about six months after their capture. It was a short message on a Red Cross POW postcard and all it said was that he was alive and well. It also gave an address at St. Priest, so we were able to send him an equally short note on a Red Cross reply card. Immediately after the end of the war there were thousands of POWs in various camps and the Red Cross initiated contacts with them through the use of these special postcards. The post office did not accept regular postcards addressed to a POW camp. We did not know until much later about the difficult times Apu had to endure, we were just relieved to learn that he was alive.

In the meantime, many changes occurred in the lives of the families, as well. A couple of days after the men were taken away, the French rounded up our families and put them in an old school building that had stood empty since a new school was opened a year earlier. Anyu slept in an empty classroom with several other women while I and some other boys occupied a smaller room.

This school, like the one we stayed in at Wittenberg, had no kitchen facilities and we were allowed to go to an inn next door for meals twice a day. Beyond that, however, no one was allowed to be out on the street except for emergencies. Actually, it was quite dangerous to be outside during the first few days anyway because the soldiers were often drunk and in that state pursued their favorite past-time: hunting chickens and ducks with submachine guns. It was scary to hear gunshots at all hours of the day but we soon got used to it when we found that it was only an innocent French "sport".

Quite apart from the "hunting" incidents, the unit of about 30 soldiers behaved in an altogether undisciplined manner. For example, the new school where they stayed had modern flushing toilets yet these troops used lampshades to defecate in and then threw them out the window onto the street below. After a week or so they either ran out of lampshades or got tired of the stench because they started to behave in a somewhat more civilized manner.

Anyu spoke French quite well since French had been the main language of instruction during her school years at the Notre Dame de Sion and she also had a French tutor at home. In addition, she was fluent in German. During the first week of occupation a French sergeant came by and asked whether anyone in our group could act as an interpreter for them. Although there were one or two women besides Anyu who spoke both languages, they were too scared to step forward. Anyu volunteered and for the next four weeks she had to go around the village at odd hours and translate between the French and the Germans. About half of the French unit was from mainland France while the others were from French Morocco. Some of the mainland soldiers were quite young, probably no more than 18-19 years old. They appeared to be lonely, began to hang out at our school and often carried on a lively conversation with Anyu. They brought some food for us occasionally; in fact, one evening a fellow showed up with a couple of chickens he had gunned down a few houses down the road from us. Anyu politely declined the present, saying we had no cooking facilities. The soldier shrugged his shoulders, took his chickens and left.

The war ended and Germany surrendered on May 7, a week after Apu and the other officers had been taken prisoners. Six weeks later the Allies adjusted their respective occupation zones and the Bihlerdorf area was attached to the U.S. zone. The French soldiers moved out of the village. However, before leaving one of them brought us a half wheel of Swiss cheese as a token of their appreciation for Anyu's interpretive services. The cheese was so heavy that he had difficulty bringing it up to our second floor room. We were quite happy with the gift and asked no questions about its origin. Later we carved it up and distributed much of it among the other families. All of them received a good- sized chunk.

Around the end of June American forces moved into the area and set up a military government to run the German civilian administration on an interim basis until the Nazi officials could be replaced. The U.S. military headquarters was established at the county seat of Sonthofen, a small town less than a couple of miles from Bihlerdorf. We found out later that apart from our 20 plus Hungarian families there were many other nationalities scattered around the county. Most of these people were "displaced persons" or DPs, as they became known, meaning they had come to Germany either voluntarily or forcibly from countries occupied by the Nazi forces during the war. At the end of the war there were several million DPs throughout Germany. The job of housing, feeding, processing and returning these people to their homeland would have totally overwhelmed the Germans and their devastated country. Therefore, the United Nations took over the task and established an international organization called the U.N. Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) for the purpose of aiding the DPs in Germany and other refugees world- wide.

An UNRRA camp for DPs was set up in Sonthofen within a few days after the U.S. had taken over the area from the French. The camp was located in what used to be an SS training facility which somehow escaped destruction. It was soon filled to capacity with many nationalities, taken there by the U.S. military, not only from the county of Sonthofen but also from areas farther away. One morning three U.S. military buses pulled up to our school and two hours later we were taken to the UNRRA camp as well.

Our families stayed at this camp until mid-August. Life there was actually quite interesting. We met people from several different countries, mostly Russia, Poland and the Baltic states. A large group of recently freed concentration camp inmates was also housed there in a separate "rehabilitation" area. The food was rather good and sufficient and we were allowed to move around the camp at will. However, we were not permitted to leave the camp without a special pass which was very difficult to obtain. Most of our time was spent on rumor-mongering, in the absence of any reliable information regarding our future. Since everybody had to be registered by nationality and country of origin, we were convinced that sooner or later all of us would be forced to return to Hungary. Most of us, of course, wanted to stay in the area at least until we had some news about our POW husbands and fathers.

Our suspicion soon became reality. On August 5 the first train-load of people from the camp left for Poland. From that day on a train departed every 3-4 days for a different country and our group was scheduled to leave for Hungary on August 17. We were quite concerned and decided to appeal to the camp commander, requesting that we be allowed to remain until our men folk returned. Since they had left us in Bihlerdorf, it was logical to assume that once they were released by the French they would come back here to look for their families. If we were shipped back to Hungary, we reasoned, who knows when and where we would meet again.

Our delegation consisted of three women one of whom, Mrs. Pummer, spoke English quite well. The camp commander was a colonel; he listened politely to the women stating our case and promised a decision by the following day. Actually, his reply came several days later and until then all of us were anxious and tense. The commander decided we would not be shipped back to Hungary, but since his DP camp was a transit staging facility we could not remain there either. He therefore made arrangements for the whole group to move to a village called Reichenbach, about 10 miles from Sonthofen where a small hotel was commandeered by the military authorities for us. This time civilian buses picked us up for the short trip to the Hotel Hirsch in Reichenbach which became our permanent residence for almost four years.

Cottage Industry in Reichenbach

The immediate post-war years were very difficult in Germany. The economy was shattered, the money was worthless, the country was in ruins and it was extremely difficult for foreign refugees to survive on the German economy. Food was especially scarce in the mountains where we lived. Everything was rationed and, as I remember, the average daily food ration for one person had a caloric value of about 900. Physical laborers and small children received somewhat more food. People who lived in agricultural areas had it better because they could trade their belongings for food. In the mountains milk and cheese were almost the only items we could trade for on the black market. With money one could buy only the few things which were available on ration coupons.

Once we settled into the hotel, survival became our foremost concern. We received no financial subsidy from the government apart from the fact that we had to pay no

rent for the hotel rooms. As far as food and other necessities were concerned we were on our own. In the beginning resources were pooled and a common kitchen established where a single hot meal was cooked daily. It was usually a tasteless mixture of boiled potatoes, beets and carrots. At one time or another all of us tried bartering with the local farmers. Our only success came one day when we heard through the grapevine that a young farmer was about to get married and was looking for an appropriate wedding suit. We kept Apu's tuxedo in the bottom of his suitcase; to this day I do not know why we carried it along with us while losing many far more useful items. In any event, it came in handy that day. I suggested to Anyu that we might be able to trade it for some food. At first she was reluctant but since we were desperate she decided that food was more important than a tuxedo that Apu may never wear again. The barter was consummated and we received enough cheese and other foods to last us for a few weeks. Another fortunate incident also helped to improve our diet. One day Anyu and I were walking on a path that crisscrossed the hillside behind the hotel. Suddenly we noticed some large porcini mushrooms in the grass among the young pine trees. Anyu recognized them right away as being edible and thought there ought to be more of them around. Soon we found a whole bunch and used my shirt for a bag to take them home. Mushrooms are full of protein and they were a welcome addition to our insufficient and dull diet. We picked enough in that general area to last us for the rest of the summer, and were also able to dry some for the winter. We vegetated this way for some months, trying to carry on from one day to the next, not thinking much about the future. There was still no news about Apu and the other men. Everything was in limbo and no one seemed to have sufficient initiative to do anything. It soon became obvious, however, that regardless when the men might be released, most of the families would no longer be able to go back to Hungary. The short wave radio broadcasts we were listening to made the Hungarian communist vengeance and terror quite real for us. There were daily show-trials against people, particularly military officers who had been associated with the country's non-communist past. The issue for us then became what to do as refugees in a war-torn foreign country.

About 20 wives gathered several times in the hotel's dining room to wrestle with this question and to discuss our limited options. The few ideas proposed were quickly shot down. The group faced two basic problems: first, none of the women had any kind of skill or profession and, second, even if they had there was no work in the area other than farming in the fields. After three or four fruitless meetings, Anyu came up with a proposal that seemed to appeal to everyone. Her idea was simply that since all the women could sew and several were quite skilled at embroidery, why not make dolls dressed in embroidered folk costumes and try to sell them to the U.S. military?

After some initial difficulties, this cottage industry succeeded beyond our fondest hopes. By the time the men returned from France about six months later, we could barely keep up with the orders. The chief sales representative was Mrs. Pummer, who went around to several U.S. installation post exchanges (PXs) with her sample case and negotiated each deal separately. In the beginning, we sold the dolls mostly for food and cigarettes (which were better than cash at the time). The PX chiefs profited from these deals because they bartered hand-made folk art for things like used shortening that was left over after donut making. To us, however,

a few pounds of leftover fat were a life saver. Eventually, we became more daring in our dealings and asked for other items as well, such as coffee and sugar which were practically unobtainable on the open market. The business thrived to the point that we had to hire additional workers to keep up with the demand. Soon, orders came from as far as Munich. We had become a big business by local standards but, apart from the uncertain future, our main concern remained the whereabouts of our men. We had heard rumors from other cities about the miserable treatment of POWs in French custody but, at that point, the question for us was more basic: were they alive or dead? We were overjoyed when the first Red Cross postcards began to arrive around mid-December. Eventually, each family received one or two of these cards; by Christmas, we knew that all of them were alive and reasonably well. Only later did we find out how miserable their conditions were.

During this period the commander of the St. Priest POW camp was systematically stealing most of the money earmarked for the feeding of prisoners. His activity went on for months to the point that eventually the POWs became too weak even to crawl out of their beds. Most of them had hunger edema. At one time, for example, Apu's legs were swollen to almost double their normal size because of accumulated fluids. He had a particularly difficult time because he was still weak after the long bouts of typhoid fever. The only person who was doing reasonably well was a Lt. Col. Bodor who had read somewhere that Africans were afraid of mentally ill people. Since the guards were mostly Moroccan troops, Col. Bodor decided to put the theory to a test and declared himself a lunatic. He started to act accordingly, uttering peculiar sounds, jerking his head and sitting for hours, fishing from an empty bucket. The ploy worked; whenever he showed up, the Arab guards got out of his way. Soon he was able to walk into the military kitchen undisturbed, where he helped himself to the guards' food while the rest of the POWs starved. Their condition would have become fatal had it not been for the unexpected visit of a Swiss Red Cross team. They were appalled by the prisoners' condition and reported the situation to the military authorities in Paris. As a result, within a few days the camp commander was relieved and the food situation improved considerably.

Leslie's Return and Illness

In early April 1946, all POWs from St. Priest were suddenly taken to a military compound in Strasbourg, where for the next three weeks they were fed wholesome meals in order to improve their condition. The compound was a staging area for the repatriation of POWs. On April 30, the St. Priest group, together with Hungarian soldiers from other POW camps, was put onto a freight train departing for Hungary under guard. The guards were again Moroccan troops. Their French commander, it turned out, had been a POW himself in Germany and had eventually escaped to Hungary. He had spent the last two years of the war there and had even managed to learn some Hungarian.

As soon as the train left Strasbourg, Apu and the rest of the group began to plan their escape. None of them wanted to go to Hungary, especially since most of them still had families in Reichenbach. The escape plans were potentially quite dangerous because the locked box cars they were riding in were always surrounded

by armed guards as soon as the train stopped at a station. Finally cooler heads prevailed and they decided to tell the commander their predicament and ask him to let them go. The commander was surprisingly sympathetic and when the train arrived to Lindau, a city fairly close to our village, he allowed the whole St. Priest group to leave. Only three or four officers decided to continue the journey to Hungary, mainly because they had no dependents in our group. At the Lindau station the Red Cross fed our men and gave them train tickets to Langenwang, the station nearest to Reichenbach. It was a sunny afternoon on the 3rd of May, almost exactly a year after they had been taken prisoner, when we saw from our hotel window a ragged and obviously tired group walking into the main street of Reichenbach. Our joy was indescribable. We all rushed out of the hotel, hugged and kissed everyone in sight and gave silent thanks to God. Our prayers had been answered; we were together again at last!

It took a few days for the men to adjust and catch up on the news after a whole year's absence. They were amazed to find how successful their wives had become. Since the macho image had to be preserved, the men soon became full-fledged workers in the doll factory. The women were quite amused to see their husbands learn to operate the sewing machines while some of them even tried embroidery. They became very helpful with the business end, such as bookkeeping, billing, shipping and receiving. The business continued to flourish and by the end of 1946 we had become the largest firm and taxpayer in the county. We owed much of this success to hard work and to the expansion of our product line. In addition to dolls in Hungarian costumes we started to dress them in Bavarian costumes and, again at Anyu's initiative, began to sell hand-painted wooden plates, as well.

The U.S. Army PX at Sonthofen had become our steady customer and the major in charge there helped us to make contacts with PXs at other installations. He was an avid hunter and also a gun collector. One day he mentioned to Mrs. Pummer that he had heard much about the quality of German hunting rifles and shotguns and would very much like to get one or two of these before he rotated back to the States. Mrs. Pummer mentioned this conversation to us in passing without realizing that she was setting into motion a dangerous but potentially quite rewarding chain of events. As we listened to Mrs. Pummer, it did not occur to us as yet that we might be able to help the major and ourselves in the process. It took several days for the idea to take root, namely that we should go to Bihlerdorf, visit the farmer with whom we had lived when the French occupied the area over a year earlier and should try to recover Apu's guns from the hayloft behind the house. It was a dangerous and uncertain proposition at best. The county was still under military law and possession of firearms was illegal. If caught one could face several years in prison. Conviction for a crime of this nature would also have barred us from emigrating to the United States. Even if we could pull it off, there was no guarantee that the major would want Apu's guns or that he would not just take them without compensation, knowing full well that we had no recourse. Anyu had lots of misgivings about the whole idea. She argued that we were not likely to find the guns, even if we ignored the inherent dangers. I tended to agree with her but Apu was adamant: at least we had to try, he said. After all, these were <u>his</u> guns and he had the right to do with them as he pleased.

Apu and I took the afternoon train from Langenwang to Bihlerdorf and waited in the village until it was almost dark. It was a clear evening as we walked up to the farmer's house on the hillside. He and his wife were quite surprised to see us unannounced, yet they greeted us warmly and listened to Apu's feeble explanation as to why we were in the neighborhood at such a late hour. They sat us down, offered us food and drink while Apu told them at great length all that had happened to us during the past year. After a while I excused myself to go to the outhouse which was right next to the barn. The hayloft looked much the same as in the previous year except the stack of hay was considerably bigger. With increased confidence I grabbed a pitchfork and started to dig feverishly at the specific spot I remembered. A few minutes later I hit something hard and knew it had to be the guns. I pulled them out and wrapped all three of them in an old linen tablecloth that was stitched to the inside of my raincoat. I had to work fast because I was gone from the house for almost 20 minutes. I ran to the road, hid the guns behind some bushes and went back to the house. The farmer and his wife were so absorbed in Apu's story they barely noticed my return. I winked at Apu and he knew right away that the first phase of our escapade was a success. He finished his saga in a hurry, saying we had to rush to catch the last train. This was quite true because we had less than 30 minutes to get to the station. After saying a fond good-by to the old couple we gave them a Bavarian doll as a present. As soon as we were outside we rushed to the road, picked up the guns, dumped the leather cases and wrapped the guns themselves in our raincoats. Apu carried the two shotguns and I had the rifle as we practically ran all the way to the station carrying these strange looking packages. It was around midnight when we arrived back to our hotel. Anyu was in a panic and firmly convinced that we had been arrested.

We were too wound up to be able to sleep so we unwrapped the guns and started to clean them right away. They were in excellent condition; the oil-soaked cloth had protected them well. The next day we contacted the PX major through Mrs. Pummer and told him that we had some guns he might be interested in. A few days of fearful waiting followed until one morning, when he drove out to our hotel to see the guns. It was love at first sight; he offered us $150.00 plus 20 cartons of cigarettes which we accepted on the spot. It was an excellent deal all around: the major received three Mauser guns for a fraction of their original cost while we, on the other hand, received a price that amounted to a fortune in those days. Ultimately the results were well worth the risk we took. We gave some of the cigarettes to Mrs. Pummer for her efforts and sold or traded the rest on the black market. A year later Apu still had about $100.00 left which he gave to a friend of a friend who promised to exchange them on the black market for the new German currency at a very favorable rate. I was not at home at the time. When I heard about the deal I knew it was too good to be true, and so it was. Two weeks after he took the money from Apu the fellow wrote him a letter from Munich, claiming that he had lost our $100.00 somewhere. His letter was full of profuse apology but we had no doubt that he had stolen the money. There was nothing we could do since it was still illegal at that time in Germany for anyone except Americans to possess U.S. currency.

Thanks to the sale of the guns we were able to improve our diet. This occurred none too soon because all three of us were quite skinny. For example, I was 6 feet

4 inches tall but weighed only about 150 pounds. Apu was even thinner although ever since his return from France our first priority was to "fatten" him up. Even after several weeks there seemed to be no improvement in his condition; he felt lethargic and had a constant low grade temperature. He also noticed a growth on his chest which felt tender to the touch. In August he decided to have a thorough physical examination and checked into the nearest hospital in Oberstdorf. The results of this examination were essentially negative but his doctors were still puzzled about the persistent fever. They decided to open up the swelling on his chest which turned out to be full of pussy fluid. Microscopic examination of the fluid revealed that it was teeming with live typhoid bacteria. It meant that Apu was a bacteria carrier ever since his recovery from the typhoid fever a year earlier. Although he himself had become immune to the typhoid fever, his body was still fighting the typhoid bacteria and he could potentially have infected anyone he came in contact with.

Since the hospital in Oberstdorf had no isolation ward for contagious diseases Apu was transferred to a larger hospital in Immenstadt. The doctors there decided that a conservative approach was the best avenue to recovery. They left Apu's wound open hoping that the continuous draining would eventually clear up what was thought to be an isolated area of infection. This was a mistake that almost cost Apu his life. He was in the isolation ward for three weeks and with each passing day grew weaker. He would have died, had it not been for the fortuitous appointment of a new hospital director, Dr. Hans Jordan. During his first visit he recognized Apu's grave condition and operated on him two days later. The exploratory surgery revealed that the typhoid bacteria had invaded his ribs. Dr. Jordan operated on Apu two more times during the subsequent weeks, each time cutting off pieces of his infected ribs hoping to stop further spread of the bacteria. Unfortunately, these operations were unsuccessful and Apu's condition continued to deteriorate. At the end of September Dr. Jordan asked Anyu to come to the hospital and see him about Apu's condition. He told her quite frankly that he was unable to get rid of the infection and Apu had but a few weeks to live. The only thing that could possibly save him was a new antibiotic called penicillin which was not yet available in Germany. Dr. Jordan thought, however, that the U.S. military hospital in Sonthofen might have some.

This was devastating news for us, especially since it was unlikely that we could get penicillin from a U.S. hospital. Our only remaining hope and contact was the PX major. Anyu and Mrs. Pummer went to see him but he could not promise anything other than to get them in touch with the chief medical officer of the hospital who was also a major and a friend of his. Mrs. Pummer and Anyu met with the medical chief twice. At first he refused outright to cooperate, saying that it was against military regulations to give medicine to German or, for that matter, Hungarian civilians. The women left, totally dejected but Anyu was not about to give up the fight. She insisted that they go back the next day to see the major again. When he refused their request again Anyu finally broke down and started to cry. Thereupon the embarrassed doctor gave in and took Anyu and Mrs. Pummer in his own car to the Immenstadt hospital. He wanted to deliver the penicillin to Dr. Jordan personally because he had to explain how to administer this new drug.

The penicillin injections had to be given to Apu over several days and in the beginning there was no apparent improvement in his condition. In the meantime, his older brother Vilmos, also a refugee in Germany at that time, arrived after having received a letter from Anyu with the bad news. When he heard about Dr. Jordan's assessment of Apu's condition he started to make arrangements for his funeral, unbeknown to us. He even bought a nice wreath of artificial flowers and hid it discreetly behind a cupboard for the time being. On the third day of Apu's penicillin treatment Uncle Vilmos, or "Vili bácsi" as I called him, went to visit him. A few hours later he returned to our hotel and said to Anyu: "I do not think that Laci (Apu) is going to die! When I went into his room he was so weak he couldn't even lift his hand to greet me. Yet when he opened his eyes his first question was whether I had brought some salami and bread for him because he hated the hospital food." According to Vili bácsi anyone who wanted to eat salami was not about to die. He packed his bag the next day and went home. On the way to the train station, he stopped at the flower shop and returned the wreath for a refund. Four days later, Apu was cured of the infection and started to regain his strength rapidly. In mid-October he was released from the hospital and we were together once again.

Tom's School Years in Passau

The general situation in Germany improved considerably by the end of 1946. Although our own outlook as refugees remained cloudy, we began a slow adjustment to everyday life in our temporary homeland. At that time we still had no idea whether we would emigrate abroad or stay permanently in Germany. One thing we knew for certain: the return to Hungary was out of the question. It appeared we would have to live in Germany for the foreseeable future. Under these circumstances it became necessary to continue my education, especially since I had lost two years of schooling already.

Around that time we heard about a Hungarian school having been organized in Passau, a city along the Danube River in north-eastern Bavaria. As so often in the past it was Mrs. Pummer again who brought us definitive news about this school. During one of her sales trips to Munich she happened to meet the head of the recently established Catholic relief organization "Caritas" which was instrumental in supporting the school. Mrs. Pummer's interest was more than idle curiosity because her own two sons also needed to continue their education. The information about the school in Passau was encouraging. It was apparently located in a large Hungarian refugee camp and the principal was an educator who has had a similar position in Hungary. The coeducational school had three barracks reserved for live-in students, two for boys and one for girls. There were also a few day-students who lived in the surrounding area. Most importantly, both the German authorities and the U.S. military government agreed to recognize the diplomas the school conferred. Based on this information the four families, including mine, who had school-age children in Reichenbach soon decided to send them to Passau.

I was the youngest of the five boys involved and, frankly, had mixed emotions about leaving my parents in Reichenbach. My life so far had been reasonably pleasant; the steady work in the doll shop had provided some income and had

allowed me a limited social life, such as going to the movies and on ski trips during the winter. However, I recognized that my education which had stopped with the 7th grade two years earlier had to be continued. The other four fellows had similar misgivings but it was easier for them since they were only one or two years away from a diploma. The five years in my case seemed like an eternity. Be that as it may, all five of us arrived at Passau in March 1947. The name of the refugee camp was Waldwerke and it was located outside the city on a hillside along the bank of the Danube. Just below our camp there was another one for Yugoslavian refugees. These two facilities had been used during the war to house Allied POWs who used to work in a factory nearby. Not much had changed since that time except that the barbed wire fence and guard towers were removed when the compounds were converted to refugee camps.

I spent two years in Waldwerke and completed the 8th, 9th and 10th grades in an accelerated program. In many respects these two years left an indelible impression on my developing personality and hastened the process of my maturing. In retrospect, what Waldwerke taught me about human nature, about interacting with people from all walks of life, and about being responsible for myself and others was possibly far more important than the three grades I completed there. In addition to academics, I became involved in several other activities, both in school and in the camp life as well; school plays, boy scouts, debates, camp newspaper and, I am sorry to say, black marketing. I was active in them all. While still in Reichenbach I took English private lessons from a local teacher so that by the time we arrived to Waldwerke I spoke English reasonably well. As a result, the school principal, Mr. Csejtey, relied on me in certain school matters that required interfacing with U.S. military government personnel. He even sent me to Munich on two occasions to make a personal appeal on his behalf for increased support to the school. I was successful on both occasions and returned with substantial commitments from a joint American-British charitable organization.

The black market was thriving in Waldwerke and the adjacent Yugoslavian camp ever since they had been established. At first I hesitated to participate in this activity but early during my second year it became essential to supplement my funds. By that time the doll-making activity at home had fallen on hard times and my parents were unable to cover my expenses at school. I bought and sold several things during that period but I remember one particular transaction which perhaps best illustrates the nature of what went on. One day an elderly gentleman who lived next door to our barracks offered me two new bed sheets for sale. He asked 13 marks for them, I offered 10 which he accepted. I took the sheets down to the Yugoslav camp and traded them for a piece of new heavy-duty canvas which was large enough to cover the back of a small pickup truck. On the way back to the Hungarian camp a Yugoslav truck driver stopped me and asked whether I would sell him the canvas. He gave me three cans of coffee for it which I sold later to a Hungarian fellow for 30 marks. The whole transaction netted 20 marks of profit which was not bad in those days for a few hours of trading.

The living conditions at Waldwerke were quite austere. The boys lived in two single-room barracks, with two rows of wooden double bunk beds in each. The girls had one barrack somewhat below ours with similar inside arrangement. The beds had sacks of straw for mattresses. We had to supply our own pillow and blankets.

There was a single wood-burning stove in the middle of the bay which barely provided enough heat in the winter though we kept the fire going day and night, as long as our meager ration of fuel lasted. The winter of l947/48 was particularly cold and we ran out of coal and firewood by the end of February. This was the only time we had to go to a nearby private forest to cut down and steal a few smaller trees for firewood. About ten of us went on this expedition at night, in total darkness, and tried to cut the trees as silently as possible. In the process one of the trees fell on me and severely bruised my right leg. I did not pay much attention at first but as the swelling and pain persisted I finally went to see the camp's doctor. According to his diagnosis, the periosteum, which is the membrane that surrounds the bone, was injured and became inflamed. It was a lengthy and painful recovery and, as I remember, it took several weeks for the leg to heal. To this day my right shinbone is slightly enlarged. We cut the trees into manageable pieces and stored them under our beds to dry. Unfortunately, we had to burn them before they could dry completely and as a result we had more smoke than heat in the barracks.

The food supply was also rather sparse. Everybody who lived in the camp had to hand in half of their monthly food ration coupons for which one meal per day was available at the community kitchen. Needless to say this wasn't nearly enough for the school's ever-hungry teenagers. All of us coped with this problem as best we could. Some of this "coping" became quite imaginative. For example, I decided to try to obtain double ration coupons on the basis of my weight which was well below the official guidelines for my size and age. I went to a medical clinic in Passau where they determined that I was indeed "unterernährt" (undernourished) and I received a medical certification which entitled me to double ration coupons.

I was happy with the outcome but, unfortunately, for several weeks I didn't get much benefit out of the extra rations. The story in retrospect is almost embarrassing. It was about that time I became infatuated with a pretty 17-year old schoolmate of ours who seemed to enjoy the undivided admiration of several boys older than me. Thus it appeared a losing effort to keep up with the "older" generation until one day, much to my surprise, she asked me if I would like to go for a walk with her. Of course I was convinced that the invitation was due to my 16-year old irresistible charm but, alas, it turned out she was only after my extra ration coupons which she somehow heard about. At the end of our first walk she graciously allowed me to kiss her but only if I gave her one of my coupons. This "kiss for coupon" arrangement lasted for a while until finally I realized that the object of my infatuation was clearly using me for food rather than romance. In the meantime I remained as hungry as ever,

The day-students generally had more and better nourishment than we did because most of them lived at home with their parents. Thus when a day-student classmate of mine, Bėla Kapotsffy, invited me one day for a paprika chicken dinner I gladly agreed. The invitation was even more enticing because I knew that he lived with his father on a Hungarian barge moored at the Danube bank just below the Yugoslavian camp. Since I have never been on a ship before, the evening promised to be interesting. When I arrived Mr. Kapotsffy was already cooking the heavenly-smelling dinner but after a friendly embrace still found enough time to show me around. I was surprised how comfortably Bėla and his father lived on that barge in

comparison to our paltry accommodation at Waldwerke. They had two fairly spacious cabins with a tiny bathroom between. Just before dinner I learned that Mr. Kapotsffy's wife had died before the war broke out and he became quite an accomplished cook since. I never found out, however, how he and Bėla came to live on a barge.

After the delicious dinner Mr. Kapotsffy winked at me and announced with a bright smile that he is going to tell me a secret about my parents. Much to my amazement it turned out that he not only knew Apu but they were classmates at the Academy at Keszthely some 25 years earlier. According to him Apu was a real "macho" man in those days therefore all students who knew him were surprised when he fell head over heels in love with my then 18-year old mother. One day Mr. Kapotsffy and two of his buddies decided to check on the progress of their romance and secretly followed them during an afternoon stroll in the city park at the Lake Balaton. Apparently my parents sat on a bench while the three spies were hiding in the bushes behind them and observed the unfolding scenario. After a while Anyu picked up a long, slimy worm from the ground and said to Apu: "If you truly love me you'll swallow this worm." Apu took the worm and swallowed it without a word. They got up and went home without realizing that they were closely observed. The three conspirators said nothing to Apu about the incident because they knew how thin-skinned he was and all feared his strength.

I was fascinated by this story and could hardly wait to verify it with my parents during the next school vacation. When I gleefully told them what I heard from Mr. Kapotsffy they both admitted knowing him well but dismissed the story as pure fabrication. I must say, though, this was the only occasion I saw both Anyu and Apu blush and appear to be embarrassed. Incidentally, several years later I found out that the Kapotsffys also emigrated to the USA about the same time as we did. Sadly, soon after they arrived Bėla was drafted into the Army and later killed in Korea.

We tried to go home for school vacations as often as possible. In the summer of 1948, the four fellows who had enrolled with me graduated and I alone returned to Waldwerke in the fall. I hoped to be able to work at the doll factory during the summer to earn some spending money for the school year. The situation in Reichenbach, however, was far worse than I expected. Our sales had declined precipitously as the German economy began to recover. My parents could barely sustain themselves and were in no position to finance the upcoming school year. Fortunately I was able to get a summer job with the U.S. military in Sonthofen, first as a kitchen helper and later as a pin boy in a bowling alley. The money was not much but it helped to pay the tuition and part of my other expenses. When I was ready to go back to Passau, Apu gave me the last two cartons of cigarettes that remained from the rifle transaction. Since it was still illegal for civilians to possess American goods I decided to carry these packs tied around my legs under a loose-fitting pair of trousers. This was a wise precaution because black marketing was quite widespread throughout Germany and most long distance trains were checked by police at one station or another for contraband.

I had to change trains in Munich and knew from previous experience that if a raid was to come it would occur in Landshut, a major stop between Munich and

Passau. There were three people in the compartment, a young and obviously nervous woman, a middle aged man and myself. The train sat nearly 20 minutes at the Landshut station and it soon became obvious that a police raid was in progress. No one was allowed in or out of the carriages and the young woman became more nervous with each passing minute. Finally she burst out in a whisper, saying she hoped they would not check this compartment because she had two pounds of American coffee in her suitcase. The man sitting across her said nothing and neither did I because I was also rather concerned about the cigarettes I was carrying. Suddenly the door flew open and a German policeman, accompanied by a U.S. military policeman (MP), entered the compartment. The German demanded to know if we had any contraband. I said nothing and before the shaky woman had a chance to answer, the man sitting across her volunteered that she had two pounds of coffee in her suitcase. The MP lifted the woman's suitcase off the rack, asked her to open it and confiscated the two cans of coffee. Without a further word they left the compartment and the train soon continued on its way to Passau. The poor woman was totally beside herself, berated and cursed her fellow passenger, calling him a stool pigeon and worse. The man finally told her to calm down, said he had 40 pounds of coffee in his own suitcase and would double the woman's loss as soon as we arrived at Passau. I thought it was a very smart move to divert attention from himself, in the hope that the police would be satisfied with the bounty they found and leave the rest of us alone. The woman was quite happy with this outcome; before the train pulled into the Passau station the fellow gave her four cans of coffee, just as he had promised. The 20 packs of cigarettes I had strapped to my legs also came in quite handy and the money I received for them covered a substantial part of my expenses.

Preparation for Emigration

I took the 10th grade final exams in June 1949 and said a fond farewell to Waldwerke and to Mr. Csejtey in particular, knowing full well that I would never return. Emigration to various overseas destinations had been underway for some time and by mid-1949 the International Refugee Organization (IRO) had processed thousands of refugees to their new countries. The IRO was an arm of the United Nations and operated several resettlement centers throughout Germany. The closest one to us was in Augsburg. Soon after my return to Reichenbach we went to Augsburg to register for emigration to Australia. Everything we had heard about the country and the opportunities there seemed to confirm our choice. The IRO notified us in August that we should report to Augsburg for processing to Australia. We packed our belongings, took the train and reported to the IRO housing office where they provided us with two rooms for the duration of our stay. After the preliminary IRO screening tests we were scheduled for the Australian consular medical examination, the "acid test" before emigration. We suspected that Apu's passing of this test was very unlikely because of the extensive surgery on his chest. The Australians wanted only the healthiest specimens for their country. Our fear was justified: a few weeks later we were notified that Anyu and I passed but Apu was rejected. We were in quite a dilemma because Anyu and I would not leave Apu behind. Australia, therefore, was no longer a valid consideration for us. The other alternative was the United States, but by 1949 the law under which refugees were admitted had expired and a new "DP Act" had not yet been passed by Congress. For all practical purposes, therefore, the U.S. was

closed to most refugees who were still in Germany at that time. Nevertheless, we decided to register, hoping that emigration would resume sooner or later. An answer to the question whether the U.S. would allow Apu to come, would have to wait.

The most immediate problem was subsistence and that could not wait. While we were in Augsburg, the doll factory in Reichenbach closed its operation because it was no longer profitable. We had nothing to go back to, no job, no income and no place to live. Fortunately, a petition we had submitted to the IRO bore fruit and my parents were admitted to a refugee camp at Kleinkötz, some 50 miles from Augsburg. This camp was administered by the IRO and though not fancy, it provided a reasonable subsistence for the people there. I decided to stay in Augsburg and because of my German and English language skill soon got a job at the medical office of the IRO Resettlement Center. The pay was barely enough for my room and board with a German family but at least I was employed and on my own. This job lasted for a year, until December 1950, when we finally left Augsburg on the way to the U.S. The intervening year, however, turned out to be quite eventful for our family.

As I became more familiar with the bureaucratic maze of the IRO, I kept an eye open for occasional job openings for which Apu might qualify. In the meantime, my parents were transferred to Leipheim, another IRO camp even closer to Augsburg than Kleinkötz. A few weeks after that move my cousin Otto escaped from Hungary and soon arrived to Augsburg. I was able to get an IRO job for him almost immediately through my connections since he spoke several languages fluently. At that point there were three Thiringers in Augsburg since Vili bácsi also moved there in order to take English lessons from a local language teacher. We spent quite a bit of time together, often going to performances in the recently reopened opera house.

Because of my job in the Center medical office I often had to go over to the U.S. consular medical office. I heard there that the chief medical officer, Dr. Krieger, was an avid horseman. Since Vili bácsi was a well-known horseman himself, I thought it might be a good idea to bring them together. Vili bácsi was reluctant at first but agreed when he realized how useful that connection might become when he or Apu were ready to emigrate to the U.S. I arranged a meeting and they soon became fast friends. Dr. Krieger's friendship helped us on several occasions while we lived in Augsburg. For example, when I found out that there was an opening on the Center's police force and asked him to recommend Apu, he put in a good word for him. He did get the job and they moved from Leipheim back to Augsburg.

An interesting event took place about four months later. The Center's police chief, Apu's boss, was a Frenchman who owned a nice cream-colored Mercedes. One night while Apu was on duty, someone broke into the chief's car and stole the radio. The chief was very upset the next morning, blamed Apu for the loss of his radio and fired him on the spot. It was totally unfair because Apu was not even close to the crime area that night. However, a refugee had no appeal rights against an IRO officer. Apu was out of a job and we were quite upset about it. A day or two later Anyu wrote a letter to her brother Béla in Budapest and mentioned among other things the unjust firing of Apu. About three weeks passed when Apu

was suddenly called to the Center director's office and told that the director had received a letter from the Director General of the IRO in Geneva, Switzerland, instructing him to re-hire Apu immediately to his old job or any other position for which he might qualify. The letter also stated that under no circumstance was the police chief to be allowed to harass Apu any further. Apu had no idea what prompted this letter on his behalf from the highest echelons and could give no answer to the Center director when asked how he knew the IRO Director General. The police chief was also called in a few minutes later, given a copy of the letter from Geneva and told not only to re-hire Apu but to promote him to the rank of sergeant. The chief apologized to Apu profusely and complied with the director's orders.

The next day Apu received a letter from Geneva which threw light on the mystery. As luck would have it, when Anyu's brother received the letter with the news about Apu losing his job, he remembered that an ex-girlfriend of his, Vera Flatt, was working at that time as executive secretary to the Director General of IRO in Geneva. Uncle Béla wrote to Miss Flatt immediately, asking if she could help Apu somehow. Vera in turn wrote a letter for her boss' signature and from that moment on Apu's reputation at the Center was firmly established.

The processing of emigrants to the United States resumed around October 1950. This was good news for us and for thousands of other would-be emigrants who had been waiting for this opportunity for many months. The only catch was that each emigrant had to have a "sponsor" in the U.S. who would commit himself to employ the refugee upon arrival. These sponsors usually made their job offers through various churches and charitable organizations. Without a firm offer the processing stopped at the IRO level before the case ever reached the U.S. authorities. Thus the first hurdle for us was the availability of a stateside position which did come a few weeks later through the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) of the U.S.A. The written offer was for a butler and maid position in Suitland, Maryland. There was no mention of me but we assumed that I, as a dependent, did not have to have a separate job offer. For some reason, Vili bácsi and his wife received a sponsor somewhat earlier and had already finished processing by the time we began ours.

With the NCWC offer in hand it took only about two weeks to pass the IRO and U.S. medical screening. During the previous six months or so we had become quite friendly with Dr. Krieger. In fact he ate most of his lunches at my parents' apartment, a short walk from his office. It turned out that Dr. Krieger had a severe stomach ulcer requiring a special diet which, at his request, Anyu prepared for him. By the time we were scheduled to be examined Dr. Krieger was quite familiar with Apu's medical background. As a result, the actual examination became a mere formality and we were out of his office in less than 30 minutes.

Leaving Germany for the U.S.A.

We received word in late November to get ready for the trip to Wildflecken, an IRO staging center in north-eastern Germany for U.S.-bound emigrants. The transport was delayed for about a week and we did not arrive there until the first week in December. Vili bácsi had already been at the camp for a couple of weeks when we

arrived. Apart from seeing him and his wife, Wildflecken offered no attraction for us whatever. It was located in the countryside, wooden barracks along slushy roads. The heavy snowfall and bitter cold did not help our disposition either. We stayed at this place for about two weeks while trying to occupy ourselves constructively. Apu volunteered to work in the camp store and I taught English by the linguaphone method.

Shortly before Christmas, we were transferred to Bremen, the last stop on our slow journey to the U.S. Accommodations here were quite good compared to Wildflecken. We stayed at an army compound with all kinds of amenities, including a snack bar and two movie theaters. Even though we lived comfortably we celebrated both Christmas and New Year's eve in a subdued mood knowing full well that we were about to leave Europe, perhaps never to return.

On January 8, 1951, we packed our meager belongings again and the following morning were taken by train directly to dockside in Bremerhaven where the U.S. Navy transport ship "Gen.C.C. Ballou" waited for us at anchor. The embarking proceeded smoothly and shortly after noon the gray ship slowly pulled away from the pier. Most of the thousand or so emigrants crowded onto the deck and waved good-by to the shore, crying openly. Anyu also stood there wiping away her tears while Apu and I were caught up in the excitement of the moment without outward manifestation of sorrow.

The transoceanic crossing lasted 11 days. During the first day we were still in the relatively quiet waters of the English Channel. Almost everybody seemed to be fine although a few people got seasick the moment we left the Bremerhaven docks. Once outside the Channel the weather turned somewhat stormy. High winds and choppy waters tossed the ship and soon most of us got seasick. The few people who did not get sick volunteered for the various jobs that were posted on the ship's bulletin board every morning. Based on his Resettlement Center experience, Apu again became a policeman. Anyu helped in the dining hall and I got a job as one of the ship's interpreters. Although there were at least a dozen different nationalities on board, the universal language was still German, or what one would call "kitchen" German. Some people were already trying to mix English with their own variation of German. The second morning on board an old Ukrainian man walked up to me and said "Hey you, wohin du gehen?" (Hey you, where are you going?). Wanting to answer in kind I said "Ich gehen nach Suitland. Wohin du gehen?" (I am going to Suitland. Where are you going?). The man answered "Ich absolute Chicago!" Anyu had it relatively easy because after a day or so only a few people showed up for meals even though the ship's crew made every effort to force the passengers to eat. I accompanied these crew members as they went around trying to get them out of their bunks and literally force them onto the deck or to the dining halls. The scenes were pathetic; hundreds of people moaning in their bunks and vomiting everywhere. The stench in these unvented compartments was unbelievable; it made even healthy people sick. Apart from one or two sudden episodes of sickness, the three of us fared reasonably well. There were a number of steep and narrow metal stairs connecting the several levels throughout the ship and after several days the cleaning crews were unable to keep up with the volume of vomit on them. We were about half way to New York when I suddenly slipped on vomit as I was climbing the stairs and tumbled down several feet. My bruised right

ankle started to swell immediately and within a few hours was covered with a huge hematoma. I spent the rest of the trip in sick bay, in a nice comfortable bed. The immediate attention with bandage and ice compresses helped the healing process, so that by the time we were approaching the east coast of America I was able to hobble around.

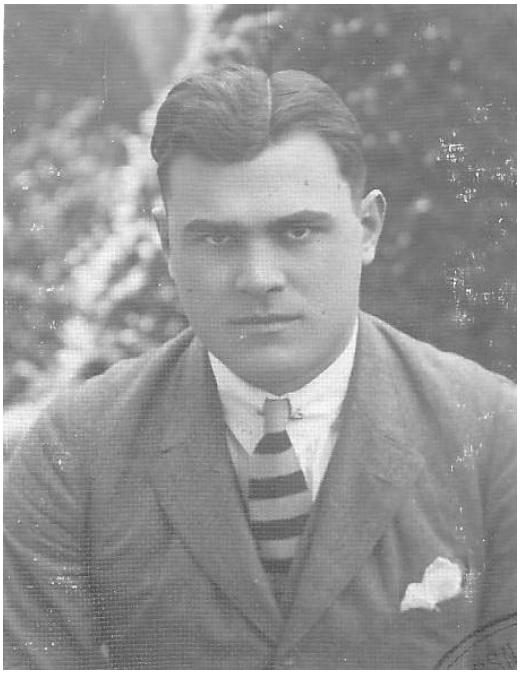
Vilmos in 1864

Gizella and Vilmos in 1891

Magda in 1917

Vilmos in 1902

Vilmos and Gizella in 1921



Leslie in 1920

Magda at Age 18, 1922

Horváth Children, Béla, Magda, Árpád, 1909

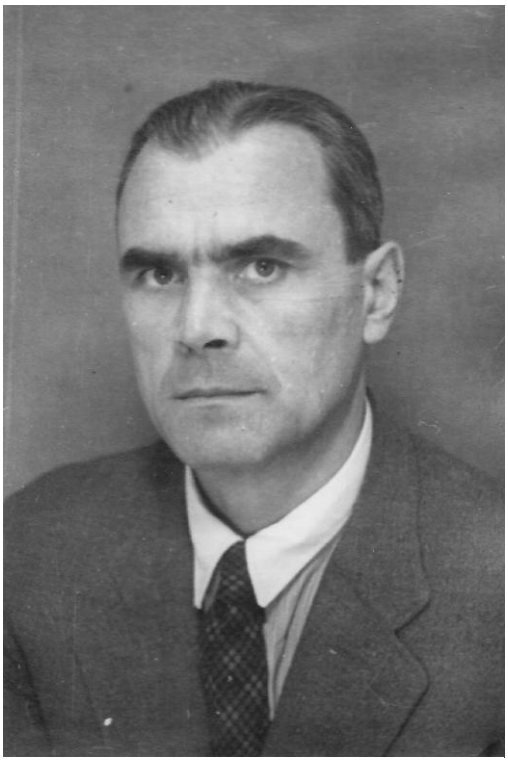
Magda with Tom, 1931

Tom in 1932

Tom with His Doves in 1942

Leslie as a P.O.W in France, 1946

Leslie in 1938

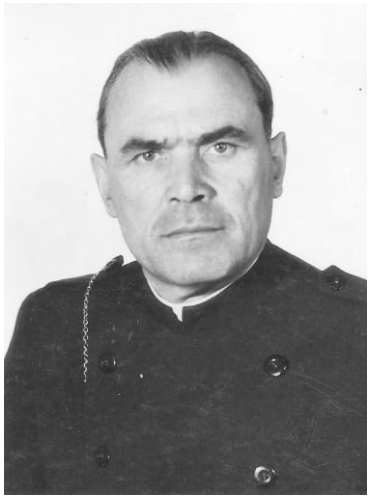


Leslie in 1948

Hotel Hirsch in Reichenbach, Germany

Magda and Tom in 1946

Magda, Leslie, and Tom in 1947



Leslie as IRO Policeman in 1950

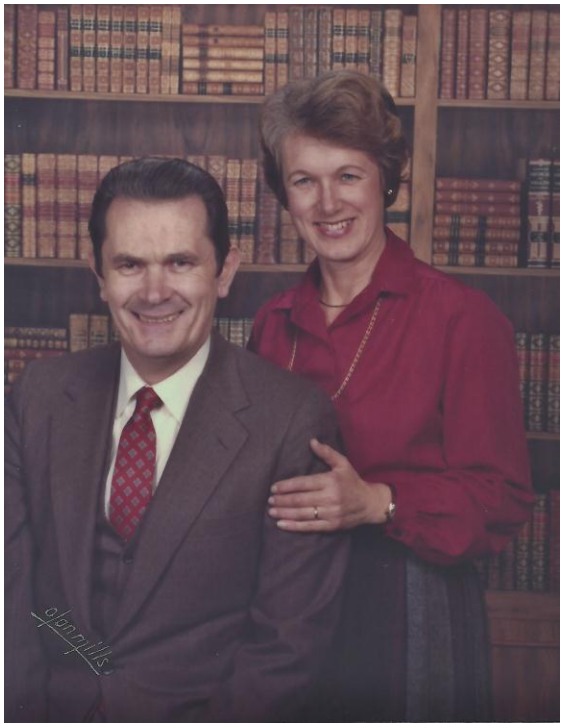
The Family on the Train to Bremerhaven

Tom as USAF Basic Trainee in 1951

Tom as USAF Staff Sergeant in London, 1955

Erika in 1958

Tom and Erika's Wedding in 1960



Tom and Erika in 1983

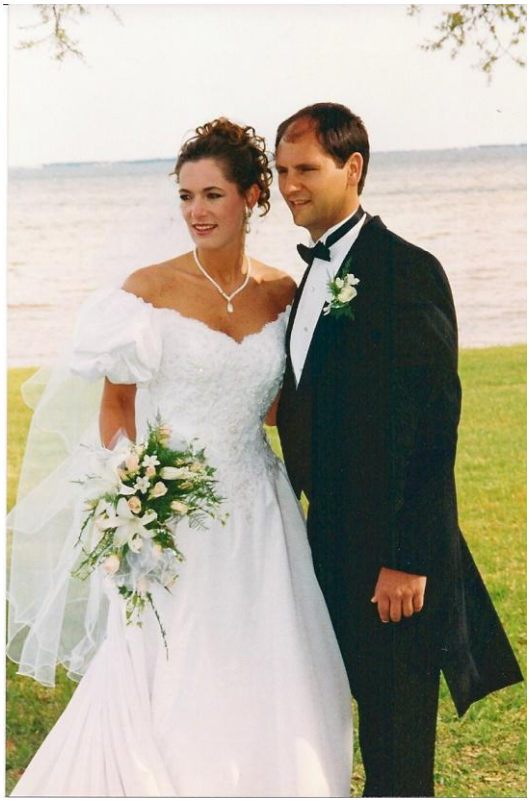
Our First Home in 1961

The Family in 1965

The Family in 1985

The Children in 1983

The Horváth Family Crypt at Keszthely



Tina and Dave's Wedding in 1993

Peter and Kathy's Wedding in 1990

Andrea and Michael's Wedding in 1992

Our House in Alexandria

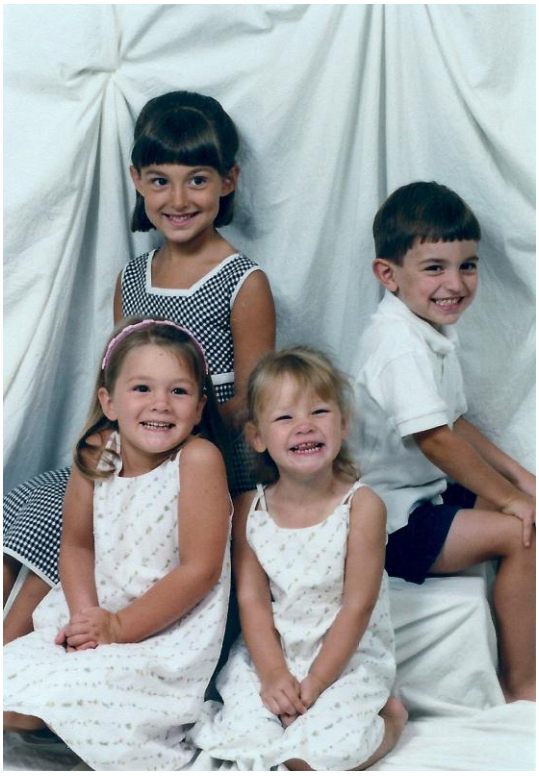
Mami and Heinke in 1991

Michael, Andrea, Peter, Kathy, Tina, Dave

Leslie in 1988

Leslie in 1995

Magda's Last Picture in 1973

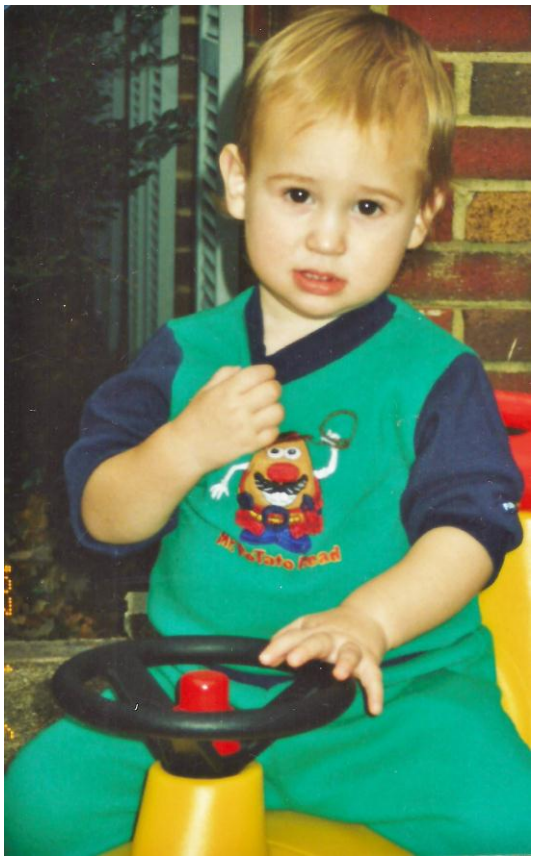


Melissa, Leslie, Natalie, Stephen in 2000

Erika Packing from Wheelchair

Kara in 2003

Our House in Sarasota



Little Joe in 2003

PART II – THE THIRINGER FAMILY IN THE NEW WORLD

Chapter 5. The New Immigrants in the U.S.A. (1951)

Arrival to New York and Denver

After sailing a circuitous route along Newfoundland and Nova Scotia we finally arrived to New York harbor on January 20, 1951. We thought we would dock at Ellis Island like many thousands of immigrants before us had done over the years but instead our ship tied up to a cargo pier in Manhattan. Our luggage was unloaded into a huge warehouse along the pier. A number of counters had been set up at one end of the warehouse, one or two for each immigrant- sponsoring organization. Multilingual guides were directing people to the appropriate lines. We found ourselves standing in front of an NCWC counter where a lady looked up our names on her roster and, much to our surprise, told us that we no longer had a job in Suitland. Apparently the positions had been filled but she asked us if we would like to go to Denver, Colorado, instead. We knew nothing about Colorado although Apu recalled from his earlier studies that a pretty destructive beetle hails from there. I asked the lady about the jobs they had for us in Denver. Her answer was somewhat vague, though she assured us that a Monsignor Kolka would certainly find us good jobs there. Then she added that we did not have much of a choice because the Denver sponsorship was the only one available to us. Faced with no alternative we agreed to go to Denver. Anticipating our agreement the lady had already arranged everything for us. We received our train tickets in an envelope plus something like $30 spending money per person. Then she tied a yellow tag with our name and destination on our coat buttons and made us sign a receipt for the train fare and cash advance. She made sure I understood that it was an advance only and that the NCWC expected full reimbursement from us as soon as we were gainfully employed. With that she escorted us to the street, hailed a taxi to take us to Grand Central Station, wished us "bon voyage" and went back to the next customer. The cabby loaded our suitcases and was about to leave when we realized that our two large trunks were still back in the warehouse. I jumped out of the cab, rushed back to the NCWC counter to find our lady and the trunks. Though she seemed annoyed at my interruption she told me the trunks would be shipped separately and we would get them once we arrived at Denver.

Grand Central Station was truly "grand" in those days. Hundreds of people were milling around and we felt completely lost in the crowd. As we stood there trying to figure out what to do next, an elderly man came up to us, looked at our tags and asked whether we needed any help. I told him we had just arrived from Europe and were going to Denver but that we did not know when, or from where our train would leave. He looked at my ticket and told us we had another hour until departure, and then he asked if we had any money and when I said yes, he suggested we buy some food for the long trip. He took us to a grocery store on the lower level of the terminal and helped us with the shopping. Being used to European scarcity, the selection for our eyes was enormous. Soon it was time for boarding, so our man took us to the platform and handed us over to a conductor's care. He wished us good luck and disappeared in the crowd. A good feeling spread slowly over us as we settled into the comfortable Pullman seats. This must be a good country, we thought, if total strangers are as helpful as this man had been.

The long train ride gave us an opportunity to get a sense of the immense size of our new country. On Sunday morning, the day after we had left New York, the train arrived in Chicago. Because of all the excitement and new impressions we could not sleep much during the night. Since there were about 30 minutes before the scheduled departure from Chicago I decided to explore the huge station. Anyu and Apu remained on the train, guarding our luggage. While on the platform I made my first "independent" purchase, three hot dogs and three cups of coffee. I was quite proud of myself and my parents were duly impressed when I returned although Apu mumbled something about the need to save our meager resources. I also picked up a Sunday newspaper or, more precisely, only the "A" section since I thought there were five or six papers put together by mistake. The vendor was a bit surprised when I handed most of the paper back to him. A lady standing nearby watched the transaction, and then asked me politely why I bought a paper and gave most of it back. After a short conversation she understood that based on the size of European newspapers I had thought the man had given me more than I paid for. She straightened out my misunderstanding which became yet another data point in my expanding store of American experiences.

Monsignor Kolka was waiting for us on the platform in Denver, a small sign in hand with our name on it. He checked our name tags against his sign and greeted us with a bright "how do you do." Apu wanted to show him that we were "educated Catholics" and greeted him in Latin: "Laudetur Jesus Christus" (Praise be to Jesus Christ), to which the Monsignor replied "that's okay." Apu realized right away that there was not much hope for a Latin conversation so he let me continue in English, such as it was. Msgr. Kolka packed us into his car and took us to a somewhat seedy hotel where he dropped the bombshell on us, namely that we did not have jobs in Denver either. When I translated the news to Anyu and Apu they were visibly upset. Apu told me to ask the Monsignor why on earth we had to come all the way to Colorado for nothing. I tried to be more diplomatic but let him know all the same how disappointed we were. Msgr. Kolka said we should settle down and not worry because he would surely find jobs for us in a day or two. In the meantime we should relax and get acquainted with the great city of Denver. Before leaving he gave us some money with the proviso that it be paid back to him, together with the cost of the hotel room, as soon as we had a regular income.

Almost a week later Msgr. Kolka showed up with the first prospective employer. He was a grouchy old fox rancher and the first thing he wanted to know was whether we ever had anything to do with foxes. I wanted to give him an honest answer but Apu insisted, half jokingly, that he knew a great deal about foxes. "After all" he said in Hungarian "I used to go fox hunting with some of the best people in Hungary." I did not think this would impress the old rancher so I fudged the answer, saying that although we did not know much about foxes we were fast learners. The man did not seem convinced and wanted us to show him our palms. He turned to Kolka, saying he did not believe we had ever done any physical labor and he had no use for some "two-bit intellectual" refugees. That was the end of our first interview.

The Mount Vernon Country Club Period

After two more days of uncertainty Msgr. Kolka appeared again, this time with a nice middle-aged couple. The man's name was Jon Rowell and he was the manager of the Mount Vernon Country Club, located above Golden, Colorado, about 10 miles from Denver. Kolka himself was a member of the club. The wife, Margy Lou Rowell, recently had a baby, an addition to their three children ranging in age from 4 to 17. The Rowells had been looking for a housekeeper but were also willing to hire Apu and me as kitchen helpers for the club. They seemed quite friendly and down to earth so we accepted their offer.

The Rowell's house was a few steps from the club building in a spectacular setting, some 2000 feet above Denver. My parents had a small room in the house while my room was in the club basement. Anyu worked directly for Mrs. Rowell but Apu and I were kept busy in the club kitchen. Our work was not particularly difficult but the hours were long; ten hours or more were not unusual. It took us some time to get used to the routine. The main difficulty in the beginning was communication, particularly Apu's rudimentary English. I had to translate almost everything for him. Our bosses were three black cooks whose heavy southern accents were even more difficult for us to understand. We did everything from dish washing to garbage hauling. Anyu had an easier time. She was soon on quite friendly terms with Mrs. Rowell who entrusted her with the care of the new baby, Connie. Apart from baby care Anyu also did light house cleaning and some cooking. Most of the main meals, however, were prepared at the club and either Apu or I carried them to the Rowells' house.

One of our jobs was the cleaning and restocking of a large walk-in freezer. We had the key to this freezer because every Saturday morning we had to take out two beef hind quarters and put them in the oven for the customary roast beef dinner in the evening. Since Apu and I were on the club payroll, our meals were part of our wages. After years of marginal subsistence in Germany we were understandably famished for good food, particularly during the first few days at the club. The freezer and three large refrigerators contained everything imaginable for gourmet meals. In the beginning we stuck to basics for breakfast, such as five fried eggs, two small steaks and a piece of strawberry shortcake for each of us. Since the club was closed until lunch and the cooks did not arrive before 11:00 a.m. we had the kitchen to ourselves. After about a week we became quite selective and prepared only the best stuff we could find, such as frog legs, filet mignons, etc. One day Mr. Rowell came into the kitchen as we were preparing our breakfast. That morning we had bacon and eggs and I was in the process of cracking 10 eggs into a bowl while Apu was frying a dozen or so strips of bacon. Mr. Rowell thought that perhaps we were making breakfast for some unexpected club members. When I told him we were preparing our own food he was incredulous. He simply would not believe that we could eat all that food. He got himself a cup of coffee and sat down to watch us while we methodically consumed everything in sight. We soon were satiated, of course, and our meals became more modest both in quality and quantity.

One of the cooks was a tall lanky fellow, appropriately named Slim. He had a cleft lip that made his southern brogue even more difficult to understand. On a

particularly busy day the whole kitchen staff was under considerable pressure and Slim told me to peel some potatoes. The peeler was in the basement, a machine that could peel a small sack of potatoes in just a few minutes. The kitchen was quite noisy, the dishwasher was running and I just could not understand what Slim was saying. He repeated it two or three times and got very agitated in the process. Finally, he grabbed a meat cleaver and started to chase me around a long table in the middle of the kitchen. Apu's back was turned to us as he was washing some pots, so he could not see what was going on. As far as I was concerned this was no joke. I ran around the table for my life because Slim seemed to have lost all control. Beside the two of us there was no one else in the kitchen who could have stopped him. As I ran around, I grabbed the large lid off a pot on the stove and used that as a shield to protect myself. By then Apu realized what was going on and shouted to me in Hungarian: "Run around once more and I will hit him from behind!" Fortunately, Mr. Rowell entered the kitchen at that moment which made Slim stop in his tracks. I explained to Jon that I could not understand what Slim wanted me to do. Once the tempers had cooled and the potatoes were peeled Slim came over to apologize. As time went on, I came to understand him much better and our relationship became friendlier.

After three months on the job I undertook my first major purchase, a 1937 Chevrolet. It was quite an investment especially because I didn't even know how to drive and, obviously, had no driver's license. The car was for sale by an old caretaker who lived near the club and it seemed to be for a layman like me in very good condition. The price also seemed reasonable so I asked Mr. Rowell for a $100 advance which added to my savings of $150 covered the purchase price. Jon tried to discourage me but to no avail. I got the car and with the help of a recently hired young itinerant handyman named Ralph I learned to drive in two weeks. The big test of my newly acquired skill occurred on May 8, 1951 at the Colorado Motor Vehicle License Bureau in Golden where I had to report for the written and driving tests. Since I had no previous license Ralph drove the car and me to the Bureau and waited at the building while I took the written test and later drove the examiner around. After we returned Ralph claimed that the examiner's face was white as a sheet. In any event he didn't say a word and I got my first license within the hour. Ralph and I hopped in the car, this time with me behind the wheel, and headed back to the club. About a mile outside of Golden I inadvertently drove into a fairly large pothole which promptly broke the car's right front axle. We had to go back to the city on foot and had the car towed to the nearest garage. By then my pride of accomplishment had been deflated considerably and the $125 repair bill didn't help matters. Another club employee came to pick us up and a few days later he also drove me back to the garage with a loan from Apu in my pocket to pay for the repair.

A week later Ralph who had no car of his own asked me if he could borrow mine for a couple of days to visit a relative outside Colorado Springs. Since I felt obligated to him I agreed without asking anyone's advice. The next day I began to have second thoughts about my "generosity" especially since I knew nothing about Ralph other than his name. The more I thought about the possibility of never seeing my car again or about Ralph getting into an accident which might have to be paid for through my new insurance the more nervous I became. On the third day Ralph was still not back so I decided to ask Mr. Rowell for advice. Hearing the

story he was amazed about my gullible nature and after a short lecture suggested to wait another day before notifying the police. Fortunately it never came to that because Ralph arrived by the end of the day and profusely apologized for the delay. The car was in good shape with a full tank of gas and continued to perform well during the next four months. Although this incident turned out all right I still learned a lesson to be more careful and less trusting in the future.

The main reason for my buying a car so soon after our arrival to the States was because both my parents and I felt very isolated in the mountains without any access to transportation. Another more private motive also played a role, namely that I became rather enamored with a very pretty 17-year old Hungarian girl named Suzy who lived with her parents in Littleton just outside of Denver. We met the family quite incidentally through a mutual friend of ours who also happened to live in Littleton. These two families were sponsored by a large Protestant church group and arrived to Littleton from Germany together some three months earlier than we. When our friend found out that we also arrived they and Suzy's family came up to the club one weekend to visit us. The three families spent a nice afternoon together while Suzy and I thoroughly enjoyed each other's company, away from the older generation. A lot of phone conversation followed but because neither of us had wheels or knew how to drive there was no opportunity for personal contact until I bought a car. After I became a licensed driver we spent most of our free time driving all around the Denver area savoring together the short time available. Time was especially short for me because by August the probability of being drafted by the military was looming increasingly on the horizon.

Leslie and Magda Move to California

The weather in that part of Colorado was quite unpredictable. It was nice and warm in January when we arrived, but in early May there was a huge snowstorm which buried us under almost three feet of snow. It took the highway crews two days to dig us out. Worse than that was the constant wind that blew unhindered across the barren hillside. It was particularly bad for Apu and me because we worked in the hot, steamy kitchen, sweating most of the time, and in that condition had to go out into the biting cold wind several times a day. Later that month Apu came down with a severe cold and became so sick he had to be taken to a Denver hospital. Fortunately, he improved fairly soon but we concluded that the climate and working conditions were detrimental to his health. He had been corresponding for some time with a friend from our years in Germany who had emigrated to California and found a job there as a gardener a few months before our arrival to Colorado. When he learned of Apu's illness, this friend suggested that he should come to California where the climate would be far better for him. Thus encouraged, my parents got on a bus in the middle of June and went to visit their friend who lived just south of San Francisco. They stayed a few days with him and with his help they went job hunting during that time. They were quite impressed with the beauty of the San Francisco peninsula and were happy to receive a job offer from a rich family in Burlingame. Apu was to become the gardener and Anyu the housekeeper for this family of three. The pay was considerably better than what they received at the club and the main house had separate quarters for them. They took the bus back to Denver and, much to the Rowells' disappointment, resigned on a two weeks' notice. We packed up their belongings and shipped them

by train from Golden to Burlingame. They boarded the bus once again, but not before Msgr. Kolka appeared on the scene and collected all the money we had owed him and the NCWC.

Chapter 6. Tom's Years in the Air Force (1951-1955)

Enlistment in the U.S. Air force (USAF)

I was sad to see my parents leave but knew that the move was in their best interest. A couple of months later it was even more difficult to say good-by to Suzy even though we knew that we would have to part soon anyway because my being drafted in the military was becoming more likely. The Korean War was a full-blown affair by 1951 and a precondition of my admittance to the U.S. had been that I would register for the draft and agree to serve if called upon to do so. As long as I had to serve anyway I thought that volunteering would give me a choice as to which branch of the military service to join. Thus, after having passed a battery of tests in late August I signed up for four years in the Air Force and was sworn in on September 5, 1951. That same evening about 20 of us were put on a commercial plane bound for San Antonio, Texas. Our final destination was Lackland Air Force Base (AFB), a huge basic training site just outside of San Antonio. It was close to midnight when we arrived to the base, hungry and miserably hot since the temperature even at that late hour hovered around 85 degrees. We were marched to a mess hall which, as it turned out, had no dinner left for us so we were given breakfast instead. After eating a few bites we marched to the barracks and practically collapsed on bare mattresses without even removing our clothing. It was obvious that we had fallen through the cracks somehow; nobody expected 20 guys to arrive at midnight.

In the fall of 1951 Lackland was overcrowded with about 80,000 airmen, mostly basic trainees. The Korean War needed troops in a hurry and many of the newly arrived trainees, ourselves included, had to be housed in huge temporary tents set up on several parade grounds. After the first night in transit barracks we were assigned to a training squadron and moved into one of these tents, where we remained for the next three weeks. Beginning with the fourth week we were moved into permanent barracks that had just been vacated by graduating trainees.

The training lasted eight weeks and I can say without any reservation that those eight weeks were the most miserable times in my life. Physical exertion and constant harassment by drill instructors were the order of the day. This was done on purpose, mainly to break us into the military mold. We were well into the second week of training before they issued us underwear, fatigues and other items of clothing. Until then we marched, crawled on our bellies and slept in the same underwear and clothing we had worn since we had left Denver. When we received our uniforms we had to mail our civilian clothing, such as it was, back to our homes. In my case, Anyu unceremoniously dumped the whole package in the trash.

During the latter part of training we had to take a battery of aptitude tests to determine which Air Force career field we were most suited for. I passed these tests with flying colors and though I was asked for my preference the need of the Air Force came first. As a result, I was assigned to the supply career field and told that my next assignment was to a supply technical school at Francis A. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming. I was somewhat instrumental in being assigned to

this base. After the test scores were in each of us had to report to a career guidance counselor to learn the results and our next assignment. My counselor happened to be a black sergeant named J. Owens. He seemed like a rather pleasant fellow but there was not much discussion about either the test results or the assignment. He told me in no uncertain terms what my specialty is going to be and where I had to report for further training upon graduation from Lackland. The original training base I was assigned to was located somewhere east of Texas nowhere near Denver, close to Suzy. I had but a few minutes to devise a strategy to help me get transferred to another base closer to her. First I had to flatter the sergeant somehow then ask him for a training assignment as close to Denver as possible. My career field was set, there was no chance of changing it, but I hoped the decision regarding the place of initial training could be altered.

As I was contemplating my next move I suddenly remembered that the famous black athlete in the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin had the same last name as my sergeant. With an incredulous smile I asked him if by any chance he was the famous Jesse Owens of 15 years ago. He seemed mighty pleased as he looked at me and said "yes" which, of course, was not true. Nevertheless, I reacted with pleasure at the opportunity of meeting such a famous person and congratulated him. He was even more pleased and I figured, rightly, that the solution of my problem was going to be a "piece of cake." In five minutes and a couple of phone calls later my reassignment to Warren AFB, only about 100 miles from Denver, was a done deal. Accordingly, upon graduation in early November I was put on a military transport plane and flown to Cheyenne. We left Lackland in 80 degree heat but when we arrived to Cheyenne it was snowing, with temperature in the thirties. Everybody there was already wearing winter uniforms as we stepped out of the airplane shivering in khakis.

The supply technician course I was supposed to attend was delayed almost a month for some reason. Thus I had the first opportunity since enlistment to relax and get acquainted with the new surroundings. After the miserable eight weeks at Lackland, Warren was a distinct change for the better. In the school environment people were more relaxed and the course itself was easy for me. More importantly, the weekends were free and I had the opportunity to take the bus to Denver and look up Suzy I had left behind.

A couple of weeks before I was to start the course, a German measles epidemic broke out at the base. I was not particularly concerned because I had had measles as a child. Nevertheless, I contracted this so-called "three-day measles". A very high fever hit me so fast that I barely made it to the infirmary building where I promptly passed out. Fortunately, the whole thing was over in about four days.

As I started the supply course I felt the lack of a high school diploma quite acutely so I decided to do something about it. The base education office had an arrangement with the Cheyenne High School whereby airmen were able to take courses there and complete the work required for a diploma. My case was somewhat more complicated because I had finished only the 10th grade in Passau and had only limited background in English, civics and U.S. history. Through the education office, however, I was able to take an equivalency test at the Cheyenne High School and started two evening courses in English and U.S. history. After the

final examinations in March 1952 I received my high school diploma, which was quite an accomplishment considering that the work was done in addition to the regular Air Force course load.

The supply course was over just about the time the high school final exams were held and in addition to those results I was eagerly awaiting my next assignment. It turned out that the assignment orders for our graduating class were quite arbitrary: airmen whose names started with the letters A through K were transferred to Europe while people from L through Z were sent to Korea. I was uneasy about having to go to Korea and requested an appointment with the base Inspector General (IG). The IG was a colonel who listened thoughtfully to my explanation, why I preferred to be assigned to the European theater of operations rather than to the Far East. I argued that as a Hungarian refugee from communism who was not even a U.S. citizen yet I might be in a real dangerous situation if captured by the Korean communists. The fact that my father was considered a war criminal by the communists would put me in double jeopardy. I reasoned that even the provisions of the Geneva Convention would not apply to me, a stateless person. The colonel agreed and my orders were changed to a three year tour of duty in England.

Three Years in England

All airmen who had received overseas assignments were granted an advance leave of 25 days before having to report for embarkation. The military had a very generous leave policy in those days but even so, one normally had to have a year of service before accumulating 30 days of leave, hence the advance. Not having seen my parents for over six months, I wasted no time to catch the first bus to San Francisco. Bus travel was the cheapest mode of public transportation then as it is today. As I recall, the trip took almost two days with intermediate stops in Salt Lake City, Utah and Reno, Nevada. I boarded the bus with about $100 in my pocket, all the money I had after six months of service, and a month's pay in advance. Most of the advance was spent on the bus ticket. I spent some $30 on meals by the time we arrived to Reno, where within an hour I gambled away the rest. The Mount Vernon Country Club had a few slot machines, even though they were illegal in Colorado, but nothing I had seen before could compare with the casinos in Reno. We had a two-hour dinner stop there and after a greasy hamburger I decided to try my luck. It took the "one-armed bandit" only about ten minutes to swallow the fistful of loose change I had. That should have been sufficient warning but I decided to go for broke. I had about $60 of paper money left which I turned in for silver dollars and started to play one of the dollar machines. The psychology of gambling is fairly simple: people seldom quit while they are ahead. Greed takes over and an eventual loss is almost inevitable. Even though I had as much as seventy or eighty dollars at one time or another, I kept pushing the cartwheels in the slot until I was down to my last few dollars. I could have kicked myself but it was too late. A lady who had been watching my slow demise could hardly wait for her turn as I headed out the door with a few silver dollars left in my pocket. She could not have put in more than two or three dollars when she hit the jackpot. I turned around and saw her trying to catch the coins in her skirt as they were pouring out of the machine. That added insult to injury and I felt quite miserable as I boarded the darkened bus.

I arrived in San Francisco shortly after midnight. There were only a few people lingering around the terminal and the last bus had left for Burlingame an hour earlier. I had no choice but to wait for the first bus in the morning. An uncomfortable six hours later I finally arrived to Burlingame. My parents were still asleep when a taxi deposited me in front of their employers' house. Fortunately, Apu had some cash so I was able to pay the taxi driver. It was great to see Anyu and Apu again. We had a lot to talk about and I was glad to find that they had adjusted to their new environment quite well. Their employers, the McLeans, had been good to them and were quite nice to me as well during the short time I spent at their home.

The San Francisco peninsula was a beautiful place in the 1950s, lush vegetation everywhere and not nearly as crowded as it is today. Burlingame was only a few miles south of San Francisco and the city was easily accessible by train or bus so I visited there at every opportunity. Unfortunately, the four weeks of leave came to an end much too soon and after borrowing some money I had to say good-bye to my parents again knowing that this time I would be gone for three years.

The cross-country bus ride to New York lasted three days and four nights, as I recall. By the time we reached Chicago I was quite tired, not having been able to sleep much on the bus. I decided, therefore, to interrupt the trip for one night and get a good night's rest in a hotel near the bus depot. It turned out that Johnny Ray, who was a very popular singer in those days, was giving a concert in a nearby auditorium. Although I was rather exhausted, I could not resist the opportunity to see the phenomenon of the day. It was quite an experience as hundreds of screaming teenagers tried to rush the fellow on the stage. The music, such as it was, left me cold. We arrived to New York on March 26, 1952. The bus depot was a huge place and I had no idea how to get to Camp Kilmer from there. It seemed the closest bus terminal was in New Brunswick, NJ, but there was some schedule complication to get even that far. Fortunately, I found three fellows at the information counter who also had to report to Camp Kilmer and were similarly at a loss as to how to get there. We decided finally to share a cab which took us door to door for not much more than the bus fare would have cost.

After eleven days at Camp Kilmer we boarded the USS Goethals in New York and sailed off for Southampton, England. The ship was a WW II troop carrier, similar to the one that had brought us to the U.S. a year earlier. It was small, overcrowded and uncomfortable. The crossing took about eight days in the stormy north Atlantic and everybody was more than happy to step onto solid ground at Southampton on April 15. Several trains were waiting for us at dockside and took us to a large U.S. air base at Brize Norton, some 40 miles east of Oxford.

The early 1950s saw the heating up of the "cold war" in Europe as the Korean War or "police action", as it was called, dragged on. Under the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) agreement, large U.S. military contingents were stationed all over non-communist Europe. For the U.S. Air Force the United Kingdom was ideal for forward placement because the country was full of largely abandoned air fields and facilities built during WW II. From these aerodromes, as the British called them, U.S. and British air forces had flown extensive raids against targets throughout the continent. After the war most of these fields were left abandoned

but by 1950 the NATO Command decided to reactivate several of the larger ones. My job was to work at this reactivation effort. At that time there were two major USAF components in Britain, the Tactical Air Command's (TAC) Third Air Force, consisting mainly of fighter aircraft, and the Seventh Air Division, a Strategic Air Command (SAC) component of intercontinental bombers. There were also some Army engineer units whose job was to help with the construction effort.

I spent about a month at Brize Norton, longer than expected because I was assigned to a newly activated unit, the 7523rd Air Base Squadron, which had to be fully staffed before its final deployment. The squadron was at full strength by the end of May and assigned the task of rebuilding and expanding the Royal Air Force (RAF) Station at Chelveston, Northamptonshire. Chelveston was located about 15 miles southeast of Kettering in the English midlands, a small village next to a large abandoned air base with an RAF skeleton crew whose job was mainly to raise and lower the Union Jack. Our squadron was first quartered in some empty British army barracks at Desborough, about 20 miles from Chelveston and we shuttled daily to our work station. The first order of business was to construct housing for the troops. We erected Quonset huts made of corrugated heavy gage sheet metal. Each of these huts housed about a dozen airmen. Next, utility lines had to be brought in or extended and water and sewage pipes put underground. In short, all the construction necessary to house about 1,000 military personnel. As soon as a sufficient number of Quonset huts were built, we moved the whole squadron, as well as the engineers, from Desborough. Living conditions in the beginning were quite primitive; roads were not yet constructed and there was ankle-deep mud everywhere. Huts were connected with narrow board-walks and one wrong step in the dark meant mud all over.

Although we all worked very hard during the first year at Chelveston, I still found time for relaxation. Having lived in Europe before, it was natural to grab the first opportunity to get to know England and travel to the Continent. I spent many weekends in London, went to the theater and opera, and was even fortunate to witness the Queen's coronation in 1952 which was indeed an historic event. I also got involved with the local Hungarian community. The Hiesz family, in particular, became such close friends that they asked me to be the godfather of their second daughter Agnes, born in January 1954. This friendship has lasted over 40 years and we still keep in touch and visit whenever the opportunity arises. Apart from the visits to London, I also traveled to Paris, Brussels, Bern, Rome and other cities on the Continent. Several of these trips were by military aircraft on a "space available" basis. Paris had become my favorite destination and by 1954 I had been there on several occasions. It was relatively easy to do so because there was always an empty seat or two on the weekend courier aircraft which flew from Blackbush airport near London to LaBourget in Paris. The same plane returned on Sunday evenings. There were several other fellows from Chelveston who also visited Paris from time to time, so four of us got together and found a one room efficiency apartment on Avenue Kleber, close to the Trocadero, which was available for about $60.00 per month. The rent included a maid who cleaned the place once a week. The $15 per person share of the rent was a bargain and, as a result, we had our own place in Paris for about a year, between 1954 and 1955. We worked out a schedule whereby two of us went to the apartment every other weekend or sometimes longer, if time permitted.

Chelveston became fully operational by 1954. Although our squadron remained there to run the base, operational duties were transferred to the 7th Air Division of SAC. The newly lengthened runways soon became the training destination for the huge B-36 bombers that flew over from the U.S. and then went back a few days later. The base supply office where I worked supported not only the housekeeping needs of the base but also the requirements of these SAC organizations. By that time my responsibilities had increased considerably and promotions came on the fast track accordingly. I was promoted to Airman 1st Class in December 1952 and to Staff Sergeant little over a year later in February 1954.

The only uncomfortable episode in my otherwise rewarding stay at Chelveston occurred in the summer of 1954. One day, we were told that a certain Colonel LaBarr from Headquarters 3rd Air Force, located at South Ruislip near London, would arrive the following Monday to inspect our supply operation. Major Beatty, my boss and base supply officer, was visibly nervous several days before the inspection, possibly because the colonel's reputation as a hard-nosed inspector was well known throughout the Command. We all looked very sharp on the fateful morning. I was working on a classified stock balance report as Col. LaBarr stopped at my desk. He asked for my name and what I was doing. I saluted and explained the report I was working on. "You have an interesting accent, sergeant. Where are you from?" the colonel inquired. "I was born in Hungary, Sir," I answered. The conversation went downhill from there. "How long have you been a citizen, sergeant?" "I am not yet a citizen, Sir." "But you do have a security clearance, don't you?" LaBarr insisted. "No Sir, I do not" was my answer, even though I knew that all hell would break loose. The colonel grabbed the classified report off my desk and marched right into Major Beatty's office. We could hear some heated conversation through the closed door. The upshot was that I was relieved of my duties within the hour and transferred to a unit supply office in the far corner of the base. For the next three or four days I did mundane jobs, such as counting dirty linen and issuing rolls of toilet paper. The following Monday Major Beatty wanted to see me in his office. I was prepared for the worst but he was quite pleasant as he said: "Sergeant, I do not know whether you are a communist spy or not, but I figure that if you are, you have already copied the classified information from the report you were working on. In any event, the report is overdue and there is no one else here who knows how to do it. Why don't you just come back, finish the damned thing and get it out of here." So I returned to my old office and finished the report. The next day I was given a temporary security clearance which was eventually made permanent.

A couple of months later I was notified to report to 3rd Air Force Headquarters with two witnesses to take the oath of citizenship in front of a so-called "traveling official" of the Justice Department. I asked two friends to come along, who were quite happy to do so, especially since all three of us received two days of administrative leave for the occasion. We went to South Ruislip, and on September 28, 1954 I became a U.S. citizen. The whole ceremony was over by early afternoon, so we decided to go back to London for a little celebrating. It was just as well that we had the next day off because the "celebration" lasted until way past midnight and we would not have been in any condition to report for work.

Return to the U.S. and Discharge

I had a good time in England during the three years I was stationed there and was even able to fly home on a 30-day leave and spend Christmas of 1953 with my parents in California. Nevertheless, I eagerly awaited the final return to the U.S. The orders for stateside transfer came on April 22, 1955. I reported to Southampton for embarkation and left that port city for New York aboard the USS Rose on May 6. The nine day crossing of the Atlantic was reasonably smooth this time and there was great jubilation when the Manhattan skyline came into view. After a few days of processing at Camp Kilmer I departed for a 30-day leave in California. This time I flew, instead of taking the bus.

My parents had changed jobs twice while I was in England. Fortunately, each change meant an improvement over their previous position. By 1955 Apu had become the head gardener at Filoli, a 700-acre estate of William P. Roth at Woodside, on the San Francisco peninsula. The Roths were a very rich family whose wealth had been inherited mainly from the Matson shipping fortune. Mrs. Roth was one of the Matson heirs. Their fortune also included extensive real estate and other holdings in Hawaii. Apu's domain was a 17 acre formal garden around a huge mansion, tended year around by 15 full-time gardeners. Apu and Anyu lived in a small two bedroom cottage in the middle of this beautiful setting. Anyu helped out at the main house but she also worked for the Roth's married daughter whose family, the Coonans, lived about six miles from Filoli. My parents were very happy at Filoli and stayed there 18 years until their retirement in 1971.

Filoli became my permanent home for the next four years. When I arrived in May 1955 Anyu prepared one of the two bedrooms for me and I began to enjoy thoroughly the comforts of home life. I was very busy during my furlough since there were a lot of things to be taken care of before I had to leave for my next and last Air Force assignment at Lincoln AFB, Nebraska. Foremost on my mind was how to make sure that my application to Stanford University was accepted. The decision to go to college after the Air Force was an easy one; far more difficult was the implementation, namely the "how" and "where." My heart was set on Stanford, ever since I first visited the campus during the Christmas leave in 1953. It was also a logical choice because the location was only about eight miles from Filoli. That would have allowed me to live at home and thereby cut the cost of education considerably. The tuition at Stanford was quite high even then although the $330 per quarter would seem like chicken feed for the students of today. If turned down at Stanford, which was a distinct possibility, my fallback position was to enroll at nearby San Mateo Junior College, a two-year institution with a far more liberal admission policy than Stanford. I submitted an application to Stanford in early January while still at Chelveston. Frankly, I did not have much confidence in being accepted and the fact that there was no response, even after I returned to California, seemed ominous. Still, I was not giving up. Through Anyu I found out that Mr. James Coonan, the Roth's son-in-law, had been an influential Stanford alumnus and had sat on the Stanford Alumni Association's board of directors a year or two earlier. Mr. Coonan learned from Anyu that I was back and had not yet received a response from the University. A few days later he asked me over to meet him. We had a long conversation, after which he said he would try to help me. Through him I had a meeting with Mr. Jack Shoup, executive director of the

Alumni Association, who subsequently found out that my application had been rejected. Since they had not yet sent notification, Mr. Shoup told me to sit tight for a while and let him try to reverse the decision.

Needless to say, I was quite disappointed but there was nothing to do except wait and hope. In the meantime, I bought a 1951 Ford convertible with a loan from Apu and was getting prepared to leave for Nebraska. There was still no news from Stanford when I left Filoli in the early morning of June 17. The drive was long and hot, especially through the Nevada and Utah deserts. I arrived at Salt Lake City, Utah, in the late evening after a much longer drive than originally intended. I pulled up in front of a hotel, but as I tried to get out of the car a sudden excruciating pain in the lower back made me double over. The pain was so intense that I simply could not straighten out. I dragged myself somehow into the lobby of the hotel and bought a tube of Ben-Gay ointment at a gift store, thinking that a deep heat rub might ease the pain. Next I found the men's room, stripped in an empty stall and rubbed the ointment on my back. The pain seemed to ease right away but as I stood there, I realized that I had to put something on my back to prevent the uniform from getting greasy. The obvious solution was to use some toilet paper and wrap it around my waist to keep it from slipping. In my haste I had forgotten to lock the door of the toilet and as I stood there half naked, wrapping the roll of toilet paper around my waist, a man suddenly opened my door. He stood for a moment with an incredulous stare frozen on his face, then slammed the door and ran out. In spite of my discomfort I had to chuckle about this incident. The fellow probably had a good story to tell for the rest of his life. The next morning after a good night's sleep I felt completely refreshed. The back pain was almost gone and after another long drive I arrived to the Colorado-Nebraska border. I slept in a motel that night and reported at the base around noon the following day.

Lincoln Air Force Base was a SAC installation near the state capital. It has since been deactivated but in 1955 it was full of mostly B-47 medium range bombers. As all SAC bases, this one was also under tight security and periodic alerts made it even less accessible. As luck would have it, I arrived to the gate on a Sunday during one of these alerts. I handed my orders to the air policeman (AP) at the gate and told him I was supposed to report to the 818th Support Group. The man looked at the orders and asked where I had enlisted. "In Denver," I responded. He looked at me suspiciously and got on the phone. A few minutes later an AP truck arrived full of armed airmen who told me to leave my car and get in the truck with my hands over my head. I started to protest but they shoved me into the truck and drove to the AP headquarters building where the sergeant of the guard said I was under arrest for being a suspected spy. First I thought they were joking, but when I realized that they were quite serious I demanded to see the officer of the day. About an hour later a lieutenant arrived and started to interrogate me. I finally began to understand what made them suspect that I was a spy. Their naive assumptions started with the fact that for some reason the guard who should have been told to expect my arrival never received the word, and when he saw my serial number (17343387) on the orders and I told him that I had enlisted in Denver, he became even more suspicious. It turned out that he also was a Denver enlistee but his serial number apparently did not start with the numerals 173. (Each enlistment center in the U.S. had a block of distinct serial numbers and by 1955

the Denver numbers apparently started with different digits from mine). It was my foreign accent which finally clinched the case in his mind, and as a result I was put under arrest. I was pretty upset and, paying no attention to military courtesy, told the lieutenant in no uncertain terms that I could not help it if the guard had no record of my arrival or that his serial number was not similar to mine. I also told him that the Russians would know better than to send a spy to the main gate with forged orders, wrong serial number and an obviously foreign accent. I then demanded that they get in touch with the first sergeant of my new organization so that he could verify my expected arrival. The lieutenant became somewhat uncertain after this outburst and ordered one of the APs to locate the first sergeant. It took another 30 minutes until they finally contacted him at home. He immediately confirmed my identity and on that basis I was released. I was fuming for days over this incident and it did not help that my new coworkers found it quite amusing. I remained leery of the AP eager-beavers for the rest of my stay at Lincoln.

The next few weeks passed uneventfully except for the exciting news from Stanford around the end of July that I had been admitted "conditionally" for the Fall Quarter. The condition was that I maintain at least a "C" average for two quarters to be matriculated. This was quite a concession by the university, considering their initial rejection. Jack Shoup must have pulled a few strings to reverse that decision. I was elated and could hardy wait for my discharge. The big day came on September 5, 1955, exactly four years after my enlistment. I had the car packed and hit the road as soon as base clearance procedures were finished. The long drive home gave me an opportunity to assess the impact of the previous four years. In retrospect, I still consider this period in my life as one of the most exciting and rewarding. It provided an unmatched opportunity for self-development and integration into the mainstream of American life, not to mention the overseas experience and the benefits of the Korean GI Bill which paid for my four years of college education.

Chapter 7. The California Years (1955-1964)

Attending Stanford University

I arrived home three days later and started college life at the end of September. Frankly, maintaining the "C" average for two quarters proved to be far more difficult than I expected. The freshman classes were full of cream-of-the-crop bright kids just out of the best high schools and it was quite a challenge just to keep up with them. Having been outside a structured academic environment for several years added to the difficulty of adjustment. Nevertheless, I managed to achieve the required grade average and my matriculation was confirmed on March 29, 1956. Progress became easier from that point on and my grades improved steadily with each successive quarter. Because I was several years older than my classmates, I decided to try to graduate in three years rather than four. This meant having to take a heavy course load and attend summer terms as well. In 1957 I also enrolled in the Air Force ROTC program and upon graduation in June 1958 was commissioned as second lieutenant in the USAF. Because of my veteran status, however, I was not required to go on active duty.

All these activities became insignificant in comparison to the momentous events of October 1956. The Hungarian revolution energized the whole world, including the otherwise politically apathetic students at Stanford. I and many others became very active during those tragic days and I remained so for several months afterward. I organized on- and off-campus demonstrations, meetings, and lectures in support of Hungarian freedom and wrote several letters to Washington urging governmental action. Unfortunately, despite the great moral outrage, nothing was done to stop the carnage and help that suffering country to achieve its freedom. It took almost another three and a half decades and the collapse of the U.S.S.R. for Hungary to become free again. After the brutal oppression of the 1956 uprising many of us felt that freedom for Hungary would not come again in our lifetime.

Much of the following year, 1957, was spent on intensive study in my major field, political science. For relevant experience I campaigned for and got elected to the position of Off-Campus Representative to the Student Legislature. Needless to say, with all these activities my social life was curtailed somewhat but I still managed to enjoy the opportunities both on and off campus.

I received my BA degree in June 1958, having earned it in three years as planned. A month earlier, my application to the Graduate Division was approved and a few days after commencement I registered for the summer term as a graduate student. During that same summer I met my future wife, Erika Forfota a Hungarian girl, who lived at that time with her parents and siblings in Santa Barbara, California. They emigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1955 and settled down in Santa Barbara. The children continued their education while their father, Dr. Erich Forfota, a physician, was preparing himself for the medical board examinations, and serving a two-year internship at the Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital. The family had escaped from Hungary in the fall of 1944, a little earlier than we had. After living for several years in Austria and Germany, they went to Dacca (formerly East Pakistan) in 1950, where Dr. Forfota accepted a five-year contract as

professor and radiologist at the Dacca University Medical School Hospital. Due to health reasons and other hardships, the family returned to Germany in 1954, but Dr. Forfota completed his five years of service in Dacca. In the meantime, permission was granted by the authorities for the whole family to enter the United States where they finally arrived in December l955. Erika was l5 years old when she went to Dacca. Since there were no adequate European style schools in that city, her parents reluctantly decided to send all four children away to an English-style boarding school in the "hill country" of India. This meant being away from home for nine months out of the year (holidays were in December, January and February). During the first year they were in a missionary school in Darjeeling in the foothills of the Himalayas and thereafter in Shillong in the hill country of Assam somewhat closer to Dacca. Erika finished her high school education there and received the so-called British Overseas Certificate. The final examination papers for this high school certificate were actually sent to Cambridge, England in those days and graded there. After returning to Germany Erika was able to find a job immediately and worked as secretary to the Education Director at an American army base close to Stuttgart. GIs could obtain their high school equivalencies at this small school, or take University of Maryland correspondence courses. It was good preparation for Erika's entry to the U.S. After working more than a year among Americans, she hardly felt like a foreigner when the family touched shore in New York.

Our meeting came about through a somewhat romantic coincidence. I had not met the Forfotas, but heard through a family friend about a Hungarian family with three pretty daughters in Santa Barbara. The friend, Ilona Lehel, who was somewhat of a matchmaker, suggested that I visit Santa Barbara to survey the situation. Since Santa Barbara was located a good 300 miles from Stanford and I was quite busy at the time preparing for final examinations, I paid no particular attention to her suggestion. A few months later I received an invitation to the Pannonia Ball in San Francisco, a formal affair held annually for the benefit of young Hungarian emigrants most of whom arrived to this country after the 1956 Hungarian revolution. I knew some members of the organizing committee and one of them mentioned that the Forfotas would also attend. I met the family during the ball and then spent most of the evening with Erika, the oldest of the three sisters. The rest, as they say, is history.

During the ensuing year we managed to visit each other several times, in spite of distances and demanding academic loads for both of us. Erika was then a junior at the University of California in Santa Barbara (UCSB) while I spent most of my time in graduate seminars and occasionally in California state politics. By the time I finished graduate school and received the Master of Arts degree in June 1959, we had talked quite seriously about our future together. Much of this "talking" took place in the exchange of weekly letters, especially after I accepted a Logistic Support Officer appointment with the USAF at Sacramento, CA, in July 1959. We were officially engaged during the Easter holidays of 1960 and set our wedding date for August 27 of that year.

In the meantime, a significant development occurred. Shortly after our engagement Erika came to Sacramento for a short visit mostly to help me find an apartment we could move into after our wedding. Though she did not say much I

could sense that she was not happy with the prospect of having to live in Sacramento. This was not surprising because in comparison to Santa Barbara or the San Francisco peninsula Sacramento left much to be desired. It was a very hot, humid and distinctly provincial city in those days. Although I liked my job and the solid career opportunity it offered I was not happy with the living conditions either. As a result I decided to try to get a job around San Francisco, an area preferable to Sacramento in every respect. The initial feelers bore fruit a couple of months later when I received a job offer from the Lockheed Missiles and Space Company (LMSC) in Sunnyvale. Both Erika and I were delighted with the Logistics Engineer position at LMSC because in addition to a modest pay increase it enabled us to start married life in an area both of us knew and liked. I resigned from the Air Force effective August 19, 1960, and moved back to Filoli for the few days until the wedding. In the meantime, Erika graduated with honors from UCSB and was busy with wedding preparations.

Marriage and Life on the San Francisco Peninsula

The marriage ceremony took place at the Santa Barbara Mission Church with Father Benignus Barát a Hungarian Benedictine friend of mine officiating. After the reception which was held at my in-laws' house, we spent our wedding night in a motel overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It was quite exciting for both of us to register for the first time as Mr. and Mrs. After a healthy breakfast the next morning we departed in my big and beautiful '59 Oldsmobile convertible for a week of honeymooning on the south shore of Lake Tahoe in the high Sierras.

Our first home was in my parents' two bedroom duplex in Redwood City. It was a small but convenient apartment located only about five miles from Lockheed. We lived there for three happy years and our two daughters, Andrea and Christina, were born during that time. Andrea's arrival was totally unexpected because we had planned not to start a family for at least a couple of years. Nevertheless, when Erika became pregnant a month after our wedding we were overjoyed. Erika could hardly wait to tell her parents the happy news. The opportunity presented itself at Thanksgiving 1960 which we celebrated in Santa Barbara. We were all sitting solemnly around the dinner table waiting for my father-in-law, "Tati" (as he was called in the family), to carve the turkey when my beaming wife made the announcement. After a momentary silence, Tati put down the knife and sat down. Under his stern appearance he was a sentimental person, so it was not surprising that it took him a moment to regain his composure. He then got up slowly, went over to Erika and embraced her without a word. It was truly a touching scene, the poignancy of which was soon broken by the clinking of glasses and happy congratulations. Only Erika's aunt Ica remained seated, dabbing her eyes silently. "What's wrong with you, Ica?" my mother-in-law demanded. "Nothing," she answered "I just wish that Erika could have remained happy a bit longer." Tati, who never had much patience with Ica looked at her with amazement and said "Ica, how could you say a silly thing like that." It was obvious, though, that Ica had no idea why anybody would consider her remark silly.

Andrea was born on July 13, 1961. Shortly afterward Tati received a job offer from Georgetown University Medical School in Washington DC, to teach radiology there. The position seemed very advantageous, so he accepted it and they moved to

Washington in September 1961. About two years later, our second daughter, Tina, was born on August 11, 1963. We were "experienced" parents by that time and the arrival of the second baby presented no great challenge to the family's routine. However, we started thinking about the need for a larger home and after much soul searching bought a newly built house with a low interest G.I. loan in a Sunnyvale subdivision. Neither of us had ever expected to be able to own a house so soon, after barely three years into our marriage, since we had started out with no savings at all. It was an exciting period in our lives.

NASA Job Offer in Washington D.C.

During the following spring, we packed up the family and flew to Washington for a short vacation. It was a pleasant spring in Washington and we were quite impressed with the beauty of the city. We stayed with my in-laws in suburban Maryland and drove to the city for sightseeing almost daily. We had such a wonderful time that after a few days we thought it might not be a bad idea to live there permanently. We talked about this only in passing, yet the possibility stuck in my mind until one day I decided to "test the waters." The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) headquarters building was located on Independence Avenue, clearly visible from the Mall where we did most of our sightseeing. I told Erika I was going to the NASA employment office just to see what openings they might have. We agreed to meet in front of the building in about a half an hour. As it turned out, my "look-see" lasted almost an hour and a half during which I had two interviews and a job offer from the Office of Manned Space Flight (OMSF) program control office. The job sounded so interesting that I accepted the offer on the spot. Only on my way out of the building did I start wondering how Erika might receive the news. Her initial reaction was quite predictable; she was upset about having to wait an extra hour for me. Her mood did not improve much after I explained the circumstances and my acceptance of the job offer. The sudden, unexpected, and unilateral decision overwhelmed her even though I tried to assure her that we could still say no if she did not like the idea. She was very quiet for the rest of the day, and only the next morning did we start discussing the pros and cons of the NASA offer. Eventually we got Tati and Mami involved as well, and they were understandably happy with the idea of our moving to Washington. We agreed finally that the opportunity to work at NASA headquarters during the most exciting time of space exploration was too good to pass up, even though the relocation may, on the short run, cause some difficulty and need for adjustment. We returned home with some misgivings, not the least of which was my parents' reaction to the news. We should not have worried about that. As always, Anyu and Apu were completely supportive of our decision even though it meant another long-term separation from their only child and his young family. Little did I realize that I would remain at NASA for the next 25 years.

Chapter 8. The Washington Years (1964-1993)

The Move to Washington

The official written job offer arrived in August and we agreed to the reporting date of September 14, 1964. The biggest task ahead was the sale of our new house. It was sold eventually although we barely recovered the money we put into it. I resigned from Lockheed on September 4, after having worked there almost four years. It was a very interesting period for me; I learned a great deal and progressed quite well. During the last year I had become the operations planner and master scheduler for several military satellite programs. In that position I had become thoroughly familiar with the manufacturing, checkout and launch activities of satellite systems, an experience which helped to secure the position with NASA.

A few days after my leaving Lockheed I packed our '62 Mercedes and set out alone for the long and lonely drive to Washington. Erika was pregnant again and I hated to leave her alone with the children and the task of packing our belongings for the movers. Fortunately, my parents were able to help her and after the movers left she stayed with them at Filoli. Our agreement was that she would stay there with the children until I could rent a house or an apartment, which I did shortly after my arrival to Washington. In the meantime Tati lost his job at Georgetown University and accepted a new position at the Roswell Memorial Cancer Institute in Buffalo, New York. Consequently by the time we arrived to Washington they were no longer there.

There is an enormous difference in the September climate between California and Washington. After five days of cross-country driving in a car, without air conditioning, I arrived on a hot, humid day with temperature about 85 degrees and matching humidity It started to rain the following day and continued on and off for a week or so. I checked into a motel in Arlington, Virginia, and started to work right away but my thoughts were with Erika, wondering how she would get used to the new environment after the beauty and comfort of Filoli. Knowing her preference for some "elbow room" I gave up the idea of finding an apartment and concentrated on searching for a house in the suburbs. There were quite a number of rental properties available through the classified ads but the three or four I visited left a lot to be desired. I was getting anxious because the movers were scheduled to arrive within a few days. Finally I found in the west end of Alexandria a nice three bedroom house in the quiet neighborhood of Lincolnia Hills, ready for occupancy within a day or two. The owners, a military family, introduced me to the neighbors who organized a combined "going away" and "welcome" party for us. Their genuine goodwill made me feel right away a part of the community and I felt much better about calling Erika to come with the children.

Erika flew in a couple of days before the movers were scheduled to arrive with our household goods. As late as a day earlier I was told by the company that the van would arrive on schedule. I took a day off from work and we waited in the hot, empty and humid house on Lowell Avenue. After several hours of fruitless waiting we called the company and were told that the van had broken down somewhere in Tennessee. Everything had to be transferred into another van and it would take at

least four days for it to arrive to Alexandria. We were understandably upset but there was nothing we could do except wait. The four days of delay turned into a week by which time we, with two small children, could no longer stand the cramped and shoddy one bedroom housekeeping motel unit in Arlington. Erika insisted that we move into the empty house and sleep on the floor, if necessary. Fortunately, our new neighbors were kind enough to give us some folding cots and blankets for the next two days until the van finally arrived.

The winter of 1964, our first in Virginia, was quite cold by local standards. There was a heavy snowfall shortly after Christmas, the first snow we had seen in several years. The girls were particularly delighted and would not leave us alone until we bought a sled and joined the neighbors sliding down on a steep, unplowed street just a few yards from our house. In spite of her pregnancy in the sixth month Erika was in the middle of the crowd, zipping downhill while holding Andrea and Tina in front of her.

Peter's Birth and Tati's Passing

The birth of our third child, Peter, on March 28, 1965 was not without significant worry. During the morning of that day Erika began to lose some water mixed with meconium and her obstetrician's partner told us to go to the Alexandria hospital without delay. The regular obstetrician was off-duty that day. The partner met us there and became quite concerned about the baby's condition. I was pacing around the waiting room not realizing that anything was out of the ordinary. Finally the doctor came out looking visibly nervous. He told me that the baby was showing signs of "fetal distress." He felt that labor should be induced immediately so that the baby could be delivered as soon as possible. Then he said that because Erika has had mumps during the first weeks of pregnancy, there might be some "complications." He hesitated when I asked "what complications," then told me to sit down. He proceeded to explain that there was a possibility for the baby to be born deformed or dead. Suddenly I felt the whole world crashing in on me. When I asked him what the chances were of this happening he said there was about a one-third probability for the baby to be born deformed, one-third that it would be still-born and one-third that it would be healthy. With that he shook may hand in sympathy and left.

The hours that followed were among the most difficult in my life. I sat there dazed for a while, not really comprehending what I just heard, even though I kept repeating the doctor's words in my mind. Erika was my main concern: how would she take the blow if it came and her joyous expectations suddenly turned to tragedy. It was almost a relief that I had to go to the airport to pick up Mami who was arriving from Buffalo that afternoon to help with the children. She noticed immediately that something was wrong and I finally had to tell her the frightening news. She cried all the way home and made me promise that I would call her immediately, regardless what happened.

I returned to the hospital's maternity waiting room and was told that Erika was in labor but had not yet delivered. The next hour or so seemed like an eternity. Although I tried desperately to think positively – after all there was a better than 30 percent chance of a healthy baby – the frightening alternatives kept returning to

my mind. Suddenly Erika's doctor rushed into the waiting room with a wide grin on his face. He grabbed my hand and said "Congratulations, you are the father of a healthy big boy!" My feelings of relief were indescribable. A few minutes later Erika and the baby were wheeled out of the delivery room. She was smiling and both looked positively beautiful. I gave a silent thanks to God and headed for the nearest phone to call Mami with the good news.

Peter's birth was an important event for our extended family as well, particularly on the Thiringer side. After all, Apu and his four male siblings together had only two sons, one of whom had no children. We had two daughters and the family consensus had been that it was unlikely for our third child to be a boy. Thus it seemed, until Peter's arrival, that the Thiringer family was destined to die out. My uncle, Vili bácsi, who had no children, was particularly pleased when we called him with the birth announcement. He said jokingly, "I have been waiting for a Thiringer male for so long that I don't believe it until I personally check his plumbing!"

We finally settled down when about six months later a house similar to the one we were renting came on the market nearby, within the same subdivision. We decided to buy it since by then we were used to the area and liked the advantages it offered. In September 1965 we moved to Benning Court and a month later my parents' short visit from California found us already settled in the new home.

A very sad event occurred about a year after Peter's birth. Tati suffered a severe stroke in the spring of 1966. Although he recovered he never completely regained his faculties. As a result he was not able to continue his work, had to resign from Roswell and move back with Mami to Santa Barbara. A few months later, on October 21, 1966, he underwent surgery for an abdominal aneurism and died on the operating table at the age of 63. His untimely passing was a devastating blow for Mami who could not get over her loss. Indeed, we all missed him very much and it was particularly unfortunate that his grandchildren never really had the opportunity to know him.

Career Summary, First Visit to Hungary

My work was quite interesting in those days. Although not involved directly in the technical aspects of the space program, I had the opportunity to participate in many facets of the Gemini and Apollo programs. During my 16 years in the OMSF program control office I was involved in a wide variety of activities ranging from budget preparation and flight scheduling to writing congressional testimonies for our top executives. I was also present at the conceptual "birth" of the Space Shuttle in the early 1970s. I recall one meeting in particular during which a dozen or so OMSF executives debated for hours the final configuration of the Shuttle. There were at least five competing designs to choose from, each with its own merits. Finally, after a long period of seemingly redundant discussions Phil Culbertson, Director of Advanced Programs, stood up and summarized the single most logical set of criteria and parameters of the competing designs. Perhaps, because everybody was quite tired of the seemingly fruitless debate by then, they all agreed with Dr. Culbertson's proposal which set the course of manned space flight for the foreseeable future. My job was to write the minutes, assign action

items and prepare a statement for the Associate Administrator notifying Congress of the decision. In 1980 I transferred from the OMSF to Headquarters Administration as Chief of the Budget and Support Branch. Two years later I became Deputy Director of Headquarters Administration. In 1983 I was appointed to the Senior Executive Service of the United States which includes the highest positions within the Civil Service of the government. I served in that capacity in several interesting and challenging positions until my retirement in 1989.

In 1967 Erika and I decided to visit Hungary for the first time since we had left some 20 years earlier. It was not an easy decision. We had a lot of misgivings about applying for an entry visa, especially since Apu was still considered a "war criminal" by the Hungarian communist government because of his anticommunist activities in 1919. On the other hand, we reasoned that we were children when we left Hungary in 1944 and Apu's status surely could not be held against us. If the Hungarian Embassy issued visas and allowed us into the country it seemed logical that they would leave us alone. The Hungarian tourist industry was barely beginning to flourish in the 1960s and any harassment of an American tourist, especially a government official, could have created adverse publicity for them. Thus, with some trepidation, we handed in our visa request to the Hungarian Embassy in Washington. It took four weeks to get the necessary permits because, as we were told, the visas had to be approved in Budapest.

In the meantime Mami arrived from California for a visit and agreed to take care of the children during our absence. She was still very depressed but we hoped that being around her grandchildren might improve her outlook on life. She had been quite restless since Tati's death and could not accept life without him. After our return from Europe she planned to go alone on a European tour herself, hoping to regain some perspective of the future. My parents also planned to travel to Europe that summer, Anyu hoping to go to Hungary while Apu would wait for her in Vienna. Since Mami wanted to visit Hungary in the same time frame they planned to meet in Budapest during the second week in August. Their decision was contingent upon our experiences in Hungary. In essence we became the "guinea pigs" for them.

As luck would have it, the Arab-Israeli war broke out a couple of days after our arrival to Vienna. The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. immediately took opposite sides in the conflict: the U.S. supported Israel while the U.S.S.R. was on the Arab side. Rumors were rampant about the "cold war" heating up; we even heard that the communist block countries were closing their borders to western tourists. All this just added to our uneasiness about driving into Hungary. I decided that under these circumstances it would be prudent to ask the US Embassy in Vienna to give us reliable information and advice about entering the country. We went to the embassy but it was a disappointing trip. The consul was noncommittal; his only advice was that we should check in with the U.S. Embassy in Budapest upon arrival if we decided to go. If they did not hear from us within three days, he said, they would initiate a search. Though this did not relieve our anxiety, we left for Hungary the next day in our rented car.

It is difficult to describe our feelings as we arrived to the Hungarian border at Hegyeshalom. There was a heavy steel barrier across the highway, similar to the

gates at railroad crossings. It was manned by two soldiers with submachine guns slung over their shoulders. There was also a high guard tower on either side of the barrier and a heavy barbed wire fence as far as the eye could see. It was interrupted by yet another guard tower in the distance. The meaning of the "iron curtain" became a sudden reality for us.

We stopped behind a long line of cars waiting at the gate. The cars were admitted one by one and it took almost an hour before we got in. Finally the gate was raised. The guard waved us through and lowered the gate behind us. The feeling was unreal. We could not turn around only go forward a few feet because there was another closed barrier about 100 feet ahead. Three customs officials descended on us like locusts, checking the car and our luggage inch by inch. They even used a mirror on wheels to check the underside of the vehicle. We had to tell them the purpose of our visit, the destination, the people we intended to see and the places where we would stay. We were also told to report to the police within 24 hours of our arrival. Finally, after 45 minutes of intensive scrutiny, they stamped our passports, opened the second gate and waved us on.

The drive to Budapest was mostly uneventful. It was a clear and warm June morning as we drove through the beautiful countryside which even the communists could not ruin. Fields of wheat and barley swayed in the wind and the roadside poppies were in full bloom. Childhood memories kept us silent for the first hour or so. A peculiar feeling welled up within us. After all, here we were, grown up Americans who spent many more years abroad than in Hungary and yet we felt that with all its problems and faults Hungary was and will always remain a part of us. Since then we have been back to Hungary many times yet we never felt the ties to our roots stronger than on that June day in 1967.

Just before Komárom there was a "detour" sign on the highway which we missed somehow. Suddenly we were the only vehicle on the road. We paid no attention until we saw several Russian military trucks and armed personnel carriers driving toward us in both lanes of the road. A small truck preceded the convoy and the driver shouted angrily in Russian, waving us off the road. I pulled onto the shoulder and waited while a number of vehicles and several tanks lumbered past us. The soviet soldiers were quite amused at our predicament and waved with cheerful smiles as they passed by. A while later we arrived to Budapest and checked into the Hotel Palace which was reserved for foreigners paying with convertible currencies. The Hungarian "forint" was not convertible to foreign currency in those days and could be spent only in Hungary. Anyu's brother, Uncle Bėla, and Erika's cousin Sanyi with his wife Angyal had been waiting for us in the hotel lobby since noon. They were sitting on the opposite ends of a long sofa, with a bouquet in hand. The two families became acquainted only after they rushed to welcome us when we entered the lobby.

We stayed in Hungary for a week, much of it in Budapest. Our impression of the city and its people was depressing. The buildings were sooty gray, the walls still full of holes left since the street battles of WWII and the uprising in 1956. The people themselves seemed to have a hopeless expression on their faces; they were impolite, pushy and impatient. Once the word spread about our arrival various relatives invited us. Sometimes we had to visit two or three families in one day.

Even though most of these people lived in one or two rooms their homes seemed like oases in a sea of proletarian egalitarianism. It appeared to us that everyone had to live by his or her own wits. The standard of living was so low in those days that people had to resort to bartering in exchange for goods and services.

Uncle Bėla, an elderly bachelor, provided a good example of the arrangement that flourished throughout the city. On the fourth day of our stay he asked me to drive him on an errand. He sat in the car with a small package in his lap. A few streets from his apartment he asked me to stop at a flower stand where he bought a single carnation. He continued to give me directions until we arrived at a state-owned laundry, called "Patyolat." He went in while I parked the car and hurried to catch up with him. Behind the counter a heavy-set middle aged woman was serving several customers. Her face lit up when Uncle Bėla walked up and gave her the carnation. "Dear Gizike," he said, "I brought this carnation just for you." Gizike started to blush and thanked him profusely. I could hardly wait for the continuation of this unfolding scenario. Uncle Bėla gave the woman his package which contained a shirt and asked her to sew on a couple of buttons. Gizike disappeared behind a curtain and started to work on it while several people in the line began to grumble. The shirt was finished in a few minutes. Gizike wrapped it up and returned it to Uncle Bėla with a bright smile. "Thank you, Gizike, you are an angel," he said as we left the store in the midst of hostile stares. I was really intrigued and wanted to know why he had not asked Erika to sew on the buttons. "My dear fellow" he answered "you will be gone in a few days but I have to live here for the rest of my life. These contacts are important and must be nurtured." I could see his point. He died in 1989, just short of his 90th birthday.

After we returned home we gave Mami and Anyu an objective description of our impressions. A few weeks later they traveled to Budapest as well, for the first time since 1944, and met there as they had planned. They left with many more negative impressions mainly because they searched for traces of a world that had disappeared forever. Hungary has changed a great deal since 1967. The "iron curtain" was dismantled in 1989 and all Russian solders left the country shortly thereafter. It is now a free, thriving democracy albeit with many serious problems.

Mami continued her trip in 1967 from Budapest, visiting several European and other countries around the world, wandering restlessly and not finding peace. She returned to her home in Santa Barbara, still discouraged, sad and lonely, and lived there by herself for the next 17 years. She took her last trip to Europe in 1984. The same year Erika and I were there as well and arranged to meet her in Paris. It was then that we realized for the first time that her ability to live and move independently was becoming very difficult for her.

Anyu's Death and Mami's Decline

Meanwhile my parents began to think seriously about retiring and moving closer to us. In 1970 they sold their duplex in Redwood City and eventually asked me to buy a small house for them with the proceeds, a place suitable for retirement. We canvassed the neighborhood and were fortunate to find a house practically within walking distance from us. We bought it and rented it out for a year, until 1971, when they moved east to make it their home. In 1972 we bought a new house as

well, in the subdivision of Heywood Glen which was just being developed between our old house and my parents' home. We had lived seven years in the Lincolnia Hills house but with the children soon becoming teenagers we needed a larger home. The models at Heywood Glen seemed to fit the bill since we liked the area and, naturally, we also wanted to remain near my parents.

We could not move into the new house until January 1973, two months later than anticipated. A number of problems had delayed the construction, not the least of them Hurricane Agnes which had completely inundated the area. Work had to be suspended for over a week because the ground was too saturated for work to continue. Meanwhile we had to close on the sale of our Lincolnia Hills home, six weeks before the completion date of the new house. My parents' generous offer to take us in solved our dilemma. Their small three bedroom house was bursting at the seams with the addition of two adults, three small children, a dog and a cat plus a substantial amount of luggage. Luckily the new owners of our home allowed us to store much of our furniture in the basement until we were able to move into the new house.

While living with my parents we noticed Anyu's increasingly frequent coughing spells. She shrugged off our concern, dismissed any suggestion to schedule a medical checkup and continued her life-long habit of heavy smoking. She continued her daily chores which became more arduous by the sudden increase of the family. Eventually she could no longer ignore the ominous signs. Shortly after we moved into our new house she underwent a pulmonary examination the result of which was not definite initially, only suspicious. It did not relieve our anxieties and in fact a short time later a second examination confirmed the presence of lung cancer. Cancer was a disease that Anyu had been dreading ever since her father had died of it some 50 years earlier. Still, during the next seven months she bravely endured the unpleasant treatments, radiation therapies and hospital procedures even though she was convinced of their futility. In spite of the treatments or because of them she was able to function quite well until mid-August, yet both she and we had a sense of foreboding. In late May she asked her brother Bėla to come from Budapest for a last visit. Much to Anyu's delight Uncle Bėla was able to spend almost a whole month here. She felt much better during this period, so much so that she decided to fly with Apu and Uncle Bėla to California for a week. The trip seemed to serve two purposes for her, to show Filoli to her brother and to say farewell to the place where she and Apu had spent so many happy years together. A few days after their return Uncle Bėla flew back to Hungary. He appeared quite stoic during the short good-bye and only on the way to the airport did he break down, crying over the impending death of his beloved sister.

Throughout her brief illness Anyu's main concern, as always, was her family and friends. The following touching letter to her best friend in Australia, Martha Pummer, reflected a philosophical acceptance of the inevitable. She wrote it on March 15, 1973, shortly after her cancer was positively diagnosed:

"My dear Márti (Martha),

"This time I am not going to resent that you haven't kept your promise to write me once a month. I know and understand that there must be many other items and cares occupying your time. It is also true that after so many years it becomes increasingly difficult to find mutually interesting thoughts and subjects that would bring separated friends together across long distances even for a few minutes. This may sound a bit sentimental but I must introduce somehow what I want to tell you, my dear. It is difficult to say simply 'goodbye' because I'll die soon. A week ago I came home from the hospital where after all kinds of tests it was determined that I have lung cancer. Since the case doesn't lend itself to surgery they'll start a radiation regimen next week. I don't know if my system can take this treatment but, frankly, I don't have much hope regarding the outcome. If anything, I suspect it will accelerate the inevitable. For the time being I feel reasonably well and am able to take care of the work around the house. The treatment, however, will surely weaken my condition thus it is likely that I'll not write you any more. I know this is the nature of life. People come and go – there is no exception. Still, I am sorry to leave my family, especially Laci (Apu) who would also need support as he grows older. I also regret to leave our nice little house and garden which I cultivated with great joy and ambition as late as last summer. It would have been nice to live for another year or two but if this is the will of the Almighty there is nothing we can do about it.

"The reason I want to say goodbye to you now my dear Márti is because I would like to thank your goodness, your love, your helping hand and your very good heart that was always ready to accept and help others. I only ask you to think of me from time to time with an occasional prayer.

With my love, as ever, your Magdi (Anyu)."

Five months later, on August 27, she wrote her last letter to Mrs. Pummer:

"My dearest Márti,

"Your countryside must be quite lovely and I wish for you to be able to enjoy it for a long time in good health. There are many beautiful areas here as well, beauties that I can no longer appreciate. Somehow I am no longer interested in this world. Tomorrow I'll go to the hospital to die. The doctor said there is no hope. At this point I only want to spend a few quiet, warm hours with Laci and my family who are all very good to me. I hope this short time will be granted to me.

"It is likely that you will not be able to read my handwriting and I can't talk well either because the tumors are pressing on my vocal chords. So these are my last lines to you dear Márti who always has remained so close to me, your old friend, who now sends her final goodbye.

With my love as always, your Magdi."

These and other letters to Mrs. Pummer from Anyu and Apu were found among her belongings after her death. We visited her sons shortly thereafter, in 1999, during

our travels in Australia and New Zealand. They, the younger one an old schoolmate, gave us the letters which Mrs. Pummer had meticulously saved over the years.

We had mailed Anyu's last letter to Australia just before she was taken to the Alexandria Hospital. She knew that the end was near. She did not want to be a burden for Apu or for us but wished to die as soon as possible. Her Living Will specifically instructed us not to keep her alive by artificial means and she asked only for pain medication. She weakened rapidly and by the afternoon of September 4 (after less than a week) she was already in a semi-comatose state when Apu arrived, accompanied by our Catholic parish priest. He anointed her according to the Church's last rites and a few hours later she died peacefully. She was a loving, unselfish person whose memory will always be with us. A week later Apu returned her ashes to her brother, Uncle Bėla, in Budapest who had them buried in the Horváth family crypt next to her parents in Keszthely, Hungary. It was ironic that during the last years of her life Anyu had often voiced her concern about Apu's survival without her. As it happened, Apu died 23 years later, living alone and taking care of his needs with remarkable resiliency almost until the end.

Mami's condition continued to deteriorate slowly, after her last European trip in 1984. For example, it became increasingly difficult for her to drive to the city for essential errands. It caused so much concern to her children that in 1985 they persuaded her to sell the Santa Barbara house and move to Santa Cruz where her daughter, Karin, was living. The transition was very difficult. She bought a small duplex unit and although she was happy to be close to one of her children, she missed her house and could not adjust to the new surroundings. It was becoming obvious that her memory was failing and she increasingly needed help; living by herself was becoming unmanageable. In 1989 after several and sometimes heated discussions among the four siblings it was decided that we would take her into our home permanently. We certainly had the room; our children no longer lived with us, Erika had the time and I had just retired. So Mami moved in with us, but again with great reluctance on her part. The fact was she no longer felt at home anywhere. Her sense of disorientation, confusion, memory loss and accompanying anxiety made things difficult for all of us. She needed constant attention and supervision, yet no amount of reassurance and love from Erika or me could make her comfortable.

Mami lived with us just short of one year when we had to face the fact that this arrangement was not working. The nursing home solution loomed large, causing great apprehension and raging debates among her children. In order to gain some time her son, Gerbi, cared for her in his home for a few weeks after we took her back to California. She then lived in Karin's house for another six months. During that time she broke her hip which finally made a nursing home mandatory. Although the hip was operated successfully she never learned to walk again. In April 1991 she was moved into a newly opened nursing home in Evergreen, Colorado, very close to her daughter, Heinke. She lived there for over two years, receiving good care ensured by Heinke's daily visits.

Three Weddings and My Retirement

As our children grew up we became more and more involved with the usual school activities such as soccer, high school band boosting, and so on. Erika also became quite active as a Girl Scout leader and trainer, and is involved with this activity even today, long after our daughters have passed the Girl Scout age. She has held all kinds of positions in the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital, including a couple of years on the Board of Directors.

The children became adults almost before we realized it. Andrea graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1983 with a B.A. degree in education. She is currently employed as the office manager and an executive assistant in a large real estate development and management firm in northern Virginia. She married Michael Billewicz on October 3, 1992 and they live in Fairfax County. Tina graduated in 1988 from George Mason University with a B.S. degree in nursing. Upon graduation she decided to join the Air Force and is currently serving as a Captain at Eglin AFB in Florida. Her husband is David Bonorden whom she married on April 17, 1993. They will reside in Austin, Texas, once Tina's Air Force commitment is over. Peter is a University of Virginia graduate, having received a B.S. degree in aerospace engineering in 1987. He is employed with Booz, Allen and Hamilton, a Bethesda Maryland consulting firm. He married a schoolmate, Kathleen McKavitt, on June 30, 1990 and they reside in Virginia, about eight miles from us.

On July 1, 1989, after a fond farewell from my friends and co-workers, I closed the book on 30 years of federal service and left with Erika for an extended vacation in Europe. Since then we have been busy with the weddings of our three children and have worked on various projects that had been put off for a long time. We still travel a lot and intend to enjoy the fruits of a rewarding career as long as God grants us the health and ability to do so.

Chapter 9. The Washington Years – Continued (1993-2001)

Almost fifteen years have passed since my retirement in 1989, a span of time rich in family events both happy and sad. As stated in the Preface, originally I had not intended to continue the "family saga" beyond the weddings of our children which at the time seemed a logical conclusion of our family's history. Since that time, however, several developments including two deaths, six births and a permanent change of residence have had a significant effect on our line of the Thiringer family. A chronological account of these and other events, therefore, seems appropriate before the details fade from our memory. Undoubtedly there will be other changes in the future, perhaps to be chronicled by someone else in our family.

Mami's Last Years

A major and sad event was Mami's death on September 28, 1993, on her 91st birthday. She was getting excellent care at her nursing home in Evergreen, Colorado, thanks to Heinke's daily visits that kept the staff on their toes. In spite of that, however, she became progressively weaker during the last two years of her life. Heinke spent a great deal of time with Mami as her condition deteriorated. Her dementia was such that eventually she recognized no one except Heinke, and only when she spoke Hungarian to her. Her reaction to hearing the mother tongue was positive most of the time, but it was emotionally wrenching for Heinke to realize that she no longer recognized her as a daughter. The situation was considerably better during the first year at the nursing home when Heinke was still able to take Mami to her house and provide a brief change of scenery.

Erika flew to Denver twice during the last period of Mami's life. Her siblings also visited from California at various times. During Erika's first visit in late summer of 1992 Mami was still sufficiently strong to be taken to Heinke for a few hours. On that occasion Gerbi also arrived from California and the three siblings had an opportunity for a last family reunion with their mother. Unfortunately Karin was unable to get away from her job to join them. When I picked up Erika at the airport upon her return she sadly remarked that Mami would not last much longer. Alas, she lived for almost another year and a half.

In early 1993 Erika flew to Denver again. It was still winter in Evergreen where Heinke lives with her husband in the high Rocky Mountains about 2,000 feet above Denver. Though it was around the end of March the snow was still quite deep. Erika spent a couple of weeks there and provided some relief for Heinke by taking over the daily visits to the nursing home. Mami was considerably weaker, no longer able to get out of bed, and did not recognize Erika. She knew she had a daughter named Erika but in her mind that person was not around. Heinke was used to similar reactions from Mami but for Erika, though she was emotionally prepared, it became a very sad visit. The quiet solitude among snow-capped mountains, however, and the opportunity to browse through Heinke's extensive library seemed to ease her sorrow.

On 27 September 1993 our phone rang late in the evening. Heinke was on the line, having just returned from the nursing home. She said: "Mami is in a coma

and will probably die within the next 24 hours." We assured her that Erika would fly to Denver on the first available flight. Early next morning Heinke called again to tell us that Mami had just died quietly after Heinke had spent the entire night at her bedside. Though it was difficult to get a seat on such a short notice, Erika was able to fly to Stapleton airport that afternoon. She rented a car and drove directly to Mami's nursing home. Heinke met her and they went to Mami's room together where she lay peacefully after a long, difficult and often lonely life. The date was 28 September, Mami's 91st birthday.

The other two siblings arrived from California that same evening and the next morning the whole family drove to the funeral home to see Mami for the last time. She was covered only by a white sheet, according to Heinke's explicit instructions not to change anything, lying on her side on a gurney, the position in which she had died. She looked peaceful, almost as if she were napping. Her face which always had looked younger than her age was smooth and serene. The four children and Heinke's daughter, Kirsten, stood at her side and even as they struggled with their own individual sorrow they knew that Mami had reached her destination, a place where she had wanted to be ever since her husband had died.

She was cremated the following day and later a priest held a simple memorial service with only the four siblings present. They stood in a circle around the altar, holding hands with the priest whose deeply moving words helped to ease their pain. Mami had never been a religious person, yet they felt she would have been pleased. Heinke kept the urn in her home while making arrangements for burial next to Tati's remains, to be marked by a new bronze plaque. She was laid to rest in the Montecito cemetery of Santa Barbara, California, where she had lived most of her years after Tati's death. A few years after Mami's death Heinke took a trip to India, mostly by herself, and visited many of the places where the Forfota family had lived and traveled during the 1950s. Unbeknownst to anyone, she took a small portion of Mami's ashes with her and, after making the proper arrangements according to Hindu customs, she scattered those ashes into the Ganges River from a small boat, together with bright yellow marigolds, as the local people do. It was a meaningful and tender gesture from Heinke who still has very strong feelings about those years.

Apu's Deteriorating Health

Apart from Mami's passing our saddest event occurred in 1996 with the death of the main contributor to these memoirs, my father, Apu. His strength and agility had been declining for years, yet as late as on his 90th birthday he was able to attend and be the center of a large party in his honor. There were many people at our house on the evening of May 19, 1990. The place was decorated; Andrea and Michael even drew a large "Happy 90th Birthday, Apu" banner which hung from the ceiling of our family room. I brought Apu over -- he had given up driving the year before -- and it was heartwarming to see the outburst of genuine affection as the guests sang "happy birthday to you" and he slowly entered the room. He soon became the center of attention as he joined people in lively conversation, both in Hungarian and English. His magnetic personality and sharpness of mind at such an advanced age were something to behold.

This was the last big party he attended. It became increasingly apparent that he was tiring rather easily; even walking from one room to another with his bad knees became very painful. The periodic cortisone injections into the knee joints no longer had much effect. He tried all kinds of remedies; I even took him to a Chinese acupuncturist, to no avail. In the beginning he used a single cane but eventually he felt safer with two. By the latter part of 1990 he gave up all outside activities except two: the winter trip to Warm Mineral Springs in Florida and the weekly grocery shopping with me.

He had traveled to Florida for more than ten years to spend the winter months there, convinced that the daily bathing in the warm mineral-laden waters helped to ease the pain in his joints. We suspected, though, that the social life and new friends he made there were probably just as important to his well being as the waters. Apu always made friends easily. Only after his death, as we went through his address book did we realize how many people he knew and corresponded with. He was looking forward to these trips all year and had his bags packed well before Christmas for the flights just after the beginning of the New Year. We always took care of his house and affairs until his return, usually around the end of March. As I mentioned in the Foreword, it was during one of these winter sojourns in Florida that he wrote the first part of our family chronicles.

Despite the ever-increasing pain in his legs and his weakening physical condition Apu attended the weddings of all three of his grandchildren whom he loved very much. The first one was the easiest since Peter and Kathy were married just a month and a half after his 90th birthday. He was in a relatively good shape then, and the wedding took place in a church only about two blocks from his house. Andrea and Michael's marriage in October 1992, however, was another matter. It was more difficult for him to attend partly because it occurred two years later and also because it was held on Ocracoke Island in North Carolina, about 10 hours away by car. Although he was then past 92, he came with us and had a good time.

The winter of that year, 1992/93, was memorable for another reason: it was Apu's last trip alone to Florida. Even before he left we noticed that he did not display the usual anticipation. Since we were concerned about his condition and planned to spend a couple of weeks in Sarasota at the end of February 1993, we decided to visit him at Warm Mineral Springs, located about 40 miles from Sarasota. We arrived to his rented room in a house near the lake on a beautiful sunny morning. Apu seemed to be fine but we noticed a couple of scabs on his leg and forehead. After some prompting he told us that a week or so earlier he had tripped and fallen on the road while walking to the lake. He had lain on the road, unable to get up, until some passers-by helped him. We did not belabor the incident, not wanting to upset him, but it was clear to us that his independence was coming to an end. There were no more problems during the remainder of his stay at Warm Mineral Springs. When we picked him up at the airport upon his return he volunteered that this was his last trip to Florida. The stoic resignation in his voice implied the sadness within.

As it turned out, however, he traveled to Florida once more, about a year later. This time he drove with us to Tina's wedding in April 1993, at Eglin AFB in the Florida panhandle. Because of his age and condition we decided earlier not to urge

him to undertake this arduous trip. Nevertheless, when Tina called him and Apu realized how disappointed she was at the prospect of not having her grandfather present at her big event he gave in and packed his bag one last time. We took it easy during the long drive and Apu held up remarkably well. He sat in the front row during the ceremony at the Eglin Officers' Club and with the help of two canes he even walked under an arch of sabers after the wedding.

Upon our return from Florida Apu's condition slowly continued to deteriorate. The two canes were no longer sufficient to provide the necessary balance for him. At first he resisted the idea of using a walker but when I got one for him just to try out he immediately liked the feel of the additional support and safety it provided. Even with the walker, however, he became increasingly reluctant to leave his house and only on rare occasions were we able to bring him to our home for a dinner or a small party with friends. He also became more withdrawn as he gave up most of his copious reading and letter-writing. This was partly due to the fact that his vision had been deteriorating for the last 2-3 years and by 1993 he could barely see in one eye. He seemed to be loosing weight as well and often complained about persistent cough or dry throat. This slow process continued yet he was still well enough during the first half of 1994 so that Erika and I felt sufficiently secure to leave him and take a vacation in Europe. Andrea and Peter checked on him almost daily during our absence and a young man, a Home Health Aide, came once a week to clean his house and help him bathe.

Shortly after our return from Europe a scary episode occurred. Even with his walker Apu was very careful when moving from one room to another, especially since he sometimes experienced momentary dizziness and loss of balance. On one of these occasions he collapsed and could not get up. Fortunately he had a cordless phone with him and was able to call us. As we were out of the house at the time, he left a message on our answering machine describing his predicament. He was still lying on the floor when we frantically rushed over to his house upon hearing the message an hour later. He was lucky that apart from a few bruises he suffered no ill effects. Nevertheless the incident scared both him and us and, as a result, I scheduled a thorough physical checkup for him.

The examination on September 12 revealed some minor problems and the presence of a suspicious colorectal lesion. Three days later I took him to the Arlington Hospital for a colonoscopy examination by a specialist. The colonoscopy clearly confirmed that the lesion was cancerous but a subsequent CAT scan did not indicate any metastases. While Apu was dressing I talked to the doctor who suggested an operation to get rid of the cancerous part of the colon as soon as possible.

I took Apu home in the early afternoon. He felt quite weak after these medical procedures and went to bed right away. He complained of intestinal pain that we attributed to the accumulated air introduced during the colonoscopy. Around 2:00 a.m. the following morning our telephone rang. Apu was on the line asking us to take him to the Fairfax Hospital emergency room because he was having unbearable intestinal pain. Erika and I got dressed immediately, went over to his house and drove him to the hospital. By the time the doctors examined him his abdomen was greatly distended. The doctors immediately suspected that his colon

must have been perforated during the colonoscopy and air was seeping into the abdominal cavity. An immediate operation was essential in order to prevent peritonitis. By 4:00 a.m. he was on the operating table and one of the best surgeons in the area who happened to be on duty that night began the operation. He repaired the punctured colon and removed the cancerous part of the lower colon. He also performed a colostomy to serve as a temporary bypass for the rectum. He assured us after the operation that there was no visible spreading of the cancer to any organs in the abdominal cavity. This confirmed the Arlington CAT scan findings and was a great relief to us. The operation lasted several hours, was a complete success, and Apu came through like a trooper. He remained in the hospital for over three weeks in order to build up his strength and to be trained in colostomy procedures. On October 11 he was transferred to a convalescent home in Alexandria for an additional three weeks of further rehabilitation. We finally were able to take him home on November 1, 1994.

It was amazing for all of us to see how Apu coped with this new adversity. Even though he was over 94 years old and had just survived a major operation he mustered sufficient strength and determination to adjust to a radically new situation. To get used to and live with a colostomy appliance is not easy for anyone, least of all for a person of Apu's age. Nevertheless, he learned to take care of himself without any assistance. Although his general condition did not improve after the operation, at least for a while it reached a plateau before the situation worsened again. Though visibly weakened, he was able to tap his inner reservoir of strength which helped him to hang on. We believed that the impending birth of his first great-grandchild was perhaps the main reason for Apu's will to live. He was really looking forward to the arrival of Kathy's baby and was overjoyed when he had the first opportunity to see little Melissa. For the next year and a half, until his death, Melissa was the center of Apu's attention and he was delighted whenever he had a chance to see her.

In May 1995 we celebrated Apu's 95th birthday with a small family dinner. As usual I brought him over to our house for the occasion. It was painful to see how difficult it was for him to negotiate even the single small step up from our garage to the house. I had to lift him by his elbows over the threshold. He was still in a fairly good mood throughout the dinner and, as usual, Melissa's presence provided the highlight for him. Later as I took him home he remarked in a sad voice that he did not believe he would live to see his next birthday. I contradicted him but was full of foreboding myself as I looked at his pathetic, sunken figure. Yet, almost another year passed before the final tragedy struck.

The year of 1996 started innocuously enough. Apu was still sufficiently strong to be with us on Christmas Eve 1995. We had a nice dinner and the whole family was present, even Tina and Dave from Texas. They usually try to spend Christmas of one year with us and the next one with their relatives in Texas. 1995 was our turn. Ever since our children were small our family has celebrated Christmas on the evening of December 24, the European way, by lighting real candles on the tree and opening presents after dinner. It became sort of a family tradition for us. This time, too, we gathered around the nicely decorated Christmas tree after dinner and sang several Christmas carols. Melissa was the center of attention, of course, excited and happy but too young to really comprehend the occasion. Apu sat in

his usual arm-chair, his face expressionless, staring at the tree and the surrounding commotion. I looked at him several times wondering what was going through his mind, yet I felt somehow that it was best not to disturb his reverie. He seemed tired and soon after we unwrapped the presents he asked to be taken home.

The Florida Condominium Purchase

A couple of months later, in February 1996, we decided to take advantage of our relative Vili (Bill) Graff's long-standing invitation to spend a few days in his condominium at Sarasota, Florida. The Washington weather was rather miserable just then thus the Florida sunshine sounded very enticing. Apu was quite apprehensive about our leaving even for a couple of weeks. We reassured him that Andrea and Peter would check on him daily while we are away. We also promised to call him regularly from Vili's place. He accepted the reassurance but his reluctance reminded us again how dependent he had become on us. It was the first time that he seemed really uneasy even though our absence was going to be quite short.

It took us a good day and a half drive (about 980 miles door-to-door) to the Sarasota condo complex. Vili, as always, turned out to be an impeccable host. He even cooked a dinner for our arrival (Hungarian layered potatoes) which was quite delicious. We had a very good time there yet we could never quite relax since Apu's immediate future and our increasing role in it loomed dark in the recesses of our minds. It was not the first time we had been to Sarasota and the area was becoming quite familiar and enjoyable. The condo overlooked a large heated swimming pool which was an additional attraction to the other amenities. Vili had to go back to Washington in a few days and we had the place to ourselves for the rest of our stay.

As we were coming and going we noticed that the apartment door facing Vili's had a lock box on it. Just on a lark we called a real estate agent who verified that indeed the condo was for sale, fully furnished. We had no intention of buying a place in Florida at that time although we had talked about the possibility from time to time. Anyway, we asked the agent to show us the apartment and we were "hooked" the moment we walked in. The owner, a retired bachelor from New York, had kept the place in immaculate condition. Not only was it fully furnished but he was even going to leave kitchen utensils, bed linen, blankets, towels, television set, etc., behind. Apparently he had found a rich girlfriend in town, moved in with her and was eager to sell his condo. It was in a "turnkey" condition, with excellent quality furnishing, and the decision to buy it took us less than a day. Furious negotiations followed. The situation was somewhat comical. We sat in Vili's living room and the owner in his own living room about 20 feet away and the agent hurried from one room to the other with each offer and counter offer. In the meantime another agent was showing the condo to a customer who apparently also made an offer, better than ours, less than an hour after the owner had accepted ours.

Frankly, the whole transaction left us dazed. In less than 48 hours we had a two-bedroom, two- bath condo. Such a purchase had not been in our plans for at least

another two years. When we arrived home Apu was also quite surprised to hear the news. His only question was when and how much time we intended to spend there. Behind the question we could sense the lurking insecurity of being left alone. It was even more apparent a month later, in April, when we had to drive to Sarasota again for the closing procedures. We had to reassure him that everything would be fine and we would return in a few days. It was a strange but exhilarating feeling to receive the keys at the lawyers' office, the first and probably the last time ever for us to own a second home. Even now, a couple of years later, as I write this story here in Sarasota we occasionally wonder how everything happened so fast. In our excitement it never occurred to us that a tragedy was just around the corner.

Apu's Final Weeks and Passing

Soon after our return home we started finalizing plans for a summer journey to Europe. Naively, perhaps, we felt that we could get away for 4-5 weeks as long as we could make arrangements for Apu's complete care. He seemed quite agitated upon realizing that we were seriously thinking about going although he knew that we already had canceled a trip the previous summer because of concern about his condition. It was a difficult decision but we hoped that with a competent and full time care-provider he would be well taken care of. Very reluctantly he agreed but his growing sense of physical and emotional insecurity was quite evident. Almost like a premonition he said, not for he first time, that he didn't think he would live to the end of the year. The implication was that perhaps we should postpone our trip. We had become his "lifeline" and, clearly, his reliance on us for everything became stronger as he became weaker.

Our plans and concerns once again became academic as the unexpected tragedy struck. The date of May 4 is indelibly seared in our minds and will probably stay with us as long as we live. The telephone rang about 1:30 a.m., waking us from deep sleep. Apu was on the line saying, "Please come over right away, I am standing in front of the bathroom sink and cannot move." All kinds of possibilities raced through our minds as we dressed and rushed over to his house. Apu had not yet put the door chain on so we were able to get in. He was lying on the bathroom floor, not standing in front of the sink. He had apparently collapsed while brushing his teeth and must have passed out momentarily. When he came to, the last thing he remembered was standing at the sink. In his fall he had hit his head on the edge of the sink and a small cut was still bleeding. Fortunately his cordless phone was again in the basket of his walker and he was able to make the call. He was quite coherent by the time we reached the bathroom but we could not get in because his head was lodged against the door. I asked him to try sliding away from the door to enable us to squeeze in to help him but he couldn't move. We had no choice but to push the door and Apu's body with it, until we were able to enter.

It is strange how people act in stressful situations. Most of our reactions were quite logical: we assessed the situation, cleaned his bloody head and asked how he felt. His answer was reassuring. Though he couldn't move his left leg he felt no pain and all other extremities were functional. He kept repeating the obvious that nothing like this had ever happened to him before. We, on the other hand, did not do the obvious, namely to call the emergency number 911. Somehow it never even

occurred to us that he might have broken his hip or another bone, probably because he did not complain of pain. Our main concern was to make him comfortable by getting him off the floor into his bed. Though his bed was only about 12 feet from the bathroom it took us close to an hour to get him there. We tried several ways to get him up but all our efforts were in vain. Finally we had to lift and carry him to his bed. By this time both Erika and I were quite exhausted but at least he was reasonably comfortable for the rest of the night.

Later in the morning I contacted his physician Dr. Patel who, amazingly, agreed to come out to see Apu. Doctors nowadays simply don't make house-calls anymore. Apu was resting comfortably when Dr. Patel arrived. A cursory examination revealed that Apu couldn't move his left leg and it seemed shorter than the right one. This indicated to the doctor that he may have broken his hip. We were wondering what to do next because, though not in pain, Apu was totally immobilized. In such a situation home care was not possible. After a short conference with Dr. Patel we decided to have Apu transferred to the Alexandria Hospital for a more thorough assessment of his condition. The next morning an ambulance took him to the hospital's emergency department. Erika and I followed a few minutes later.

A hospital emergency facility is quite depressing, even under the best of circumstances. It is often full of severely injured people and other patients with lesser problems. In this environment Apu was wheeled into a curtained cubicle, not unlike the Fairfax Hospital's emergency room where we had taken him to some 20 months earlier. After almost three hours in the waiting area an orthopedic surgeon came out and told us that the x-ray confirmed Dr. Patel's suspicion of the broken hip. According to the surgeon the fracture was so massive that Apu's left femur was actually pushed up, past the broken joint, hence the appearance of the shorter leg. In the doctor's opinion there was really no choice but to operate, otherwise Apu would remain immobile and would die in a very short time, probably of pneumonia. Only later did we realize how ironic that statement was! We followed the doctor to Apu's cubicle to talk to him and make certain he understood the situation. We found him in a relatively upbeat mood and he readily agreed to the proposed operation which, at his age and condition, was not without risks.

The operation was a complete success. In two days the nurses helped him to stand on the new hip joint and take the first few steps. The contrast, however, between his general condition and attitude after the operation two years earlier and this one was markedly different. He was quite weak, had no desire to get out of bed and needed a couple of blood transfusions due to anemia. Four days after the operation he was transferred to the same convalescent home where he had stayed after his first operation. The chief nurse remembered him with a cheerful "Hi, Leslie, good to see you again."

The situation though was far from cheerful. Just before his transfer to the convalescent home the hospital took a routine x-ray of Apu's chest which revealed "multiple cancerous nodes" in his lungs. A subsequent blood test indicated that his liver seemed to be affected as well. Dr. Patel informed us about these findings a few days later. According to him, these metastases most likely resulted from Apu's colorectal cancer; therefore the prognosis was not good. He had probably

less than six months to live. We were saddened but not surprised. It had been obvious for quite some time that something was basically wrong with him. The bouts of coughing spells, the steady weakening, the unexplained weight loss and this latest collapse coupled with Apu's pessimistic assessment of his own condition all pointed to the approaching end. Fortunately he had no particular pain or discomfort as yet, so we decided not to tell him the sad news. We also agreed with the doctor's suggestion that at his age and condition it made no sense to initiate any cancer therapy. Thus our aim was just to keep him comfortable as long as possible.

We used much of the next 20 days while Apu was in the convalescent home to prepare for his eventual care at home. The Arlington Hospice was enormously helpful in this regard. I cannot praise this organization sufficiently; the dedicated staff was absolutely God-sent. They phased into Apu's care while he was still in the convalescent home and made arrangements for all the home-care equipment we needed, such as a hospital bed, oxygen equipment, air mattress, etc., so that we were able to furnish a bedroom ready for a terminally ill patient.

As his birthday on May 19 approached, Apu became more depressed. He asked us not to let anyone visit him on that day but relented when we told him that even Melissa would like to come. When the day arrived we all wished him the best, which he accepted with a sad smile of resignation. Our daily visits by then had become a stressful routine. It was difficult for us to see the deterioration day after day, his refusal of any assistance, physical therapy, etc. He was increasingly unable or unwilling to talk, eat or drink and was getting weaker and sometimes even hallucinated. He came up with some weird stories. One day he told us about an Italian communist conspiracy afoot in the building saying that those people were about to overthrow the government unless we did something about it. He had some clear days as well and sensed that something was very wrong with him. Eventually Erika told him gently that the doctors had found some cancer in his body. Apu's immediate reaction was somber and touching. In Hungarian he said: "Thank God, I am ready and I shall stop eating. It is time for me to go, the sooner the better."

The important events during his remaining days at the convalescent home were Melissa’s visit with Peter and Kathy and Tina's arrival a few days later. Apu had always been delighted to see Melissa. Somehow the bouncy presence of his little great-granddaughter made him forget his own age and approaching end. It was wonderful to see how he perked up when she climbed onto his bed. Tina arrived from Austin, Texas, shortly after we told her the news about Apu's condition. She had always been very close to him and it saddened her greatly to realize that Apu might not be alive to see her first baby who was due in July. We told Apu that Tina would arrive in a few days and from then on whenever we arrived for the daily visit his first question was, “When is Tina coming?" After her arrival to National Airport we took her directly to Apu's bedside and his happy smile brought tears to everyone's eyes, including the nurses' who quietly stood in the back of the room, not wanting to miss this reunion.

Apu's condition continued to deteriorate. He refused to eat and barely sipped a little water or juice. During the third week, an oncologist we consulted ordered a

new x-ray which indicated definite spread of the cancer in his lungs. Based on these findings the specialist revised Dr. Patel's earlier assessment and said that Apu's life expectancy was no more than three or four weeks. Tina came with us to see him every day and being a registered nurse, had a clear understanding of the clinical details of his condition. In her view Apu had not weeks but at most just a few days left and she urged us to take him home as soon as possible. Since by then his bedroom at home had been changed into a hospital room we decided to take Tina's advice. We also succeeded in hiring a live-in nurse's aide who was ready to start as soon as Apu arrived.

He was happy to go home and rallied visibly when the ambulance picked him up on June 3. After a short ride they arrived to his little house and I could see his eyes resting briefly on the roses along the front of the house as the crew wheeled him in. The nurse's aide arrived a short time later. A registered nurse from the hospice came that afternoon to examine Apu. She told us with compassion that in her view Apu had but a few days to live, an assessment that underscored Tina's prediction. That afternoon, though, he felt strong enough to ask us to call a close friend of his in California. The short conversation exhausted him and he lapsed into a semi-comatose state. He was barely conscious during the next two days and on the second day, June 5, we asked the local Catholic priest to administer the last sacrament, the extreme unction. Apu probably was not conscious any more yet it was a deeply moving ceremony for us all. We stood around his bed, Erika and I with our children and we prayed with the priest as he anointed Apu. We all cried, yet felt at peace as we faced with him the inevitable termination of human existence.

That night Erika decided to stay at Apu's house to relieve the nurse's aide who had not slept much during the two previous nights. She was also anxious because she had trouble understanding Apu's occasional slurred words. Erika did not sleep too well either and about 2:00 a.m. on June 6 she woke up with an uneasy feeling. The house seemed too quiet somehow. She went to Apu's room and, touching his cheek, realized he was dead, even though his skin was still warm. She came out quietly and called me, saying: "Tom, I think Apu just died." I woke Tina and together we drove to Apu's house. Tina confirmed Apu's death while I called the nurse on duty at the hospice. We also called the funeral home where I had made arrangements earlier for his cremation. One of his last wishes had been to be cremated and for his ashes to be buried next to my mother's in a family crypt at Keszthely, Hungary. The hospice nurse certified Apu's death and the funeral home attendants took his body away. Only then did the reality begin to sink in that my beloved father was no longer with us.

The void which Apu's death left behind was palpable not only for us, his immediate family, but also for his many friends and relatives around the world. Our feelings were perhaps best expressed in a eulogy read by Erika at a small wake in the funeral home on June 9:

> *"Dear Friends - I would like to thank all of you for taking the time and coming here today to remember and pay respect to our father, grandfather and reat-grandfather, Leslie Thiringer, or "Apu," as we in the family liked to call him.*

"Apu was a very special person to us and, it seems, to so many other people as well. As Tom remarked the other day, 'a whole era, largely unknown to many of us, has ended with his passing.' A close relative in Hungary wrote: 'We always considered Apu as the last remaining pillar of our family. Always there, always steady, always enduring. Come what may, he would stay on top, as he did so many times. A voice from the past which could help interpret the present; someone who made a difference, who cared and who dared; someone who truly lived and enjoyed doing so. No small mind, no weak heart!'

"He lived a very long life; in his middle years full of adventure, danger and tragedy. Some very difficult times during the 40s and 50s but his life here in the United States was successful and happy. He was almost never sick - or so it seemed to us, until the last few years.

"He had many, many friends. We think it was so because his natural charm and warm, generous personality made every-one like him. He corresponded frequently, until quite recently, with old friends in various parts of the world - many of those preceded him.

"He saw his three grandchildren grow up, get married and start their lives successfully. He was so fortunate to have his first great-grandchild close by; she brought many sunny moments into his life. We are saddened because he did not live to see his second great-grandchild, expected in five weeks.One life is taken, another added to our family!

"We shall miss him so very much but we know that he was ready and longed for the peace of God which he so richly deserved. And God was merciful to him indeed. "Let us pause for a moment, each in our own way, for a silent prayer for, and remembrance of, Leslie or Apu..."

In the weeks following Apu's death we received over 60 condolences from people in the US. and several foreign countries. Just a sample of these represents the general feeling about him as a person and the void he left behind:

A niece in Hungary: "... *he was our favorite uncle. As children we were impressed by his strength and courage, as adults we admired his willingness to help everyone. Because of his unimpaired intellect even in old age it was wonderful to talk with him. His excellent style and memory for detail always made his writings enjoyable."*

A grandnephew in Sweden: *"We will always think of him with much love."*

Another relative in Hungary: *"To hear that Apu, who had always seemed so strong and indestructible, had died is hard to believe ... He will be missed more than I can say."*

A relative in Slovakia: *"A wonderfully strong personality left us. His great willpower and tireless effort created a new existence in a different world ..."*

A relative in Austria*:* *"Apu has left us. Most importantly he left us with many beautiful memories and he was a great example to us all - we shall remember him and his example... Apu was a sweet, sweet man, full of character, knowledge and mischief. We shall miss him greatly."*

A friend in Scotland: *"We have happy memories of him as an incredibly fit (both in mind and body) 90 year old..."*

Friends from Ottawa, Canada: *"We lost in him not only a loving friend but also a true nation-building Hungarian gentleman"*

"He was a true gentleman who brought with him the era of the past, a more refined and distinguished world."

A friend from Montreal, Canada: *"...we liked him not only because there are very few gentlemen of his kind left but also because he had been a faithful friend."*

Friends from San Francisco: "*... his death means the loss of an outstanding and distinguished person."*

"He was an exceptional person. I was proud to call him my friend."

A friend from San Diego: "*... your father was an outstanding person. His memory will live long in the hearts of his family and among his friends."*

A friend from Maryland: *"Hungary has lost a great man. We can thank him, among others that Sopron did not become Odenburg in 1921*."

Kathy's parents: "*We knew Apu only a short time but in that time we grew to love him and admire all the wonderful traits he had - kindness, generosity and a strong understanding of what we as humans and the world we live in is all about."*

Apu's Burial, Our Last Travels in the 20th Century

The weeks and months following Apu's death were very busy and filled with things that needed to be done regarding his house. His personal things had to be stored or disposed of, the furniture sold or given away, and the house itself repaired and prepared for sale. It was a sad period for Erika and me, but in some ways it helped us to bear our grief. Just before Christmas 1996 we found a buyer and said good-bye to the house.

We took Apu's ashes home and, honoring his wishes, planned to take them to Hungary for burial in the Horváth family crypt at Keszthely where Anyu's ashes have been resting since her death in 1973. We knew that the earliest we could go to Europe would be the following summer, thus there was plenty of time to make the necessary arrangements.

In 1973 the shipment and burial of Anyu's ashes had been a relatively simple matter. Through her brother, Uncle Bėla, we obtained the address of a funeral home in Budapest and Apu sent the ashes sealed in a metal container to them by mail. They provided the urn and made all the arrangements, including the burial,

based on Uncle Bėla's instructions. One would have thought that with the collapse of a totalitarian communist government the bureaucracy and red tape became simplified. Not so, as we found out. We were fortunate in that Uncle Bėla's widow, Ica, who lives in Budapest agreed to take care of the arrangements in Hungary well in advance of our projected arrival. As it turned out, most of the problems occurred in Keszthely where several authorities had to be persuaded (and paid off) to grant the required permits for burial. The whole idea that a private person would bring the ashes of a deceased person from the USA in his luggage, to be buried in the local cemetery, was totally out of the ordinary for everybody connected with the funeral. At every turn Ica had to provide officially notarized translations of the death and cremation certificates and pay grossly inflated "permit fees". It took her several trips from Budapest to Keszthely and a number of weeks to negotiate these arrangements but by the spring of 1997 everything was taken care of.

In the meantime we were expecting another big event at home, namely the birth of our second grandchild. Tina's daughter, Leslie, was born on 20 July 1996. The "lunar landing baby", as Dave called her, arrived on the 27th anniversary of the first human landing on the moon. Apu had been eagerly awaiting the arrival of this second great-grandchild since he had learned about Tina's pregnancy in December 1995. Unfortunately, fate interfered and he died a few weeks before the baby's birth. A couple of months later Kathy announced her second pregnancy and expected delivery in June 1997. We wanted to postpone our European trip until after the baby's birth, but this latest addition to the Thiringer clan, Stephen, arrived on 22 May, about three weeks earlier than expected. Thus we were able to depart for Europe on the originally planned date. In fact, by that time Kathy was already in such a good shape that she volunteered to drive us to the airport.

We were a bit concerned about carrying Apu's ashes with us since we had to travel through four countries (France, Germany, Austria and Slovakia) before arriving to Hungary. However, the concern was ill-founded; at none of the borders was our luggage searched, or explanation needed regarding the box containing Apu's remains.

Our first stop, Paris, was quite memorable since we were able to spend a few days with Tina and Dave who were attending the Paris Air Show at the same time. We were traveling in Europe exclusively by train this time and it became an interesting and comfortable experience. The longest stretch, from Paris to Vienna, took about 13 hours, even with the super fast and comfortable Mozart Express. From Vienna we went to Bratislava (Pozsony), Slovakia, to see relatives there and attend the wedding of my cousin's grandson which was quite an interesting affair.

We spent two weeks in Hungary, first taking care of the main purpose of our trip, namely to bury Apu's ashes next to Anyu's in Keszthely. During the short but touching graveside ceremony, with several of our relatives there, not an eye remained dry while we prayed and sang with the Franciscan priest as the urn was lowered into the crypt. It was a fitting farewell to a long and unique life.

After the funeral we returned to Budapest and a few days later continued our trip to Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Four weeks and many interesting

experiences later we arrived home. It was good to be back after such a long and fairly exhausting itinerary. No sooner we arrived Tina called with the news that she was pregnant again! Our fourth grandchild was expected in April 1998. The family is still expanding, the cycle of life is continuing: birth follows death as surely as death follows birth.

We took two more interesting trips abroad toward the end of the last century. In the spring of 1999 we flew to New Zealand and Australia, the longest non-stop flight we have had so far, some 13 hours from Los Angeles to Auckland. The many interesting sights and impressions made the long, uncomfortable flight worth while. Our only regret was the short time of one week we stayed in New Zealand. The lion share of our two-month trip was spent in Australia. During the first stop, Melbourne, we visited my cousin Otto whom I have not seen since the post-WW II days in Germany. The past 50 years had left its indelible marks on both of us still it was wonderful to spend a few days together reminiscing about old memories and more recent family events.

From Melbourne we flew to Perth at the western edge of the continent to visit the Pummer brothers and their families. Ivan and Tom, old friends of mine ever since we fled Hungary together in 1944, emigrated to Australia about the same time we came to the USA. Like with Otto we kept in occasional touch by mail over the years but nothing could have replaced the wonderful two-week long visit we spent with them. For the last part of our Australian trip we flew to Sydney which, apart from the personal visits, was perhaps the highlight of our journey. Sydney is a most interesting cosmopolitan city that presents new impressions and surprises at every turn. One of these surprises, a somewhat frightening one, was a very unusual storm which dumped hail up to baseball-size on the city causing several million dollars worth of damage. On the way home we decided to break the long flight and stopped in Hawaii for a few days. It was a nice respite especially on the lovely island of Maui.

The following year, 2000, we went to Europe again, seeing relatives and friends mostly in countries we haven't visited for some years. The first stop was London where we had a chance to spend time with our old friend Nicholas Hiesz and family. Despite his advanced years we found him full of energy and in excellent spirit. It would have been difficult to imagine that a scant three years later he would die of a stroke while walking the family dog.

From London we flew to Göteborg for a week with Klara Thiringer, my Swedish cousin, and her family. The rare occasions we have a chance to spend time together make these reunions that much more special. With one exception the rest of the trip took us to more usual continental destinations such as Budapest, Bratislava and Bern. Rome, on the last leg of our vacation, was an exception because we haven't been there for a number of years. We were looking forward to this opportunity with anticipation and were not disappointed. The city is a gem among cities although this time the "holy year" crowd and mid-summer heat were almost unbearable. In addition it so happened that the queen of England's state visit coincided with our "state visit" and the three days she stayed in Rome tied up the city's already enormous traffic congestion even more. Nevertheless we enjoyed our stay but by the end of the journey we were more than ready to come home.

Chapter 10. Arrival of the First Four Grandchildren (1995-1998)

As I have mentioned before, our family has been richly blessed with grandchildren. The first four arrived from 1995 to 1998, one child every year between the families of Peter Thiringer and David Bonorden. The axiom that birth follows death certainly became a reality for us following Mami's passing in 1993 and Apu's death in 1996. Each pregnancy and birth is a unique experience in a family, not only for the parents but the grandparents as well; therefore they deserve a retrospect in the family chronicles.

Before going into details of the events, it might be interesting to compare briefly the changes in hospital delivery practices during the past four decades. In the early 1960s it was almost unheard of for a father to be present during the birth of his child. In both the California and Virginia hospitals where our children were born I was only allowed to be with Erika in the "labor room." Once the time of delivery arrived she was wheeled into the "delivery room" while I was shooed unceremoniously to a waiting area full of expecting fathers biting their fingernails. Nowadays a father is not only allowed but actually encouraged to stay with his wife from the moment they arrive to the hospital. He is supposed to assist during the labor and delivery and sometimes is even allowed to videotape the whole event, another activity that would have been unheard of in the 1960s, even if video cameras had been available.

Once a baby was born he/she was taken to a "baby room" with rows of tiny cribs and a long window to the corridor. Family members could see the babies through this window who were taken to the mothers only at specific times for feeding and some cuddling. Erika was not too happy with this arrangement; she wanted to have her babies with her all the time, as it is done at present. The idea of separation was, perhaps, to give some relief to the new mother. Mothers in those days spent about five lazy, comfortable days in the hospital. This stay became progressively shorter and nowadays a new mother is usually discharged within 24 hours. The new system may be "cost-effective" but it is often quite hard, particularly on young, first-time mothers.

Other birthing practices also evolved during the past 40 years, often more favorable to young parents than the short hospital stay policy. Generally, by the 1990s hospitals became more liberal with their rules and obstetricians adopted a more relaxed attitude with parents. Our grandchildren are the products of this "new era" and the following is the story of their arrival.

Melissa Marie Thiringer

Melissa Marie Thiringer was born on January 8, 1995, a joyful event for Kathy and Peter especially since Kathy experienced a miscarriage with her first pregnancy. They were thrilled to find out, appropriately on Mother's Day 1994, that Kathy was expecting again. The pregnancy was basically uneventful but the last day before the delivery was not without some excitement. Here is the story as Kathy recalls it:

"Peter was on a business trip to Richmond VA, the weekend Melissa was born. Since I was still about a week away from my due date I felt safe to bid him good-bye, as Richmond is only about 90 minutes from home. I usually accompanied him on these trips in the past but this time I felt 'safer' to stay behind because I had been experiencing quite a bit of back pain and knew that sitting all weekend at a conference would be uncomfortable.

"Peter and his brother-in-law, Dave, left for Richmond Friday morning. Peter was sporting a beeper we rented from the Fairfax Hospital in case I should be unable to reach him by phone. Before he left we agreed to have a "trial run": I would beep him later that evening and he would call me from the convention center. Friday night I beeped Peter as planned. Unfortunately, he waited until the speaker finished, about an hour later, to call me. I was a little concerned to say the least!

"Saturday dawned and I made plans to go to the movies with my sister who was home from college. During the movie I remember feeling "funny" but didn't really give it a second thought. I went home and took a nap because my stomach was feeling a little upset and I was due at my friend Karen's house for dinner. The dinner was wonderful and afterward I rested on a couch while watching a movie. When the movie was over I went to use the bathroom and again felt kind of funny. I thought I felt my water leaking but wasn't sure. I was beginning to feel anxious though, but not wanting to upset Karen or her husband I didn't say anything and drove myself home. On the way home I started to wonder if I should try to contact Peter but thought surely I was being nervous about nothing.

"Upon arriving home I desperately had to use the bathroom again. As I walked through the house I noticed several messages on our answering machine. I was very anxious by this time yet a little later I was trying to listen to the numerous messages. The first message was from Dave in Richmond asking for Peter's beeper number so that he and some of our friends could page him and play a joke on him. The second message was from Dave as well; stating they somehow got the number and were going to beep him and they were wondering if that would be okay with me! The third message was from Peter himself, wondering why I had paged him and hoping everything was okay. The fourth and final message was from Peter again, saying that the whole thing had been a joke.

"After all this I was a real wreck. I decided to lie down on the couch and think about whether I should call him and then suddenly my water broke!!! At that point I was actually relieved because now I knew I had a legitimate reason to call. I beeped him, called my mom and called my doctor's answering service. It was about 10:30. Peter called back and started talking right away. He asked where I had been and started to explain that the whole thing had been a joke. Imagine his surprise when I told him it wasn't! He told me later he almost didn't answer my page because he thought the guys were fooling around again. Even more funny was Peter telling the gang at the convention that he was leaving because I was in labor. They thought he was getting back at them!

"In the meantime my parents came over to keep me company. Peter started the journey home and the doctor covering for my doctor told me to come to the hospital when my husband got home. My contractions started around 11:00 p.m., and after

a short time they seemed to be coming very quickly. I began to think that Peter wouldn't make it! He called every 20 minutes from the highway and arrived, in record time, around midnight. We went straight away to the hospital.

"I was given an epidural between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. Both Peter and I tried to sleep a little but the baby's heart rate kept dropping and I was a little nervous. They put me on oxygen which seemed to help and we settled in for a long wait but, surprisingly, at 5:00 a.m. I was ready to go! I pushed for about 1 hour and 45 minutes, still very numb and not feeling much of anything. Melissa was born at 7:03 a.m. on Sunday, weighing eight pounds and 13 ounces. The nurses commented what a beautiful baby she was and we agreed!"

We didn't know anything about Saturday's fast developing events until Peter called from Richmond shortly after he talked with Kathy and got ready for the "record time" drive home. He called again around 11:30 p.m. on his cell phone from the highway saying that Kathy's contractions were becoming quite frequent but he still hoped to arrive home in time to take her to the hospital. We were already in bed when the second call came and since Kathy's parents were already at her house Peter felt that the immediate situation was well under control. We agreed that there was not much we could do other than to wait for the arrival of the latest little Thiringer.

That event was announced with a loud baby-cry in the telephone about 7:30 Sunday morning. Peter was calling from Kathy's room, holding the receiver so that we could hear the baby's cry from Kathy's arms. It was a joy to hear the voice of our first grandchild and we immediately dressed to go to the hospital but not before we called Apu with the news. He already had heard from Peter and we could tell from the tone of his voice how excited he was about the birth of his first great-granddaughter! Because of his frail condition he decided not to come with us to the hospital though he insisted that we tell him all the details as soon as we returned home.

Kathy's parents and sister were already in her hospital room when we arrived, standing around a bassinet admiring the little wiggly occupant therein. Peter was sitting next to Kathy's bed, a picture of red-eyed exhaustion after the all-day conference followed by a mostly sleepless night. Much to our surprise, however, Kathy seemed completely relaxed and alert as if events of the past 24 hours did not affect her at all. We congratulated the proud parents and joined the rest of the family around the bassinet. It took but one look at the tiny bundle to convince all of us that the nurses had it right: Melissa was indeed a beautiful baby!

Leslie Capri Bonorden

Leslie Capri Bonorden, our second grandchild, was born on July 20, 1996, barely six weeks after the very sad and wrenching event of Apu's death. The impending birth of a new baby somewhat softened our grief over Apu's loss and Erika gladly accepted Tina's invitation from Texas to be present at the delivery of her baby.

She arrived to Austin in the evening, about five days before Tina's due date. Already there was subdued excitement in the house. The first thing Tina did was

to hand her a copy of a sheet of "birthing instructions" she and Dave had put together for their doctor who was to read and sign it upon their arrival to the hospital. They had talked about the matter in his office and apparently he was in full agreement.

It was an amazing document! Erika got so involved thinking about it that she couldn't sleep for a long time. She knew that Tina intended to have a totally natural childbirth, without artificial intervention or pain relievers, assuming that the delivery was normal. Tina and Dave had attended Lamaze-type delivery training and both felt strongly about it. Based on what they had learned, the delivery instructions included some of the following:

- Permission from the doctor and hospital staff to have both mothers (Dave's mother, Hallie, and Erika) present, to act as "coaches" during the delivery. In addition, they asked that a young friend of Tina's, an experienced delivery coach, be allowed to videotape the birth.

- They were going to bring a tape player and have soft music (by Yanni) in the room to help Tina relax. Dave was prepared to help her further by walking with her in between labor pains or to massage her back in a warm shower, if necessary.

- Most importantly, perhaps, Tina requested that immediately after delivery the baby be placed on her bare tummy for a few minutes so that "first bonding" between mother and child could occur. Cleaning, weighing and measuring of the baby could wait until later.

Tina and Dave were very serious about all this and Erika could only admire their spunk. Other preparations were completed as well. Everything was packed days ahead of time. In fact, several bags and loose items were literally piled by the front door -- an amazing amount of stuff!

On July 20, around 6:00 a.m., Tina woke Erika with a smile on her face, saying: "Time to get up, Mom, and bake the cake!" Erika jumped out of bed, "Have your labor pains started?" -- "Well, yes", Tina said, "I felt kind of funny all night, uncomfortable, but didn't want to wake up Dave until I was sure." They had both been awake since 4:00 a.m. yet Tina was quite calm and happy. They all had a bite of breakfast after which Erika got busy and indeed baked a large sheet cake which they took, still warm, to the hospital. It was going to be served, together with champagne and candy cigars, during a real "birthday party" for the new baby girl. Yes, Tina and Dave had found out much earlier that the baby was a little girl!

Incidentally, shortly before going to the hospital Tina told Erika the names they had chosen for the baby. She said, kind of quizzically, "Mom, I hope you and Dad won't mind, but we have decided to name our baby 'Leslie'', after Apu's name! What do you think?" Erika was totally caught off guard and, emotion showing on both their faces, answered “of course, Tina, we don't mind; in fact Apu would have really loved it too!" Leslie's middle name, “Capri”, also commemorates a member of our family, the second daughter of Erika's brother, Gerbi and his wife, Xenia. Baby Capri was only a few months old when she tragically died of Sudden Infant Death

syndrome (SIDS), much to the sorrow of all of us. Before deciding to use her name Tina, with a touching gesture, asked for and was given the parents' consent.

Tina, Dave and Erika arrived to the hospital around 9:00 a.m. but not before Erika called me with the exciting news. Tina by then was definitely uncomfortable, her pains were coming every two minutes or so. She was quickly processed at the registration desk while Dave and Erika dashed upstairs with the luggage to the reserved, private labor-and-delivery room. Erika stood in the doorway watching Dave with amusement as he methodically checked everything in the room to make sure it was adequate. Tina arrived in a wheelchair, was helped into bed and the attending nurse immediately examined her. Everything was okay; she was already two inches dilated!

By this time Hallie, Dave's stepfather Harry, and Tina's friend also arrived. Dave and the three ladies took turns holding Tina's hand or wiping her wet forehead. As labor pains became intense and faster it was important to help her concentrate and count from one to ten while pushing hard and taking deep breaths. A bit later the doctor came in and greeted them with a cheerful "Hello." He was the one on call that Saturday morning, dressed in his jogging suit and sneakers, and had been paged while jogging. He was not Tina's regular physician but his partner and turned out to be friendly, efficient and doing a fine job delivering Leslie. After the greeting he excused himself, saying he would be back as soon as the baby was ready to make an entrance. Tina's total labor time from the time of her arrival to the hospital was about five hours and she was fully dilated in about 90 minutes. The rest of the time, more than three hours of it, was taken up with pushing. The four "coaches" were standing around her bed, comforting and encouraging. The attending nurse had left the room after saying she felt a bit unnecessary with all the folks around. As the labor progressed Tina became so irritable she could not tolerate the slightest noise in the room, not even soft conversation. She actually snapped at Erika at one point to "hush up" for which she apologized later.

Finally, around 2:00 p.m., the nurse summoned the doctor and things began to happen fast. With every push the baby's head appeared a bit more -- the "coaches" by then were counting in unison: p-u-s-h---1--2--3--. Erika stepped back holding her breath, she could barely stand the suspense, when suddenly, PLOP, the baby landed in the doctor's hands! Everyone took a long breath of relief. Tina was in tears (as were Hallie and Erika) and with joy and relief in her voice she called out: "Doctor, is she alright, is she alright?" The doctor handed the baby to the neonatal specialist who examined her very quickly because Tina was anxiously calling for her. She was placed on Tina's chest, making soft, mooing sounds. Tina cuddled her and whispered to her with pure bliss on her face. Erika will never forget that tender moment. Then, remembering that I was eagerly awaiting the news back home, she stepped out to call me so that I could share her joy.

In the meantime everyone in the room was amazed how quickly Tina recovered. After all that hard work she cheerfully asked for her lipstick and makeup; she wanted to look good on the photos being taken of her and the baby. The obstetrician still had some work to do, waiting for the placenta to be delivered, about thirty minutes later. He then invited all those present to a "mini-physiology" lesson. Holding the placenta in a basin, he carefully examined it, pointed out the

main vein and artery which had connected the baby to the mother, and declared it to be perfectly normal. Everyone stood around him in awe. It was amazing.

Tina and Dave spent one night in the hospital. Since the maternity ward was not full Dave was allowed to sleep in the second bed in the room. Friends and family who visited the next morning received a glass of champagne and a piece of the birthday cake which Erika had frosted hastily and decorated with Leslie's name. By mid afternoon they were home and introduced the baby to their two Labrador dogs, Ellie and Jethro. According to Erika it was another memorable moment as both dogs approached the bassinet, with noses high and cautiously sniffing the air. Tina encouraged them but Ellie shied away until she took the baby out and let the dogs come quite close to sniff her. Thereafter they not only accepted her but became quite protective of her.

The first night at home was very special for Erika. Since Tina was still tired from lack of sleep and Leslie was a bit fussy, Erika encouraged both parents to go to bed until the next feeding time, around midnight, and she took care of the baby. She lay down on the living room couch with Leslie next to her and every time the baby squawked she put a pacifier in her mouth, rocking her gently until she quieted down. Not much sleep for Grandma but she loved every minute of it! She stayed a few more days with the young family before coming home reluctantly. I called her in Austin every day to get the latest "status report" but those conversations were poor substitutes for the extensive account I received upon her return.

Stephen Joseph Thiringer

Stephen Joseph Thiringer, our third grandchild, was born on May 22, 1997 three weeks earlier than expected. Kathy's account of this exciting event is as follows:

"*On Thursday morning, much to my surprise, my water broke three weeks early. I had been feeling 'funny' for the past few days but dismissed it because of the time left until my due date. True to Thiringer fashion, however, Pete had packed his bags the night before to leave on a business trip so, naturally, I went into labor. Little Melissa, our two-year old, was asleep in bed beside me, having crawled in sometime during the night. She managed to sleep through the entire preparation for the hospital. Initially we called Erika to drive over and watch Melissa but she had taken a substitute teaching job for that day so my mother came instead. Since Melissa's birth had been rather quick from beginning to end I was warned that this baby might come very quickly as well.*

"We dashed to the hospital and it wasn't until we were on the road that I fully realized I was three weeks early. Though this was a borderline for full term I kept wondering if everything was okay. We arrived at 8:00 a.m. at INOVA Fairfax Women and Children's Center where I had given birth to Melissa. This hospital has been widely acclaimed as one of the busiest and best on the East Coast. It also has one of the largest Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and the month of May apparently was a record setter for them as we found out later.

"Unfortunately this birth was not as quick as the first; in fact my labor progressed very slowly. Even after Pitocin was administered there was concern over the

strength of my contractions. I was also given an epidural injection and waited out the day. Erika arrived around 7:00 p.m. just as I was ready to push. Under advisement from the nurse I declined another dose of epidural thinking that the baby was probably going to come out after a few pushes as most second babies do. I was feeling a lot of pain by then and asked Pete to ask his Mom if she wouldn't mind waiting in the hall. She graciously obliged and we all assumed the birth to be over soon. Well, I pushed for two hours with no pain medication. The baby wasn't budging and my doctor who was new to the practice kept wondering aloud about what could be happening. Pete and I became a little agitated with her, to say the least. She seemed to be wondering aloud but not doing anything about it. I finally asked her if forceps or an episiotomy would help. Then she asked if I would like to try the vacuum aspirator. I gladly agreed and with one push the baby came out. It was quickly evident that the umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby's neck twice. The doctor was unable to loop the cord back around so she cut it at the neck to allow the baby to slide out.

"'It's a boy' I heard everyone say. I was thrilled! Stephen Joseph, so named for Peter's middle name and my favorite name, Joe, was born at 9:33 p.m. and weighed eight pounds one ounce. His color and response, however, were not good; the APGAR (reaction) scores were 5, 5, and 7 out of a possible 10. He had a weak cry and grey pallor. The nurse showed him to me but would not let me hold him. Instead she told us that he would be taken down to the NICU to be evaluated. Pete went down with her. In the meantime poor Erika had gone home worried about when I would finally have this baby!

"When Pete came back we sat alone in the labor/delivery room for a while, talking about events of the day. We realized that the situation was much different when Melissa was born and I missed her very much at that moment. I was never really worried about Stephen because I knew he was fine. Somehow I felt that God would not give me a little boy and then let something go wrong. It took a long time though to settle myself. The hospital was the busiest it had ever been and I had to share a room with another lady whose baby was also in the NICU. It was a different stay than the last time. Then with no baby in the room I got lots of sleep, the nurses left me alone and I had an extra night stay.

"Melissa came to visit the following day though she couldn't see her brother. It was a nice mommy/daughter visit. The grandparents also came and two by two we took them to the NICU. We were required to scrub and wear gowns. As we prepared we could hear the helicopters coming in, airlifting babies from all over Virginia to this amazing two-ward NICU. We had to walk by roughly a dozen babies on warming beds attached to so many different monitors. My heart was so relieved to see Stephen tucked away in the back in a little isolette. We were allowed two at a time around his bed. He looked sweet, peaceful and wonderful but I couldn't hold him yet. Although he was having trouble keeping down his formula we were assured that he was fine. With one neo-natal nurse to every two babies the communication was excellent. I was encouraged to call and visit as much as I wished. Finally that evening I was able to hold him. It was a little scary because he was still attached to a few machines and the monitors would beep constantly. The nurses just came over and turned them off.

"Stephen's condition improved and after two more days in the NICU we brought him home. The doctors were not sure what caused his trauma; possibly the cord being cut around the neck did not allow for a normal rush of air to his lungs. This could have caused his pale color and lethargy. In any event he rapidly gained strength and became a healthy, bouncy addition to our family."

Shortly after Stephen's birth Erika and I left for a European trip and took Apu's ashes with us for burial in Hungary. Naturally, we were concerned about Stephen's condition and as soon as we reached Budapest sent an e-mail to Peter and Kathy asking for an update. Their reply had reassuring good news which set our minds at ease. We could hardly wait to see the little fellow and were overjoyed as Kathy brought him to the airport when we returned and she came to pick us up. The first male Thiringer descendent in over a half century was every bit as cute and healthy-looking as any baby we have seen in a long time.

Natalie Camille Bonorden

Natalie Camille Bonorden, Tina's second child, arrived on April 25, 1998, not much later than the date for which her mother had planned the birth. She wanted to have her babies about 18 months apart, as she and Peter had been. To her it just seemed the right thing to do. Here is her story:

"One evening I asked Dave to bring home some Chinese food. Meanwhile I asked a friend to type up a tiny slip of paper with the message: 'Are you ready for No. 2?' which I slipped into a fortune cookie after removing the original message. We had our dinner and at the end I said: 'let's open our fortune cookies' making sure that he would get my doctored cookie. As I watched him closely he had the strangest, most puzzled expression on his face. He didn't get it and said something like 'this is an interesting message!' I just looked at him and said 'yeahh…!' until he finally caught on and we had a good laugh over it.

"There was no particularly memorable event during the pregnancy. We moved to College Station shortly after I became pregnant and it was a crazy, hectic time. I had not yet seen a local gynecologist there and one day, after I came home from grocery shopping, I had some bleeding. I immediately thought the worst and panicked. It was already past doctor's hours but the doctor I called was very reassuring. Still I was quite upset and grieving; in essence I had already written off this baby. Dave happened to be out of town but when I called him he immediately drove home all the way from Dallas. He arrived around 2 a.m. when I was already asleep. The next day we went to the doctor together and an internal ultrasound was made. This was most reassuring because what we saw was a healthy heartbeat. According to the doctor the baby was just fine. He then explained that bleeding during the first trimester does not come from the fetus but from the mother and it does not affect the baby in any way. He said it happens frequently, no one knows why. This was the first indication that this pregnancy was going to be different and not nearly as much fun as the first one. With Leslie there was all the excitement, the novelty and nothing negative happened. This time there was more discomfort, pelvic pressure and other little things.

"We did not tell Leslie anything about the new baby until just before the birth; she was too young to understand most of it. We used some videotapes, stories and talked about the baby in Mummy's tummy and she was beginning to understand. We knew it would be another girl since we had the same thing done as with Leslie. We asked the doctor to write down on a piece of paper his opinion of the baby's gender and to give it to us in a sealed envelope. During Christmas of 1997 we opened the envelope in my parents' house and found out that it was a girl! We were both disappointed but only a little and Natalie was born about four months later.

"What preparations did we make for the birth? With Leslie I remember I was quite unprepared and scrambling so I told myself it would be different this time. Although this baby was 15 days late, when the big moment came I was still unprepared. Her due date was April 10 and I thought that if Mom (Erika) whom we invited to be present at the big event came on the 7th or 8th for two weeks she would surely be able to see the birth and have a few extra days with us. As it turned out Mom could not stay long enough because she had to return home for a prior engagement and she missed the birth. We had a good visit, nevertheless, and she helped me to get ready.

"When the baby decided to make her appearance she came in a big hurry. I had been bloated and uncomfortable for a day or two and by Saturday morning I had some cramping. For several hours I thought that's all it was until the cramps became more severe. By the way, I was already scheduled for induction on Monday if delivery did not occur earlier. The doctor insisted on it, in spite of my resistance, saying that it is not good for the baby to delay the birth any longer.

"Finally I said to Dave: 'What if this is not cramping but real labor pains!' He looked at me with big eyes, and said: 'Really?' I called my doctor but he was not there, since this was another weekend. The doctor on duty was not impressed with my story but later he sheepishly admitted that he was wrong. Eventually when the pains became more severe I decided that I was indeed in labor. My friend, Kathy, had arrived by then. Her plan had been to come to the hospital with me to videotape and act as my coach. She just stood there, saying 'I can't believe that you are actually in labor' as I was breathing through another contraction and continued to throw some things in a bag. Dave tried to call his Mom and could reach her only just before we took off for the hospital. They too missed the delivery. Since Kathy couldn't find a baby-sitter we decided that she would stay home with her son, Reese, and take care of Leslie as well. As a result of all this confusion there was no coaching and no videotaping.

"We arrived to the hospital emergency room around 3:50 p.m. and 40 minutes later the kid was out! From the way I looked and breathed the nurses could guess that I was close to delivery but nobody checked how far I was dilated. I was much in pain and had contractions in the elevator all the way up to the maternity ward. They had to catheterize me which relieved some of the pressure I felt. Then they checked my dilation – it was 9 (10 being the highest) and the nurse went into panic: the baby was coming!

"When one is in the middle of labor nothing in the world seems humorous. Dave though thought it was funny the way the nurses suddenly went into high gear,

calling for the doctor and hurrying about with dishes clanking. Meanwhile I was getting irritated about the noise, complained loudly, and then a nurse started to ask me questions - in the middle of a contraction – such as how I spell my middle name. I growled at her saying that she should ask my husband; I am having a baby here so don't bother me with questions! Then she asked me: 'Ma'am, do you want to be an organ donor?' I shot back: 'you mean if I die?' She stumbled and stuttered, said 'yes' at which point I said: 'Look, I am a nurse myself and you can be blunt with me but no, I don't think I am going to die and I would like to keep my organs for the time being!'

"The doctor did make it to the birth but just barely. He told me to push, once, twice and the by the third time she was out -- very different from the first time. When Leslie was born I had to push for two and a half hours. With Natalie's birth I was rather miserable but at least the pushing phase was quick. When they first asked me if I wanted anesthesia I said I would prefer not to have it, perhaps just a local for the episiotomy. They later told me that it was a good thing that I didn't ask for anesthesia because there was no time for it.

"Everything went well even though Natalie had the umbilical cord around her neck twice. After it was all over I suddenly felt so great that I walked on my own feet to the maternity ward. That afternoon and the next day our Texas family arrived. I was discharged the next day, on Sunday, but not before we celebrated with a little party in the hospital room, a birthday cake which I made ahead of time, balloons and streamers, etc. We still had not decided on her name and were stuck between Kara Nicole and Natalie Camille. Dave put out a sign in our front yard with both sets of names but when I finally asked him he preferred the second set so we decided on Natalie Camille. Natalie was born at 4:41 p.m. and her weight was 9 lb. 1 oz. Amazingly, her dark hair was about 2-3 inches straight up earning her the 'mad scientist' designation. In the hospital Leslie was all smiles when she was introduced to her little sister. We put the sleeping baby in her lap but then she awoke and squawked which made Leslie dissolve into tears. This continued for some time; whenever the baby cried Leslie cried too."

Needless to say that we the proud grandparents waited anxiously while events unfolded in Texas. A few minutes after the delivery, Dave called with the happy news. Even though Erika missed the "main event" both of us felt blessed and happy about the cute new addition to our expanding family.

Chapter 11. The Florida Years (2001-2003)

After the birth of our fourth grandchild, Natalie, and the eventful years of 1999 and 2000 we were fully prepared to enjoy a relaxed, quiet 2001. We were also looking forward to our winter vacation in Florida followed by the birth of Tina's third daughter, our fifth grandchild. As it turned out, the period of four months before Kara's arrival became one of our busiest and most hectic since our wedding some 40 years earlier.

The Move to Sarasota

We had been thinking about the possibility of permanently moving to Sarasota ever since Apu's death in 1996. During previous winter vacations we often drove around the city and got acquainted with several appealing and affordable neighborhoods. As a result, the relocation idea eventually gained some momentum. Our winter vacations which usually lasted three months, from January to April, provided an excellent *in situ* time and opportunity to mull over the pros and cons of such a move. Friends who had been living in Sarasota for several years also helped us with their observations and advice. In March 2000 we were so close to "biting the bullet" that we even contacted several realtors and chose one to help evaluate the various possibilities. He was quite cooperative even though he understood that any final decision was at least a year away.

In spite of this initial enthusiasm the whole idea appeared somewhat premature and was put on the back burner after our return to Alexandria in April. Later that year our interest perked up again as two Alexandria realtors approached us with comparative market analyses of the houses in our subdivision. It was surprising to us, to say the least, to discover that we were living in the midst of a rather high-priced housing market. This and the fact that our house by then was almost paid off provided an additional incentive to start thinking again about the possibility of "down sizing" and moving to Sarasota permanently. In early December I contacted our Sarasota realtor by e-mail and sent him our preferred area and price parameters, asking him to look for a suitable house for us. He wasted no time to get in touch with us upon our arrival to Sarasota in early January 2001. He took us around to see at least a dozen homes during the next several days. Ironically, not one of them appealed to us for one reason or another and the poor fellow was getting visibly disappointed. For him, of course, the incentive was to sell us a home as soon as possible whereas we were in no particular hurry, at least so we thought.

As it turned out, he was instrumental in our finding a home after all. In mid-January he showed us a house in the Southfield subdivision of Sarasota County. It didn't appeal to us but as he drove us around Erika noticed a "for sale by owner" sign in front of a cute Florida-pink house. We called the owners that evening and the next morning drove back, this time alone, to meet them. The empty house, a three-bedroom, two baths home with a nice swimming pool was in impeccable condition. It was "love at first sight" as they say, so much so that after another visit on January 20th we agreed on the price and signed a contract.

We immediately started to look for a buyer for our condo but not before spending some uncomfortable minutes with our realtor. He was understandably unhappy to lose a deal but since we had no contract with him there was nothing he could do. As far as our condo was concerned we were fortunate in that a Hungarian couple from Vermont just happened to be winter-vacationing in Sarasota and when we showed them the condo they liked it at first sight. After two more visits selling it to them became no problem. This transaction, as well as the purchase of our house, was concluded without a realtor's assistance which saved both parties a hefty commission. We sold it fully furnished just the way we bought it in 1996. Still, when we moved out we were amazed how much accumulated stuff we had to take out. Since there was a delay of well over a month before we could finalize the purchase of our new house we had to find a place to store all this material. Fortunately we were able to move everything into the Graffs' two-car garage and also stay in their house until the settlement on ours took place. The waiting period for the new house settlement was put to good use. It enabled us to clean our condo and settle on its sale. The Graffs were away just then so we were enjoying their hospitality, unfortunately without them. We settled on the new house on March 12th, received the keys and moved all our belongings over from the Graffs' garage. A few days later we drove north to Alexandria to get the old house ready for sale.

After quite a lot of work we put it on the market and had an open house during the first Saturday in April. Amazingly, the second couple who came that afternoon bought it for the full asking price! We were utterly surprised at the speed and the lack of bargaining. Frankly, I was prepared to accept an offer of at least two-three thousand dollars less than what we asked for. The settlement did not take place until the end of May because the buyer's wife was eight months pregnant and they didn't want to move until after the baby's birth. It didn't make much difference to us because this way we had enough time to pack and prepare for the move to Florida. We packed boxes upon boxes ourselves, mostly books and small stuff, because thereby we were able to reduce the freight costs considerably. The fragile and valuable items we decided to take ourselves. It was a rather difficult task to get rid of a lot of furniture and other things we had accumulated over the years. It was necessary, though, because the new house in Sarasota is considerably smaller. We gave away many things to our kids, to neighbors and to charity.

Since we intended to move out of the house by the second week of May we gave to Peter a power-of attorney to sit in for us at the settlement and sign most of the necessary documents. We still had to sign a few papers ourselves before leaving for Florida. After the signing session, as we were coming out of the lawyer's office, Erika stumbled down on a few stairs and twisted both her ankles, with a hairline crack in the right foot. It was a disaster. She had large swellings with huge hematomas and both her feet had to be immobilized. She was wheel-chair bound for a week in an absolutely foul mood. She is a very "impatient patient" even under the best of circumstances which this definitely was not. We were in the middle of packing and she felt terribly frustrated because of the enforced inactivity. Through sheer willpower, it seems, she actually improved within a couple of weeks so that by the time the movers arrived she was able to hobble around.

A day after the movers were gone we left also with our two cars loaded to the roof. I bought two walkie-talkies so that we could talk to each other on the road. It was

a long trip of 980 miles with one overnight rest about half way to Sarasota. Two days after arrival Erika took off by plane, still hobbling, for Austin, Texas to be present at the birth of our fifth grandchild Kara Nicole on May 17th. She stayed a couple of weeks in Austin then hurried back because the movers had arrived and I was fighting a losing battle with the enormous mess they left behind. Nevertheless, pretty soon the place began to look quite habitable. I felt that we had brought down far more furnishings than we needed or could squeeze into the house. In retrospect this was predictable but the reality of it created quite a difficulty for us.

On June 1, Peter took care of the settlement on our old house and by then we were beginning to feel at home in the new one. Still, it was difficult to pull up stakes after some 36 years in the Washington area and 28 of it in the old house. We still miss our two children, their families and our northern friends although the large Hungarian community here made the parting and adjustment easier. The anticipated arrival of our fifth and sixth grandchildren whose stories are told next also helped to ease the transition.

Kara Nicole Bonorden

Kara Nicole Bonorden, the last Bonorden baby and our fifth grandchild was born on May 17, 2001. Thirteen months earlier, in late June 2000, Tina had a miscarriage. It was a sad event but it didn't stop her from trying to have a third child. She always wanted to have three children even though Dave would have been just as happy with the two girls. Nevertheless, after some talks and "arm twisting" they agreed to try for another baby, this time hoping for a boy. She became pregnant in August 2000. As she relates, this pregnancy was not as much "fun" as the earlier two:

"The biggest problem was that I carried this baby uncomfortably low, not high as the previous babies. I also thought that in addition to my age which definitely was a factor, physically I was not in as good a condition as with the other two babies. Taking care of two small children saps your strength to some extent and there never seemed to be enough time to keep in shape with workouts and other exercises. I also had some sciatic and other aches and pains. Because of these reasons we decided to have the baby on time, not allowing a late delivery. This was an important consideration because both Leslie and Natalie had been born later than their due dates. We also knew that Mom (Erika) wanted to be with me this time, having missed Natalie's birth a couple of years earlier. As a result we set a delivery induction date for May 17, two days after Mom's scheduled arrival.

"Dave, Mom and I showed up at the hospital on the designated date at the crack of down, leaving Leslie and Natalie at home with a friend. From what I was told earlier by several people, induced labor was usually more painful than a natural one so I agreed to have an epidural injection to lessen the labor pains. Natural birth was very important for me with the first baby while the second happened so fast that there was no time for any pain control. The labor induction medication (Pitocin) I was given worked too slowly at first so it was decided to break my water to accelerate the process. It didn't do much good and the result was a lengthy, very painful labor. In fact I had more pain this time than during the two previous labors. *Another problem was that because of the broken water the nurses were hesitant to do too*

many cervical checks to avoid any potential infection. As a result there was no way of telling how the dilation was progressing. Eventually I was begging for pain medication, i.e. the epidural shot and was quite upset about the labor process to that point. When the anesthesiologist finally arrived I was ready 'to rip his head off'. When he asked how I felt I just glared at him. He then asked whether he should explain what he was going to do or just get on with it I almost yelled at him to get on with it! He got to work and very shortly I was much relieved and suddenly free of pain. One negative aspect of an epidural is that it slows down the delivery. In my case it certainly delayed everything after the initial high doses of Pitocin which caused my pain in the first place.

"While things were slowing down there was a lot of visiting. Family members came and went and everything was relaxed. My friend Christina, Mom and Hallie (Dave's mother) were there with Michelle (Dave's cousin) and her kids. When the nurse finally checked and noted that the baby was ready to be born she was out with about three pushes. Upon initial examination the baby was found to have a slight, rather common, heart murmur and although I was allowed to leave the hospital after 24 hours I had to take her back the next day for a checkup. The examination turned out well. Both the pediatrician and a cardiologist said the baby will naturally outgrow the heart murmur which was caused by tiny holes in the ventricles that allowed blood to pass between the heart chambers. Apparently these holes disappear in most children by the age of two.

"Kara's size surprised both of us. We heard that most second or third children are born larger than their first sibling but that was not the case with her. She was tiny in comparison to Leslie and Natalie. She seemed frail and slept a lot but was healthy otherwise. She grew quickly and soon became as big as the other two had been at that age. She became a good feeder but breast feeding was quite difficult and unproductive for me so I basically stopped nursing after about a week. It was frustrating for both of us but she took readily to bottle feeding and was not any worse for it. She was not colicky as the other two had been and that was a blessing for me. Neither was she a demanding baby at all, just a joy in every way."

Erika stayed with Tina and Dave for a couple of weeks, helping wherever she could. Although I received regular telephone updates from her and she also took some excellent video pictures of the new member of our still expanding family, I was eagerly awaiting her return and a more detailed account. Her narrative and pictures underscored the joy we felt about the arrival of our latest grandchild.

William Joseph Thiringer

William Joseph Thiringer, "Little Joe" as he became known, is our sixth grandchild and the second male Thiringer progeny in our family. He arrived on August 2, 2002. News of Kathy's pregnancy was a joyful surprise to her parents and us. Considering the frequency of births between the Bonorden and Thiringer families the announcement perhaps shouldn't have been totally unexpected. As Kathy recalls, she and Peter were delighted to find out in November 2001 that she was pregnant again. It so happened that a month later both sets of grandparents came up from Florida to Virginia for the holidays. Kathy made the announcement at a festive family dinner shortly after Christmas. In the midst of happy

congratulations she did not let on about their concern just a few days earlier. She was seven weeks along when, as she recalls, on Christmas Eve it looked like she might miscarry the baby:

"The doctor recommended a sonogram and happily we could see a peanut-size baby with a tiny beating heart! I became anxious again at 12 weeks when they couldn't find a heartbeat. After another sonogram in the doctor's office showed a picture of a beating heart I knew I was okay! A sonogram at 18 weeks showed a very healthy baby. As with my other pregnancies we decided to leave the baby's gender a mystery until birth.

"My pregnancy progressed normally. At 38 weeks, however, the doctor and I decided that I should have another sonogram to try to determine the baby's weight. Stephen and Melissa both had been big babies and I had a somewhat difficult time with their delivery. If this baby proved to be large as well, the doctor would induce me early, before he or she got too big. The estimate came to eight and a half pounds and I still had two weeks left! Since a baby averages about ½ pound gain a week at this point and I had another appointment in less than a week I knew we would be discussing this situation.

"True to my other labors, however, I was early again. I went to a dinner/shower with some friends on August 1, came home and my water broke that night. At two in the morning I called my sister who had just been at our house baby-sitting and asked her to come back. Peter and I tried to wake Melissa and Stephen and tell them where I was going but they were too groggy to understand. My only challenge at that point was who would watch the kids while we were at the hospital. My sister could stay only until morning because she was teaching her last day of summer school and had to give the exam. As Peter drove me to the hospital I had every phone book and directory of my friends with me and hoped to work the problem there.

"As I was being wheeled into the hospital I met my doctor who said 'I was just about to call and tell you we would induce your labor but you beat me to it!' The labor didn't go very fast and when morning came it gave me time to call around between contractions and find someone to watch the two kids. My sister ended up taking them to a friend's house where they spent most of the day.

"Apparently there was a woman in the next room who was having her first child. When it came time for both of us to deliver the nurse suggested I go first because surely I would go much faster. Pete and I tried to explain to her that usually I take a while. She refused to believe us until it took two hours to deliver our baby boy, William Joseph Thiringer, who was born at 4:00 in the afternoon! He weighed in at 8 pounds and 11 ounces.

"We call him Joe because that has long been a favorite name of mine but William is his first name because of a family tradition. Peter is named after his father's middle name, Stephen is named after Peter's middle name. As we realized later, Peter has another unofficial middle name: William. Perhaps most importantly he is named after two people in my family: William Forbes Uber who was my maternal grandfather and a great man. William Francis Xavier Uber was my only male cousin

who died much too young while I was pregnant. But William Thiringer will always be our little Joe."

First European Trip in the New Millennium

Little Joe was barely a year old in 2003 when we decided that it was time to visit Europe again. We have not traveled abroad during the previous three years mainly because of the move to Florida, the birth of our last two grandchildren and not the least because of the increased threat of terrorism. Still, by late 2003 the "travel fever" was strong enough to make us depart again to old familiar places and to new places not seen before. It was a wonderful experience and everything went according to plan. We walked the streets of Vienna and briefly visited our relatives nearby. After a couple of days with them we took a train to Budapest and settled into a hotel near the home of Erika's cousin. It was much easier this way since both he and his wife were in and out of hospital recently. They are finally able to enjoy a new three-room apartment with sky-light windows and modern facilities – and an elevator! A tremendous improvement over their living conditions during the past 50-some years. We also revisited a few places in Budapest and were happy to find the city becoming beautiful again due to a lot of reconstruction and repairs. The Danube was lower than we had ever seen it and the ravages of the summer drought were visible everywhere.

After eight days in the city we traveled again by train, this time to Kolozsvár in the Transylvanian part of Romania. It was supposed to be an express train yet it stopped on the Hungarian side at every small town and so the whole trip took about eight hours. Within minutes of arriving in Kolozsvár and looking around we ran into Erika's newly discovered relative, a short, blue-eyed, smiling lady. Looking up she said "Erika?" who said "Ilse?" and the next second they were hugging. From that moment on we became family with no fuss, no pretense. We took a taxi to their house and stayed three nights with them. We learned that Ilse's husband, Ferenc László, (a Hungarian) is a well known Ph.D. music historian and university professor. He is also head of the international Mozart Society, and the Austrian government recently awarded him a medal and citation for significant accomplishments.

Erika's new relatives Ilse Herbert-László and Gerda Herbert-Türk are sisters. Their great-grandmother and Erika's grandmother were also sisters. They are of German-Saxon heritage and delightful people. Both couples are musically inclined and active at the Kolozsvár Music Academy. Ilse teaches and plays the cello, Gerda teaches piano, and her husband is a composer and teacher. All of this information came to us by surprise and the initial contact was facilitated by another second cousin in Germany with whom Erika started to correspond shortly before the beginning of this trip.

After three very short days in Kolozsvár we went to Marosvásárhely, where half the population is still Hungarian. We met more nice people at a small English library which was founded by American Hungarians a few years ago. After seeing the sad and neglected state of the mostly Romanian Kolozsvár it was refreshing to observe how the people of Marosvásárhely manage to get along with each other and keep their city nice and clean.

Returning to Budapest we stayed there two more nights before a couple of friends drove us to Bratislava. As always, we very much enjoyed the week we spent there visiting Slovakian-Hungarian relatives. They took us to the Schwechat Airport, outside Vienna, for our flight back to Frankfurt. From there we took a local train to Mainz and stayed two nights with a German friend whom we had not seen in three years.

The last leg of our journey took us into new territories. After flying from Frankfurt to Madrid, we joined a 12-day bus tour and visited the most important regions and cities of Spain. It was a wonderful experience. We traveled first to the north, through the Basque region, then down to Barcelona and from there roughly followed the Mediterranean coast to the Costa del Sol, to Gibraltar, and then back to Madrid. During 12 days we stayed in eight different first class hotels, ate marvelous meals, made friends with other Americans on the bus, and learned a lot about Spain, its history, economy and politics, its very different regions and their people. We had an excellent guide who informed us about many things during the long drives on modern highways through varied terrain and interesting countryside. We saw some of the spectacular northern mountains, drove across the plateaus in the country's center and viewed the coastal and southern regions full of orange groves, and miles of olive plantations. Gibraltar where we spent a few hours scrambling around the "Rock" and eating lunch was especially fascinating. Other highlights included many great cathedrals and castles, old and new – in Segovia, Burgos, Saragossa, Barcelona, Valencia, Granada, Seville and Toledo. It was difficult to decide which was the most spectacular. The whole country was most interesting, with its old and remarkable history. We attended a flamenco show in Barcelona and a big farewell dinner on the last night in Madrid when everyone became a bit silly and/or sentimental – a great tour.

The next morning a taxi took us to the airport and we caught a flight back to Frankfurt. In spite of our concern that we might miss our connection (we had a total of 45 minutes transfer time) we caught the Lufthansa flight to Washington and enjoyed the service, food and comfort of business class travel. Kathy and the children waited patiently at Dulles Airport, even though we were the last ones coming out of the international arrival area. To our chagrin, one of our suitcases was left behind in Frankfurt because it had been wrongly labeled in Madrid. Fortunately it arrived to Peter's house the next evening, just before our departure back to Sarasota. As wonderful as this trip was both of us could hardly wait to arrive home. After seven weeks away and living out of suitcases it felt good to settle in our own house again.

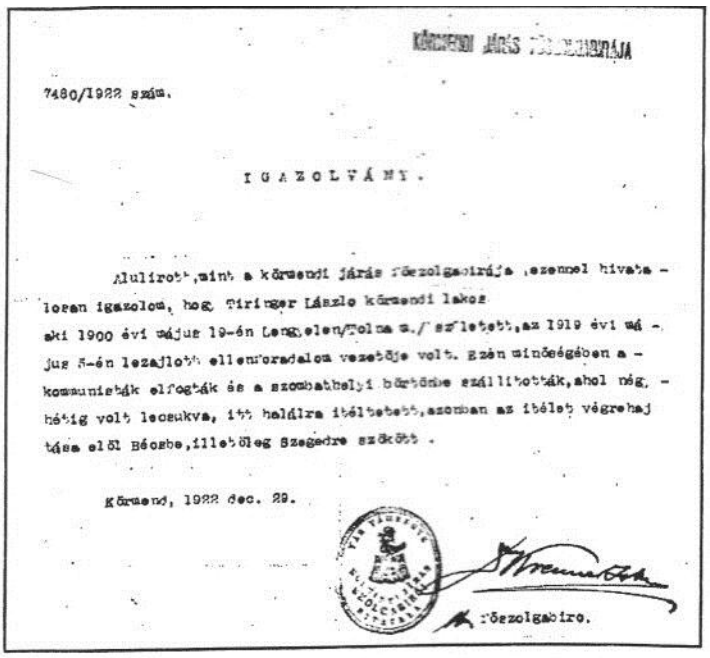
EPILOGUE

The revision and expansion of our family chronicles is now complete. A cousin of mine who wrote her memoirs some years ago titled it “My Life in a Nutshell.” These chronicles have tried to encompass the story of several lives over many generations “in a nutshell,” not only my parents’ and my own life story but, in a rather cursory way, those of our ancestors, our children and their families as well. Of course it is impossible to do justice to everything that happened to a family over a time span of some three hundred years. Since much of the early details were lost or obscured with the passage of time we often had to limit ourselves to describing even major events in a “nutshell.” Sometimes we also faced the difficulty of having to rely on anecdotal evidence instead of solid documentation destroyed during the battles of WW II in Hungary. Nevertheless I believe that these chronicles illustrate to the reader how our family was able to overcome adversity and succeed under often very difficult circumstances.

Ultimately, I hope that these memoirs will be not only an interesting story for our descendents in the new world but also will inspire them to remain proud of their Hungarian ancestry and heritage. If this will come to pass our efforts will not have been in vain.

****

ATTACHMENTS



7480/1922 szám.

I G A Z O L V Á N Y .

Alulírott,mint a körmendi járás főszolgabirája ,ezennel hivata - losan igazolom, hogy Tiringer László körmendi lakos eki 1900 évi május 19-én Lengyelen/Tolna m./ született,az 1919 évi má - jus 5-én lezajlott ellenforradalom vezetője volt. Ezen minőségében a - kommunisták elfogták és a szombathelyi börtönbe szállitották,ahol még - hétig volt lecsukva, itt halálra itéltetett,azonban az itélet végrehaj tása elől Bécsbe,illetőleg Szegedre szökött .

Körmend, 1922 dec. 29.

főszolgabiro.

(translation)

No. 7480/1922

CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OF KÖRMEND DISTRICT

CERTIFICATE

I, the undersigned Chief Executive of Körmend District hereby officially certify that László Tiringer, resident of Körmend born on May 19, 1900 in Lengyel/Tolna County/ was the leader of the May 5, 1919 counterrevolution. In that capacity he was captured by the communists and was taken to the Szombathely jail where he was imprisoned for four weeks. He was sentenced to death but escaped execution by fleeing to Vienna (Austria) and subsequently to Szeged.

Körmend, December 29, 1922

Dr. István Kremmer
Chief Executive

Certificate of Leslie's Imprisonment and Death Sentence in 1919

(translation)

To Mr. László Thiringer, reserve sub-lieutenant,
Keszthely.

In response to your request for a statement regarding your conduct during the period you served under my command, I can testify with the best of conscience to the following:

László Thiringer, reserve sub-lieutenant, having risked his life to escape a communist jail, was among the first to join the officers' regiment. He provided outstanding services to the nation both at Szeged and later as a member of the battalion. I have known him to be a courageous and aggressive soldier, very suitable for special assignments. I was always satisfied with his services. He was discharged from the battalion as a reservist.

During the West-Hungarian Uprising he again volunteered to serve under my command. He was assigned to the most exposed left flank of the southern army where he proved his courage and determination on several occasions. With his platoon he pushed back a numerically superior enemy force at Deutschegg and Hohenbrugg, inflicting heavy casualties. At Deutschegg he and three members of his unit were completely surrounded by the Austrians. They broke through the enemy lines, causing heavy casualties to the Austrians. I awarded him a commendation for the success of this mission. He was also wounded during a subsequent engagement.

(seal of Lajtabánság)

Pál Prónay
Lieutenant Colonel

Budapest, January 29, 1923

Letter from Lt. Col. Prónay Regarding Leslie's Military Conduct

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS

March 29, 1956

Mr. Thomas Thiringer
Filoli, Canada Road
Redwood City, California

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

I am glad to report that your academic record for the Winter Quarter, 1956 satisfies the conditions upon which you were admitted to Stanford University on trial.

Your matriculation is now confirmed, and I earnestly hope that your academic success at Stanford will continue.

Sincerely,

Rixford K. Snyder

Rixford K. Snyder
Director of Admissions

RKS:jl

Admission Letter to Stanford University

ADDRESS OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS TO
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

December 8 1956

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

After consideration at the White House, your recent communication to the President, expressing your concern for the Hungarian people, has been sent to this Department so that we might also see your views. We appreciate very much the spirit which prompted your message and have brought your views to the attention of interested officers of the Department.

As of possible interest, I have enclosed material describing some of the action taken by this country and the free world to assist the Hungarian people.

Sincerely yours,

For the Secretary of State:

John P. Meagher

John P. Meagher
Chief
Public Services Division

Enclosures:

Selected material.

Mr. Thomas P. Thiringer,
Box 231,
San Mateo, California.

First Letter from State Department Regarding 1956 Hungarian Uprising

J. ARTHUR YOUNGER
9TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE:
INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

July 8, 1957

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

Millions of people have the same concern which you expressed in your letter of July 4th for Hungary and the valient fight that she made. However, there has been no program short of war wherein we could deliver this country from its present bondage.

I feel sure that the Hungarian uprising was not without most beneficial results. Nothing has happened in the world which has turned public opinion against Communism like the Hungarian incident.

The present purges that are going on are, I am sure, the direct results of the handling of the Hungarian uprising. I am also confident that as time goes along, we will find that those who gave their lives in this revolt will have made an outstanding contribution to the liberation of those Satellite countries now under the control of Russia.

Like you, I wish that something more realistic could be done at the present time, but there seems to be no acts short of war that could be done which are not being carried on by the State Department.

Cordially yours,

J. Arthur Younger, M. C.
9th District, California

Mr. Thomas P. Thiringer
Box 231
San Mateo, California

JAY:ld

Letter from Congressman Younger Regarding 1956 Hungarian Uprising

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

August 9 1957

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

After consideration at the White House, your letter of July 4, 1957 to President Eisenhower, also signed by other members of your family urging further efforts in the cause of freedom for Hungary, has been sent to the Department of State so that we might also see your comments. We appreciate the interest which prompted you to write as you did, and your letter has been brought to the attention of the appropriate offices of the Department.

As you undoubtedly know, the United States, in cooperation with other members of the United Nations, has requested that the General Assembly be reconvened as soon as possible to give further consideration to the Hungarian question. I can assure you of our Government's continued devotion to the cause of freedom and the attainment of the peaceful liberation of the captive nations.

In the belief that it will be of interest to you, I am enclosing a copy of a speech given by Ambassador James J. Wadsworth, Deputy United States Representative to the United Nations, at a meeting of the Assembly of Captive European Nations in New York.

Sincerely yours,

For the Secretary of State:

John P. Meagher
Chief
Public Services Division

Enclosure:

As stated.

Mr. Thomas P. Thiringer,
Box 231,
San Mateo, California.

Second Letter from State Department Regarding 1956 Hungarian Uprising

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

August 15, 1957

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

Because of your recent correspondence with me on the Hungarian situation, I am taking the liberty of writing to you.

I know you will be pleased to learn that the Congress on August 6 approved the Hungarian resolution expressing the sense of the Congress that the General Assembly of the United Nations consider and adopt the Report of the UN Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary. A meeting of the United Nations General Assembly has been scheduled on September 10 to consider the entire subject.

With best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours,

William F. Knowland

Mr. Thomas P. Thiringer
Box 231
San Mateo, California

Letter from Senator Knowland Regarding 1956 Hungarian Uprising

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

May 29, 1958

Mr. Thomas Peter Thiringer
P. O. Box 231,
San Mateo, California

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

I am glad to report to you the action on your application as a matriculated Stanford student for admission to the Graduate Division.

Your application has been approved for work in the Department of Political Science for the quarter beginning in the Summer of 1958.

If I can be of any assistance to you in making plans for your work, please let me know, although if your question has to do with details of the program which you propose to take, I think you will find a representative of your department more helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Harvey Hall
Registrar

HH/bld

Admission to Stanford Graduate School

DEPARTMENT OF AIR SCIENCE
AIR FORCE R.O.T.C., DETACHMENT NUMBER 50
United States Air Force
Stanford University
Stanford, California

May 30, 1958

Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Thiringer
P.O. Box 231
San Mateo, California

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Thiringer:

I am very pleased to inform you that your son, Thomas Thiringer, has successfully completed four years of Air Force ROTC at Stanford University and will be commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force upon his graduation in June.

Your son's class started out in 1954 with over one hundred members; now there are only thirty-two. Tom's AFROTC grades, his attitude and aptitudes have enabled him to be among the remaining few. This is no small achievement, and I would like to congratulate you on the part you played.

The commissioning ceremonies will be held on Saturday, June 14, 1958, at two o'clock in Cubberly Auditorium. My staff and I cordially invite you and your guests to attend.

Sincerely,

ARTHUR S. BLUM, JR.
Colonel, USAF
Professor of Air Science

Notification of 2nd Lt. Commission to USAF

ROBERT C. KIRKWOOD
State Controller
Sacramento, California

December 11, 1958

Dear Mr. Thiringer:

This is to express my sincere appreciation for your wholehearted support and for your splendid work during the campaign.

I have been deeply heartened by the confidence you have shown in my administration. Together we waged a vigorous, affirmative and clean campaign which directed attention to the issues of State government and to California's future.

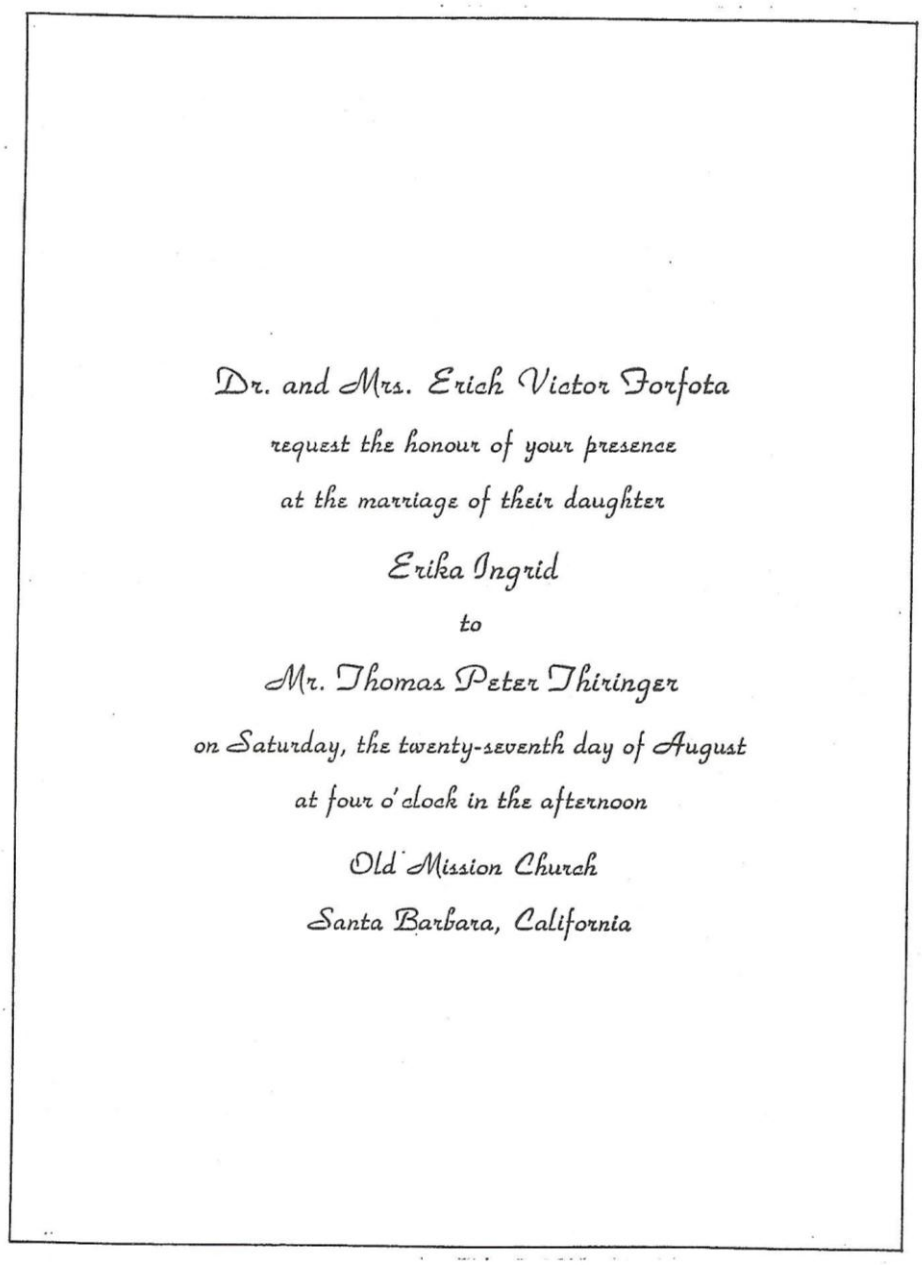
During the months ahead I hope to have an opportunity to thank you personally. In the meantime, please know that your help and friendship have been invaluable. I hope that I may continue to count you a friend and supporter in the future.

With grateful thanks and kindest regards.

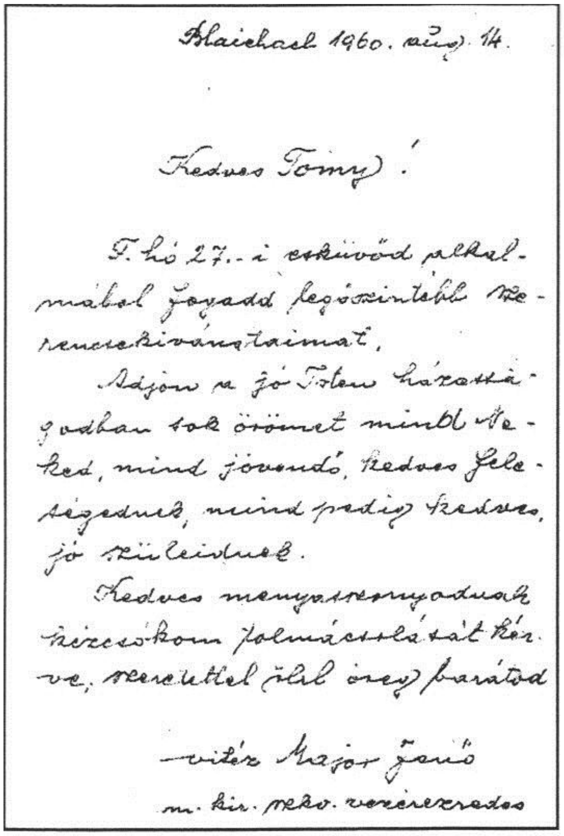
Sincerely,

Robert C. Kirkwood

Mr. Thomas P. Thiringer
P. O. Box 231
San Mateo, California



Tom and Erika's Wedding Announcement, 1960



Blaichach 1960. aug. 14.

Kedves Tomy!

F. hó 27.-i esküvőd alkalmából fogadd legőszintébb szerencsekívánataimat.

Adjon a jó Isten házasságodban sok örömet mind Neked, mind jövendő kedves feleségednek, mind pedig kedves, jó szüleidnek.

Kedves menyasszonyodnak kézcsókom tolmácsolását kérve, szeretettel ölel öreg barátod

vitéz Major Jenő
m. kir. nyug. vezérezredes

(translation)

Blaichach, Aug. 14, 1960

Dear Tomy!

Please accept my most sincere good wishes on the occasion of your wedding the 27th of this month.

May God grant much happiness in your marriage to you and your future wife, and to your dear parents.

Please convey my greetings to your dear fiancee. With affectionate greetings from your old friend,

vitez Eugene Major
former Colonel General
Royal Hungarian Army

Wedding Congratulations from General E. Major, 1960

Date Aug. 25 1960 | County Clerk's Receipt Serial Number SB 83521 | Action or Proceeding Number 610A

Received from T. Thiringer

In re: to

In re: Forfota

Misc. marriage License

For Complaint Petition Papers on Appeal Papers on Transfer

Filing Acknowledgment Demurrer Answer Appearance Motion

Collections	Trust Collection	Notice of New Trial	Complaint in Intervention
Court Fee	Not Disb. by Clerk	Two and 00/100 Dollars	
Civil Matter	Law Lib. Fee		
	2 -		

J. E. LEWIS, County Clerk, By P. L. Brancher PHB., Deputy.

THOMAS P. THIRINGER
ERIKA I. THIRINGER
1027 - 17TH AVENUE
REDWOOD CITY, CALIFORNIA

101

90-1168
1211

_____ 19____

PAY TO THE ORDER OF _____ $ _____

_____ DOLLARS

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WELLS FARGO BANK
AMERICAN TRUST COMPANY
2529 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY, CALIFORNIA

⊕

DELUXE CHECK PRINTERS - LH

Marriage License and First Check

HEADQUARTERS
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United States Air Force
3800 York Street
Denver, Colorado 80205

RESERVE ORDERS)
NUMBER E- 5301) 14 JUN 65

ILT THIRINGER THOMAS P AO3094048
6017 LOWELL AVE
ALEXANDRIA,VA 22300

BY DIRECTION OF THE PRESIDENT YOU ARE PROMOTED AS A RESERVE OF THE AIR FORCE TO THE GRADE SHOWN BELOW.

COMPONENT	GRADE
AFRES	CAPTAIN
EFFECTIVE DATE	CURRENT PROMOTION SERVICE DATE
14 JUN 65	14 JUN 65

AUTHORITY

SECTION 8366 TITLE 10 US CODE

FOR THE COMMANDER:

H. W. GARRECHT
Assistant Director
Directorate of
Administrative Services

AIR RESERVE RECORDS CENTER · CONAC · OFFICIAL

DISTRIBUTION:

E-

Promotion to Captain in USAF Reserve

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUITE 2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

June 6, 1979

Mr. Thomas Thiringer
National Aeronautics and Space
Administration
Code MSB-2
Washington, D.C. 20546

Dear ~~Mr. Thiringer~~ Tom:

This letter is to thank you for the many times you have been of assistance over the years that I have been on the Committee staff.

It has been a privilege to be associated with you in one of the most exciting and demanding times in the space program.

It is my hope that we will be working together in years ahead.

Sincerely,

J. E. Wilson

JW/tm

Let's get together soon!

Letter from Jim Wilson, Staff Counsel to Committee on Science and Technology

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Presents this certificate to

Thomas P. Thiringer

for having been duly certified and
appointed as a member of the

Senior Executive Service

of the United States of America

SES

Administrator, NASA

JUL 29 1983
Date

Appointment to U.S. Senior Executive Service