



TIDAL WAVES

“Against All Odds”

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“Against All Odds”

In memory of my beloved husband whose tender love and caring support made my life, against all odds, happy and fulfilling.

In the life of the individual and in the history of mankind the waves of time shape, erode, build and destroy. It is in our power to make sure that it will not wash away the human race, but help build a better future for all creatures of this earth.

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PREFACE

“When trying to piece together our pasts, memory can be notoriously selective, choosing, even creating one detail at the expense of the other, transposing incidents, disregarding times.”

(Karen McCosker – A Poem A Day)

To my daughter, Marlene, my son Frank, and our dear grandchildren Adam, Joy, Steven, and Sasha – with love.

My narrative of our lives is not a historical essay, nor a fictional story, nor a strict listing of past events. It is written the way I remember it today, as close to the objective truth as my memory allows. It is colored by my impressions and feelings of the past, and by the mood of the day in which it was written. It is, however, always scripted with love, acceptance, and peace in my heart. I hope you will read it and accept it the same way.

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INTRODUCTION

April 27, 1997

Hello, everybody! This is your “Nagymama” speaking to you. I was asked again and again to write a diary, with stories and happenings from the past, and thoughts and feelings of the present. I finally agreed to fulfill my daughter’s request and I will try to the best of my ability to give you a detailed account of our lives.

April 29, 1997

At this point I don’t have the time and inspiration to return to our past and fill this booklet with our memories. But I feel a need to tell you that life is not always easy, there are setbacks, tragedies and losses. But there is one thing that no one can take away from you. And that is the love you receive from those around you and the love that you give in return. My father, your grand or great grandfather, always said: “parents’ love is unconditional, it is natural, not sacrificial; and it is given in return for the love they received from their parents.” As I have received much love from my parents, I reciprocate in expressing my unconditional love to you, Marlene, our only daughter, and to Frank, our firstborn son; including all your children, our beloved grandchildren. Before starting the story of our lives, I wanted to share with you my feelings toward you all. This is all that I have to say today. More to come in the future.

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May 11

It is Mother's Day and I enjoy all the blessing of being a mother. I am healthy, happy, have my wonderful husband at my side; and my two children, the ones I brought into this world, are doing OK. They have their own families, the sweetest, smartest, best kids (at least in our eyes) to love and cherish. While I enjoy all the blessings of motherhood, I remember my own Mom (your great grandmother – "dedanya"). Her life ended abruptly – due to a negligently performed operation – March 14th, 1929. She was only 26 years old, in the prime of life and motherhood. She was the most loving and gentle person, who adored her husband (my father) and her children (my brother Csaba and me). Her optimistic outlook and love of life was expressed at her deathbed. According to my father, when she was already half gone from this world, a baby's cries were heard from another hospital room. At that moment she opened her eyes, gave a big smile and said, "Laci (that was my father's name), do you hear that? A baby is born!" Her voice was full of joy, as though she was reassuring us all that death, including her own, is not the end of life, as new life emerges at the same time. I sometimes wonder what happened with that baby.

I will never forget the prophecy my mom made a few days before her death. We had a large family gathering of adults (13 of them) sitting around the huge dining room table, and us kids – 2 cousins, my brother and myself – sitting at the separate children's table. Curious about what was being discussed among the grownups, we strained our ears to catch some gossip or "for grownups only" topic. I was shocked to hear one of them say, "when 13 people sit around a table, one of them will die shortly" (This was an old Hungarian superstition). My mother, being the hostess, tried to make light of it and said, "You have nothing to worry about, it's

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always the hostess who is chosen first.” Although I wasn’t really sure what all this meant, I recall a cold chill running through my body, and a sense of fear and awe. What if it’s true? My mother can’t leave us just like grandpa did? The festive occasion lost its appeal and glamour, and shortly after dinner I left to return to the security and familiarity of my own room and bed. I was only 6 years old then.

Many exciting, happy and sad things have happened to me since that night, and you will be hearing and reading about it in the coming pages. Meanwhile, don’t forget that life is here to be lived to the fullest, to enjoy every moment, to love every creature, to smile when a newborn baby cries, and to shed tears with those whose hearts are broken. God never tells us “why” things happen or don’t happen. But He sure gave us all the information on “how” to live our lives to make it worth living.

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MY CHILDHOOD 1929-1939

Sacre Coeur entrance stairway



Our living room in the Sacre Coeur



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Our Chapel -
Sacre Coeur



Relaxing on our terrace

Alumni identification card



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May 16

Maybe it's time to start telling you the story of my life from the beginning (July 21, 1922) to the present day. My father, a Transylvanian native son of rich landowners, whose entire estate was lost in 1919 due to the Versailles Treaty – was a 36 year old lawyer in Budapest when I was born. My mother was only 19 at my birth and she too was a Transylvanian born to Austrian and Slavic background parents. My only brother, Csaba, was 18 months older than me. We were living in a comfortable suburban home, belonging to the well-to-do upper middle class.

My memories really start with the death of my mother in 1929. That was also the year of my first days in school – a school that I called “home”, the convent of the Sacred Heart, where I lived as a boarder. I can't describe the feeling of happiness and belonging that the convent gave me. In those wonderful years I was surrounded by numerous friends and by friendly, loving nuns. We all knew what was expected from us, we all had definite plans for the future, and our days were filled with fun, love, security and excitement. I remember my first junior high school years. My friend Dora, whose parents were divorced, spent many weekends at our house. We went to movies together, whispered little girlish secrets to each other, and at the same time, were fierce competitors for the number one spot in class ranking. Dora was gifted in every way but mathematics. My weakness lay in the field of arts and music. Our favorite subject, however, was phys ed and sports. We loved doing things together and experiencing life to the fullest.

I will never forget our first unescorted trip to the opera of Budapest. Dora's father, who was a music critic, presented us with the precious tickets. We were only 13 at the time and attending an opera performance was a pretty serious business. We

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dressed appropriately for the occasion; navy blue velvet outfits with white silk blouses and white ribbons in our braided hair. And off we went, just the two of us, to the performance. Even my brother remarked: “You really look like ladies.” Was this a compliment to cherish! Our seats in the opera house were up front among the music critic’s boxes. All those important men surrounded us and discussed the performance, using words of music jargon we never even heard before. Our importance and our feelings of being “adult” diminished in a very short period of time and there we sat, two frightened little girls, bewildered and a little disappointed, but by the same token elated by the wonders of Verdi’s music and the elegance of the Budapest opera house. I thought to myself, “so we are not noticed as “ladies” today, but boy are we going to tell stories in school tomorrow! We’ll be the most important and most sophisticated 13 year olds in school, if only for a few brief moments.”

May 21

Another day to remember, just as important and exciting for Dora and myself, was when in the same year the nuns picked the two of us for a most responsible and unusual mission. It all started with a trip to the convent’s country cottage. The entire student body, about 80 girls, spent the day picnicking, playing games, and having fun. On our return one of the sisters proclaimed, “Oh my gosh, we left the cat locked in the kitchen! Somebody will have to return right away and let her out.” Naturally, Dora and I volunteered and with the permission of Sister Balthazar, the two of us got on a bus and started the trip all over. This time just Dora and I – the heroes – who are on an important mission to save a poor, incarcerated cat. We took the assignment very seriously and acted as “adult” as possible. In those days kids were kids and the thrills were simple pleasures; little

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unusual, unexpected happenings. It did not take drinking, smoking or dope or joyrides in a stolen car to make us feel elated, happy and envied by peers. Saving a pussycat from being locked up was something we discussed, talked about and remembered for a long time.

However, while recalling the fun-filled weekly excursions to the country cottage, a dark day's shadow appears in my mind. The trip started as always with a walk to the bus stop and then boarding the leased bus that will take us to the cottage. But this time our bus wasn't there. So Sister Balthazar picked two volunteers to escort her (the nuns were not allowed to walk outside the convent unescorted) to the bus depot to get our bus. Claire (a classmate) and Marie were chosen and they left with the sister right away. In a couple of minutes we spotted our vehicle coming – no, not coming – racing down the hill. It rushed past us and ended up in a ditch not far away. As it turned out, a faulty brake caused the accident. However, the cause did not matter. The result was what broke our hearts. Both girls died and Sister Balthazar was seriously hurt, but eventually recovered. Thus I met with death again. This time it involved losing a friend, a classmate, a person of my own age. I realized that dying is not only for adults, for the ones who already had a life, who already fulfilled some dreams; but it can happen to anyone, including me.

When I first met up with death at the age of 6, losing my grandfather (who lived with us and was very much a part of the family) I was saddened and bewildered. We loved “Nagy tata” and enjoyed his wonderful stories of kings and queens and the talking animals. Our imagination soared with his stories and we kept on guessing whether those things really happened or whether Grandpa had just invented them. But what did it matter? Nagy tata was real and his stories brightened our days. Now he is gone, and so is my mother, and now my

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classmate. But somehow none of them are gone completely. So often I feel their presence, just remembering them and all the others – most importantly my father – who left this world since then as well. They seem to still be here with me. They are in my mind, in my heart, and in my whole being. I feel their unconditional love, I hear their wise advices, and sometimes I laugh with them as I did when they were with me in flesh and body. I sometimes even argue with them and still try to convince them about important matters. But I realize that my arguments are weak in light of their loving and wise admonishing. It took me a lifetime to really accept this. Now I know better!

May 27

My mind is wandering between past and present. The beautiful memories intermingle with my happy feelings of today. The sun is brightly shining. I sit on the back porch of our Florida home and watch the bluebirds and cardinals fight for food in our birdfeeder. In the grass, a little squirrel is picking up the seeds the fighters drop, and in the background all the gorgeous colors of the blooming hibiscus bushes blend together. It couldn't be more beautiful and peaceful. I am at peace with the world, with myself, with God, with my fate; just as I was way back in the convent, surrounded by friends, security, love and happiness. All those fun filled days of "conge's" – days when there was no school, just fun and games. The nuns planned everything around a specific theme. I remember the "conge" of cowboys and Indians. When we woke up in the morning, we found at our bedside either a small cowboy hat or a paper tomahawk inscribed with our names. This was the way we were assigned in two camps. The excitement of finding out whether our friends were assigned to our camp or to the "enemy" quarters was in itself mind boggling. And then we entered a dining room turned into a cornfield

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with no tables or chairs, but breakfast prepared on the floor. “Oh, boy, what a sight!” After the meal, we had our first round of games, “cache-cache” (hide and seek in groups). The coin toss gave the Indians the first chance to hide anywhere in our 4 story building. They had 2 minutes to hide and then we had 3 minutes to find them and to tag them, if we could. There was a lot of discipline in that game. The groups had to stay together, no individual initiative was allowed. Those hiding didn’t even dare to breathe when they heard the seekers approaching. And finally, if apprehended, the hidiers scurried like mad to get back to the starting point without being tagged. By the time the last game of “cache-cache” was played we were exhausted and starved, ready for lunch. Afternoon started with a little rest, reading, talking, playing individual games. Later again, we divided in our assigned groups and played “Volkerball”, an exciting ball game. The last competition of the evening after supper was “Loup ou est tu” (Wolf, where are you?). One person was chosen as wolf, received a bell and got two minutes to hide. The group then ran all around in the building and whenever they yelled, “Loup, ou est tu?” the wolf had to ring the bell if she heard the question. Again, we had 3 minutes to find and tag the wolf or lose the game. Several girls had the chance to be wolf until it was time to go to our little chapel for evening prayers. From there, we walked up 4 stories singing “Leise sinkt der Abend nieder, lieber Heiland gute Nacht”. (The night is taking over daylight, our dear Jesus, good night). It was the most inspiring song and beautiful melody, reassuring and relaxing us before we went to bed.

Recently, I asked my classmates to put the song on tape and when I feel down or worried or angry, I just listen to the tape and remember those wonderful days of the past and my spirits are lifted and my soul relaxes. I only wish that today’s youth could grow up with so much security, peace, love and clean fun and excitement. Does it have to take dope or alcohol to experience a real high? Please,

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dear God, take care of my family, my kids and their children – all four of them – so that they can grow up to be as content and satisfied and happy by the time they reach the ripe old age of 75 as I am today! However, I wasn't 75 always. I was only 17 and starting my senior year when things began to happen.

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WAR GETS REAL FOR A TEENAGER

(1939-1940)

It all started with the early morning radio announcement of September 8, 1939. We were informed that Hitler had ordered the German troops to march towards Poland. This meant undeniably and irrevocably war. Though it was the German army going to war, it was evident that sooner or later, all the little surrounding countries including Hungary, would get involved in one way or another. War, confusion, insecurity, all at a time when I thought the world was mine, and I was ready to conquer it. With the easy burden of only 17 years on my shoulders, I had all my plans set for the future. Certainly this conflict had not been totally unexpected. After all, we all knew that world peace was balanced on the edge of a razor blade; however, this news shocked all of us. Like the tidal waves that are foreshadowed and inevitable, but the extent of it is not foreseen, so had this news broadcast shatter my teen world. We all realized that this world was on fire, but I was hoping that the blaze would never reach me. And yet, here it was; real war – with guns, bomb shelters, wounded and prisoners. I wonder if the doors of the school will open. Maybe I won't be able to get my high school diploma. Or maybe they'll just give it to us without requiring attendance. This idea perked me up. I decided I would have to do something extraordinary under these unusual circumstances. "I am part of history!" This date, this hour, will be quoted in history books for many, many years to come, and I belong to it! It is a part of my life and I am going to make the most of it. Thus my first reaction of panic and fear changed to excitement and anticipation.

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July 10

Automatically, I ran through the daily routine of getting dressed, eating my breakfast, and then rushed to meet my friends to decide our further course of action. By the time I reached Claire's house, everything seemed as normal as any other September morning. Yellow and red leaves covered the roads, the air was fresh, the sun was shining, a light breeze rustled through the air, and people were rushing to work. Doesn't anybody feel the importance of the day? Or is it only my privilege to sense the great and terrible things that are ahead? At Claire's house we listened eagerly and excitedly to the radio, which shortly announced that life would go on as usual, schools would open as scheduled, and we would have to work for our diplomas just as others had before us. Suddenly I realized that the tidal wave which I thought was about to destroy my present and future did not yet extend to my doorstep. My life will go on as usual, but the future seemed less secure and some uneasiness surrounded me. Being 17 at that time, my main concern was the present anyhow, so why not enjoy every moment of it?

With this notion, I left Claire's house and went home to prepare for the first day of this somewhat fearful school year. The first day was followed by many others, with fun and work, hope and fear coloring each one of them. The first great news broke when Claire secretly showed us her "Nazi" membership application. She was always somewhat different, extravagant, original and daring, but this announcement came as a lightning bolt. It shocked all of us. The teachers, and particularly the nuns, condemned Hitler and everything connected to him. Most of our parents shared the same opinion, and if this membership comes to daylight, it will be a real scandal and certain expulsion from school. This element of danger and Claire's rebellious courage to contradict our adults made her a real hero in our

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eyes. We all admired her for her daring action, yet on the other hand, somehow I felt something was not right. Claire was certainly courageous and original, which deserves admiration, however, an air of doubt and uneasiness shadowed my feelings. What comes next? This first conflict in our young lives foreshadowed what the future might hold for us. But it only spurred us on to live faster, grab for more, and to do something worthwhile, while we still felt we had the time to do it.

July 14

“While we still have the time to do it” – makes me continue my saga of the past. I hope that God gives me enough time to tell you many of the things that made me what I am today, that formed my life, my thinking, my beliefs, and my attitudes. Your lives will have just as much excitement, hardships and successes, which will form and mold you to become the best person you can be and you too will be able to find in all evil some good and realize that we are here for a reason, and we have to fulfill our calling up to the last minute of our existence. Right now, my calling is to continue my memories for your benefit..... Kathy signed up for volunteer nurse’s training, and Chris planned to spend the summer in a work camp. Only I had not decided on a specific plan of action. Maybe writing letters to soldiers on the battlefields would be a good idea? Or should I side with the anti-Nazi underground and work for them? Perhaps something could be done with the war orphans? The most appealing idea was to be of service to the civil defense. However, I discarded all these plans because I was burdened with very difficult decisions. Where do I really belong? My father, my family, my school with all the nuns, were strictly anti-nazi, while despising communism just as much, and they hoped and prayed for Hitler to perish. The same hatred for him burned in my heart too, but how can I disregard the dangers of communism? Everybody, but

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everybody I knew was anti-communist, and horrible tales were whispered about the atrocities of the Soviet leaders and troops. Could I put myself in a position where I might aid their cause? No! No! No! The best thing is to forget about all these problems and live my own private life with no concern for anything else. Besides, I began to have problems of my own.

July 16

I was always sick, tired and feverish, with constant throat infections. Finally, in November, the doctor decided that I need a tonsillectomy. I had to leave my beloved school and exchange it for a hospital room. My operation went without a hitch and within a week I was home to recuperate. But something was still very wrong with my entire system. After weeks of examinations, tests and x-rays, I was diagnosed with rheumatic fever. That required extended bed rest, no school, no fun, no friends. I spent 2 and a half months alone at home. My books and my German shepherd, Bob, were my only company. It sure was a new experience; but not without its different ways of experiencing some happiness. Until that time, I had been too busy with studying, having fun, being with my friends, and had found no time for serious reading. Now I did nothing but read voraciously, while listening to soothing music on my little clock radio. I learned to appreciate the quiet times of letting my imagination enter the stories I read and learned to have fun without friends and activities. It was a different kind of enjoyment, but life again smiled at me and I was content with my fate. More than contentment entered my days, when in the spring of that year my father sent me to a resort area in the highest mountains of Hungary. The luxury of the high society surrounded me, and I experienced a kind of freedom I had never had before. I enjoyed above all the beauty of nature; snow, sunshine, and the very first signs of spring. Even today,

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the most awesome sight for me is the white snow on the mountains, reflecting the glorious sunshine, with blue skies above and cool, quiet in the air.

My father accompanied me to the mountain resort. Before my father departed, leaving me alone in that fairy tale world, I asked him, “What advice do you give me? What is it I should or should not do?” Being for the first time in my life without the routine and discipline of the convent, and surrounded by “real adult people” – men, women, and boys, I was somewhat apprehensive, and expected a long litany of do’s and don’ts. However, my father’s advice was short and easy to follow, “Anything you believe you can tell me without fear, you can do; things you think you’d rather keep secret you shouldn’t do.” That was it! I was only 17 then, but today, at 75, I still think this was the best and most useful advice I could have gotten. I lived accordingly since that day and I saved myself much headache and trouble. If you want to avoid some unnecessary hardships and problems, I suggest that you follow the same advice. Never do things you have to keep a secret from your parents!

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My mother



My father



My parents in Vienna 1922

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Our country home in
Celldomok



Our home in Budapest



Celebrating my 6th birthday

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At the age of 10 with my brother Csaba,
in true Hungarian outfits



My father and I



My college picture

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HIGH SCHOOL ENDS BUT THE WAR GOES ON

(1940-1942)

July 17, 1997

In the fall of 1940, after a full year of recuperating, of being on my own, enjoying the solitude of home and the luxury of an elegant resort, I restarted my senior year with many new experiences. I realized there is life outside the walls of a convent, and one can find friends among all kinds of people, including boys. It was a very special year in my life, with many excitements, insecurities, fun and disappointments, and above all, with experiences I never dreamed of before. By now, I was ready to return to the safety and security of my school, to be reunited with my friends of so many years; with the teachers and nuns I had known so well and to settle into the comfortable routine of my beloved school; forgetting my own problems and the problems of the war around us. We were involved in our school work and in preparing for our “matura” – a 3 day graduation examination. This was the culmination of 12 years of studying and it was – at least to us – one of the most important events in our young lives. We all buried ourselves in our textbooks and while pretending that we were busy studying, our minds wandered and we were really dreaming of a secure future, a handsome and rich husband, and dozens of children. We tried to forget about the outside world and the war, and we concentrated on our present days and the little every day happenings. “Liz has a steady boyfriend” went the gossip of the day; “and the sisters discovered it”. We wondered if she would be expelled for such “criminal” behavior. But who cared now? Only six more weeks and the “matura” and graduation is over with.

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July 18

As I picked up my pen today and reread the last paragraph of my story I realize how the world has changed in 50 some years. I wonder if my grandchildren will be able to even imagine that in those times an 18 year old girl did not even dare to think of a boyfriend before graduation from high school? That was unheard of! Or maybe not so.... Some exceptions existed. My mother was only 16 when she got married. It never dawned on me how she must have felt being so different and I wonder how the other married women treated her? Did she have her hardships and difficulties because of that? I will never know now. However, I will make sure that all of you know about the happenings that influenced you parent's and grandparent's lives and, therefore, I go on with my memories. We were preparing for our graduation examination and as it was the custom, the boarding school students (and that year there were only 2 of us: Klara and I) spent the 6 weeks preparation in a cottage of the nuns situated in the outskirts of Budapest in the woods. There were 24 graduating seniors in our class, with 22 of them being day students. We took all our books with us, a small harmonica, and a heart full of laughter. The days passed by with some studying done in the most unusual ways. A birdhouse on the top of an old birch was my favorite spot. Up I climbed, carrying my notes and books with me. Klara watched from the ground with disbelief. After several attempts, I finally made it to the top and gave my full attention to my history notes. Forgetting the insecure position I was in, I placed my books beside me, or at least that was my intention. My history books, however, took a dive, opened their pages like parachutes, and arrived with a sudden thump on the ground. "Shall I throw them back?" asked Klara innocently, "This way you don't have to climb down again." "OK," I nodded and grabbed with both hands for the ascending book. The book got caught in a niche of

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branches, and now it was my turn to take an unexpected dive, landing right beside Klara. “Did you hurt yourself?” came her innocent question again. “No, I did not hurt myself, only the branches and the rough ground did”, was my angry answer.

Due to that experience, we decided to find a safer place to study after we got the books out of the tree. Our next choice was a small cave housing the statue of our Lady of Lourdes. The rain started to drizzle, so we had to find shelter. Besides, the statue was in need of a good spring cleaning, so we put it out in the rain and climbed inside the cave. However, we discovered that it was too dark to read, thus we again had to make a change. Instead of studying from the books, we turned to fortune telling. My grandiose idea was to let the numerous spiders crawl into Klara’s books, then squash them and whatever pages their dead body is found in should be studied, because our questions will surely be drawn from those pages. How could Klara resist this “sure” way of finding out about the examination questions? Besides, it was a good way to eliminate a lot of hard work and study. That Klara’s books got all messed up and dirty was part of my scheme in getting even with her for the “innocent” questions she had asked way back when I fell out of the tree.

July 20

Day after day, we had our little adventures and our minds opened not so much to the abstract knowledge, but to the beauty of nature and the joy of friendship. The nearer the day of examination came, the less did we worry about it. With every passing day, we appreciated more and more the wonderful colors of spring flowers, the bright red skies with the setting sun, and the sunrise serenades of the early birds. Isn’t life just wonderful as it is? – was our thought. War and peace, exams

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or graduation don't really change anything. Friendship and nature seemed to be the answer to my inner conflicts and yearnings. If only these 6 weeks would never come to an end! In fact, these days were the last carefree, happy student times for us. But like everything else, this too, had to have an ending and the big days of examinations arrived. The committee of seven professors faced us in a small classroom where the pupils were admitted one by one, and had to answer so many frightful questions. Our anticipation and trepidation, however, turned somehow into disappointment. The professors were kind and helpful, the questions all seemed to have an answer and the three days passed by as smoothly as any other schooldays. Are these the frightful days of exams we had feared for eight years? A few days of sweat and fear and it was all behind us. We made it, we graduated; life, real life was waiting for us!

As I stepped out of the school building that beautiful sunny day in June of 1941, I looked around anxiously to see the reflection of my joy and victory in the eyes of passersby. I finally graduated and am ready to take on the world! But people once again passed by indifferently and cool, and I began to understand that in some ways everybody is like an island to himself. It is not easy to find people who share the joys and sorrows, the victories and fears, the disappointments and jubilations we encounter. I felt like stopping and shaking some and shouting to all, "Stop! See! Listen! Big things are in the air! War is nearing our borders, youth is graduating and facing an uncertain future!" But nobody listened, nobody cared. So instead of shaking the indifferent people I shook the fascination of the moment off, and resigned to my fate of living a common, everyday life just as others do, with little excitement and adventure. How could I have sensed what effect the ever returning tidal waves of history would have on my personal life? War, with all its bloodshed, terror and heroism, brutality and idealism, did not reach our borders

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yet. All I knew was that my carefree schooldays were over and a brand new chapter is opening in my life.

October 10

It has been three months since I sat down to continue my life story. All summer we have been away in Georgia, in Canada, and finally, we are back home and I turn my thoughts to my past and to your future once more. “You”, includes both of you, Marlene and Frank, and all four of my dear, dear grandchildren. It was you, Marlene, who asked me to write this book for you; but the more I get into story telling, the more I have all of my offspring in mind and hope, that by the time you’ll reach my age you’ll feel as satisfied and happy with your past life as I do; and will be as proud and appreciative of your children and grandchildren as I am. I just want you to remember that by now you are the pride and happiness of my life and I only hope that I’ll have many more years to witness your achievements and your wonderful approach to parenthood. God bless you and your kids, my grandchildren, And don’t forget that life does have its ups and downs, and relationships go from love to disappointment and back to mutual understanding and love again. Enjoy it while it lasts as I enjoy these quiet moments of talking to you and sharing my feelings and my past with you.

Getting back to the latter, I am thinking about the summer after my graduation. Naturally, it was a new beginning in every way. My father returned to Transylvania and I had no other plans than to be with him, wherever he went. And Transylvania, after more than 20 years of Rumanian occupation, was returned to Hungary again. It was my ancestors’ home, my father lived his childhood and early adulthood there and I had spent many summers visiting the different family

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estates and all the relatives who stayed in the occupied homeland. I was thrilled to be a Transylvanian again, to belong to a place that was home to my parents, my grandparents and many generations of Csiky's, Lazar's, etc. These were my roots, this was the soil I called home, the place where half of the dead in the cemetery were in some way related to me. I thought I finally found my niche; I believed I belonged there and was hoping to be happily settled there. However, after a couple of months I became restless, I missed all my friends, the familiar surroundings, the nuns, the atmosphere of Budapest, and even more the atmosphere of the convent life. And it just so happened that I found an advertisement in the paper about a girl's finishing school in a convent in Budapest. As if God had seen that I need to return to the lifestyle of the past twelve years and sent me the way to do it. My father approved of my plans and by September I was in Budapest in school again, in a convent with nuns and girls of my age, many of whom had graduated from my beloved Sacre Coeur. What a blessing! Again being a carefree, happy student without any concerns, any thoughts of war, and fears of the future. Enjoying the present, the security of the convent, the love of the nuns and the understanding of my friends.

October 17

This was in many ways a very different convent from what I was used to. No uniforms to be worn, no closed doors and no study halls and no silencium. Two girls shared one room; some students were already engaged or at least had boyfriends and we could come and go as we pleased, as long as we were in our room by 11:00 pm. Our subjects prepared us for life, they were not just for developing some scientific knowledge. It was all relevant, unlike geometry, physics, algebra, etc. My favorite subjects were the ones that afforded me outdoor

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activities, such as gardening and raising poultry and pigs. I spent much of the day in the beautiful big park until I started to chase some ducks one day. I could easily catch up with them when they were simply trying to outrun me. But I forgot that only they had wings and that I didn't. And when they finally decided to fly over a low fence, I tripped and broke my ankle. That accident slowed me down quite a bit and with a big cast on my leg I had to find other outlets for my overactive personality. It was the kitchen where my imagination and "talent" gave me an opportunity to experiment and concoct new recipes. This too, however, came to an abrupt ending when I spilled the oil on the lit gas stove and nearly burned down the entire kitchen. Yes, I sure had my share of bad luck and accidents during the school year of 1941-42, but it was again a wonderful year. Full of friends and fun, security and freedom, and above all, away from the worries of war and all its problems and horrors. Life, however, does not stand still and the Russian troops came nearer and nearer to our Transylvanian (eastern) border. By the time the school year ended, my father already left the endangered Transylvania and settled as near to the western border as possible. As a probate judge and lawyer, he bought a nice home in Celldomolk and that's where I returned after the school year ended. Again a new beginning; a new life, different place, unknown people. How I wished I would be back in the Sacre Coeur where I spent my entire childhood and adolescence; where I knew everyone, where I was at home, felt secure and loved. But at this juncture of my life little personal concerns didn't matter anymore. War was at my doorstep, my brother was somewhere on the battlefield fighting against the Russian army that already threatened our borders.

There was fear in the air and very little normalcy remained. One of those normal fun activities, however, happened Dec. 4, 1942. This was a day as important to the infantry as St. Patrick's day is to the Irish. St. Barbara was the patron saint of the

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infantrymen and Dec. 4th was her dedicated feast day. Not far from us there was the largest Hungarian infantry establishment (Hajmasker) where the celebrations included a “live” St. Borbala who knighted all the freshly drafted young men. And I was chosen to be St. Borbala. It was quite an experience to find the appropriate outfit. We borrowed the mantle from a theatre troop, but it was absolutely necessary to have a palm branch to knight all the new recruits. And Hungary has no palm trees. But finally, a good friend of mine (you knew her as Palma-neni) found the solution. Funeral homes use sometimes palm trees for decoration and sure enough, we did receive one branch from them for the big day. From morning to night the festivities never ended until the dance floor opened, the band started playing and we all danced as though there was no war and no danger. Trying to forget that these young men, whom I just knighted, would be on the battlefield within a very short time. And who knows how many will never come back and how many will never be able – due to injuries – to dance again? Maybe it was the last hurrah for them, and we tried to make the most of it. In many ways it was the last of the good times for me, too. A few days after the celebration, high fever and stinging back pain put me to bed. I was diagnosed with pleurisy on both sides of my lungs and my recuperation took me again for several months out of my active life. I had to go back to Budapest where there were better medical facilities and better doctors. I was wrapped every two hours in ice cold, wet towels and had to stay in bed for about two and a half months. There were no antibiotics then. I was mostly alone, did a lot of reading and writing, listened to my radio (there was no TV then either!) and my only companion was my dog, Bobby. But somehow I felt no depression, no isolation, no anxiety. Amidst all the fears and excitements of the war, all the news from the battlefields, it was a sobering, quiet experience to be tied to my bed and read all the stories of wonderful people; heroes, lovers, romance and mystery, and forget the misery outside my sick room.

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COLLEGE IN WARTIME – OCCUPIED BY GERMANS AND RUSSIANS (1942-1943)

October 28, 1997

Again more than ten days passed since I last had my pen in hand. Our front door's lock stopped working, our garage door did not open, the airconditioner in our rented home had to be replaced, and right now my car's battery died while Nagypapa has gone to replace it. I am stuck alone at home. With nowhere to go, no planned activity, I picked up my notebook and try to continue the "story of my life".

By the summer of 1943 I was my old self again, completely healthy and ready for action. At that time "action" for a young girl meant one of two things: being engaged or already married, or studying at some school. With most men on the battlefield, and in a small town, where I knew very few people – studying was the only viable option for me. Besides, I enjoyed my studies and I could get back to Budapest under familiar circumstances. I enrolled at Pazmany Peter University as a language major and chose the "Studentenheim" in my beloved Sacre Coeur as my home again. Naturally, by that time, many of my old friends were gone, so were many much loved nuns. But it still was the same convent, with some old and many new faces; the same building, the familiar chapel and the same atmosphere. Or was it really the same atmosphere? By September of 1943, we were very much involved in war. We still pretended to be safe and to somehow avoid the terrors of war; naziism, communism, bombardments, etc. The university courses were taught as if it was peacetime; in the convent we stuck to the old routines, played and studied, prayed and sang and made believe that nothing had changed. This

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was, however, the first Christmas that I spent away from my family. I stayed in the convent with the nuns, prayed for peace, for my brother and all my friends and relatives who were on the battlefield, and for those who were killed or maimed or had lost a loved one. Times did definitely change. But not yet altogether.

I remember my father thinking about remarrying. Not because he wanted a wife, but because he believed that with all the turmoil I would need a mother who keeps the home together. He found an appropriate widow with whom we spent much time together. At one such occasion, Nanu (that was her name) invited a handsome young nephew, who was a lieutenant in the army, named Ferenc (Francis). I was in the prime of my life and he was debonair and very pleasant. But somehow, we could not warm up to each other. Military men, with their uniforms and rigidity, did not impress me and he really didn't care for a studious college student living in a convent. So no romance evolved, but the same was also true of my father and Nanu. After several months of courtship they drifted apart and I thought this was the last I would see of Nanu and Ferenc.

1944 was definitely a turning point in Hungary's history. In January we started the second semester at the university. The convent was still the same, the university opened its doors with regularity, but there was electricity in the air. We heard about bombardment, about Russian troops at our borders, about atrocities of soldiers; but the real shock came, when on March 19th, 1944, the German army forcibly marched into Hungary, took many military posts and made the Hungarians their pawns in their power struggle. The university closed its doors, so did the convent. We were all sent home to our parents and there was no more pretending, no more escape; war had entered our daily lives with all its brutality and horror. I returned to my father, where it was much safer, much further away from the

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ongoing battles. The Russians entered through Transylvania, the United States started the bombardment of the cities and our lives as we had known them before had changed in every way. Refugees, first from Transylvania and later from all over eastern Hungary, escaped to the west leaving homes, belongings, dreams and part of their lives behind. Sometimes we had as many as 25-30 people camping out under our roof. Some were old friends, some relatives, some strangers. But all were welcomed and fed until they decided to go to even safer places, where the nearing Russian troops, hopefully, could not catch up with them; where the bombardment of the American air force was less likely; where they believed their survival was more likely.

It was, however, not only the Hungarian refugees who made our home theirs. As our three story home was the biggest and nicest home in the city of Celldomolk, the German army decided to use the middle floor as their office. The top floor with the bedrooms became the living quarters for our family and the refugees, the middle part belonged to the German military, and the lowest level housed my father's office and the servant's quarters. But this was not all. With the Germans occupying Hungary, the Jewish persecution began. Within a very short period of time, they found a helping hand in my father. The few who escaped German captivity fled to our house, through the back door, by the servant's quarters. And while I entertained the German soldiers on the second floor, my father gave clothing, food and advice to the escaping Jews. This maneuver was not without danger, but my father, being who he was and what he stood for, could not see innocent people being sent to concentration camps. Little did he know that within a few years all of us would have our share of persecution.

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At the time, however, few people suspected that the home which housed German military officers was at the same time safe haven for Jewish escapees. People were mostly occupied with their own survival. Destruction and death were lurking everywhere. The Germans were in our home, the Russians were already in the middle of Hungary occupying half the country, and the Americans were targeting every part of the country with their bombs. Now it was time to dig shelters and hide underground whenever the sirens sounded. There was no more safe haven for anyone. Young and old, children and women, Christian and Jew, military and civilian; all had to run and fear for their lives. At night the entire town was in complete darkness; no street lights, no windows without darkening curtains, no one on the streets. We all huddled together in our beds, always ready to jump and run – in the darkness, to the back yard, where we had dug a trench against the bombs. It was the most horrifying experience. I didn't even dare to sit in the bathtub for a while as we never knew when the sirens would announce another air raid and the possibility of death from above. We were always ready to run and hide. My little puppy dog Treff was even more frightened. He never left my side and when we were all huddled on the bottom of the trench we dug, he hid under my belly and howled until the sirens stopped and the airplanes left. Half of our railroad station was in ruins and one afternoon we could clearly see and hear the bombs falling in the nearby town park. After the air raid stopped, we ran to see if anyone was hurt. Arriving at the park, the most terrifying sight was waiting for us. Four or five children, all around ten to twelve years of age had been torn to pieces and were lying in the crater of a bomb. As long as I live, I will remember that picture of children's limbs strewn around in the town park, and parents trying to piece their child together. I was wondering if those who launched the bombs knew how many innocent lives they destroyed and how they would feel if they could see the effect of their "heroic" war efforts. How can war ever be justified? In order to save

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some innocents from suffering, we inflict suffering on other innocents. Is that what mankind has become? I only pray and hope that none of you will ever experience the horrors of war and the fury of man gone mad. Now, I think you understand why I can't stand horror movies and violence in any shape or form.

It takes a man like my father to interpret such a horrible event in some positive manner. When the townspeople's fury and anger was at its greatest against the American pilots, my dad came up with the following explanation: When these pilots completed their mission against their military targets, they had a bomb left over and had to get rid of it before they returned. Not wanting to kill any civilians, they dropped it outside the town on a park, where they believed it could do no harm. My father never wanted to harm anyone, and thus, he could not imagine that someone could harm others willingly. In a way this is my philosophy, too. Already at that young age my motto was: "People are good, not bad. It's only the circumstances that make their behavior malicious." And throughout my life, with all its trials and tribulations, I found more good than bad, more love than hatred, more understanding than indifference. I found that giving a helping hand without expecting anything in return will always boomerang back to you, sooner or later, in one way or another.

December 15

It has been quite a while since I told you about our war encounters, so I had to reread this last episode and right away another story with air raid and pilots came to my mind. We were spending a beautiful summer afternoon with friends in the vineyards when the sound of sirens made us hide in the trenches. I don't know if it was the sunshine or being with friends or if we just had gotten used to the constant

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bombardments, but this time we all looked at the sky to see the horror show in the air. We have never seen so many American bombers being shot down, and pilots ejecting from burning planes. One parachuting American landed quite near to the German anti-aircraft gunners. To our greatest surprise, a young German soldier left his position, ran to the wounded American, untangled his parachute, then picked up his enemy (whom he had probably just shot down), and carried him in his arms to the field hospital. As I spoke English, I was summoned to the hospital to serve as a translator. While I was there fulfilling my duty, a second surprise stunned me. Hungarian peasants, who were the target of the American bombers, came with some gifts such as lemons (which were a real treasure in Hungary during the war) to ease the pain of their “enemy”. I couldn’t believe my eyes! Could that really be? War, killing of innocents, anonymity, and brutality surrounded us and at the same time I see the most unselfish and heroic acts from the most unlikely people. Maybe I was right all the time when I believed in the intrinsic goodness of the human heart. If we only knew how to help people to find that bright light in their souls and let it shine under any circumstances!

Maybe I am one of the very lucky ones who were given an opportunity to see at least a flicker of it even in the darkest, bloodiest days of my lifetime. A ray of sunshine and happiness entered our home, when a distant cousin, Agath, arrived as a refugee with her mother and two daughters, Erika (10) and Andrea (8). Agath was full of laughter, full of fun, full of love. They left their home and their earthly belongings were reduced to the minimum, possessing not even all that is necessary to have a normal life; and still the attitude and spirit of Agath and her mother uplifted us all, made us forget the uncertainty and the horrors and filled our days with smiles and warmth. Agath arrived just in time (or was she sent by Someone higher up?) because shortly after her arrival my father was drafted – in his sixties –

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as a punishment for his anti-nazi behavior. With Agath and family at my side I didn't feel abandoned or alone; they became my family now. My father and brother were away, my beloved school in Budapest was taken over by the Russian army, but I still felt safe and had no worries with my new family at my side.

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THE BOMBS DON'T STOP FOR APPENDECTOMIES

(1944-1945)

December 18

However, we couldn't enjoy our newly found extended family for long. With the Russian army marching westward, nearer and nearer to our home and the Germans ordering evacuation of the city, we had to leave again. On December 8, 1944 we boarded the evacuation train of the local military whose commander was a good friend, the husband of Palma-neni. Again, I left home and friends behind, but with my cousin Agath and Palma-neni and their families I was surrounded by a loving group of people. The trip was not without excitement. The train became our home for more than 10 days. We cooked and slept there and played and worked there, abandoning it only when the enemy air raid came, trying to get as far away as possible and finding some hiding places or trenches to escape the possible ordeals of the bombardments. I will never forget one interesting episode in Ulm, Germany. We were near a prison camp filled with British, American and French prisoners when again, the sirens howling made us jump out and run for cover. It was there that I realized, observing personally the absurdity of war; these prisoners feared for their lives and hid from the bombs just as we did. However, it was "their" countrymen, "their" fellow soldiers who might have caused their death. "All is fair in love and war" the saying goes, and the irony of the American Air Force made me understand the meaning of that phrase.

Finally, after ten days of travel, a week before Christmas, we arrived in Munsingen, a small village with a beautiful castle, which was used as an insane asylum for many years, until Hitler placed the "youth corps" there. We were housed on the third floor of that building; the Hitler youth had left and the building

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was abandoned. It was not easy to start life in an abandoned castle without my immediate family, adjusting to the new surroundings, in a different country, different climate, with different people. But with Agath, Palma and their families, and being used to community life and dormitory living, I again began to feel safe and secure despite war and constant bombardments. There were eight families in our compound. Actually, none of them was a “real” family, as the men were all missing. Only women and children were housed together in two big rooms. We made one of the rooms the dormitory where each of us possessed a bed and a nightstand and we shared the few available closets. As we didn’t have too much clothing, it sufficed. The other room served as living, dining and family room all in one. Somehow, we managed to live, to get along, and even to have fun, play cards and sing together. Now, looking back on those days, it seems like they should have been very hard times. Even food was scarce and the winter was freezing cold. However, somehow, we enjoyed each other’s company, we shared fairly in work and food, we formed a bond that lasts a lifetime, and we hoped and prayed that someday the horrors of war would stop.

By now, air raids were daily events and spending hours in a dark shelter in the basement, with all of us huddled together, had become a normal routine. Nobody knew when and how it would end, what would come once it was over, and where we would settle to restart our shattered lives. Being young and single, surrounded by people whom I loved and who reciprocated my feelings, and having no burdens of planning or preparing for the future (there was no foreseeable future for us), we lived for the moment and nothing else. In a way this was not an unpleasant situation; no responsibilities (except for the daily chores), no worries (except for the daily air raids). I felt I was given the license to simply enjoy every moment that offered some enjoyment. The four foot high, glistening, white snow, the

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sunshine, the friendly roommates, the younger children, and the lack of pressures of “future planning and preparing” made these months happy for me. It was again like being in a girl’s boarding school and enjoying the companionship of friends with no thoughts and cares about the future. Nothing else existed but the present moment, so we all tried to make the most of it.

February of 1945 brought again some new happenings into my young life. I started to experience stomach pains, fever overcame me and by the end of the month I was diagnosed with appendicitis. I entered the hospital, about 12 miles away, and underwent the operation. At that time, the Germans were experimenting with a new method of anesthesia, which nearly cost me my life. It took nearly 24 hours to awaken me and bring me back to life. On the third day an air raid moved us all out of our hospital rooms. Wheels were attached to our beds and we were moved down to the basement. Above our heads ran the pipes carrying the hot water for the central heating system and the beds were placed one beside the other. If someone would have needed help, there was no way to remove the person, not even enough room for a nurse to get by. I was in many scary situations but this time I was really frightened. So were the other patients. No one said a word, only a murmur of prayer was heard. We might have been in that situation for long hours or only minutes, but it seemed like an eternity to us. The fear was even worse than if we had actually died. We couldn’t bear the burden of uncertainty and the mental pictures of suffocating or being burned with boiling water in case a pipe ruptured. “Dear God, please put an end to this, one way or another” was our only prayer. And it sure did end. We all survived and were wheeled back to our hospital rooms. My cousin Agath came to visit shortly after this ordeal and her presence caused some difficulties, too. But this time it was not mental anguish, but physical discomfort. Agath, with her funny stories and remarks, made me laugh so

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heartily that my wound nearly ruptured. As you can see, even too much of a good thing can cause problems.

January 5, 1998

Christmas has passed and I didn't find time to get back to my stories. Cooking and baking, cleaning and preparing for the arrival of Marlene and family took up all my time. Now the house is quiet again. Our family has left; it's just the two of us and I can turn my thoughts to the far away times when there was never a quiet time, never just the two or three of us, and always something exciting happening. The Allied troops were advancing rapidly, the bombardments were a daily (and nightly) occurrence; the death of innocent people (old, young, woman or child) was accepted as part of life. We didn't question why all this was happening, why God allows all the bloodshed; we lived for the moment and by now we were convinced that the end – at least the end of the war – was near. One early spring morning we saw in the near distance a brilliant light shining. As the brightness moved nearer we realized that it was a forest fire that lit up the sky. This time fire bombs had been dropped in the neighborhood and as we were told, the Americans were right behind the fire curtain. And so it was time to prepare for the arrival of the “enemy” or as some called them, the “liberators”. But whatever name we gave them, preparations had to be made.

As it was a military evacuation, we had several men in uniform with us and we felt it would be best for them to find civilian clothing to wear. This wasn't an easy task, but somehow we managed. The second big task was to get rid of all guns and ammunition that we had in the compound. We were given orders by the Germans to take all the equipment to the next village where there was a German military

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depot. That sounds easy, however, no one wanted to volunteer to sit in a horse drawn carriage on top of guns and explosives while the American army was practically within shooting distance. Finally, one young soldier volunteered to be the coachman and Agath and I agreed to deliver all the equipment (mainly explosives) to the military depot. As we were both fluent in German and English we were the obvious choice. This sure was the most thrilling and dangerous adventure of my life (at least up to that time). To make things even more eerie, the skies darkened and then as if a faucet in the heavens had been opened, the rain started pouring and in a few minutes the streets were all flooded. Our horses went wild, the sirens blasted again and we had to run as far away as we could and take cover in a ditch in case a bomb hit the wagon. Luckily, the air raid didn't last long, but the downpour did. Entering the village, we were given directions to the military depot and were also told that the Americans had already entered the village. Whenever we saw people, cars or carriages with weapons coming our way, we were puzzled about how to greet them. It was dark, the rain made everything even more unrecognizable, and Agath and I looked at each other and wondered, "Are they German?" Then we have to tell them the depot is "rechts um die Ecke" (to the right around the corner). Or are they Americans? In that case, it's going to be, "Hello friends". In the midst of the worst downpour, speckled with lightning, on flooded streets, sitting in a carriage on top of explosives, with soldiers running, shooting and screaming around us, we barely realized the danger we were in. It was some excitement and thrill and we made bets on whether the next encounter would be "Rechts um die Ecke" or "Hello friends". I don't even remember how this adventure ended but everything must have worked out Ok as I am here more than fifty years later and writing about it. But as long as I live, I will never forget the thrill of being with my dear cousin Agath in the most exciting situation, being part of a horror movie in real life!

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COLLEGE UNDER AMERICAN AND FRENCH OCCUPATION AFTER THE WAR

(1945-1946)

January 8, 1998

A couple of days after this adventure, things settled down; the Americans took over and one sunny afternoon, standing in front of our castle on top of the hill, we saw the American tanks moving uphill. Again, Agath and I formed the “welcoming committee”. Everybody was ordered into the basement bunkers (we didn’t know if there would be some shooting) and the two of us, dressed in our Sunday best, holding a bottle of famous Hungarian wine in our hands, were ready to welcome the Americans and their tanks. There were no shots fired, but a handsome young man climbed out of the first tank and approached us. He was surprised to hear us speak English and even more astonished when we handed him the Hungarian wine. As it turned out, he was of Hungarian descent and even spoke a few words in Hungarian. However, he cautioned us that this was a war zone and soldiers were soldiers, not saints; so in the future it shouldn’t be the pretty young ladies all dressed up, wearing jewelry and makeup, who welcome the entering soldiers. He also gave me and Agath official papers that allowed us to move freely around and posted a big sign on the entrance door, stating that we were under the sponsorship of the American army.

This is how the war ended for us. The shooting, the air raids, the bombardments, and fighting had come to an end. Five years of fighting, killing, horrors and heroics, all for naught. I really didn’t understand why we had to suffer and endure all that. So what now? Where do we go from here? Was it worthwhile? Who was right? Was there a just cause? Will life ever be the same? Millions of

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questions with very few answers. One thing I was sure of, however. There are no absolutes. Nobody is all right or all wrong. There is no obvious division between nations, races, ages, religious orientation, etc. We all are suffering humans, individuals who have feelings, who need love and understanding. I belong to the human race and not to some special, small, interest group. I felt free of all ties and ready again to do something worthwhile, helping my fellow man, making my own mark in some little way on this earth. That feeling of “the world is mine to conquer” returned and I was ready for action again. But for what action? We did not even know how to handle the present moment, let alone plan for tomorrow and the next year and the years after that. It was still mainly a matter of living from day to day.

January 20, 1998

However, that living was not unpleasant, even though food was scarce and it was everywhere freezing cold. By May, the war had ended even between Japan and the U.S.. We heard of an atom bomb being used and several hundred thousands dying as a result. I could not understand why that slaughter was necessary. The Germans had already capitulated and the small Japanese island nation with no natural resources was alone fighting against the entire western world (Russia, the USA, Britain, and France). But we did not spend too much time thinking about world politics. Our only concern was to have enough food, particularly for the kids, and a reasonably warm room. To achieve this, Agath and I went into town to the headquarters of the UNRRA to offer our services and to request some food rations. There were several desks with American soldiers sitting behind them and in front of each desk stood a long line of applicants. We stood beside each other at the end of two different lines. As we were nearing the desks, we realized that one

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of the officers was exceptionally handsome. It happened to be in my line, so my cousin told me (in Hungarian – to make sure the fellow behind the desk would not understand our conversation), “Let’s change lines, you wouldn’t know what to do with him, you are too young”. “No way”, came my reply, “Just talking to such a handsome guy will lift my spirits”. Back and forth we argued, had fun, and extolled the good looks of the officer. Finally, I stood in front of his desk and asked him, “What language do you prefer, German or English”? In clear Hungarian came his reply, “Hungarian will do”. I was surprised, embarrassed and ashamed. Again, we had met an American of Hungarian origin, and a very handsome one in this case. After this experience we were very careful about what we said, even in Hungarian. You never know who understands you! Despite this incident, or maybe because of it, we were given a big load of food supplies and I got a job as a translator to a Swedish officer.

The two of us combed the nearby prison camps, riding (for the first time in my life) in a jeep. Our task was to register all the POWs and sort them according to their appropriate native countries. Since I spoke English, German, French, and Hungarian, I was well suited for the job. Also, being young and single, I could go at a moment’s notice with my Swedish boss. It was an interesting assignment and to a certain degree quite dangerous. The young Swede enjoyed all alcoholic beverages, and was “under the influence” more often than not. Our jeep rides took us through woods and meadows, highways and byways, and always at a high speed. Again, my youth protected me from fear and worry. Not so my cousin and aunt. In a very short time they put an end to my translator adventures. Anyway, summer was nearly over, normalcy and regularity were returning, and after many years of “living in the present”, it was time to think of the future. As I already had three semesters under my belt from the Hungarian University, my obvious choice

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was to return to my studies. The University of Tübingen was about 50 miles from our location. By that time, we had already moved from the castle on the hill to the small town where we had deposited the ammunition and guns during the last days of the war. We found an apartment with three rooms, two bedrooms and a family room. But there was no kitchen or bathroom, and these were located at the end of the corridor and used by all the renters on our floor. However, we had a sink with running water in the middle room, where a wood burning stove was also located, which heated, to a certain degree, all three rooms. The heat really wasn't sufficient, but we could cook and boil water on top of the stove. It seemed like a very "luxurious" and comfortable arrangement. I shared one bedroom with my cousin Agath, while her mother and her two daughters were housed in the other bedroom. So far so good. All that I had to figure out was how to get from our home in Munsingen to the University in Tübingen. It didn't take too much research to find out that every morning at 5 a.m. the milk truck came around to pick up the big milk cans and take them to the nearest railroad station. From there, an hour long train ride took me to Tübingen. I enjoyed tremendously the early morning ride on top of the milk cans in the beautiful Alps. Very often during my one and a half hour truck ride, I was all snowed in by the time I arrived to the train station. The dancing snowflakes and the gorgeous scenery made me forget the freezing weather and the uncomfortable position of sitting on the top of the metal cans.

January 21, 1998

So I was a student again. However, this time I was in a foreign country and under somewhat trying circumstances. All lecture halls were huge and no attendance was taken. There were no windows intact; most of them had been completely shattered

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by the bombs and the shootings. We sat in our winter coats, with hats and gloves on in the classrooms, trying to take notes on the lectures. But we had world famous, excellent professors, whose presentations were interesting and captivating. With all its inconveniences, I still enjoyed being back in the classroom, surrounded by people of my own age, and with no more fear of death due to the terrors of war. Naturally, this still was only a temporary solution. I had no idea what had happened to my family and thought, “Are my father, my brother, my friends alive? Did our house survive the bombardments and the Russian invasion? Is it safe to go back “home” to Hungary, where the Russian occupation has made life dangerous and difficult?? Or should we think of a final settlement outside Hungary, maybe in the United States, where I had two uncles living?”. All these were questions without answers at that time and we simply had to make the most of our temporary living situation and circumstances. Our little village changed hands more than once. First, it was the Americans, then the French military who were the occupying forces. We got along with both of them, but the French were giving us more troubles than the Americans did. Maybe the reason was that among the French, we didn’t find any that were “of Hungarian descent”. Or maybe the Americans sympathized more with civilian “displaced persons” (DPs, as we were called). Anyhow, we managed to adjust to our new way of life. We made friends among the German neighbors and the French occupying forces. I went to college by milk truck and train, the kids enrolled in a French school and we even started some traveling within the boundaries of the French occupied zone of Germany. Here and there we worked for the UNRRA as translators, and I helped out by substituting in the elementary school. But our main income came from selling our valuables, the jewelry we had with us.

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That brings to my mind a funny story. After the first day of American occupation, we followed the advice of the first U.S. officer we had met, and decided to hide all our valuables. We put them in all imaginable places. We cut open the lining of the children's teddy bear (the only real toy they had) and sewed our diamond rings and bracelets into it. By the time life had returned to a normal everyday living I was in college, the French had taken the place of the Americans and we needed to make some money. Thus, we decided to sell our valuables. We were ready to sell, but where was the jewelry? Where had we hidden it? None of us seemed to remember what had happened. All the excitement, the total changes in our lifestyle, had erased our memories pertaining to the jewels. For weeks on end we frantically searched, but to no avail. One cold, snowy evening, when we put the children to bed, my niece hugged her Teddy bear and expressed her affection for him, "You are my best friend, your heart is always loving. Your fur is so soft. Your tummy is my jewel box." And that's when we all remembered!!! Teddy's tummy was veritably a jewel box. We opened it up again and saw with relief and happiness that we would be able to pay for college tuition, schooling for the kids, winter coats, and other necessary expenses. The mystery had been solved and we could go on with our lives.

By the time I enrolled for my second semester at Tübingen, some mail service had been restored. My father was alive in Hungary, my brother was a prisoner of war in Russia, one of our homes (the one in Budapest) had been partially destroyed by bombs, and squatters had taken it over and were living in it. The home in Celldömölk had again become a local military headquarters. But this time it was the Russian (not the German) army occupying it. Armed with all that information, I wasn't sure if I'd ever want to go back to a country I had called my homeland once. Now it seemed like a foreign country, all in ruins with many members of my

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family and friends dead. Our houses had been destroyed or simply taken away from us. Russians, whose language I could not speak or understand, were in charge. No, I thought, that's not where I can build a future, have a family, raise my children. I would be more at home anywhere else in Europe or the United States. I belonged to the western world and culture; I was fluent in German, English, and French; so why go back to something that doesn't exist anymore? Why suffer the pain of loss (of home, family, friends, and culture) again? Let's forget the past and start building the future. Agath and I started a correspondence with our relatives in Europe and the U.S., hoping to find the most suitable country to settle in and rebuild our shattered lives. But that was not meant. By the summer of 1946 a letter sent by my father brought the worst news for me. He was seriously ill, might not have too many more years to live, and if I wanted to see him again, I had to hurry home. And did I ever want to see my beloved father! There was nothing that meant more to me than being once again with him; being there when he needed me and had nobody to rely on but me. I did not have to think much about my decision. My father needed me, so I must go. So I went, leaving my cousin and family, my secure life, my plans for settling outside of Hungary, my university studies all behind, finding the fastest way possible to get back to Hungary. I travelled this time all by myself, without the companionship of friends. However, at that time, scheduled trains were few and far between and none from our little village to Hungary. But where there is a will, there is a way, and I found it. I had to leave, however, the relative security of the western world and re-enter a country occupied by Russian communists, where everything was insecure, people were jailed for "political" reasons, and nobody knew what the future held in store for them. But this was not the first time in my life that I had suffered painful losses, that I had to start from scratch to build my life, that I had to enter a feared and unknown way of life. All my thoughts centered around my father, his illness,

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and finding a fast way of getting from Germany to Hungary. But that's another chapter to be written another day.

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COMING HOME AND BECOMING THE ENEMY

(1946-1949)

January 24, 1998

Today I pick up where I left off a couple of days ago. As it became obvious the “waves of time” again gave a new and unexpected direction to my life. Again, it was necessary to chart my lifeboat into unknown waters and to hold on, being ready for whatever fate holds in store for me, while expecting among all uncertainty, the best of all possibilities. I remembered my father’s saying, “things always work out, somehow”; there has never been a time when there was a no how”. These two words came to my mind and I was convinced that this time again things would work out for me “somehow”. And they did. As it happened, there was a Hungarian transport train from our area going to Hungary, taking some of the famous Hungarian horses, mainly studs, stolen by the German government, back to Hungary. I was allowed to join them in exchange for some translator functions. I don’t remember the packing, the goodbye’s, the leaving. Maybe it was too painful, so I conveniently erased it from my memories. The trip lasted nearly a full week and I consoled myself by spending as much time around the horses as I could. I always liked riding, had owned my own horse once, and these were magnificent creatures. I became friends with them in no time, called them by name and enjoyed their loyalty. They must have been as frightened, confused and scared as I was, and they appreciated the comforting strokes of my palm on their bushy heads and bellies. Once we arrived at the Hungarian border, we had to depart and I was taken by the communist secret police to a dungeon kind of place with all other civilians on the train. Later, I learned that the locality was called ‘Komarom’ and the fort’s name was ‘Angelfort’. All women were herded into one

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big room. There were no bathrooms or toilets available. In the morning we were escorted to a hillside where there was a well. We could use the tall grass or bushes to relieve ourselves and could wash in the ice cold water from the well, while the soldiers watched and laughed, seeing us embarrassed and half naked. Some women's bodily functions simply stopped for two or three days, during the duration of the interrogations. We were interrogated individually, one by one. Some were taken to prison right on the spot; some disappeared for good. However, most of us were let go and released to our destinations with simply threats and some scary advice. Now we understood what communism really meant.

I was classified immediately as a "class enemy". By class they meant the working class. And anyone whose parents were well to do or intellectuals or professionals, was immediately labeled a "class stranger". If in addition to your parents' sin of not being the lowest socio-economic class, you also had some sins of your own (like being educated in a catholic school, aligned with the right wing, fighting on the side of the Germans, being in any way refined or educated, having obeyed German evacuation orders.... And many other fictional "anticommunist" behavior), you were labeled "class enemy" and your chances of getting a job or into higher education were questionable. Thus, my first steps on Hungarian soil confirmed all my fears and speculations and I vowed that I would not sink or perish now, having survived war, Nazism, evacuation, bombardment, etc. With that resolve, I took a train, carrying my little luggage, including what remained of my jewelry and minimal clothing, to my father's home. Seeing him, being in his embrace again, made me forget all my fears, my mistrust and disgust with the people and the new communist order in Hungary, and I felt again secure, loved and

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welcome. Nothing mattered at this point. In my father's arms, I felt at home and safe again.

February 1, 1998

Actually, my father's embrace was the only thing that made me feel at home. Our house in Celldomolk was confiscated by the Russian army along with most of the furniture and decorations in it. Whatever my father salvaged was moved to a nearby city (Szombathely), where he rented a small apartment and a tiny office to perform his duties as probate judge. It was a far cry from our beautiful, big house and garden, but it was still our home and even though it lacked the luxuries we had had in the past, it was comfortable, and offered all the necessary things one needs. I settled quickly enough into my new circumstances and took over the role of the "lady of the house". Naturally, this time there were no servants and I had to do the cooking, etc., myself. But the most important event was the improvement of my father's health. His unbearable headaches and dizziness turned out to be the result of high blood pressure and stress, and not, as diagnosed before, a brain tumor. What more did I need to be content and satisfied? My father and I spent hours telling all the stories of the past two years. It was a constant conversation, sometimes into the middle of the night. I would like to share with you one of the most memorable and unbelievable true stories he ever told me.

When I left Hungary my father was over 60 years of age, was in the military as a draftee, and that was the last thing that I knew about him. Shortly after that, the Russians occupied even the most western part of Hungary, and my father became a prisoner of war. It was not easy at his age to march with the POWs, to be herded from one camp to another. But my father found a guardian angel. A young

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Russian guard took a liking to him, called him “old bourgeois dad” and tried to make sure that he got some food and a place to rest at night. They communicated only by sign gestures, as my father didn’t speak Russian and the guard had no knowledge of Hungarian. But apparently, they liked and trusted and understood one another. After several days of marching, they arrived to a big railroad station, where the POWs were being herded into the cattle wagon for transport to prison camps in Siberia, Russia. This was more than what my father was willing or able to deal with and accept. He motioned to his “guardian angel”, who tried to figure out what he wanted. Using facial expressions, his hands and bodily movements, the guard finally understood that my father wanted to be saved from being sent to Siberia. For a couple of seconds he seemed to try to find some solution, then suddenly, he pointed his automatic machinegun at my father and yelled, “davay” meaning, “go ahead, march”. My father’s trust in people, even a Russian prison guard, showed itself when he grabbed two of his fellow POWs, who came from the same city as he had, and whispered to them “come with me”. And so they marched at gunpoint for more than a mile, when the guard stopped, dropped the machine gun, and hugged my father. And he, with tears in his eyes, hugged him back, thanked him and God, and walked away a free man together with the two fellows whom he had saved. Once again I was confronted in his story with the vision of the most unexpected and unusual goodness appearing amidst the most dangerous and trying circumstances. The fact that my father was alive and with me in Hungary was the doing of a young enemy soldier. I only hope that when he needed some help, there was someone like him to lend a hand and save him from whatever evil threatened.

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FALLING IN LOVE WITH A KNIGHT

(1947-1949)

February 10, 1998

Life certainly has unexpected and funny twists and turns. I had been home for only a few weeks when my brother, again through the help of a Russian prison guard, made it back from the POW camp in Russia. He never told us the real story of his ordeal and return, but there he was alive and healthy, together with his family. So we all weathered the terrors and horrors of the war, we all survived our difficulties, we were one family again, in Hungary, our native country. So far so good, but what now? How do we restart our lives? Where do we go from here? Is there any future for us in this Russian occupied, devastated, communist country? We just held on to each other and tried to readjust again. My father was still a probate judge, my brother, with his knowledge of several languages and before the war experience, found employment in the import-export industry, and I decided to apply to the University that I had attended before. By this time I had already finished five semesters, and hoped to have a college degree in a year and a half. I was busy finding some living quarters in Budapest and filling out application forms when I received a letter from my cousin Agath, from Germany. She asked me to do her a favor. She explained that a young military officer was coming back to Hungary and that she wanted me to meet him, get some information from him, and relay it back to her. To my biggest surprise, when she gave me his name, Ferenc Ryll, I realized that I knew this man. I had met him before as the nephew of the lady whom my father had almost married in 1943. This made my task very easy and I was eager to see how Ferenc looked without a uniform.

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The arrangement was made that we meet at a certain bus stop on February 16th, 1947, early in the afternoon. By that time I was again a college student and lived by myself in a rented room. The house was owned by a poor widow, who not only had lost her husband, but on the last day of war, her only son had been shot to death by the enemy. Everywhere there was some misery left behind by that horrible war. I was lucky to be alive and to have my entire family around me. At that point I didn't realize that the luckiest moment of my life was just about to happen on that beautiful winter afternoon of February 16th. I still remember every little detail. I had an orange wool dress on, a warm fur coat, and a green handknit hat. This time I felt much more mature, sophisticated and independent. I had met young men in many different situations, but nobody of any importance or interest to me. Perhaps, I thought, this would be a more important connection since we had some memories of the past that tied us together. He was approaching the bus stop as I got off and we hesitantly recognized one another. I found him to be very handsome and he suggested that we have a cup of coffee together in a nearby pastry shop. And so we did. This simple meeting, doing a favor for my cousin, changed my life forever.

February 28, 1998

Instead of the debonair officer in uniform, I found a handsome civilian, and instead of the studious college student (living in a convent), he found a more sophisticated, independent young lady. It was a pleasant surprise for both of us. Not only the past memories tied us together, but our present situation also made us relate to each other easily. We were both "class enemies", we both lost many friends, relatives, financial security, social standing, and belief in the future. There was little to hold on to, little to hope for, little to live for. Under those circumstances I found my

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“knight in shining armor”. He was pleasant, refined, intelligent and thoughtful. As it turned out, his honesty was unquestionable, and I felt I could depend on him no matter what happened. From the first moment of our meeting, I fell madly in love and life seemed again worth living, and despite all the difficult present circumstances, I looked forward to the future again. The total, unconditional love and trust gave me wings. I was ready for action again, but this time I knew that action would require sacrifices, hard work, and planning to overcome the problems and difficulties of our situation. I still had to finish college and Ferenc was trying to find a job, any kind of job that a former military officer, a class enemy, was allowed to get. Finally, with the help of a former classmate who happened to be Jewish and, therefore, not a class enemy, but privileged class, Ferenc was happily working as a truck driver. Perhaps everything would work out after all, there is life in communist Hungary under Russian occupation.

No sooner did we start to plan for a future together, when our hopes were crushed and we again entered a very difficult time in our newly found relationship. One night in November of 1947, the secret police broke into Ferenc’s home and took him away to an undisclosed location. It was quite common in those days that the secret police (AVO) force entered someone’s home and arrested one or more occupants. There were no charges filed, no court date announced, people simply disappeared and some never were seen or heard from again. There was an expression “csengofrasz” (doorbell horror) associated with those disappearances, as the police always pushed the buzzer and if no one opened the door, they broke in. The day after my only beloved’s disappearance, I was notified by my future mother in law and was completely devastated. Where did they take him? Is he suffering? Is he ever coming back? Will I see him once more? However, I did not have the time to ponder these questions. I had to find out about him, use any and

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all connections, friends and acquaintances to rescue him. This was the time for action and not the time for despair. Within a week we found out that Ferenc was in the dungeons of the AVO (communist secret police) and together with his sister, we took a care package to his prison. Naturally, we could not see him, but at least we had something to hold on to. I also started a novena (a nine day catholic intensive prayer form) to ask God's help for my fiancée. I had to use every avenue I could to get him back safely to us. You may not believe in God or His intervention in human affairs, but my faith was unshakable. On the 9th (the last day of my novena), before visiting my broken hearted future mother in law, I performed a "final sacrifice". I took all of Ferenc's love letters, photos, and small gifts and burned them, telling God, "I offer my most beloved possessions to You with the firm belief that You will give me back my Ferenc." After nothing was left (sometimes I wish I had at least one of those letters) I took a bus to see Alicemama (Ferenc's mother). As I entered the apartment, a wonderful sight awaited me! There was Ferenc, sitting at a small table and eating his first meal at home, in freedom and peace. We had no words, just tears, embraces and hugs. Just remembering that moment brings tears to my eyes and fills my heart with joy and gratitude. There is a God in heaven and He listened to my prayer! The high of these kinds of moments gives me strength and the power to survive the lows of tragedies and devastations. And we did need strength and power to survive all that was still ahead of us.

After the joy of seeing each other again, we heard the story of his ordeal. The secret police tried to get Ferenc to admit to some trumped up political charges. They beat him severely day after day, even after all these years, his legs still carry the signs of those beatings. There were times when he had to go on his hands and knees, since he couldn't stand on his swollen, aching soles. Three or four prison

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guards stood in a circle, placed him in the middle, and beat him in turns. I shiver even today when I think of the suffering and humiliation that he had to endure. And that was not all. After being released, he was placed under so called “police supervision”, which meant the following: he was to be home by dusk, he could not use any public transportation, nor the telephone, he had to report to the police headquarters weekly, he could not be anywhere where there was a crowd (movies, restaurants), he was not allowed to leave the city, and many more restrictions of one kind or another. These were supposed to be the happy times of our engagement! Finding a job became practically impossible, and there were restrictions related to my studies, too. I received my absolutorium (indicating I had completed all the coursework and exam requirements for my field of study), but was denied the opportunity to practice teaching and therefore, could not receive my teaching certificate. By the spring of 1949, we finally had to admit that there was no future, not even a secure “present” for us in Russian occupied, communist Hungary. We had to escape this large prison and find a way to get through the “iron curtain”. This expression was not simply a symbolic one. It meant barbed wires, landmines, and border guards with dogs, and months or years of jail if the escape attempt failed. Our thoughts of possible escape were given a real impetus when I was chosen by some American foundation as a recipient of an American college scholarship. Ten outstanding students behind the iron curtain were the lucky chosen ones to be honored with an invitation to an American university on a full scholarship. Now we had a definite place to go, a future to plan for. All we needed was a permit from the government to leave the country. However, all our attempts and requests were denied; there was no way that we could legally attain our goal. Our only choice had to be the secret escape.

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ELOPING, ESCAPING, AND THE HONEYMOON IN JAIL

(1949)

March 5, 1998

Finding an escape route, involving practically no one, preparing for a final trip out of Hungary, getting all the remaining valuables (jewelry, important documents, etc.) ready, and marrying without letting our parents, relatives or friends know, was not an easy undertaking. And what prompted all this secrecy? Under communist law, leaving the country was a serious criminal offense and anyone who knew about it and did not report it to the authorities was charged with aiding a criminal and was punished as an accomplice, with a lengthy jail sentence. We did not want our old parents, our beloved relatives or our good friends to be punished if we failed in our attempt. Thus, we had to do it all by ourselves, with no help or advice from anyone near to our hearts. Thursday, June 9th, 1949, we appeared in front of a judge who had the authority to marry us. We received our marriage certificate, packed all the before mentioned important valuables, and spent our last quiet night in our homes, Ferenc at his mother's house and I stayed in the dormitory. Our hearts nearly broke, having to leave our family without final goodbye's, yet being prepared to never see those beloved familiar faces again. Weeks before, we had arranged with a "people smuggler" to meet us Friday, June 10th at the railroad station and for a large sum of money, guide us out of Hungary. We sold much of our earthly belongings, begged and borrowed under false pretenses, to come up with the required sum. But everything seemed to go as planned and we stepped onto the train with trepidation in our hearts, but at the same time, with anticipation of a bright future somewhere far away from communism, dictatorship, and terror. Things would get better, we thought, they

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have to. By now, however, I was not the same fearless young adventurer, who had enjoyed the ride on the ammunition wagon in Germany. Now it was not just “today” that mattered. We planned a future together, we wanted to raise a family; with children, love, and happiness, in a free country, in our own home. Now there was much more at stake than just our lives. The journey started with the whistle blow of the conductor and we were on our way. After nearly a day of travel, we arrived in Szombathely, where my father lived and where I first settled (with him) when I returned home from Germany in 1946. The same city that welcomed me back after two years as a “displaced person” would be the one to see me last before we leave the country for good. If only neither my father nor anyone of my friends would bump into me here, I thought. Please, God, let us get away without being discovered on our way out! It was already dusk and from the railroad station our people smuggler led us on back roads out of the city to a little country restaurant. There we realized that another single girl and a beautiful red-haired woman with a 12 year old son, both dressed impeccably, were also heading the same way. We did not speak to one another; at separate tables we ordered a bite to eat and at the motioning of our leader, we followed him one by one out into the unknown dark night. When we stepped into a safe, wooded area, our guide greeted us, introduced us to one another, and gave us some instructions. There was a full moon out on a beautiful, warm summer night, but we were shivering and full of fear. We found out that this was our guide’s 21st trip across the border, and just two weeks ago he had taken the little boy’s father to safety outside the country. Now the mother and son felt assured that they would meet him within a few days in Austria. If only we made it through the night, walking several miles through the woods, we’d pass the border and reach the brighter future. “Alea jacta est”; there is no turning back. And on we went.

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April 5, 1998

Our guide was leading the troop, then came the single girl, followed by mother and son, and finally, Ferenc and myself. We marched in complete silence, no word was uttered; here and there an owl howled and the full moon made the night seem like daytime. We walked among the brush parallel to the road and were told that our most perilous moment would come when we had to cross the open road to continue the journey in the wooded countryside. "One, two, three, four... how many more steps until we reach the safety of Austria?" Minutes seemed like hours, the little baggage we carried seemed to weigh tons. Our guide stopped suddenly, we all crouched on the ground, and our eyes followed the direction of his pointing finger. There we saw a little, flickering light on top of the cherry trees on the other side of the road. What could it be? Perhaps they were fixing the telephone line by flashlight? But why would they do that in the middle of the night? Or could it be the bright eyes of an owl? Whatever it was, it made us all feel frightened. It certainly was an ominous sign, so we decided to get away from it as fast as we could. We quickened our steps, tried to keep as low as possible in the bushes, and murmured our desperate prayers in quiet fright. "Please, God, lead us safely out of this country." After a few minutes of quiet marching, our hour had come. We had to climb up an embankment and cross the open road. It was now or never. If we make it safely across, we are protected in the dense wooded area and there is nothing more to fear. At least that's what our guide promised. So up we climbed and there stood on the roadside, six travelers trembling, but hopeful. But in one moment of horror, all our hopes were crushed. Two AVO policemen stood in the middle of the road with their machine guns pointing at us and shouting, "Stop or we shoot!". So that's what it meant to reach the end of the road? All was lost, we were going to be imprisoned, spend months or years in jail, lose our last

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belongings, and never find proper employment. It's over now, we thought. No future, no present, no family, no hope. Our guide's voice reached us in our despair as he announced, "I bribed the policemen and they'll let us go." From hell to heaven, from despair to jubilation, in a moment in time. We said goodbye to the policemen, even invited them to come with us to the free, western world, when suddenly the headlights of a jeep made the moonlit night even brighter. This time, several supervising secret police stepped out of the vehicle and asked our policemen for an explanation. To save their own lives, they could do nothing other than report that they had caught six escapees and were marching us to the police station. No more than a few seconds of jubilation, and now we were in more trouble than before. With police escort we returned in the middle of the night to Szombathely in somber mood, disheartened and afraid.

April 16, 1998

We arrived at the police station around two in the morning. They lined us up facing the wall, and made us stand there without movement for what seemed like an eternity. First, they called the mother and her son in for interrogation, then went the single girl (Marta), and finally, just before we were about to collapse, our turn came. We were interrogated separately, alone in a room with two policemen. First, my bag was searched. They confiscated everything that they found; a nightie, a slip, a bra all hand made with lace and embroidery. This was to have been my underwear for the honeymoon. I never had anything that fancy, but it was gone now and I would never wear it. Then they took my pocketbook. There wasn't much money in there (Hungarian currency couldn't be used in the western world), but they found all my jewelry, what was left of my mother's inheritance and the pieces I had received from Ferenc for engagement and other occasions.

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Finally, the policeman saw my wedding band on my finger and he made me take that off and put it in the pile. Tears rolled down my cheeks and with trembling voice I begged, "Please, let me keep this. I got married 24 hours ago, and the ring is engraved with the date and names." But begging and tears were all in vain. My two day old wedding ring was gone along with all the memories of my mother's jewelry and all the hopes of my honeymoon underwear. This truly felt like the end of the road. The tidal waves of time had washed away our last hopes and the last mementos of our past. In the secret police dungeon I was led to a 5' by 8' cell containing a wooden bunk bed with nothing on it, not even a sheet or blanket. There is no light in there, only a 10" by 12" opening on the heavy metal door that allows the light from the corridor to seep in. There I sat by myself on the edge of the bunk bed in my one and only outfit, and dare not allow my mind to think or my heart to feel. I am numb and my soul is dead. Of course, even my watch was taken, so I have no idea how long I have been sitting in my frozen body and soul. I don't know if it's day or night as the same electric light shines continuously from the corridor. On and off I am reminded of my whereabouts by the screams of my fellow inmates who have endured this situation for weeks or months. These outcries brought me to my senses. No, I cannot allow myself to go crazy like these others; I'd better get my thoughts together and work out some way of survival. To keep my mind awake I solved mathematical problems in my head (I had always loved math); to keep my soul from dying, I started praying; to keep my body from going completely numb, I began exercising in the little space available (gymnastics had been my favorite subject in school). I thought, "somehow I will manage to get out of here safe and sound. I will have to. My husband, if he ever makes it, will need me." Despair was not a word in my dictionary. Somehow things would be better sometime in the future. Again, I remembered my father's saying, "Things work out always, somehow. There was never a time when things went no how."

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So no need to despair, just go on living and surviving the latest tidal wave of this still young life.

June 2, 1998

I had spent only two days in my solitary cell when the most unexpected and wonderful thing happened. A guard opened the door, threw two pieces of bread in and whispered, "Ferenc sends this." My dear Ferenc, my dependable husband, had found a way to send food to me in this God forsaken place. How he achieved this feat I'll never know, but it not only gave me bodily nourishment, it lifted my spirits and gave me hope. Not even in the communist jail cell was I forgotten or alone. "I have God and Ferenc on my side. Things will have to work out!" They would work out, despite the fact that we were fed only once a day with baked beans and bread and water; and led to the bathroom only once a day to wash up and relieve ourselves. During the day we were interrogated individually while several AVO police tried to threaten us, hurt and cajole us. They were hoping to get some more innocent people (our friends or relatives) imprisoned on false charges. If by chance we uttered the name of anyone, it would be enough to get them arrested. It paid off now that we hadn't involved our family or friends, and thus, nobody was made an accomplice to our "horrible" crime of attempted escape. After six days of interrogation, we were taken to the county jail from the AVO dungeons, where we were again treated like human beings. We were charged with "trying to leave the country unlawfully and smuggling jewelry" (our own). We were given an opportunity to get a lawyer, our relatives were allowed to visit once a week for half an hour, and once a week all the women were lined up in the corridor where their husbands were allowed to speak to them (for five minutes).

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The first time my father came to visit me, the tears rolled down his cheeks when he saw me in my striped prison uniform. I had never seen him cry before and it was now my turn to console him. I just looked him in the eye and asked, “Why do you cry, Daddy? Didn’t you pay good money for more than 12 years to keep me under lock and key in a uniform in the convent? Now it doesn’t cost you anything, and I am surrounded by many nice girls, get fed and clothed for free.” This did it, and my father smiled again and hugged me saying, “You are right. We’ll get through this one, too!” And it wasn’t the worst of times. There were 17 of us in one room. We all had our own bed at the end of which there was a fold down chair. There were no tables, but there was a sink with flowing water and a metal can (like a garbage can) with a cover to be used instead of a toilet. Once a day we were led to a real toilet in a real bathroom with several sinks available. We received food three times a day and were made to work some days. Our job was to make down out of goose feathers. We sat in a big room with bags full of goose feathers in the middle. We had to strip the fine feather from its stem and put it in another bag, throwing the stems away. The entire room was full of flying, fine down, we could barely see each other and our eyes, nose and mainly our throats, were constantly irritated by the pollutants. But we were alive, most of us were young, some were newlyweds, and we enjoyed each other’s company. My biggest thrill was when I was called for some reason, by a guard and my name, my new name, Mrs. Ryll, resonated throughout the entire building. I thought, “I am Mrs. Ryll! I am married to the most wonderful man in this whole world and nobody can take this away from me. So we see each other for only five minutes a week, but we still have each other. We’ll start over sometime, somewhere and we’ll have a family.” These thoughts and feelings helped me survive, with an occasional smile, my 5 months of jail time. My roommates were a big help, too. The single girl who had been caught while trying to escape with us was experiencing her seventh jail

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sentence. The communists jailed her three times and before that, the nazis had jailed her as well. She survived it all with an unbroken spirit and her personality made our days much more pleasant than would have been otherwise. Because some of the older women were embarrassed to use the makeshift toilet in the room, she hung a sheet in front of it to give them some privacy. Now nobody could see who was using the toilet in the corner. However, the sound of the metal can, as something hit the bottom of it, was still too embarrassing for some. There she came up with another idea. Whenever someone disappeared behind the hanging sheet, she started us singing in unison. It was Mozart's Lullaby that we chose as our toilet song, and even today, if I hear that song, I have the urge to go to the bathroom.

But Marta wasn't the only one who helped us to survive the ordeal. It was Magda, an atheistic, Jewish girl, whom we chose as room captain. She had survived two years in a nazi concentration camp, while her parents and fiancée perished. She was the most honest, fair and loving person. She made sure that the rich, well dressed, upper class political prisoners had no privileges above the gypsy girl who was incarcerated for stealing; or the old peasant midwife whose crime had been performing illegal abortions. Magda divided food, use of the bathroom, etc..., all equally and made us feel like one family. Again, the irony of fate, that an atheistic, Jewish girl and a convent graduate Catholic became best of friends. I respected and loved her then and still do today. Once, I asked her why she had decided to leave the country now when it was an advantage to be an atheist and Jewish, and when she had a nice home and a good job. Her answer made me think. "Look around," she said, "All the leaders of communist Hungary are Jewish. Half of the country has been jailed, or become unemployed, or is starving, while the Jews (because they are privileged, as you stated) occupy the theatres, sit in the cafes in

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furs and jewelry. This will cause anti-Semitism and another holocaust and I don't want to be part of it again. It will not help if I tell them that I wasn't that kind of Jew." I realized then and there that it is mostly the innocent people who suffer due to the hatred, the revenge, the jealousy and envy of some extremists. It seems like the vicious circle will never end. We have to do everything in our power to try to reach a balance, a compromise, or we'll all perish. My friend Magda taught me a lesson of tolerance, love and understanding. I wish I knew what became of her.

There is one more story pertaining to jail in my bag that I want to share with you. As I already mentioned, we had weekly a five minute conjugal visitation in a corridor with all the women lined up against the wall anxiously waiting to be in the arms of their husbands; naturally, under the watchful eye of the guards. But women are no less women in jail than in the outside world, and we did everything to look good, to be pretty, even in our striped prison garb. No cosmetics were allowed in jail, so we had to resort to creative innovations. Red being the color of the communists, we were given some red decorating paper for festive occasions. All we needed was some water to wet the paper and use it for blush and lipstick. To powder our shiny noses, we searched for a powder substitute. Again, we found the solution; white chalk that had been given to us for writing announcements on the bulletin board. We broke it into powder and dabbed some on ourselves. Luckily, there was no mirror available and thus, we couldn't see our own clown like appearance, and our husbands didn't seem to mind. We held each other tight for five full minutes, tried to tell of all the happenings of the week; while kissing and hugging to make up for a week of separation. And thus passed one week after another, one month after the other, and finally, my five months were up and I was ready to be released. Francis had another three weeks to serve, but I was free to go. Though not quite free. All political prisoners, after serving their official

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sentences, were led back to that AVO dungeon and lined up again against the wall, facing the wall without movement. Being my restless self, I could not resist turning my head a little to see who and what was behind me. The next thing I felt was a tap on the head with the butt of a gun and a familiar voice said, “Here we meet again, daughter of probate judge Csiky.” It was easy to recognize that voice, even though it was unexpected. The same fellow, who some years back in Nazi uniform had threatened my father with death for his anti-nazi stand, was now a communist AVO guard, trying to intimidate the daughter. It seems to me that people who give in to extremist philosophies will always find some outlet for their extremism, even if it is in contradiction of their former beliefs. Luckily, this fellow had no authority over me but to guard me and keep me standing facing the wall until the evening. Then, after nearly ten hours of facing the wall without food or drink, or toilet break, I was let go. Once again I was in the arms of my dear father. With him I felt safe and secure, and only the separation from Ferenc and the worry for his safe return darkened the happiness of freedom. Not all were as lucky as I was. Some, after serving their sentences and being sent back to the AVO, disappeared for months, years, or forever. Once you were in the hands of the secret police (AVO), your fate was unpredictable. And that was the reason for my worry about Ferenc’s safe return.

After three weeks of concern, worry, hope, and constant anticipation and prayer, my “one and only” was allowed to return to me and we were free to start over again. This time, however, we were stripped of all earthly belongings, not even our wedding rings were left. But we had each other, our youth, our love, our faith in God, and the support of our parents. That was enough to help us to restart our lives once again. My grandmother provided us with the greatest gift. We received her and my grandfather’s wedding rings, which we still wear, even though the

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inscription is dated before either of us was born. But we cherish it and wear it proudly as it stands for two marriages in the family.

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PREGNANCY, IN-LAWS, DEPORTATION, AND GIVING BIRTH (1949-1951)

June 4, 1998

Our marriage, however, sure didn't have a very promising beginning. Honeymoon in jail is not what we envisioned in our wildest dreams. I shouldn't even call it a honeymoon, as we never had a chance to see each other in private, always being under the watchful eyes of the guards and surrounded by the other prisoners, and even that only for five minutes a week. And where do we go from here? My mother in law offered us one room of her apartment. Once the entire four story corner apartment building had belonged to her, and the family had lived in the nicest three bedroom, two bath apartment. But the communists made sure that no one who had enjoyed a good life before could continue living well. Her pension was taken away and two bedrooms and a bath was given to a family of four (parents and two teenage boys). In addition, the maid's quarters served as refuge for a former nun. Thus three families used the kitchen and all amenities. Now they had to share it with us, a newlywed couple, unemployed and penniless. Thinking back on those days, I wonder how we all managed without ever having an argument or disagreement. I guess we all simply appreciated the fact that we were alive, we were not in jail or concentration camp, and we had our family surrounding us. It sure wasn't easy, but anything was better than being locked up. We applied for job after job, accepted all kinds of temporary odd jobs, until finally Ferenc hit the big times. With the help of a friend, he again was allowed to get behind the wheel of a truck. His workday consisted of 12 hours nonstop driving, to which he added a couple of more night hours on his own to make ends meet. Meanwhile, I was hired as a temporary typist substitute, and now we could afford

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to think of finally starting a real family by having a baby. Being pregnant was the greatest blessing I could imagine. Carrying Ferenc's child and dreaming of a better future for all of us made me forget all the bitter past and gave me hope for the future and strength for the present. And did I ever need that strength! About four months into the pregnancy, we heard of the newest communist atrocities. With 24 hour notice, they packed up families, old and young, classified "class enemy" or "class stranger" and transported them to work camps or state farms or other God forsaken locations. All that a family was allowed to salvage was 100 pounds per person. And this included furniture, silverware, linens, and personal items. We were praying and hoping that this time we would be spared from the ordeal and wouldn't have to leave our crowded and modest home and our stressful, but meager income producing jobs. However, I had some premonitions and told my family we had better get prepared. Let's see our doctor for checkups and necessary prescriptions, let's visit the dentist, and let's go to confession and communion, as we might never get the chance to do any of the above again.

My premonitions proved right. On June 21st, 1951 around 6 in the morning, the police knocked on our door. I was just ready to go to work and Ferenc was still delivering milk with the truck when the evacuation note was handed to me: "Get ready to be picked up within 24 hours." My mother in law was 74 years old, I was 6 months pregnant, and our one and only capable, responsible man was not home yet. I made some frantic phone calls to my brother, my brother in law, and to friends to help us in any way they could. We had to pack the maximum allowable necessities (2 beds, 2 chairs, some linen, cookware, and the little clothing we had) plus try to salvage some of the furniture, the pictures and any other belongings, before the police came back to pick us up and take everything that was left into their possession. Meanwhile, Ferenc arrived home and he lifted the responsibilities

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from my shoulders. My heart was pounding, my unborn baby was wildly kicking, and I felt like the entire universe was closing in on me. The tidal waves of history seemed to wash away even the sand and pebbles around us, and this time there was no hope left for us. Maybe “things were always somehow and never no how”, but this time I couldn’t see any somehow for the family. How am I going to give birth? How is my baby going to survive? How? Where? The answer came from my heart; “I have to make us survive; I have to fight for that baby and for a future for all of us.... I have to and I will.” A new will and determination sprung from the depth of my heart and soul and I was confident that there would be a “somehow” for us again. With the help of God and our family, we would survive this last ordeal, too.

June 9, 1998

And we did not only survive, but lived long enough to remember and write it down for all of you. It sure wasn’t easy. Some food was rationed, but the deportees didn’t receive any rationing. There was no heat in the house and no electricity. Twenty some deportees (seven families in all) ages ranging from eight to 78 were assigned to a “kulak’s” home. The kulaks were middle landowners, thus not considered working class and, therefore, treated like enemies of the regime. Most of their land was confiscated and by assigning all these people to them, even their homes and sheds were occupied by strangers. “Misa”, our kulak homeowner, had a wife and a son and daughter living in their house, which consisted of five rooms, one bath and a kitchen. There was an outhouse provided for all of us and Misa built a stove in the yard, under cover, for our use. Water had to be pumped from an outside well; running water was an unknown luxury. Being six months pregnant and having our 74 year old mother in law, we were the lucky ones who

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were housed inside the main building. A small entrance hall was assigned to us and two other families had to pass through our room in order to reach their 1 room residence. We just managed to fit in the two twin beds (one for my mother in law and one for Ferenc and myself) and our cabinet and 2 chairs. It was a very meager and bleak existence, but with the summer weather and just the three of us, we could manage. We became friends with our “host” family and all the other deportees. We helped each other in any way we could. The men worked in the field, chopped wood and tried to provide for their families. There were days when Ferenc worked all day, with his only food being onions, bread and water. Because I had to eat for two, I was given all the “goodies” like green peppers, tomatoes and milk, in addition to bread and water. But hunger, deprivation, and the lack of minimal comfort did not faze us anymore. It was the fate of our soon to be born child that worried us. The small village had no doctor, no hospital, no midwife, no pharmacy, not even a church or priest. My premonition had materialized.

And the day of giving birth to our child was nearing. I expected it to be at the end of October and we couldn't see any solution to our predicament. Only our faith in God helped us to survive those days. My deeply religious mother in law consoled me with this saying, “If God gives you a little lamb, He'll also provide you with grazing fields.” And I prayed and hoped that she would be right. A good friend of my husband's was an obstetrician in the city not too far from us. He promised to take care of me and of my baby if we could get to the hospital somehow. Legally, we were not allowed to leave our assigned place of deportation, and disobeying that law could land us in jail again. But in order to give the baby a chance at life, I had to find a way to get to that hospital. I petitioned for a permit, but naturally, it was not granted. So I had to risk my freedom in order to protect my child. Luckily, the twin sister of one of the deportees was visiting when my time came to

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give birth. She was free to travel and offered to accompany me on my dangerous journey. My husband had to stay out of this adventure so that at least one of us could be able to take care of the baby in case I ended up in jail. On the afternoon of October 26th, my labor pains started. My friend and I snuck out of the village; she bought two railroad tickets and we got on the train. After less than an hour of travel, we had to change trains. We had to wait for a long time, at least that's how it seemed to me, until the next train that was to take us to our destination, arrived. My labor pains were getting more and more frequent and the police were constantly walking among us and asking for identification. Only free people had this and I was without it. Looking back on my life and at that particular trip, I have to admit that those few hours were the scariest, most frightening, and devastating moments of my 76 years. What if the police ask for my ID? Am I going to be taken to jail? Will my baby be born in a prison cell, without assistance of any kind? Will we survive? I lived through many frightening and tough times; war, jail, deportation, but this was absolutely the worst. Somehow the policemen, probably seeing me in labor pains, did not want to get involved with me and never asked for identification. The transfer train arrived by eight in the evening. I was escorted to the hospital by my friend. Another blow came then. Ferenc's obstetrician friend was ill and not waiting for me. But the other doctors were human enough to take me in anyway and see to it that I gave birth in a hospital delivery room with their assistance. Thus, October 27th around noon, a wonderful healthy but thin little boy was placed into my embrace after a painful natural birth procedure. I couldn't thank God enough for His providence and gift. Now if He could only provide somehow for the survival of Ferenc Jr.. However, I was physically and emotionally drained and exhausted. I knew I couldn't take my baby back to an unheated, unsanitary entrance hall room with no running water, no electricity, not enough food, no emergency health facilities, not even a drugstore.

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My only option was to entrust my firstborn to my sister in law, whose husband was a pediatrician in Budapest, and where my son would get the best of care. But how can you give away your only child when you have no hopes of ever seeing him again? Especially when everything else had already been taken away from you, your home, your job, your family, and your friends? Do I have to be separated from my son, too? That thought was just too much for me and my nerves began to give out. A terrible fear overtook me. My tears were flowing 24 hours a day and I couldn't look up at the sky for fear the entire universe might fall apart. This fear gripped me as such a reality that it stayed with me for many years to come. It wasn't until 1966 in Colorado that I dared again to look up at the firmament and enjoy a heaven with all the shining stars in it. But that will be another story, much later in my memoirs.

June 12, 1998

Right now I was still in the hospital and Ferenc's obstetrician friend finally came back on the job. When he saw my predicament, my deep depression, and the necessity of giving away my firstborn, he tried to do everything in his power to keep me in the hospital as long as possible. This enabled me to breastfeed, to hold and enjoy our son for several hours a day. But even under those circumstances the communists tried to take even this away from me. A communist doctor by the name of Molnar (I'll never forget him or his name), made my life miserable and threatened our doctor friend with the loss of his job if he kept on aiding a deportee, a class enemy. But God did not allow him to succeed. Again, help came from the most unexpected places. The hospital's dental department was under the supervision of a Jewish doctor ("I'll remember his benevolent smile and his gray beard for as long as I live). This man stood up for me, took me into his

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department, fixed all my teeth, and I had the pleasure and luxury of spending an extra month in the hospital, seeing my son grow and get stronger every day. But this could not go on forever, and in addition, I had a husband alone in Sap (the locality where we had been deported). The time of departure and separation arrived. On December 8th, 1951, I again had to muster all my courage to take my six week old son, illegally, by myself, to my sister in law in Budapest. This trip was by far not as frightening as the one I had taken on my last day of pregnancy. If the police found out and caught me, they would take the child to his father and I would go to jail. So big deal! My son was safe, and what else could matter? By December 10th I had accomplished my task, given Ferenc Jr. to his aunt and godmother, and arrived back to Sap to be reunited with my husband once again. As my father always said, “Things will work out somehow.” Even if that somehow is not the way we wanted it to be, there is always hope that the future will compensate for the pain and difficulty of the present. And it certainly did.

Now I sit in our newly acquired Georgia cabin, watch the birds and squirrels in our woods, and listen to the rustle of the trees and the babbling of the little creek behind our porch, while I commit my memories to the most wonderful and most important people in my life, my children and my grandchildren. I couldn't ask for more.

TIDAL WAVES

LIVING AND LOVING THROUGH POVERTY, ILLNESS AND ANOTHER PREGNANCY (1951-1953)

June 16, 1998

The winter of 1951-52 passed by uneventfully. One day after the other we tried to survive. I was bedridden for about 6 weeks with a very painful sciatic nerve. I could not even turn in bed nor sit up, and my poor husband had to do all the work, earn a living chopping wood, do the housework, and take care of me. But as always, he faithfully stood his ground and did all he could to make life bearable. Luckily, my mother in law, due to her advanced age, was allowed to return to Budapest. Naturally, she had no home left to return to, it had been confiscated. But she moved in with one of her daughters and had to be satisfied with occupying a bed in the children's room. That was the only possession left for her (a bed, a nightstand, and a portion of a closet). Not so long before, she had owned a sizable, several story corner apartment building, and received a pension as a military doctor (medical corps) general's widow, and now, in the last years of her life, there was nothing; no pension, no home she could call her own. She had to accept and be thankful for the charity of her children. But at least she was with her family, in the city where she had spent practically all her life, and she had the minimal necessary comforts of life (heat, electricity, running water), and did not go to bed hungry. Knowing that neither she nor our son was exposed to the difficulties, the trials and tribulations of the deportees made it easier for us to survive and overcome our problems. Christmas came and went without us noticing it, and finally, spring had sprung, and with the renewal of nature our lives turned a new page. During the month of May my sister in law returned our son to us. Just to love and hold our firstborn again made up for the difficulties of trying to feed three mouths, to pump all the water for bathing the baby, and washing diapers and chopping more wood to

TIDAL WAVES

make the water warm. We received a little coal burning stove and now our weekly routine included a hike along the railroad tracks with knapsack on our backs to collect all the coal pieces that were dropped by the passing trains. In the beginning, we had a hard time differentiating coal from stones and sometimes half of our knapsacks consisted of heavy stones and only the other half was usable coal. Luckily, we didn't have to contend with this life too much longer.

Through the help of a friend, "Katineni" (who herself was deported with husband and two children), we were given permission to move to Jaszfelsoszentgyorgy, the location where she was living. Her husband's father, a "kulak", who lost all his earthly possessions, was blessed with faithful former servants who offered their homes to them. With government permission, Katineni and her family moved in with their former servants, and they found a place for us, too. Our new home consisted of a big room with its own private entrance, 2 windows, and electricity. We were also given a covered outdoor kitchen stove, without having to share it with anyone. It was like heaven after our abode in Sap. Water still had to be pumped from an outside well, but we received a part of the yard to plant vegetables and let our son run around in and play. We felt like kings, having a "Home" (room) of our own, having old friends around us (I was best friends with Katineni for 8 years in the convent), and being in a location that had a doctor, a pharmacy, and a church. Things really began to look much better again. It was time to prepare for a second child.

TIDAL WAVES

June 17

By the fall of 1952, Ferenc had become very ill, as it turned out it was contagious hepatitis B, which he contracted while working in the fields. One of his fellow workers cut her hand and my “always ready to help” husband bandaged the bleeding wound. Now it was my turn to do all the work around the house, chop wood, do the housework, and take care of him. My sister in law took our son, as it was feared that he might become infected, too. I was at that time in the third month of my pregnancy, and hoped and prayed that giving birth to this baby wouldn’t be as difficult as the first time around. However, having things work out simply and without difficulty was not meant for us. Thank God, Ferenc got better and our son was returned to us, and there was plenty of work with the baby and the household. But I enjoyed motherhood and prepared my son for the arrival of a new baby in the family. We expected this second one for the end of May, but by March, I too got infected with hepatitis, which interfered with our plans. March 22nd, when going with Ferenc Jr. to fetch water from the well, I felt the labor pains coming. I got so sick and weak that I had to sit down on our way home in the middle of the street. I had the feeling I would die then and there. My little, one and a half year old son anxiously tried to comfort me and I prayed like never before, asking God to spare my life, so I could take care of my growing family. My husband was working in the fields somewhere; I had no means to send for him. Luckily, we were not far from home, my strength returned, and we could manage somehow to get back home. All that I could do there was feed my son and wait patiently until the workday was over and Ferenc arrived. Right away, he called the ambulance and I was taken to the hospital. A cousin of mine (Doraneni) picked up our son and took him to Budapest with her, where he stayed for several months. Sometimes I wonder, when did he realize who his real mother was? Between his

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birth and his 5th birthday, he had spent more time with strangers (9 different families) than with us. It's a miracle that he turned out to be the man he is today.

I got into the hospital late that night and the pains came frequently all night. By dawn, I felt much better and hoped to go home during the day. However, the doctor said I couldn't leave until I had been pain free for a full 24 hours. All day I was without any pains, but overnight the pain returned. This went on for 6 days, until on March 27th, at midnight, I was whisked into the delivery room. Without a doctor, but with the help of a nurse, my tiny 3 pound baby was born. She had plenty of dark, curly hair, wonderful long eyelashes, and beautifully formed hands and fingers. Only her size reminded me that she was 2 months premature. I asked the nurse to baptize her right away, as we did not know whether she'd survive. I was not even allowed to hold her, to embrace her, as it was feared I'd infect her with the hepatitis. She was taken away and I was left alone in my hospital room with my thoughts and prayers. What doctors didn't realize in that small country hospital, was that it is very dangerous to give birth with hepatitis. And I nearly paid with my life for it. For several days I was in a coma with a fever over 103, and a committed doctor at my bedside. This time Ferenc was given permission to come and visit me, thus the circumstances, despite our difficulties, were much better now than way back in Sap. My daughter, by doctor's orders, was taken to Budapest to the same nursery where my son had been, and where my brother in law was the head physician. The separation from my second child (Maria Magdolna) was by far not as painful as the first one. I was confident she'd be returned to us, just as Ferenc Jr. had been, and I knew that this solution would definitely be to my daughter's advantage. When my brother in law had taken in our son with illegal papers he had told me, "If there is another child, I won't be able to risk my job and my family's security by taking in the baby. The only way a

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baby can be placed here is if it's truly premature." And God made sure that our second baby was "truly premature", so she could enjoy the benefits of a decent nursery, surrounded by family, good food, good care. When things (particularly bad things) happen, we never know what the good is that will come of it, but each coin has two sides and every cloud has a silver lining. One just has to recognize it!

June 18

By the time summer arrived, we both were healthy again, Ferenc Jr. was returned to us and we tried to live as normal a life as we could. We raised a pig and some poultry, worked in the fields, and moved from our one room home to a thatched roof little house with its own fenced in yard. Besides a real big room, with a potbellied stove, there was a separate kitchen with a wood burning stove and a storage room. Still no running water, but there was electricity and the privacy of a home used by our family only. This time things started looking up again, particularly after the death of Stalin in 1953. We had more freedoms, we could leave the village, find work outside our place of deportation, although we were not allowed to visit Budapest or many other big cities. But our families and friends could come and stay with us anytime. We had enough food for the family and even for visitors (unlike in Sap, where for the entire month of December we could not afford more than one egg!). Those times were behind us now. Maria Magdolna (Marlene), who was 14 months old by now, was returned to us again, and we were again together – all four of us. Sure, there were hardships and many of them, but we were young, had two children to take care of, and hoped for a better future for them. My husband found a job as a truck driver again. This time it was in the lumber industry, which meant he was away all week, sometimes for several weeks, and spent most weekends with us. I tried my best to provide some special good

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meals for him and he spent his weekend “rest” repairing things and chopping wood for us. In our little house the floor was simply hardened clay mixed with horse manure. Every so often, we took a hike through the village streets to pick up enough manure (there were no work gloves at that time) and then mix it with wet clay (mud), spread it on the floor and trample it until it hardened and dried. In order to compensate my “one and only beloved” with a good meal, I got up at 4 in the morning to stand in lines for hours at the food store to buy the necessary ingredients. Our son was in charge at home, took care of his baby sister (he was about 3 years old), diapered her, and made sure she didn’t get into any trouble while I was away shopping.

As I mentioned before, I tried to prepare my son for the arrival of the baby. I explained to him that mother carries the baby for 9 months under her heart, while the baby grows from a seed into a live being. Now that Ferenc Jr. saw and played with his baby sister, he remembered my explanation. One day he came to me and asked, “Was I under your heart and did you give me birth, too?” “Naturally” was my reply. In a couple of seconds, he popped the second question, “If we had another little baby, would you carry it under your heart and give birth again?” I got impatient and answered, “All babies coming to the world in this family are carried by mother under her heart and she gives birth to them!” I hoped this ended the question and answer period, but I was wrong. In no time, my son turned to me perplexed and puzzled, asking, “Just one more question, Mommy. How did Daddy enter this family?” Now I was the one perplexed and puzzled, not knowing what to say. I don’t even remember how we ended the conversation, but I’ll always remember my son’s curiosity and logical thinking. He sure had an inquisitive mind and got himself into constant trouble while experimenting with new things. On the other hand, Maria Magdolna was an easy baby, quiet and well behaved, and

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never crying. When she was 18 months old, she refused to have her diaper put on, saying vehemently, “No”. She repeated this maneuver three times, then I gave in, saying, “OK, no diapers, but no bedwetting, understood?!” She nodded and went to sleep. From that moment on, there was no need to diaper her. I always said she is a blessing from God and never gives us any problems, or any reason to worry.

As she had only had an emergency baptism in the hospital, we arranged a real baptism ceremony in our little church, with her godmother holding her under the holy water. But this was not her last baptism. When she was in the U.S. in a Christian college, she became “born again” and submerged in the water one more time. She must have assured her place in heaven. I don’t want to go into details, but in her family sacraments were often repeated. She had 2 church weddings (Episcopal and catholic) and her son was also baptized twice (Episcopal and then catholic). As you see, Marlene, you truly were God’s blessing and He stretched His hands over you and your family more than once. But let me get back to your babyhood. By 1955, more and more freedoms were granted; deportees were allowed to move anywhere except Budapest and some other big cities. Again through a former classmate of mine, we found a new home quite near to Budapest, which meant better employment opportunities and being nearer to our families and friends. In this location, we lived on the same premises as my friend and her husband and their three children. Now our little ones had some playmates, but also some responsibilities. The big ones (5 and 6 years old) tended to the cows and sheep, and the little ones (3 and 4) helped feed the chicken and ducks. Those were relatively good times and the air was full of anticipation. Everybody knew some change would have to occur; something had to happen shortly that would change the course of history. My Ferenc was working as a truck driver, being away from home most of the time, and I received a job, albeit illegally, in Budapest, as a

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factory worker polishing furniture. Thus, our family was again separated, but we were filled with hope and expecting a turn for the better. And our expectations were fulfilled on October 23rd, 1956.

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Francis' mother and
Frank in 1953



My father and the kids in 1955



In September of 1952



The last pictures in Europe



Vienna 1957

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REVOLUTION, ESCAPE AND REFUGEE CAMPS IN AUSTRIA (1956- 1957)

June 21

Working that morning in the furniture factory, my coworkers passed around secretly a typed sheet of paper and whispered: “This is the manifesto of the revolutionary college youth. Things will be happening today!” I received one of the copies and took it with me when I went home. Traveling on the bus, people were hugging one another, talking about the manifesto and saying that thousands of youth were marching towards the statue of Stalin to destroy it and declare democracy in Hungary. Somehow all our fears and our suspicions left us; we weren’t concerned that there might be communists or secret police members among us. We felt the heavy burden of tyranny lifted and expressed our happiness and hopes freely. By the time I arrived home – at that time I was living illegally at a friend’s (Rikaneni) house – the radio already announced all the good news. Stalin’s statue had tumbled; the youth, the workers, and the oppressed were marching toward the radio station to announce the good news. Tens of thousands marched united, hand in hand, singing the old patriotic songs, the Hungarian national anthem (this too, was banned during the communist regime) and waving the red, white, and green Hungarian flag, with a hole in the middle where the communist hammer and sickle had been inserted before. It all seemed like a miracle. Our elation was beyond human comprehension. But this didn’t last for long either. The underground radio announced that the secret police had shot into an unarmed, jubilant civilian crowd, there were many casualties, and people were breaking into military ammunition centers, taking guns and defending themselves. Many official military draftees sided with the fighting revolutionaries and a bloody

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revolt had begun. By the morning, Russian tanks appeared and the Hungarian freedom fighters used homemade bombs (Molotov cocktails – hand grenades) and the stolen guns to resist. The entire country stood as one, and even some of the Russian soldiers sided with the revolutionaries. Many young (12 – 14 year old) children died in that battle, but within a few days the Russians and communists were overpowered. The troops were withdrawn and the revolution was a success. At that point, our family was all separated, the children were at the location of deportation (with Katineni), my husband was working somewhere with the truck, helping the revolutionary cause, and I was still illegally at Rikaneni's. Even though there was nothing more important to me than my family, I was jubilant that our country was free again and that the people would be living under a democratic government. I had never felt that patriotic during World War II; somehow I hadn't felt that it was justified and that it would truly benefit the entire future generation. But the Russian-communist oppression was so horrible that I felt there was no sacrifice, not even my own or a member of my family's death, too big for the successful overthrow of the communist government.

Life is only worth living if there is someone or something so important that one is willing to sacrifice life, limb or even loved ones for it. And that was what the revolution meant to us. The success of the revolution meant life, happiness, freedom, and a future for us and for our children. We were full of optimism and hope and anticipation. We were so confident that all the fear and mistrust we had harbored in our hearts disappeared, as it felt like the entire country stood together as one against the terror of communism. Within a short while I found out that the children were OK and Ferenc returned safely to us, too. However, he was seriously ill with a double stomach ulcer, and ended up in the hospital. But at least we all survived and our country was free again. Now we could plan for a better

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future for ourselves. At least that was how it seemed by the end of October 1956. But our hopes were again crushed within a few days. In the first days of November we heard that the Russian troops were again nearing our borders from the East.

August 22

The Russians assembled new troops on our Eastern border and were nearing Hungary again. On November 4, 1956, our prime minister issued a last, frantic call to the Western world. The cry for help from the suffering, freedom loving, self sacrificing Hungarians fell on deaf ears in the West. By the end of the week, the Russians were again in our country trying to dictate, oppress and intimidate the population. Once again our prime minister and many leaders of the revolution were arrested. Some were taken to Russia, some executed, some tried and jailed by the newly established communist courts. Many hurriedly escaped to the West, before the iron curtain closed again. We were still hoping that the free world might interfere and somehow things would work out. Many apartments became available in Budapest and its environs, and we hoped to be able to get one where the family, including my father, could settle down and try to live a relatively human life. But all our trying, seeking, and applying was in vain. It just wasn't meant for us to stay in Hungary. December 4th, a month after the Russian troops invaded Hungary, there was a march of women and children (everyone carrying one flower stem) organized. All the marchers were dressed in mourning, marched somberly to the tomb of the unknown soldier to pay our respects to the many who perished in the bloody revolution. However, even this peaceful march of women and children turned bloody as the Russian army used live ammunition, shooting into the crowd.

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This event was the last straw for us, too. We now knew that we could not count on the West, we could not trust their promises. All our hopes were crushed, and we also knew that there was nothing left for us and our children in this Russian communist dominated Hungary. We had to try to escape again leaving behind all our beloved ones, our families and friends and the remainder of our earthly possessions. We had to save our children and give them an opportunity to live in a free, democratic country, where they were not going to be labeled “class enemy”, where they wouldn’t be deported again; where they would have a future. Ferenc voluntarily signed out of the hospital. I gathered the children, and without goodbye’s we left Budapest on January 12, 1957. Everyone had a small knapsack with pajamas and toiletries, and we put our warmest clothing on and heavy winter coats and boots. Ferenc had a very good friend, a parish priest (Lacibacsi), near the Austrian border, and we decided to go there first and make plans for our escape there and then. We took the train in Budapest and found seats in the wagon “for children and parents only”. Ferenc, Jr. and Maria Magdolna were anxious to know where we were heading. Our answer was short and truthful, “We go to visit Uncle Csaba” (my brother). Naturally, they had no idea that uncle Csaba had already escaped and was safe in Vienna. By that time, cousin Laci also made it to Austria with our help. He was only 17 and had to leave the country alone, without his sisters and mother. These were very confusing, uncertain and frightening times. No one knew what was going to follow, what would happen next. None had a definite place to go to, no future plans, no real hopes. The only certainty was that there was no present, no future, and no hope or freedom or life for us and for our children in Hungary. People by the hundreds were again being jailed, deported or executed. We had our share of those hardships and our only hope was that our 4 and 5 and a half year old children would be able to grow up in a free society,

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wherever that might be. Our decision was made and with trepidation and anxiety we took our seats in the train.

At the second stop, as Ferenc Jr. looked out the window, he exclaimed, “Soldiers with machine guns are entering the train!”. We tried to remain calm, reassuring the children that there was nothing to be afraid of. We told them the soldiers were looking for some criminals. Several people were escorted off the train, but our wagon was not searched thoroughly. When asked where we were traveling to, Ferenc showed the papers he received in the hospital, which stated that he was to go to the country for a while, where there was better and more food for his sick stomach. We were allowed to continue our voyage without any further questioning. That was a tremendous relief! When we arrived in Szombathely (the city from which we had tried to escape in 1949), we had to change trains to travel to Ferenc’s priest friend. It was not an easy journey for us. We didn’t know what to expect or what to hope for. But finally, we made it and were safe in friendly, comfortable surroundings. Now we could start thinking about when and where, and particularly how, to escape with two little children in the middle of January, in freezing cold, and on foot. But our friend, Kormendy Lacibacsi, (the parish priest in Taplanszentkereszt), with the help of a nephew, found a way. Again, we were put in touch with a “people smuggler”, with whom we made arrangements; naturally again for a sizable amount of money, to lead us through the border. As it turned out, another relatively young couple, with 2 small children (a 4 year old girl and a baby) were to join us. We dressed in several layers; first underwear, then pajamas, and on top of that our clothing, sweaters, and winter coats. Besides toiletries, I was given by our friends some food, fruits, and candy. That was it. By that time, the radio already echoed warnings of the borders being again closely watched. No barbed wires and mines yet, but border guards and dogs; and there

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were reports of some escapees being shot during their attempt. “The border is bloody again!”, was the announcement on the underground radio. But we had no choice but to trust God and the smuggler and hope for the best. We had a 4-6 hour walk through the woods ahead of us. Luckily, we had practically nothing to carry, since we had nothing more left and with 2 small children and a sick husband, we couldn’t have made it, even if we had anything. The other couple was packed like mules. The mother carried the baby in a sheet tied on her neck, with the baby cradled in it on the front of her body. On her back, she carried a sizable knapsack, heavily packed. The father carried 2 enormous backpacks, one in front and one in back, and held his daughter’s hand, leading her through the treacherous terrain. Before reaching the woods, we had to go through a part of the town again. It was already dark and somehow, this time I had a good feeling that everything would work out all right.

The peasants seeing us marching with children must have known that we were trying to escape and offered us milk and food for the children. Human goodness and willingness to help again was shown to us. Once we arrived in the woods, my husband picked up our little daughter and set her on his shoulders. We knew that she couldn’t take all the walking with her tiny legs. While going through the forest, she winced quietly and incessantly. We told them they were to be absolutely quiet, as all the animals in the forest were asleep and we shouldn’t wake them. Both children accepted our warning and, except for our daughter’s quiet wincing, there wasn’t a word uttered. After several hours of marching, we had to stop. The woman with the baby on her neck stumbled and fell, and we had to rest. I unpacked the little food I had left, gave the children the remainder of the candy and cookies, and our leader was ready to return back. He pointed to some lights not far on the horizon and explained that there was already Austria. Then he

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pointed to a single light even nearer and told us that that was where the border guards were, we had better avoid it. With that, he left four anxious adults, four frightened little children in the middle of the night, trying to make it on their own. I was confident, however, that God would help us through without troubles. And He sure did! After our leader left, an unexpected, strong wind started to blow. We had to hold the children with both hands so that they wouldn't be blown away. But no matter how unpleasant the windstorm was, we knew that the border guards would stay in their huts and not venture out to look for possible escapees. It took us no more than 15-20 minutes before we reached a border creek. Ferenc stepped into the freezing water and lifted us one by one over to the other side. When all of us had crossed safely to the Austrian side, the wind subsided and the lights of the small village neared with every step. Even though we knew we should be in Austria, we did not dare to believe it until we reached the village tavern and heard the sound of the harmonica, and the singing and yodeling of the Austrian folks. Now we knew! This was it! We were safe! We were free! There was nothing to fear! The feelings that overwhelmed us were above and beyond anything we had felt before, or for that matter, since. Nothing could be compared to that elation. It was like arriving in heaven and being greeted by the Lord. It really was a heavenly feeling that was never experienced before or in the following forty some years. My husband and I tried to recall or relive that moment, but the elation was so unique, that even though we remember its intensity, the feeling cannot return. But we remember it as a heavenly moment, a high of unmatched intensity.

September 5

From the fellows in the tavern we received directions to the nearest Red Cross camp, where we finally entered a big, warm hall, full of Hungarian refugees.

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There, we could take care of all the wet clothes, sit by the fire and have a bite to eat and a drink of warm milk. Our beds consisted of straw on the floor, but we huddled together happy and thankful that finally, after all our suffering and difficulties, we were free and safe. And there under the lights, we realized what had made our little daughter wince all the way. Her face was scratched completely by the branches in the woods. Sitting on the shoulders of her father, the trees were much more dense up high, and throughout the entire trip, her cheeks were being scratched. She hadn't had to march through the tiresome hours as had her brother, but she too, had suffered for her freedom. But we had finally left communism, with all its horrors, suffering and life threatening fears, behind. All we had was one another and our trust in God and hope for a better future. And that was more than we ever hoped to achieve.

The next day, most of us were given the order to board a bus and get ready for a long ride. No other explanation was given and all we could do was comply. From early morning until late in the afternoon, we had to sit in the bus with no food provisions, not even a break long enough to put fresh diapers on the several babies that were with the other refugees. But we could not complain, we were refugees, who were at the mercy of the host country, and we had to be thankful that they did not deport us back to Hungary. Finally, late afternoon, we arrived in a refugee camp, nestled in the beautiful mountains of Tyrol. Hundreds of other Hungarians were housed there already. We all had to register, and were told that we'd be given an opportunity sometime in the near future, to emigrate to some other country. But all that we wanted was to get to Vienna, where my brother was already settled and where there was a convent of the Sacred Heart, with several nuns, who had also escaped from Hungary. However, our request was denied. Even though the winter in the Tyrolean mountains was beautiful, and we had a

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well heated room and plenty of food, we were anxious to get to Vienna. And we were not the only ones who had their plans set. Having been used to decide and act without the approval of the authorities, we made up our minds to leave without permission, to “escape” from the refugee camp.

This time we didn't have to be concerned about border guards, jail sentences or any other horrible consequences of our escape, so we just got up early in the morning and instead of reporting for breakfast, we again took on several miles of walking in the cold winter in the Tyrolean Alps. By noon we arrived at a small railroad station. To our surprise, we were greeted with smiles and understanding and given a free ride to Vienna. This was, thank God, the last time that we had to “escape” to reach our destiny. In Vienna, we met my brother and were welcomed in the Sacred Heart convent in Pressbaum, located in the Viennese woods. We still had no plans for the future, everything was unknown and uncertain for us, but I felt like I was “at home” again. The convent, the familiar faces of some nuns, and the security and beauty of the surroundings, made us humble, thankful, and very happy. In the evenings, we went for a walk through the woods and chatted, laughed, and sang happy songs. Our thoughtful son, Ferenc, admonished us, “Be quiet, you'll awaken the animals in the forest.” With a smile, we reassured him that the animals in the free world sleep so well that no human laughter and singing will awaken them. We were finally again among friends, in the western world, ready to restart our lives, to make plans and hope for a better future. The world was ours again, but by now we felt somewhat worn out, old and beaten, and not sure that we would be able to conquer once more.

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WE'RE GOING TO AMERICA, BUT IT'S NOT WHAT WE EXPECTED!

(1957)

September 16, 1998

In our friendly, quiet little room, we stood in front of a globe of the world, spun it around and pointed our finger to any spot and sighed, "Maybe that's where we will settle." But in addition to this game, we also started some serious thinking and planning. We could go to Germany where I had gone to college, where we would have no language barriers since we were fluent in German. I also had a cousin in Australia (who escaped successfully with her family in 1949, when we landed in jail after our unsuccessful attempt). So Australia was one of our possibilities, too. A cousin of mine also lived in the United States, married to an American diplomat, and we wrote to her for advice on choosing a future home country. Instead of advice, she (aunt Manci) sent us an affidavit and expressed her anticipation and hope to see us soon in the U.S.. This was all that we needed. We were alone, confused, without our relatives and friends, in a strange place, and someone in this unknown world, a cousin in the United States, opened her heart and said, "Come!" We didn't even think of making any other plans or weighing the difficulties of settling in such a far away country, overseas, leaving the familiarity of Europe and starting a new life in a place with a totally different culture and a language that only I spoke, and not really fluently, either. But the assurance of a cousin there, who responded to our quest without hesitation, with warm, friendly invitation, made us believe that this was our only possibility. Besides, both of us were in extremely poor health and our spirits were pretty much crushed. We figured that if we couldn't make it there, or if our physical strength failed us, my cousin would always take care of the children. She already had three adopted children and

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considered adopting some more, perhaps Hungarian refugee orphans. What better solution could we have found! Now we were completely relieved. We felt that we had reached our goal, the children would grow up in the free, secure world, far away from communism, dictatorships, and wars; with the assurance of having a family there, if we might not be around or capable of taking care of them. Thus, we registered for emigration to the United States and my aunt (Mariskaneni) and uncle (Belabacsi) signed the sponsorship papers.

Now our only concern was how to get our nephew (17 year old cousin Laci) to join us and be added to our list. He was staying in Austria in some boys' school with the understanding that he'd have to find some permanent solution for himself. He, too, had some distant relative in the States, who was willing to sign sponsorship papers. By that time, it was already nearly impossible to enter the United States, as they had filled their quotas that were allotted for Hungarian refugees. If it hadn't been for the intervention and connections of my dear cousin Manci and her diplomat husband, uncle Charlie, we might still be sitting in Vienna and waiting for permission to enter the promised land of America.

So our problem was solved, but we desperately wanted to help our nephew to reach his goals. With a little white lie, we convinced the American officials that Laci, whose father had died a few years before, was legally under the guardianship of his uncle, my husband. Somehow, our plea was accepted and his name was officially (however, illegally) added to our family's list. Now all that we had to do was get him from his place to ours as there were only a few more days left before we had to depart. After a few frantic phone calls to the headmaster of the school and an express money transfer for his train trip, Laci was finally united with us and we were on our way, being transported by bus to the departure point. Our plane left

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from Shannon airport in Ireland. This was our first flight in life and we were hoarded onto a World War II airplane, not a jet, just a simple four engine military plane. We barely left the airport and were half an hour into the flight over the ocean, the “no smoking” and “fasten your seat belts” signs were lit, when we were informed that one of the plane’s engines had developed some problems and we were returning to the airport. Were we ever frightened during that half an hour flight back! Being in an airplane for the first time, riding high up in the sky, and over the ocean, was frightening enough. Now we had to accept the fact that the engine was crippled and we feared for our lives, mumbled prayers, and tried not to show our concern, so that the children wouldn’t be scared. But the thirty minutes passed without further problems, we landed in Shannon again, and after a few more hours of delay, we were back in our seats, exhausted, frightened, but ready to start our journey again. I have to admit that I was such a coward that I had to choose a seat farthest away from the window, so as to not have to look out and see our position in the sky. I missed all the beautiful sights of the sunrise and sunset. But at the time, all I could think of was our landing in the States. And after a short refueling stop in Newfoundland and about 14 hours of flying, we were descending the steps of the plane onto American soil.

First, we were taken to an old, big hotel in Brooklyn, where we had to go through some paperwork and register. We stood in a long line, waiting for our turn. Our son, Ferenc Jr., could not wait any longer and asked me to take him to the rest room urgently. After being told where the restrooms were located, we scooted along and entered the place, where to my biggest surprise, I found several stalls, all locked, with a place to put a dime in, in order to open the door. I had never seen anything like that, so it took me quite a while to figure out that you have to pay for the use of the toilet here. Pay, but how? I had no money, we had just arrived from

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Europe, and my son couldn't wait much longer. We were in our new country and my very first action was a shameful cheating. I told my son to climb underneath the door – he was a small five year old – and use the facility free. I'll never forget how ashamed I was of my dishonesty and cheating. But in many instances, we had to learn new ways of acting and handling situations. This was not our old world anymore, but I thank God every day for leading us to our new homeland and allowing us to be happy and proud American citizens.

September 30, 1998

However, during our first few days in the United States we were anything but happy or proud. We were confused, lost and had no understanding of all the things we saw, heard or experienced. After being properly registered and awaiting our fate, we looked around. What we saw in Brooklyn, New York was not a very uplifting sight. Big, black canisters (garbage containers) were in front of every house, overflowing with garbage, surrounded by plastic, black garbage bags, with paper and garbage blowing in the streets. In the back of the homes there were black iron stairways leading from the top floor all the way down to the yards. Men were all dressed in dark suits (the gray flannel suit era) and at least half of those on the street walking around and loitering were black people. We were puzzled and even the thought of a national mourning day entered our minds. Everything was dark black, dirty, and dismal. Is that what living in America means? And what are all those black people doing here? In Hungary we had met two Negroes. One was dressed in colorful uniform, performing the duties of a doorman in front of a very elegant hotel. The other was equally colorfully dressed, working in another elegant restaurant, dispensing the coffee after dinner. We had seen in movies some blacks performing as chauffeurs, nannies, and above all, singing and dancing, and

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doing it exceptionally well. We wondered how do all these Negroes (African-American was not invented yet) work to make a living? We were really narrow-minded and lacked any knowledge of life and people in our new country. How are we going to be able to adjust, to understand, to find jobs, simply survive with two small children under such unknown, never seen or heard of experiences?

But we did not have much time to ponder our future as within a couple of days our nephew, Laci, was sent to Indiana to his sponsor and we were taken by taxicab to my Uncle's house in Little Falls, New Jersey. The cab driver was a pleasant and talkative fellow, and our drive to our destination was very entertaining and educational. As we drove up to "Circle Greenhouse" (my uncle's business), he was standing outside, and even though I had never seen him, not even a photo of him, I recognized him because he was the spitting image of his sister who lived in Budapest, and who was near and dear to my heart. Things began to look a little brighter now. Maybe, after all, people are just people, whether they live in Europe or in the U.S. Maybe we'd find just as many similarities as differences after all. We were shown to our room and received a warm and friendly welcome. After dinner, we walked outside and this time our impressions were much more positive, but no less amazing. We couldn't believe our eyes, seeing all those cars, station wagons in all different colors, filling up the roads, rushing somewhere. Just as many were going one way as there were coming the other way. We looked in amazement, tried to count how many pass within a given time, but we could not keep up with their speed. In Hungary, the privately owned cars were practically as scarce as Negroes. There was plenty for us to learn to get acquainted with and to get used to.

TIDAL WAVES

October 2, 1998

So we had to start anew again. But this time not just in a different town or country, but on a different continent. There was an ocean between us and our past. A new continent, new culture, new language, new hopes and new fears, and not one person, object or word that linked us to our past. How were we going to make it here? At the ages of 43 and 35, with two small children, is there a future for us? We really had to be reborn, become Americans, shed our past. And that's what we had to do, starting with changing our Hungarian, familiar names, to easier, acceptable ones. So, I became Mary, my husband became Francis, our son's name was now Frank, and Maria Magdolna received the name, Marlene. With this first new rebirth, we were ready to start our new adventure, life in the United States.

Sitting on the porch of our new little cabin in the Georgia mountains, and facing the woods of the national forest, I realize that at the ages of 84 and 76 we are again starting a new adventure. But this time, it was no necessity that chased us into the quiet of the forest, but we came here to enjoy the peaceful, healthy life, to listen to the babble of the brook behind our cabin, to watch the dance of the colorful falling leaves, to see deer and squirrels prancing in the woods, and to enjoy the chatter of the birds, the smell and sounds of nature. We bought this cabin last fall and spent all summer painting and getting acquainted with the friendly people around us. Life is a never-ending circle while it lasts. It has its ups and downs, its tragedies and delights, but it is never standing still, ever changing, moving, and taking us to new experiences and adventures. We certainly had our share of experiences, good and bad, but right now – enjoying the October sunshine peeking through the dense woods and writing our life's events – I count our blessings and thank God for giving me such a long and rich life.

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Next year we will celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. Fifty-two years ago, when I first set my eyes on my “knight in shining armor”, I never imagined that God would give us that many wonderful years together. There wasn’t even a single moment when I thought I had made a mistaken choice. Your father, though human and having his faults, never disappointed me; I always felt his caring, his faithfulness, his love; and for fifty plus years I could always count on his help, his protection, his love. And the fruits of this love – you, Marlene and Frank – completed my happiness and satisfaction. Yes, there were times when I worried and was disappointed, but nothing good can come without some difficulties. All that I see now is two wonderful, loving, well meaning children (children? Over 40?) and four wonderful, intelligent, warm hearted, healthy, happy grandchildren. My life is so complete, my heart is totally at peace and there is nothing that I regret or miss. Had I seen the future in 1957, when we started our new life in this adopted country of ours, I could have gone through all those years with less worry and concern. But the future is not ours to know and all that we can do is trust God, trust ourselves, our family and friends, and do the best under the given circumstances. And that is exactly what we did. As I spoke English and had four years of college in Europe, I applied to Rutgers (majoring in languages). I was invited for a personal interview and accepted for the school year starting in September of 1957. New country, new life, and new hopes. Life is worth living again, trust in humanity is restored.

TIDAL WAVES

A SCHOLARSHIP TO RUTGERS, PLUS WORK, PLUS KIDS

(1957-1961)

June 22, 1999

It has been about nine months since I last sat down to my life's story and put in this notebook the happenings of the past and the feelings of the present. But somehow, as we get older, the daily chores take up much more of our time. Also, dad's unexpected health problems (failing kidney, prostate cancer, and three episodes with heart symptoms) took all my attention and devotion. In addition, my worsening arthritic pains did not allow me to be able to be in the right mood to write. But, thanks to the Almighty, as it turned out, Dad's heart problems were caused by his prostate medication, he got some drugs to control his kidney ailment, and once his prostate injections were changed, he had no more heart symptoms, though his cancer is not eliminated. My herbal cure seems to keep my joint pains in check, thus we are back to being our old selves again. We also improved our living conditions in our Georgia cottage, added two open porches (one in front and one in back), and doubled the size of our tiny bedroom. Naturally, this too took much energy, time and money. But it was all worthwhile, and now we can enjoy the enlarged cottage and the newly planted trees, bushes and flowers. Today, finally, the much needed rain arrived and I am sitting in our covered porch, listening to the soothing rain and to some classical music, while my eyes rest on the rhododendron blooming outside our porch.

This puts me back to the year 1957, when I started my studies in the Master's degree program in Rutgers University. Naturally, college here in the States is very different from my years in Hungary and Germany. There you had much less

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formal, organized studies. You went to lectures because you wanted to, not because you had to. You read, researched and studied on your own, and when the time came, you took your exams. There were no constant term papers, midterm exams, or compulsory reading. It was all up to the student to be prepared and to accumulate the necessary knowledge for the exams. But getting used to a new way of living was nothing new to us anymore. Francis, with practically no English knowledge, had to be satisfied with a \$1.00 an hour factory job. I worked as a secretary for the American Cancer Society while studying full time (12-14 credits per semester) for my Masters degree. Frank and Marlene were enrolled in public schools (first grade and kindergarten). The next big change came when I received my M.A. in 1959 and was appointed to teach in New Brunswick Junior High School. Then it was Francis's turn to enroll in the University. His best bet seemed to be a Master of Library Science program since they accepted his Hungarian credentials and he could start on the graduate level. His limited English knowledge (he had been in this country only two years or so and all our friends were Hungarian), however, made it very hard to study and work full time. But, as always in the past, he did not shirk his responsibilities, he was not afraid of hard work and put his mind to conquering the difficulties of the English language. By 1962 he too, was awarded his Masters degree (MLS) and got his first professional job.

However, the years between 1959 and 1962 had many ups and downs, some achievements, some tragic events and above all, many changes. The two most memorable happenings included happiness and achievement, but also deep sorrow and heartache. In June of 1961 I received my second masters degree, this time in guidance and counseling. Realizing that knowledge is not the most important aspect of human life, I wanted to devote myself to the emotional needs and

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personal adjustment of our youth. Also, I believed that the knowledge and insight I gained through my studies would help me to better understand and guide and raise my own two children more successfully. Thus, after two years in New Brunswick Junior High School, I applied to East Brunswick Junior High for a guidance position. I was offered a job in teaching languages again, with a promise of becoming a counselor within two years. As the pay was better, the students were brighter, and I could expect a counselorship in two years, I accepted. It also meant that we could move into a larger home and the children were enrolled in a better school district. It was definitely a move for the better. Francis, meanwhile, was studying ambitiously and working as a handyman at Rutgers University. By the fall of 1960, we bought our first house – on Holly Street in Franklin Township. We were elated with the way our life had turned out in our newly adopted homeland. Our new, split-level, home even had an extra guest room with a bath on the ground floor, in case my Dad would be allowed to leave Hungary and come to live with us. The future seemed so promising and life as good as it could ever be. We still worked very hard, with both of us carrying full time jobs, fulltime college studies and raising two children with whom we were involved in many activities, including cub scouts, the YMCA, camping, traveling and studying with them. Frank, who started first grade as soon as we arrived in the United States, with no knowledge of English, had a difficult time learning to read. So we made it a daily event to read together and take turns at reading out loud. In exchange for my efforts, Frank had to teach me all the “bad” “4 letter” words he heard in school. This way, I became aware of what some of my students were saying when they got angry or upset, and I could admonish them for using dirty language. As it turned out, we both benefited from this exchange. Frank learned to read and I improved my knowledge of “common” English. The days with all the activities flew by quickly and we tried to make the most of our somewhat consolidated new life.

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However, I will never forget the most heartbreaking day of November 1960. I had just gotten home from work and while I was preparing dinner, I listened to the radio playing “I love Paris” sung by Dina Shore. I remembered how my father loved Paris and had promised me, way back in the “good old times” in Hungary, that he would take me there one day. I was still hoping that even that dream might yet become a reality sometime in the future. My daydreaming was interrupted by the arrival of a telegram from Hungary, from my sister-in-law. It contained the most feared and least expected news, the death of my father. No details were given, just the devastating fact that the person who had meant so much in my life, who had given me so much, who had helped me to become the human being that I am today, was gone. We never said goodbye to each other, and we never will go to Paris together. A part of my heart and soul died with him that day. Even today, when I hear the song “I love Paris”, I cannot hold back the tears and I feel pain and gratitude simultaneously; pain for not having my father around anymore, and gratitude for having had such a wonderful man for a father.

Little Falls Herald
Little Falls Herald
LITTLE FALLS, NEW JERSEY, MAY 30, 1957 Ten Cents a Copy

Hungarian Family Here After Flight

Francis Ryll and his family, late of Budapest, Hungary, arrived in this country May 16th by plane.

The photograph at right, taken in front of The Herald offices, shows the Rylls with Marlene, 4 and Frank, 5½.

They had fled Hungary after the revolution there.

Ryll, shown in the continental garb of knickers and stockings, was a captain in the Hungarian army before the Russians took over.

Article in the Little Falls Herald about our arrival to the United States.



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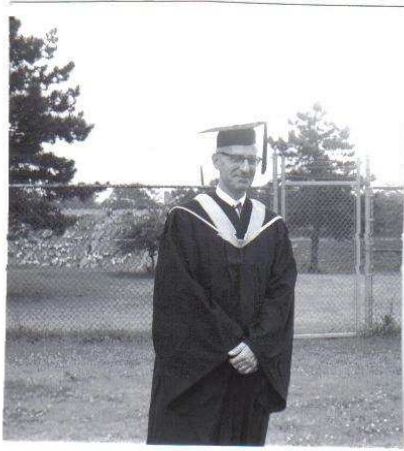
soldier to janitor

Coronet Magazine,
December 1960

Former army officer Francis Ryll (above left, gripping handle bars) gladly traded his dashing motorcycle for a drab janitor's job in New Brunswick, New Jersey (above right)

TIDAL WAVES

Our first Masters Degrees



Francis 1962



Mary 1959



The children's first Easter in our new country



Our first Christmas in the U.S.

TIDAL WAVES

IT'S NOT EASY FOR IMMIGRANTS, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE WE'LL MAKE
IT!

(1961-1980)

June 27, 1999

For the fifth day in a row the rain is coming down on our thirsty vegetation, which is getting greener and more beautiful by the hour. Our life in the States was very similar to the weather. Sometimes sunshine, sometimes rain, some happy days intermingled with some difficult ones. When in June, 1962, Francis received his MLS, he was already working as a semi-professional in the library system. However, in those days, librarians were practically all women (and many of them quite advanced in age) and they resented the newcomer, foreigner, man, intruding in their field. Whenever possible, he was quickly let go and replaced by an American born woman. Within four years Francis had been through three jobs and had no prospects in New Jersey. Thus, by 1966, we were looking for positions in other states. There were, however, many events between 1962 and 1966, which brightened or saddened our life. In 1963, with God's help and some good luck, and through my unwavering persistence, I was offered my first guidance position in Franklin High School. When I applied, I had been immediately rejected, without justification. However, having gone through "the school of hard knocks", I didn't give up. I requested an interview and an explanation. Again, being foreign born and having an accent was my handicap. I was told I would have a hard time understanding the youth of a totally different culture, and their parents might have difficulties understanding and accepting my accent. I knew, however, that Franklin Township was a brand new school system, comprised of students from many walks of life. There was a large, rich, professional, Jewish population who had moved from New York to the more quiet suburbs of New Jersey. At the

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same time the old tenement buildings sheltered many deprived Blacks and Puerto Ricans. And to add to that colorful mix, New Brunswick was a center for Hungarian refugees who were hard working, but had language handicaps. This gave me the impetus for my retort: “I believe I will be a great asset to this community because, just as they are, I am a newcomer, and just as they express themselves in different accents, so do I”. This convinced my interviewer and he stood up, shaking my hand with the following words: “Congratulations! You talked yourself and me into offering you this position”. As it turned out, this was the ideal job for me; I loved all my bosses, my coworkers, my students, and every minute of being a guidance counselor. It was the most fulfilling job I ever had.

But the years 1962-66 also had their low points. As I already mentioned, Francis had a hard time keeping his employment and on December 3, 1963 the tragic news of his mother’s death darkened our horizon. Now we had lost all our ties to Hungary. And so there wasn’t much left of our past, not even in Hungary. Because of Francis’s job search, we had to decide to leave New Jersey, and Francis accepted an assistant professorship – in the library field – at Union College, in Schenectady, New York. Naturally, it wasn’t easy for me to leave the beloved school, the students and friends, and to find another guidance job in another state. Our children, luckily, were not involved in this move, as by that time, they were in Europe in boarding schools. My brother lived in Vienna with his wife (Erzsebet-*neni*) and because of this, we sent Frank to Melk (outside of Vienna) to the Benedictine brothers school. Marlene was enrolled in Pressbaum, in the Viennese woods, in the convent of the Sacred Heart. Some of the nuns that I had known in Budapest were now in Pressbaum. When we had escaped from Hungary in 1957, we had also spent some time in that convent. By now Frank and Marlene were in their teens and we felt it would behoove them to be exposed to some different

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culture, to learn a different language (German) and to reconnect with their roots and the remaining cousins and relatives. While they were safe in Austria, we prepared for our move to Schenectady.

August 4, 1999

Naturally, this meant again job hunting, restarting in a new place, making new friends, and finding a new house. But by now, this was the normal way of life for us, and in this adopted country of ours, everybody was constantly on the move. People changed jobs, homes, and locations several times during a lifespan. Unlike in Europe, in the old times, when a person died in the same house that he had been born in, surrounded by the same people he had known all his life. But these were different times in a different country, with very different ways of living. And by now we were adjusted to it. We rented an apartment in Latham, New York. I received a position as a guidance counselor in Shaker High School in the same city. Francis got used to his academic position in Union College and by September of 1967 life was again flowing normally and peacefully. We were preparing to have Frank come back from Europe and be with us for good, again. Marlene had one more year to go. God, however, had other plans for us. Our nephew Laci, whom we had brought with us in 1957 to America, called. He was in California, where he lived at the time and had had a bad accident while horseback riding. He could barely move and needed help because he was unable to take care of himself. Naturally, we advised him to get on a plane right away and come stay with us until he got on his feet again. And so he did. Poor fellow, he was really in bad shape. He couldn't sit and ate his meals kneeling and he couldn't even tie his shoelaces. Francis had to get on his knees daily to do this chore for him. But we enjoyed

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nursing him back to good health again and having a relative with us, and a big brother for Frank.

By the end of the year he was healthy enough to look for a job and with a little luck and his aunt's (my) help, he was offered a teaching position in Shaker High School. This way I could chauffeur him back and forth to school and he was slowly but surely on his way to independence again. By January of 1968 he bought a car, with Francis's help, and did not need our support anymore. And that's when things went sour. On the last day of February, Laci's birthday, I baked a nice cake for him, we opened a bottle of old Hungarian Tokay wine and celebrated Laci's birthday. In the festive mood of celebration, he came up with a request: " Could he invite a girlfriend from California to stay with him for a while?" Naturally, with our old fashioned European, catholic upbringing, we denied his request. However, we suggested that he rent a room in the neighboring motel for her and she'd be welcome to spend the days at our house and be our guest for all the meals. This denial upset Laci, as he couldn't understand what was wrong with sleeping together, and probably the wine was boiling in his veins, too, and he became abusive, telling my husband that he was "no good", that he never helped anyone in his life, and that he only does something where he can benefit from it, etc... The argument was nasty; Francis was very hurt but kept his cool because Frank was sitting at the table. However, the next morning, I was asked to arrange that Laci leave our house as soon as possible. Francis didn't want to speak to him until he apologized for his behavior. It was most devastating for me to see friends, and in this case relatives, fight, hold a grudge, become enemies. It was nice to have Laci in our home and it hurt to let him go. We had purchased our new home in Niskayuna with him in mind as a permanent guest. On the first floor there was a "mother-in-law apartment", a big bedroom, bath and a large living room

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with a fireplace and separate back entrance. This was all assigned to Laci and we lived on the second level, where besides the living and cooking quarters, we had 3 more bedrooms and 2 baths. Now the first floor would be empty. I was hurt for my husband, felt bad for my nephew, and upset for the situation. But there was nothing I could do. Laci left in March and we settled back in our daily chores, programs and problems.

Before the beginning of the next school year, Marlene got back from Europe and both kids went to summer school to make up differences between European and American education. By September of 1968, Marlene was in 10th grade in Niskayuna High and Frank was a senior in Shaker High school. And we oldsters worked happily in our jobs in Union College and Shaker High School. Finally, we had “arrived”. A nice home, steady, respectable jobs, good health insurance, and above all, two well educated, good kids with us enjoying life in America. Frank’s graduation from high school in 1969 and Marlene’s graduation 2 years later were the only big events in our lives. Our son went into a Swiss hotel school in Zurich and Marlene chose Stephen’s college in Missouri for further education. It seemed like life was really going to be relatively “dull” with no more ups and downs, but steady, unchanging days one after another.

August 6, 1999

Did I miss the boat again with my prediction! Dull, unchanging life with no excitement? I should have known by now that this only exists in fairy tales; in real life there are always ups and downs; excitement and contentment are followed by disappointment and worry. The cycle never stops, it only takes a little rest. That’s what happened in our life, too. This time, it was our grown up kids who provided

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reason to worry. It was the 70's and by now Frank had to leave the school in Switzerland and enrolled in Washington DC at American University. There, he was introduced to smoking pot and that ended his career there, too. The next higher educational institution was Bloomfield College in New Jersey where he spent less than a year with practically no college credits earned. I was desperate; what happened to my bright, intelligent, family oriented boy? As a guidance counselor, I advised many a parent with the same problems. It was so easy to reassure them that if they were patient and waited just a few years, their son/daughter would overcome the difficulties. If they were brought up the right way, they'd outgrow that phase (which was practically normal in the 70's) and everything would be all right again. I tried to give the same advice to myself but it didn't work. I was totally frantic, frightened, and saw doomsday scenarios in my head. I couldn't sleep, couldn't function in my profession, lost my self-confidence, and blamed myself for all the difficulties and problems Frank was having. Emotionally, maybe these were the hardest times, the most difficult years in my entire life. I'd gone through so much with him (being deported during pregnancy, giving birth while escaping from deportation, giving him away as a baby and missing the mothering of my firstborn); I just couldn't bear the thought that now, after all the hardships, I might lose him to drugs. Again, looking back, I know I overreacted to this phenomenon of the 70's, but it took all my faith in God, my energy and my positive outlook to survive those years. But as it is obvious I survived it all and life is good again to me. But in those times it was not only Frank whose behavior troubled me. Our daughter went boy crazy (at least in our eyes). Maybe this was just as much "the thing to do" in those times, but with my upbringing, my religious and moral beliefs, even kissing a boy who is not your husband or "husband to be" seemed like a real serious offense. I had nightmares of Marlene marrying some abusive, no good bum, or having a child out of wedlock.

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Again, I blamed myself and wondered what had happened to my wonderful daughter, who at the age of 14, had wanted to become a nun? But at least Marlene kept up her studies, graduated from college, received a Masters degree in International Business and showed promise of a normal future.

But I couldn't concentrate all my energy on worrying for the kids, because after 7 successful years at Union College, Francis wasn't granted tenure. At the age of 60, he again had to go job hunting, sit through interviews and accept rejection after rejection. This time, however, the kids were on their own; I had secure employment with health benefits. Thus, the situation wasn't tragic, only Francis's unhappiness and depression bothered me very much. Luckily, within less than a year, he was gainfully employed as head of processing services in the "Upper Hudson Library Federation". It was a responsible position and the last job he held until our retirement in 1980. By that time, we had sold our beautiful home outside Saratoga, New York, in a development in the woods, on a golf course in Wilton, and moved into a condominium in Albany. We loved our Wilton home, took up cross country skiing (which we could do right outside our doorway). We enjoyed riding our bicycles into Saratoga, sat through several horse races there, and went back to chopping our own firewood. This time, however, unlike way back in deportation, it was fun and exercise and not necessary. Despite having such a pleasant life in Wilton, we opted for the less work requiring surroundings of a condo in the woods of Turning Point, Albany. Cross country skiing and bicycling were still options, but instead of chopping wood, we went swimming in the condo pool. And we did more traveling and started spending winter vacations in Florida.

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In Tarpon Springs, Florida - with cousin Manci 1988



Christmas at Frank's house - 1997

TIDAL WAVES

FINALLY RETIRED, TRAVELING, AND ENJOYING LIFE

(1980-1984)

August 7, 1999

By 1980, we both had retired. Francis had already passed the magical 65, but I was only 58 years old. However, all that I could think of was spending more time together with Francis, enjoying the fun of traveling, motorcycling, exploring as long as we had good health and energy. I have seen too many people focus on the money that could be earned with extra years of work and then, when they finally decide to call it quits, God calls one of them and they never get the chance to enjoy together the fruits of their labor. I decided this would not happen to us, and despite my husband's objections, I retired the same time as he did. I have never regretted that decision. We had a chance to travel all over Europe. Certainly, we couldn't afford the real luxury trips, sometimes we traveled on "a shoestring budget", but we went, we enjoyed and we were together. One of the most memorable journeys was a train trip through Spain and Portugal. We boarded a train in Zurich (Switzerland) and spent 2 wonderful weeks admiring the many magnificent edifices in Barcelona, Madrid, Toledo, Lisbon, and the snow white shores of the Costa del Sol. I think I took several hundreds of pictures every time I saw something out of the ordinary. The entire Spanish lifestyle was "out of the ordinary". After lunch, until about 3-4 o'clock, it was siesta time, even the stores were closed and streets deserted. The life came back again in the evening. Dinnertime started after 9 pm and the streets were alive with colorfully dressed people milling around and often having fiestas with no apparent special occasion. It was a real treat to have been there that summer.

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Another gorgeous trip included a bus tour through Scandinavia. Denmark, Holland, Finland, Sweden, and above all, Norway impressed me tremendously. Our bus even took us all the way to the Nordcap, where the sun never sets at that time of the year. We could watch the sun all night going around from left to right, but never down. In Hammerfest (the most northern city) the reindeer were freely roaming around in the marketplace and on the wide, unending bicycle roads, young and old were rushing to their destinations. But nothing fascinated me more than the fjords and glaciers in Norway. Standing at the bottom of the radiant blue glaciers, I felt the greatness and goodness of the Almighty. I was completely humbled and awed. Nothing gave me that exhilaration and thrill as those awesome, seemingly unending glaciers, reflecting the blue skies and majestically showing the power of the Creator. And while there, I recalled one saying of my father, “God could have made a black and white world, but in His generosity, He gave us all the colors of the rainbow.” Standing in the midst of that awesome beauty with my husband at my side, I also felt the presence of my father and gratitude and appreciation filled my heart. Our travel through Northern Europe only wetted our appetites to experience more of the same.

We planned a three month trip from Albany, New York through the Canadian Rockies to Vancouver, where we boarded a cruise ship (taking our car with us) and enjoyed the most mind boggling sites of the Inner Passage to Alaska. If the glaciers of Norway moved my soul, these Alaskan glaciers completely overwhelmed me and went beyond all my boldest imagination. We were lucky enough to see a real “calving” happen before our eyes. Calving is the phenomenon when a large piece of a several story high glacier separates and falls with a great thump and thunder into the ocean. The water responds with an equal force of gushing several stories high in the air, as though it was trying to reach to the top of

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the glacier. This display of force and power of nature is an unforgettable experience and I will cherish this memory as long as I live. Alaska, however, was only the midway of our trip. From there, we drove to Oregon, Washington, California, through the wonderful Highway 1 all the way to Los Angeles. And then it was on to Vegas and the deserts of the Midwest, admiring the different National Parks on the way (Tetons, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, etc...). Just this one 3 month trip justified my early retirement.

I was not sure how much longer we would have the energy and good health to undertake such journeys. We began to think of finding a permanent retirement place for the future and our first step was to buy a little mobile home in Florida, near Bradenton, where several old Hungarian friends were settled. After spending a couple of winters there, we opted for a more permanent Florida lifestyle and exchanged our little mobile home for a 2 bedroom 2 bath condo in “Country Village” in Bradenton in 1984. Now we had two nice condos, one in the woods of Albany for the summers, and one near the seashore of Florida for the winters. God had really blessed us and compensated us for all the hardships and horrors of our earlier years. The kids were grown and had settled down, they surrounded us with love and we were still healthy and vigorous and had each other to love and enjoy. Could we ask for anything more? Not a single day passes by without our expressions of gratitude and appreciation for the blessings provided to us. Granted, we don’t have too many future plans (we slowed down in many ways), but every day that we spend together in decent health is a special gift and we are thankful for it.

TIDAL WAVES



Entertaining friends in our Bradenton home 1991



Francis, Vice President of the Hungarian Club, Sarasota, FL 1992

TIDAL WAVES

TRAGEDIES AND LOVE NEVER CEASE

January 3, 2000

On December 1, 1999, my life came to a standstill. Your “Nagypapa”, my “one and only”, my “knight in shining armor” has left us forever. In a freak bicycle accident, his life was snuffed out in a second. I fell in love the minute I met him in 1947, and I lost him forever in a minute of misfortune. I don’t know when I will muster the energy to tell you the remainder of the story of our lives. All I know is that for 50 years I was the happiest woman in this world, I had everything that a wife and mother could ask for, and now I feel empty, lost, lonesome, at the end of my rope. You are the only ones for whom I am willing to face life alone, without the partnership of Francis. Because you, Frank, Marlene, Sasha, Adam, Joy and Steven, are all part of Nagypapa, and as long as I can see him in you I will keep on going, doing, and above all, loving all of you.....

TIDAL WAVES

DAD'S PAST AND FAMILY

I will not fill in this page (originally started in October 1999) for which I intended to get Dad's input to complete it. He left us before sharing all the necessary information. I will try to piece together all that I know and heard from him and his family at a later time. For now this page remains half empty, just as my life is, since I am without your Nagypapa, my "better half".



Nothing left but tears – December 4, 1999

TIDAL WAVES
STORIES FROM BRADENTON AND GEORGIA
(1984-1999)

September 29, 2000

It has been exactly 10 months ago today when the most tragic event of my life happened. I remember embracing him before he left for his bicycle ride and then I got on my bike to take a shorter, slower ride and to be home on time to prepare breakfast for us. But we never had that meal together, he never came back and I am trying to piece my shattered life together.

I am sitting alone in our Georgia retreat on our back porch facing the colorful woods and the babbling brook while listening to a piano concert and trying to hold back the tears, and lessening my heartache by talking to you. On August 7, 1999 I finished my last paragraph with the following words: "Every day that we spend together in decent health is a special gift and we are thankful for it." With sincere gratitude and appreciation for the 50 years with Francis I'll try to continue our life story to the best of my ability.

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Retirement allowed us even more togetherness and freedom. We traveled again to Europe, to Canada, and took a cruise to Mexico. On that trip we were joined by our very good friends, Kay and Jack Jackson. We admired the pyramids. Nagypapa even climbed part of it, exploring the Mayan village and spending time just enjoying the luxurious life in Cancun and on the beaches around it. This was our first and last trip with friends and not just the two of us. After that, we spent the summers (1994,95,96) in Canada. We always loved Montreal and visited it often; we even spent a few New Year's Eves up there with both children. We found on Nun's Island, a suburb of Montreal, an opportunity to rent for a month or two, a beautiful two bedroom, furnished apartment and enjoy the beauty of the woods and the St. Lawrence river, while spending much time in the city of Montreal. We had our bicycles with us and rode some days 20-25 miles in the country, having lunch in a small restaurant in some unknown little French village. The feeling of freedom and togetherness, the beauty of nature and the nearness of the Almighty overwhelmed us. Those were unforgettable days. Just the two of us on our bicycles, with no preplanned travel routes, stopping where and when we felt like it; speeding like mad in some appropriate places, exploring unknown territories and still feeling so secure and safe. I had my husband, my hero, by my side, with God watching over us. Some days we rode into the downtown of Montreal, enjoying and being somewhat overwhelmed by the traffic and the number of people walking on the sidewalks, and admiring the beautiful buildings, churches and monuments.

For three summers in a row, this was our favorite vacation spot and my heart is breaking at the thought that I'll never see those sights anymore with Francis by my side. Life certainly has changed altogether with his passing away.

TIDAL WAVES

September 30, 2000

By 1997 we had begun to realize that even the trip to Montreal, with all its fun, excitement and bicycling, was getting to be too tiresome, and we looked for a less hectic and nearer summer place. On our way to Montreal, we stopped in the North Georgia mountains (only 10 hours driving time from our Florida home), and began our quest for something more suitable for the remaining years of our lives. Providence led us to a gorgeous little private development right in the middle of our National Forests, where 34 log cabins were to be built on a hillside surrounded by woods, with a “gathering place” in the middle. There were already ten couples living there, one friendlier than the next. The price fit our budget and within 24 hours of thinking and decision making, we chose lot number 13 and a one bedroom, one bath, charming little log cabin. A chattering small brook marked the end of our territory and our big covered porch was to face it and the woods. We had never made a serious decision this quickly before, but somehow it seemed to be destined for us. After we deposited the down payment, we left for the last time for our summer place in Canada. It was agreed that on our way back the closing would take place and our new summer retreat would be ready for occupancy. And so it was.

Our last hurrah in Montreal was filled with enjoyment and fun, and at the same time with anticipation for our future summers in Georgia. One of the reasons we chose this particular location was our love of motorcycling. This was real motorcycle country. The winding mountain roads were all in perfect condition and there were 4-5 motorcycle rallies held yearly in the town of Hiawassee (9 miles from our development). We had started biking together the first year of our

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marriage and never stopped enjoying it. At this point Francis owned a 600 Suzuki Bandit and a real racing bike, a Honda VFR 800. We kept one bike in Georgia and one in Florida. Since our retirement in Florida in 1984, we belonged to a motorcycle breakfast group. Most riders were near our age and we met twice a week for breakfast. We rode together for an hour or so (sometimes as many as 34 bikes) and had breakfast in some pleasant restaurant. After that, we either returned home or the two of us went for some additional riding. There were always some women in the group and that made for pleasant camaraderie. Whenever something bothered me or we were depressed, or just looking for fun and excitement, we hopped on the motorcycle and went for a ride. Sometimes just for an hour or two, sometimes for several days.

Buying the cabin in Georgia afforded us with plenty of riding opportunities. No day passed by – weather permitting – without a motorcycle ride. One very special trip took us to “Deal’s Gap”. This place is not only famous for its natural beauty, but known by all bikers as the most difficult ride with over 300 curves on an 11 mile mountain ride. It was breathtaking in every way; the mountains, the woods, the bikers passing by, and the speed with which my 84 year old husband handled the road safely and exuberantly. And I felt like I was an extension of his strong, fearless and healthy body. A memory I will cherish forever. Another summer, in fact our last summer together in Georgia, we rode the entire length of the Blue Ridge Parkway. We were biking for more than a week, stopping at cozy little motels in the mountains and enjoying the gorgeous views and wonders of nature. This was our first trip where the hazardous driving conditions, combined with the speed of riding was too much for us and we ended up on our behinds on the road with the bike lying on its side beside us. Luckily, nothing happened to us or to the bike. We got up a little embarrassed and surprised, checked out the Suzuki, and

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continued our tremendous trip through the Blue Ridge Mountains. The memory of this trip will be with me until I am too old to remember anything at all. As it turned out, our fast decision to buy the summer cottage in Hiawassee Mountain Village was the best choice we could have made. We were surrounded by the most wonderful mountains and by the friendliest and nicest people. Every night Francis and I went for long walks in the woods. Here it was really just the two of us. Georgia was the best place to simply enjoy each other's company. No commitments, no stress, no social pressures, not even family concerns; just the two of us.

One 4th of July, Frank and Marlene and a friend of theirs spent the weekend there camping, sitting around a campfire, roasting mountain trout on the grill, and enjoying family togetherness. Later, Adam and Joy (Marlene's two oldest) spent two weeks with us without their parents, and this, too, was a unique and memorable opportunity for us. As though God had wanted to give us all His blessings in the last years of our life together on this earth. We spent the summers settled in the cool and quiet mountains, enjoying each other, listening to the chatter of the birds and the babble of the creek, and enjoying the surrounding National Forest. We were spending our days motorcycling, planting, walking and remembering the past, while enjoying the peace and serenity of the present. Winters were spent in our Florida home, with a busier social life, entertaining friends, playing bridge, volunteering for hospice and helping out many sick and lonely Hungarian friends in need. Our hearts were filled even more than before with gratitude and appreciation. We felt "our cup runneth over", and we had no concerns about the future, no foreboding of the shortness of time left for us.

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OUR FIFTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY- LOVE NEVER ENDS

(1999)

October 4, 2000

The year 1999 brought many memories and celebrations; Francis's 85th birthday was in August and our 50th wedding anniversary was to be celebrated that summer. As you remember, I told you that in June of 1949, we got married in an official, legal, but secretive way and the next day, we tried to escape Russian occupied communist Hungary. However, we were caught before we reached the border, we were put in jail and released 6 months later, in November of the same year. It was then that we had our church wedding in Szombathely, where my father lived and we had been jailed. While pondering which wedding anniversary date to celebrate, we came to the idea of enjoying celebrations for six months; to make up for the hardships of our first years together, for our honeymoon in jail, in separate jail cells; and at the same time to honor Francis's 85 birthday. And that's exactly what we planned to do. We started our celebration in June in a luxurious mountain resort restaurant in Hiawassee, Georgia. By coincidence, this was where we had celebrated the year before our 49th anniversary, and so it happened that we were seated at the same table and served by the same waitress. We made a promise and a pact with the waitress, that from now on we'd celebrate all the future anniversaries there with her service and sitting at the same table and enjoying the special cake with the lighted candle on top. We were looking forward to many more future celebrations there. Little did we know that there would be no more anniversaries to celebrate together. Never more will I be enjoying any celebration or any meal together with the one and only man I loved and still love.

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While I am sitting on the porch of our cottage in the Georgia woods, my heart is heavy with pain, my tears are freely flowing just as is the little brook surrounding our backyard. At the same time, however, I thank God that He provided us with those unforgettable 50 plus years and that He allowed Francis to exit this world without suffering, without having been ill or handicapped in any way. He always said, “I want to die young” (meaning – be able to do things he had done when he was young). And he did. He left this earth training on his bicycle for the senior Olympics and enjoying his physical fitness and “being young”. God was merciful to him, only I am suffering the pain of loss and loneliness. But I can reconcile that too; just the thought, that if I had gone first, he would have been left alone; he would have had to go through the heartbreak of losing his “better half” and staying back – I can accept my fate and humbly thank God for sparing Francis. I firmly believe that everything happens for some purpose and no matter how tragic, how painful, or how difficult – if we have faith – God will provide the strength. And He also provided us with the most meaningful and wonderful, and definitely unexpected celebrations. First, it was our church in Hiawassee that announced a special anniversary celebration Mass for all who celebrate their 50th. The chapel was beautifully decorated, the 9 celebrating couples were seated in the front, and we repeated our wedding vows together. For the recessional hymn the organist played the anniversary waltz and a gorgeous reception followed the holy Mass. We sure had not expected anything like this to happen and that special blessing lifted our spirits and filled our hearts with gratitude. But that was not our only surprise. Shortly after this special day our bank announced a celebration party for all clients who had been married 50 years or more. The bank’s lobby was again beautifully decorated, a gorgeous cake, with the number 50 on top was served, and all the couples were asked to tell some unique happening related to their wedding. Naturally, our jail experience was the most unique of all. We became the center of

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attraction and were surrounded by friendly, interested people. There was also a photographer taking pictures of each couple and our last photo together is proudly displayed in both of our homes.

This, however, was only the beginning of our celebrations. We decided to take one more trip to Montreal and enjoy our favorite North American city together again. We spent a week there, visiting once more the places we liked so much, walking to “Old Montreal”, to the “French Quarter”, strolling through “St. Catherine Street”, enjoying the “underground Montreal”, and having the time of our lives. We also celebrated Francis’s 85th birthday there (August 19). We had a very pleasant dinner in an outdoor restaurant in the park and topped it off with the best pastries in our favorite little French café. It was like a dream. It all seemed so unreal that after all the hardships, war, jail, deportation, escape to an unknown far away country, after 50 years together, we were still in love, still able to marvel at the natural and manmade beauty of this world, and we felt that we belonged here; we were at home, we were safe, happy and healthy. There sure was much to be thankful for and to enjoy. Now that I sit all by myself and reminisce, my tears are flowing, but my heart is full of gratitude and I thank God for all that I was given; for the wonderful family I am blessed with, for the many friends I have, and for the peace and serenity of our home in the Georgia hills. I know I should just praise God and fill my heart and lips with the feelings and words of thanks. But I can’t overcome the pain of losing the one who meant life itself to me, and being left alone, without him at my side....

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October 5, 2000

It was simply too much for me to continue the description of our celebrations. I had to stop writing and start occupying myself with the happenings of the present. Now I feel again ready and eager to put on paper the wonderful memories of those very special 6 months. Our loving and thoughtful children surprised us with an all arranged and paid for 3 weeks vacation in Vienna and Hungary as our anniversary gift. It was well beyond our expectations and surprised us and touched us. We flew to my brother's in Vienna, where we spent 5 very pleasant days in their home in the Viennese woods. We had a rented car at our disposal and took several day trips to our favorite European city, Vienna. Our enjoyment and enthusiasm is difficult to describe. Francis and I strolled the well known streets of our beloved Vienna, felt completely at home, and marveled again at the gorgeous buildings, parks and statues. We practically knew every store and every café shop in the "Kaertner Strasse" and sampled regularly the delicious pastries there. We were in a dream world that we wished could last forever. However, after 5 days, our next stop was Budapest, where our son had rented a little apartment for us. There was no need for our own car, as public transportation there is one of the best in entire Europe. And in Budapest, even I knew my way around. We spent most of our time visiting with all our friends and relatives. There was practically nobody in our circle of friends and relatives whom we didn't spend some time with. We did not intend to travel overseas anymore and this surprise trip afforded us the opportunity to say our goodbye's to all the people we loved, to visit all the places where we had spent part of our lives and to explore parts of Budapest that we had never seen before. With Francis by my side, there was always something new, something interesting, something unexpected to be seen. I didn't know that Budapest had its sizeable Chinatown, but somehow Francis discovered it. As it

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was with my father, when I was little, so it was with Francis throughout our lives together; everything was exciting, unusual, uplifting, enjoyable and worthwhile. Be it traveling, motorcycling, or just bicycling or taking our 2-3 mile walks in the evenings, I always felt like I was in heaven and my capacity for enjoyment and appreciation had no limit. Maybe that is also true of my capacity for pain, suffering, and loneliness. It overwhelms me today, as did the happiness and gratitude in the past.

But nothing lasts forever. After two weeks in Hungary, we returned for 2 more days to my brother in Vienna and then it was time to return home to Florida. And the Holiday Inn in Bradenton was the scene of our last celebration. Our good friends, the Jacksons, invited us for a very pleasant dinner, after which Francis and I took to the dance floor for a last fling. We felt we were young again, in love as ever, and we enjoyed being in each other's arms and stepping together as one to the rhythm of the music. This was our last hurrah, the end of our 6 month celebration, and we treated it as such. We were ready to settle back into our daily Florida routine and to enjoy in quiet serenity the remainder of our lives together. How could we have known then that this remainder was no more than 10 more days altogether. Just 10 more days!

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THE UNEXPECTED DEATH OF MY KNIGHT – THE DARKEST DAYS OF MY LIFE

(November 29-December 14, 1999)

October 6, 2000

On November 29th, our day started out as always with our bicycle ride in the morning. Francis regularly went on a 15-mile ride, while I was satisfied with the 10 mile route. This way I had time to prepare breakfast by the time Francis got back home. He left first and then I hopped on my bike, too. However, I didn't go further than the end of our driveway, realizing that the sun was shining so brightly and at such an angle, that my visibility was down to zero. I went back to get the darkest pair of sunglasses I had and then ventured on my trip. Even though I was equipped with the best sunglass protection, I lost my way twice while riding around on the well-known roads. But finally, I made it back home, prepared breakfast and waited for Francis to return. By 9 or 9:15, we always sat at the breakfast table, but by now it was past 10 o'clock and I was still alone. I began to worry and pray and called Frank to take the car and check his dad's bicycle route. Perhaps he was hurt or had bicycle problems and needed help. Meanwhile, I got back to my prayers, my heart was racing, my mind played tricks on me, and I waited anxiously. After half an hour of nervous anticipation, I couldn't wait any longer. I called the local hospital and asked if they had an elderly victim of a bicycle accident. Instead of receiving an answer, I was bombarded with questions: What outfit did he have on? Did he have a helmet? What design? By that time I knew he must be there and I was given confirmation of my fears. I called Frank's house, but he was still searching for his dad, so I left a message with his wife and rushed to the hospital. Before I was allowed to see him, I had to fill out several

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papers, assure the receptionist of an existing living will, and was told that he was in a comatose state in the emergency room. I don't even know how I made it in there, all I know is that there he was on the stretcher, with his eyes closed, tubes up his nose and mouth and an IV in his veins. I don't know how long I was there until Frank arrived, and later Marlene showed up. I remember our family doctor entered the emergency room repeating in a loud voice, "That's crazy! That's crazy". He too, must have been in a complete daze. I have no knowledge of how or when they took Francis to the intensive care unit, how we got there and when our family friend – a doctor himself – entered the picture. I was told later that Marlene and I went home to pick up blankets because it was freezing cold in the hospital. I lost all awareness of time and place. All I remember is holding his hand and talking to him, hoping to get some reaction. The doctors informed us that his neck was broken and that he had probably serious brain damage. If he came to, he'd be a paraplegic, never able to speak or breathe on his own, and that his ability to think would be minimal. I had no doubt in my mind that I had to keep the promise I had made years ago, reassuring him that I would never extend his life if he was maimed, tied to a bed or wheelchair, or if his quality of life was diminished. However, I had to be 110% sure that there was no hope left for him; thus I asked for all the possible specialists and consultants and tests to confirm his prognosis. The accident happened Monday morning and we were told that all results would be known by Wednesday evening. I asked for the Hungarian priest to anoint my "one and only" for his last journey; the journey that he had to make alone, the one where I could not accompany him. I sure did wish I could have gone with him and left this earth together. But God had other plans. That fatal Wednesday, Francis had some lucid moments, he answered my questions with nodding and understood when I assured him that all three of us were at his side; that we loved him and would not allow anything bad to happen to him; we'd stay constantly at his side.

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That's what we did. Our two wonderful children stayed all three days with me in the hospital, they held his hand, spoke to him, and were at my side, encouraging and loving me through this entire ordeal. I don't think I could have ever made it through without their help. They and their families were now the only reason for my staying alive. They are the greatest and best gift of my dear husband, the sweet fruits of our love. God bless him for them, and them for being who they are.

October 7, 2000

I had to take a break before I am able to continue with the description of the three darkest days of my life. Wednesday night arrived and I knew that it was the final moment, the last "goodbyes", the last physical touch. A wonderful big, black nurse was in charge. She had to take care of all the details. I'll never forget the empathy, the understanding, and the tenderness with which she performed her duty. The three of us stood there, huddled together, like one stone statue, numb and bewildered while this loving nurse pulled the last plug and put her arms around all three of us. At the same time the soothing melody of Brahms Lullaby sounded through the loudspeaker. As we were later told, a baby was born that moment and it was the custom of the hospital to welcome the newcomer with this song. Just as at the moment of my mother's death, a new life entered this world in the same hospital at the moment of my husband's death. We held each other, overcome by grief and pain, and I sensed that life as I had known it had ended forever. Whatever followed was an unknown, different world, to which I'd have to adjust again, starting anew again as I had done so many times before. But this time it was alone, without the support, the company and love of the man I belonged to, I admired, trusted and loved. I was scared....

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October 8, 2000

The memorial service was planned for Tuesday (St. Anthony's day, which Francis honored every week) the 14th of December in Sarasota, to be performed by our old Hungarian priest. I don't know how we managed to send notices to all our friends and relatives and to make all the necessary arrangements. Frank even succeeded in finding some witnesses to Francis's accident, and now we knew how and where it all happened. He had been cycling in a very quiet condo complex, where there was practically no traffic at all. He could ride fast on his racing bike in preparation for the senior Olympics. There were no moving vehicles on the road, only a black maintenance truck was parked far ahead on the roadside. Francis, riding with that very high sun facing him, never saw the parked truck until he entered the truck's shadow. He couldn't have been more than a good yard away when he spotted the vehicle. Instantly he put the brakes on, stopped the bike, and flew off head first, hitting the back of the truck with his head. He could never have realized what happened. His eyeglasses and a small bruise above the left eye carried the telling signs of the collision. The bicycle didn't even have a scratch on it. He always took very good care of everything that belonged to him and made sure this time, too, that nothing happened to his bike. How often did he tell me how he wants to take care of me now and in the future and make sure nothing bad ever happens to me. And he kept his promise until his last breath. Now, I have to believe that somewhere, somehow, he still watches over me and will help me to get through the most difficult times of my entire life.

My two children tried to watch over me through my ordeal. We sat together for four hours in the crematory while Francis's bodily remains were reduced to ashes. Our nephew, kis Csaba, who spent a school year with us when he was 17, flew

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from England to be present at the internment, which took place December 15th in the yard of the church where Francis and I prayed every Sunday. Csaba could not get to the U.S. on time for the memorial Mass the day before. When we planned for those services, I was concerned that there might not be enough people honoring the man I loved, honored and admired. But I was very mistaken. The church was filled as never before. Friends came from all over. All those whom he had generously helped; his motorcycle buddies, his tennis partners, members of the Hungarian club (where he had been vice president once), Hungarians and Americans, rich and poor, all came to honor him once more and to show their respect and support. According to the priest, this was the largest crowd ever to attend a Mass there. My cousin Manci said the eulogy and Frank addressed in a beautiful speech the Hungarian crowd in their native language. Marlene cited a most inspiring poem of her own, written for this occasion. I just sat there unable to utter a word, dazed, numb, frightened, in the gorgeously decorated church with my eyes fixed on the displayed photo of Francis sitting on his newly acquired motorcycle, his pride and joy, his last bike. I remember standing at the door after the services, people coming to me uttering comforting words, shaking my hand and hugging me. But I wasn't there. As I said it so often then, "I'm on autopilot, a dead body in a flying aircraft." I still feel that way sometimes, but I also know that I must go on and pilot my plane alone until it runs out of fuel and I am ordered to land.

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Our 50th Wedding Anniversary picture
Hiawassee, Georgia 1999



Our log cabin in the Georgia mountains in Hiawassee



TIDAL WAVES

DAD's PAST & FAMILY continued

November 16, 2002

Finally, 3 years after my dear, beloved husband passed away, I have the energy and strength to complete what I began in October of 1999. It seemed to me way back then, that I had all the time in the world to put on paper the story of the life of your Dad, before we met and became husband and wife. I hoped to have his input and to write everything in detail about his childhood and young adulthood. But when his life came abruptly to an end, I was left only with my memories of his stories. I was robbed of his live words, living stories, and his live memories forever. It is not easy to piece together someone else's memories, particularly when this someone was the dearest, the most beloved and most important person in your life. Since he is gone, everything seems worthless and empty and I don't know how I will manage to bring to life the long ago stories of the past of Francis, my "one and only". However, I will try my best for your sake.



Francis with his parents and sister
1916



The family's apartment building –
Francis's home in Budapest, Hungary

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November 23, 2002

Francis was born Ryll, Ferenc, on August 19th, 1914, in Budapest, Hungary, to a well-to-do, upper middle class family. His father, a surgeon, was a Colonel in the Medical Corps of the Hungarian Army at the time. The First World War had just started and he was performing his duties on the Russian front when Alicemama, his wife, gave birth to their second child, an eagerly awaited boy. The family already had a 3 year old daughter, Melanie, and God blessed them 4 years later with a second girl, Alice. Those were extreme times in which to bring up children. The war was raging, food was scarce, and the head of the household was serving his country far away from home, leaving the family alone with all their concerns and struggles. But for Alicemama and Ryll Ferenc, Sr., it was an unexpected blessing to have children, as they had had to wait many years until, already at a somewhat advanced age (mother was 35, father was 57), their first child was born. All that I know about Francis' first 10 years is that they lived in Budapest in a comfortable 6 room apartment, in a 4 story corner apartment house that they owned.

Alicemama's family had come from Szatmar in Transylvania (just as my family had). They were landowners and her father was a pharmacist, working in his own drugstore. There were three children in her family, a brother who died in his twenties, and an older sister, whose daughter was Nanu. She was the one whom my father had wanted to marry after he became a widower, and the one who brought her nephew, Ferenc (Francis), and me together for the very first time. In some way, I feel I owe my wonderful 50 years with my husband, at least

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partially, to her. What I know about Francis' family is that they came originally from Moravia to settle in Hungary, where all the brothers (3 or 4 to my knowledge) chose professional occupations in medicine, law or the military.

When Francis was about 12 years old, he spent a school year in Austria at the School of the Schulbrueders (a catholic school). He always remembered fondly his father visiting him there during the winter of that year. They were walking together in the park in Graz, when young Francis started to feel the unpleasantness of the cold wind. His father took the small hands of his son and warmed them in his big, strong palms. Later, he took one of Francis' hands and put it in the big, warm pocket of his military uniform. This memory lingered in Francis' heart all his life.

December 13, 2002

When Francis was 14, he again spent some time away from the family. His summer vacation in a catholic parish priest's home in Taplanszentkereszt gave him an opportunity to mature and to grow in his faith. Lacibacsi, the parish priest, was a wonderful, loving, understanding man. He owned a motorcycle and encouraged his young friend to ride the bike on his own. It must have been the most thrilling experience for Francis. Within a year, barely 15 years old, he had his own motorcycle and from that year on, he never stopped enjoying and loving his bikes, which he rode until the last days of his life. I joined in his passion of riding and in the thrill of speed. My fondest memories center around the rides we took together. (See appendix).

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However, that year did not only bring the fun of motorcycling and the pleasant vacationing at Lacibacsi's. It also brought great tragedy to young Francis' life. His father, the strong, tall, physically fit and always independent former military officer, had a stroke, and was confined to a wheelchair, depending on others to feed him, bathe him, dress him. His speech became slurred. Just when Francis most desperately needed a male role model; a man to look up to, a man to imitate, a man to discuss matters with; there was no one now but a crippled old person for him. It must have been devastating to see his Dad in this situation and to go through his teens without a father's companionship and guidance. Francis' father died after three years of suffering, in 1933 and Francis graduated from the most prestigious private boy's school "Ferenc Jozsef" at the age of 16, alone, without his father at his side.

December 16

A year later, Francis was enrolled in Pazmany Peter University's law school. However, after just a little more than 4 semesters of studies, his military duty called him to enlist in the Army. In Hungary, at the time, all able-bodied young men had to serve 2 years in the military and then they became part of the reserve forces, ready for activation in case of war or any other emergency. After Francis was released from the military he chose to go to work instead of continuing his studies. However, winds of impending war were already blowing and Francis had to leave his job and again report to the Hungarian Army. He volunteered to become a professional military officer and served with the division of military transportation. There, he was given a BMW motorcycle to perform his duties. He was so proficient at his assignment, that in 1940, he was given the opportunity to become an instructor in the Ludovika Academy (the equivalent of

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West Point). By that time, the war (World War II) was already raging and Francis spent the next two years on the Russian front, in charge of transportation in that part of the world. God spared him from injury and imprisonment and by the end of 1944 he returned for a short leave to Hungary. It was obvious by now that the German forces with their unwilling Allies, were no match for the Russian, American, British, and French allied forces. The Hungarian military was ordered by the Germans to withdraw all the way to Northwest Germany where Francis eventually became a POW of the British Army.

December 18

The military transportation division of the Hungarian Army, where Francis served, was ordered to settle in Celle in Northwest Germany. After a short period of time, however, they were told to withdraw all the way to Denmark, and before the war ended they returned to Celle again, where he was kept in the British POW camp for about a year. I know very little about Francis' life there, but there is a very interesting story connected with those years in Celle.

When the transportation division was ordered to withdraw from Hungary to Germany, the Russian Army was already occupying a big part of our country and everybody tried to hide and save their family treasures and valuables before the communists confiscated and stole everything. Because of this, Francis packed all his family silver in his big military trunk and took the trunk with him to Germany. But when the division was ordered to move to Denmark, he was unable to take all his belongings and had to find a safe place to hide the trunkful of family silver. He decided to dig a trench, put the trunk in it, and to cover it

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with dirt until his return. That, at the time, seemed to be the best way to keep it from being stolen by thieves or harmed by gunfire. By the time the division returned to Celle, the territory was already occupied by British forces and hundreds of holocaust survivors were sheltered in the barracks. Francis reported to the British officer and explained the story of his trunk full of silver, asking for permission to dig it up again. Permission was granted and after a little search for exact location, the trunk was found and opened in the presence of the officer and some curious onlookers from the camp. When they saw all the silver candelabras, plates, cups, saucers and other valuable items, they decided that it could not possibly all belong to just one family and must have been stolen from deported Jews. The British officer was now in a difficult situation and decided that Francis had to prove (if and when he returned to Hungary) that all this silver belonged to him. Francis tried to point out the fact that most pieces had his family's initials on it, the family crest, his parent's names engraved on most items, but his reasoning was not enough to allow him to keep his own possessions. The trunk was placed in the vault of a bank and when the time came, Francis had to return to Hungary without his family's possessions; instead, he had a piece of paper in his hand listing all the silver pieces and the whereabouts of the trunk.

It was October 2, 1946 when Francis stepped on Hungarian soil again. He immediately contacted the British embassy in order to settle the matter. Hungary, however, was now occupied by communist Russia and things were handled differently. Francis was classified "an enemy of the state" and not allowed to own silver or family treasures. Even though the British embassy accepted all the proofs of ownership and gave him permission to ship his trunk of silver back to Hungary, it would never have reached him. The communists

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generally confiscated everything that belonged to non-party members and middle or higher class ranking people. There was nothing to do but leave it in the bank vault in Germany, with the hope that one day in the future, when Hungary might be free again, he or his children could retrieve the lost family treasures.

Up to this point, this story is no different from many family stories of treasures taken and lost during World War II. But this story, as you will see, had a very different and interesting ending. As you already know, on January 12th, 1957, Francis and I escaped successfully with our 2 small children from communist Hungary and arrived in Vienna, to the free western world. All that we possessed was the clothing on our backs and the little jewelry that was left after our common jail experience in 1949. It seemed logical to try and claim the trunk of silver now. But being refugees, we had no money to travel to Germany, no money to pay for the 10 years of safekeeping in the bank's vault, and no money to have the trunk shipped to our destination, the United States. We were just about to give up all hope of regaining our family heirlooms when I remembered again one of my father's sayings, "If you want to achieve something that seems impossible, you have only two ways to go about it. Get help from the person at the very top or the very bottom of the organization that controls what you seek." So that's what we did. I wrote a letter to "Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, Buckingham Palace, London, England, and explained why we, Hungarian refugees with 2 small children and no earthly possessions, were in this impossible situation. I explained that this was caused by a British Army officer's decision, based on the doubts of some onlooking holocaust survivors and asked for Her Majesty's help. Shortly thereafter, a personal letter from the Queens' office arrived and assured us that the Queen would take care of all the financial obligations "from her private purse" and would ship the trunk to

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wherever we requested. Naturally, we gave New York as our, and the trunk's, destination. All the silver now decorates the homes of our 2 children while the letter from "Buckingham Palace" is proudly displayed in my Georgia home. This place is now my permanent home, filled with memories of a wonderful life, yet reflecting the emptiness of living without Francis. Although I will have to walk through the remainder of my life with an empty space beside me, grief is not my only partner anymore. Peace has joined me and hopefully, it will accompany me on my lonesome journey to its very end.

TIDAL WAVES

Francis enjoying his first
racing bike, 1927



Francis' first motorcycle
at age 15

Army Officer World War II



TIDAL WAVES

EPILOGUE

December 20, 2002

Now, when I watch the sunset at the seashore, I think of our life's story and compare it to the dancing pebbles under the ever returning waves. They come and go, washing away and shaping the shore, leaving behind the deposits that add to the beauty of the beach, and adding zest to life. I wonder how many are washed away, and how many get crippled and maimed, and how many can overcome or benefit from its force. Can I do it? I still know, as I always did, that life is ours to live, the world is ours to conquer; but are we able to keep it and cherish it, or will the forces of the waves conquer and destroy us? I do hope and believe that with God's help and our inner strength, we will choose the right road, despite all our difficulties and tragedies.

Bahia Beach, Florida 1995



Riding with our bikers group



TIDAL WAVES

A FELLOW PASSENGER

For 50 wonderful years, I have been my husband's "fellow passenger". I rode with him on our first bike, a 250cc. Puch, in 1949, through the sixth month of my pregnancy. Since then, we have never stopped riding together. We owned and rode several bikes, a Moto Guzzi, two Suzuki's, three BMW's, and a Yamaha. Our last and favorite one, my husband's pride and joy, the best bike he supposedly ever owned, is the Honda VFR; which he purchased at the age of 84.

We all know how men feel about their motorcycles, their very first love. Let me tell you now how a fellow passenger, a loving wife, relates to the pleasure and experience of riding together year after year. In the beginning, some friends tried to dissuade me from getting on a bike by saying, "it's too dangerous" or "you have to be very brave to ride with your husband", or "it must be very uncomfortable", etc... My answer to all these well meaning, poor souls is simply, "You don't know what you're missing". Most of these women probably had the experience of romantic walks in the park or in the woods, enjoying the beauty of nature and the serenity of togetherness. But riding on a bike with the man you love gives you a hundredfold the pleasure, the thrill and the high of any of these experiences. The bike takes you farther away from civilization, gives you more freedom to explore unknown territories, and adds the thrill of speed to the enjoyment; while your bodies are in complete harmony and constant touch. There is a complete trust in one another, and in your partner's ability and skill. The rider has to make decisions about which road to take and how fast to go, while the passenger is under the spell of speed, of nature's splendor, and of togetherness and belonging. It's only the two of you and God. It feels like you are removed from all earthly troubles and difficulties on the wings of the passing wind. It's the never-never

TIDAL WAVES

land of motorcycling, where two people become one while pursuing some spiritual journey on a splendid, awesome, beastly machine.

After my husband passed away, I asked a friend of ours to prepare the VFR to be stored in plain view in our garage as a monument to my husband and as a reminder of our fabulous 50 years of riding together. My friend took the bike out and started the engine. There it stood, alone on its stand, majestic, strong, shining red, in all its splendor; purring, humming, roaring, as if to say, “Hop on and I’ll take you away to places where no sorrow or heartache exists, only your devotion to each other and your love of the bike. I’ll take you where nature and the Almighty alone are the witnesses to your mutual devotedness and to the thrill and the high you get from riding together and from being “a fellow passenger”.

Mary Ryll, Bradenton, Florida – February, 2000

TIDAL WAVES

Francis enjoying his VFR in front of our home-1999



In Georgia with our BMW in 1997



Listen to My Story

{The Story of Francis Ryll told to his daughter, Marlene – 12/3/99}

**For everything
there is a season.
For everything
there IS a reason.
A time to be born
and a time to die.**

**But where I am
there IS no time.
No pain,
no sorrow,
no yesterday
nor tomorrow.**

**And in the now
that IS forever,
I rest in the arms of GOD.
For Whom I lived
Through Whom I loved
With Whom I watch you now.**

**Do not miss me.
Do not cry.
For the shadow of darkness
you feel,
is real
only on your side
of the tree of life.**

**I AM with you.
Think of me
when you hear a bird sing
and the wind sigh.
Think of me
when a biker passes by.
And KNOW this
as real
when you feel
the pain
of my passing:**

**I chose to be born,
I chose my life's story,
and I chose to die
in a moment of glory.**

**But my journey
has not ended,
and your journey
has only just begun.**

**Go out then,
and love one another
as father, mother,
sister, friend and brother.**

**And when you feel
the warmth of the sun,
Know,
that we are ONE.**

Marlene Ryll

News and Events for People **CYCLE SCENE**

MAGAZINE January 2000 Volume 1 Number 8

An old Warrior leaves the Battlefield

By Neale Bayly

A light went out in the world of Motorcycling Dec 1st with the passing of Francis Ryll. Ryll, 85, of Bradenton, a former Lieutenant in the Royal Hungarian Army and retired college professor, was killed in a bicycling accident near his home, training to take part in the Senior Olympics. He is survived by his wife of more than 50 years, Mary, and his two children. Francis and Mary immigrated to the United States in 1957 from Austria, having escaped the communist regime then present in Hungary. He and Mary had previously escaped in 1949 only to be caught and imprisoned for six months.

Francis, who was born in Hungary in 1914, has continuously ridden motorcycles since 1929. At the time of his death he owned a Honda VFR 800 and a Suzuki 600 Bandit. To all who knew him he was a true gentleman who had three loves in his life: his family, his wife, and his motorcycles. He lived a life of vitality and commitment to service and had a wish to die young. Not age wise, but doing "young things". From what I have heard about this remarkable man, I think he accomplished his wish.

Rest in peace Francis Ryll, motorcycling has lost a true friend.

HONDA VFR 800

