

PART ONE

THE HUNGARIAN YEARS

1915–1939

As all beer lovers and connoisseurs are aware of it, one of the five best beers of the world is PILSNER URQUELL of Checkoslovakia. Recently ^{the food and} beer maven of PLAYBOY. went sofar as declaring it THE best beer of the world. If SCHLITZ made Milwaukee famous as the slogan would have it, same can be said probably with more justifi- cation for PILSNER URQUELL about Pilsen.

Pilsen is somewhat less wellknown for the fact that the writer of this book was also made in Pilsen sometimes in the first months of 1915 during the First World War.

My parents lived in a small town in Western Hungary called Sopron on the Austrian border some 60 miles from Vienna. They were courting, or as we say going steady, and decided that they will go to the next Purim Spiel (Purim ball) as Argentinian gauchos and dance the Argentinian Tango called EL CHOCLO. As both of them were great dancers they won the first prize and Dad fell in love with my mother and got married shortly afterward. When the war broke out in 1914 Dad was drafted, as everybody else of the righth age, and was posted to Pilsen with the Austro-Hungarian army. My mother visited him there and if this book will ever see the lighth of print, the rest will be if not exactly history it will be identical the story of the life of one half of the twin boys resulting from that visit.

My mother's obstetrician realizing that she will have twins, told her to go to Vienna to the Allgemeine Krankenhaus - City hospital - for the delivery, in case there should be some complications.

One of the most hilariously funny book^I ever read was the autobiography of a Hungarian aristocrat called Zichy Tivi (Tibor) with the title: Where All the Trouble Started. (Ahol a baj elkezdődött). Well, where all MY trouble started was at the Allgemeine Krankenhaus in Vienna on the 17th of November 1915 about 2PM (yes, a Scorpion yet!) five minutes after my identical twin brother Tibor bushwacked his way into this Vale of Tears making my turn considerably easier I assume. I often wondered ever since, whether this feat of showing me the way, so to say, initiated or triggered a certain amount of macho complex and hankering for adventure in him, which occasionally got me somewhat pissed off or worse, for instance when he heroically volunteered BOTH of us in the Foreign Legion in Tunisia for a mine clearing course, in my absence, which is as everybody knew was the shortest and surest way to get your ass blown off.

As we were born during the First World War my parents didnt have an easy time of it feeding two more mouths, food being in short supply all over and Dad serving in the army. Fortunately our sweet old grampa was well liked in the surrounding villages where he used to go to repair sewing machines occasionally while the Old Battle Ax minded the store at home, selling needles for the sewing machines and such stuff what Grampa had in stock. So Grampa was able to barter his services as sewing machine mechanic for

home baked bread, eggs, home cured sausages and other goodies farmers "grow" beside grains. We were never hungry.

My hometown Sopron was a beautiful little town of some 35,000 people surrounded by lovely pine and other forests at the foot of the Austrian Alps. It's history went back to the Roman times. My friends from Holland visited Hungary and Sopron this past summer in 1992 and I asked them to make me some pictures of the town, and try to find the house where the beer depot was where we lived and where Dad was working as sales manager and head bookkeeper. Lovely people what they are my friends came back hauling a bunch of books about Sopron in Hungarian and German, dozens of pictures including the house where we lived, all meticulously labeled and cross indexed by the boyfriend of my friend who is a very talented graphic artist, master woodworker and interior designer. They even managed to find one of our neighbors who is 80 yrs old and we are corresponding now. It is a strange experience to see all those places again which were part of an era when I still had a family, my own country and what is called a "normal life".

My Dad's family came from Vienna and my mother's from what was in those days part of Northern Hungary and all of it part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Grampa's parents were poor as the proverbial churchmouse. His Dad was a little tailor and Grampa had about a dozen brothers and sisters. I don't remember how many survived. I remember only one of his brothers and one of his sisters. His brother was a barber in Nagykanizsa another little town further South where Grampa was born. Uncle Miklós was a really sweet guy, like Grampa, and whenever he came to visit us he made a big fuss about us kids and

we did the same. He had two very pretty blond daughters who came to visit Grampa a couple of times too and that being the "flapper era" they wore what we call now miniskirts. By then we were old enough to be fully aware of "la différence" and we kept oggling them with great interest which they got a big kick out of.

When my brother Tibor went back to Hungary after we were both "demobbed" from the British army, he looked up both of them and "scored" with both of them too, to make sure that there was no hard feeling as he put it. Grampa's sister was a little old biddy who had a little old whole in the wall grocery store in a poorer part of Sopron. We visited her only under duress to please Grampa and to raid the drawer where she kept the brown sugar.

Grampa had a nice store in those days yet, before he went bankrupt during the Depression, where he sold and repaired sewing machines and bicycles. He was a good mechanic apprenticed in Germany as it was the custom in those days. He told me that he was also qualified to drive locomotives for trains but never actually practiced this trade. Truth to be told he was a lousy businessman more interested in reading books. Grampa had only four years of formal education, his parents being too poor as I said before, to be able to afford more, but he was something of an autodidact. I remember him telling us kids to be sure to read when we are older all those heavy philosophers like Kant, Spinoza, Schopenhauer et al. Ashamed to admit I never did and I'm 100% sure Tibor did not either.

After Grampa went bankrupt during the Depression he made

a precarious living by going to repair sewing machines and whatever he could handle in the surrounding little villages and paying off all his debts to the Big Guys like SINGER, PFAFF etc so that nobody can say that Uncle Brod owes him a cent. (I adopted his name as my "nom de guerre" in the Foreign Legion when all of us from the Axis countries ^{who} volunteered to fight Rommel's Afrika Korps in Tunisia during the last period of the North African Campaign, had to change our names.

He used to get up in the early morning even in winters to take a train to a little village, coming home dog tired in the evening but I never ever heard him to complain in a single word.

We both adored him. There is no other way to put it. I never in my life met another human being as kind, as gentle, as good natured, as patient as Grampa was. And as honest. I dont recall he raising his voice once at either of us and I'm sure we gave him plenty of reasons poking around in all his drawers where he kept all his spare parts, tools and other neccessities of his trade.

If he was a fanatics about anything it was about honesty and integrity. If he told me once he must have told me - or rather us two - ^{hundred times} "if I'd have to chose between you two becoming rich and a ganef(crook) or poor but honest I would much rather have you poor and honest."

My Dad's family was much better off financialy as Grampa's. "Solid middle class". His Dad was a grain merchant in Sopron. I dont remember him well as he was by then very old. I see him sitting in his armchair by the ceramic oven they had in those days smoking his long churchwarden pipe and letting out a yell occasionally for his

wife: Caroliiiiiiin!! Carolin was a sprightly little biddy whose mouth was "offside" probably the result of a stroke. Visiting them was another of our un-favourite undertakings making it as short as we could. There wasnt even any brown sugar to compensate us.

Dad had two sisters and two brothers. One of the sister, Aunt Frieda was a "Melancholy Dame" who committed suicide I dont remember why. The other sister, Aunt Máli, was a happy go lucky gal who lived with her husband in Pozsony which was in the Northern part of Hungary which became Bratislava after the war belonging to what was till recently Checkoslovakia, now being the Check part. They had a nice cosmetic and perfumerie shop and every time Aunt Máli came to visit us she was loaded down with all kinds of nice smelling stuff for my mother and after shave lotions and shaving creams for Dad. She was always in good mood and was a lot of fun. We kids liked her.

Dad's younger brother by some five years was a handfull as a kid from what I heard, often in some kind of trouble with the other kids, mostly as the result of antisemitic remarks. He was a real scrapper who gave as good - or better - as he got. By the time I knew him he had a little shop for women's clothes, by little I mean that the whole town was little and so were the shops. He was also a lousy businessman but not for the same reason as Grampa, but because he was still basically the same scrapper as when he was a kid. When a woman gave him a hard time not being able or willing to make up her mind Maxi considered reasonable, he told her to get lost and NOT to come back. Dad told me once

laughing, after having visited Maxi, that he literally kicked a woman in the ass and out of the store! Being a small town these kinds of stories got around pretty fast and where not exactly the best P.R. for Maxi's store.

Dad's other brother who was some five years older was a very well liked and respected doctor (G.P.) in a small town close to Budapest. I heard once Dad telling my Mom that Zsiga(Sigmund) could make a lot of money in Budapest but he is a humanitarian who works in that little backwater because "they need me more". Uncle Zsiga was a great swordsman in BOTH senses and according to the law of averages he was caught with his pants down occasionally, mostly with some other guy's wife. As in those days duels were "de rigueur" in those cases Uncle Zsiga fought more than his share invariably slicing up his opponent but never suffering a scratch. I always take my bag with me and sew them up "pro bono" he said. When he was about sixty his luck ran out. He was caught "in flagrante delicto" with somebody else's wife again and as by that time duels were outlawed with the exception of officers he had to marry the lady after being divorced by her husband. He never heard the end of THAT from my Dad! Uncle Zsiga was very fond of my mom and when her doctor said that she should have her gallbladder removed Uncle Zsiga took the first train and came to see her. After examining her closely he said: Mancsi(Magda) they will take out your gallbladder over my dead body! He put her on a diet and in a couple of months Mom was OK. During that visit we told him that

we're going to join a fencing class in school. In Hungary fencing is like baseball here. When he got back he sent us two fencing kits. Uncle Zsiga must have been at that time sixty years old but he was still as slim, trim and ramrod straight, carrying his walking stick with its silver handpiece, wearing the same pinc-nez glasses he wore when I saw him the first time years ago and the same neatly trimmed salt and pepper moustache and brushcut hair likewise. And he still exuded the selfconfidence sending the same old message: Dont fuck with me!

When in the Foreign Legion we both had ringworm of the beard (tinea barba) and the idiots in the medical department didnt know how to handle it, we wrote to Uncle Zsiga who told us how to get rid of it. When the Hungarian Nazis started to deport the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz Uncle Zsiga shot himself full of morphin going out in style.

As I mentioned Dad was working as combination sales manager and head bookkeeper in the depot of the brewery, which was located on the outskirts of the town, which entitled him to a nice apartment and a horsedrawn buggy which we kids enjoyed a lot specially when we were allowed to drive the horses. We had a whole bunch of horses in the depot to draw the waggons going from restaurants to restaurants and bars in town. We both hanged around in the stables a lot, riding occasionally one of them from the stables to the buggy and helping to harness them up. This helped us a great deal when later in the Hungarian army we both served in the machine gun company. Tibor with the "Fast moving unit", read horse buggies, Hungary being forbidden by the Versaille Armistice after the IWW to have motorized units, and myself with the unit which had ponies to carry the guns. The way we decided who will go to which outfit

was by taking into consideration that Tibor had the harder job in the silk factory as dye and finishing apprentice while I had the cushy job as designer. Tibor started to show his streak of macho complex in that outfit, by always volunteering to harness up the horses with the lousiest reputation and drive those with the hardest mouth. He told me once laughing he overheard the Topkick saying to another Sergeant: where did this fucken little Jew learn to handle horses like this? Actually I did not do badly myself with the ponies either. Once I had to put the pack saddle on a pony which had the cute habit of blowing his belly up by taking a deep breath when it came time to pull tight the cinch, and sure enough he pulled it on me too, but hey, I was no tyro at the game! I gave the nag a good stiff kick in the belly with my knee, deflating the little bastard in a hurry. What I didnt realize was that my Sgt was standing behind me who busted out laughing and told me, Fuchs you are not supposed to do that but this time it is OK. Next time make sure I'm not standing behind you if you want to kick the fucken nag! -

But to get back to Dad, I assume he was paid quite decently because we had a comfortable middle class life. Incidentally, he too was a stickler for honesty. All the employees at the depot got a generous beer allowance of course only the real boozers could do credit for. Dad drank an occasional bottle of beer, Mom did not like beer at all and we kids were of course not allowed to drink, so most of our allowance was unused at the end of the week. The other employees who had any left over either sold it or gave it to friends. Dad insisted that one of us take it back to the ice cooled

storage room where the big ice making machine was also located making those big blocks of ice we sold as a sideline for the ice-boxes we all had in those days instead of refrigerators like now. Dad was a very neat, ~~a~~well-groomed and well dressed guy. One of his cronies was, Schwartz Pali, the best tailor in town, again keeping in mind that we're not talking here about Savill Row class. He was a very good small town tailor. And we hated his his roly-polly guts because he never made a half decent anything ^{for us} - they'll outgrow it anyway. For Dad he did his best every time, charging him little more then the price of the material, but our stuff he gave to one of his flunkies who invariably made a mess of it. I still remember two of his chef d'oeuvres to this very day. One was a navy blue jacket for my sunday best and another ~~a~~sport jacket with pants - in plural. The problem with the navy blue jacket turned out to be the righth shoulder which would perfectly fit a cripple. At every fitting Pali bácsi- Uncle Paul - would make big crosses with his tailor chalk on my shoulder, meaning MORE padding. By the time the shoulder was on the same level as my left one there must have been three inches of wadding in it.

With the sport suit there was another kind of problem. As Pali stocked nothing but the best fabrics, with prices to match, - it keeps the riff-raff away, as he so delicately put it, the suit was made of that classic Harris Tweed they still make in the same tan shade to these days. The problem were the pants, in plural. Pali and Dad wanted a regular pair of longpants, but we both insisted on "plusfour" - golf pants we call them now - which was the

rage in those days. To break the deadlock Pali got a brainwave and said he will make both. As we always got the same clothes in the same time, this meant two sortcoats and four pants and as it turned out Pali didnt have enough material for all that. So instead of the dimbulb making ONE pair of ^{decent} pants for both of us of whatever style we both ended up with a stovepipe for longpants and an ersatz plusfour reaching just to our knees instead of midcalf as they were supposed to. It goes without saying that we refused to wear either of them because they not only looked lousy but they were uncomfortable to boot. This pissed off Dad royally because although he must have known that we have a valid point he also knew that his crony screwed up another job for us.

Dad teached me something about things in general and wearing apparel in particular which served me well all my life. Always buy the best you can afford and take very good care of it. On the long run the best will not only turn out to be cheapest, but it will look better, feel better and probably outlast two cheap ones as well. Dont buy two cheap pair of shoes. Buy one good pair, spend a little more on shoe trees and shine them at least once a week. It will not only make them look neater but the polish will make them last longer too. I must have taken his advise to heart because my former wife told me once when I was shining my shoes, you take better care of your shoes than me. AS by that time it was obvious that my marriage was kaput I picked up her cue and told her that my shoes take also better care of me than she does. This went over as the proverbial lead balloon.

Dad was practicing what he preached. I never saw him to put a pair of pants back in the closet without giving them a good brushing. And he always pressed his own pants as Pali taught him to do. Sorry to admit that I never followed in either of his footsteps. But as I said I followed his advise regarding the care and feeding of shoes. I've a shoe tree in every pair and a wooden one too, not one of those lousy plastic or metal ones. Yuck.-

Being sandbagged in our "formative years" as they say, by Grampa's and Dad's sense of almost exaggerated honesty and integrity handi-capped me all my life for better or for worse.

All in all we kids had what can be called a "happy childhood" - if there IS such a thing, at least as far as our family life was concerned. Dad was a good Daddy specially in our younger years and Mom was a really sweet gal with a "warm jewish heart" giving us all the love any kid could want. What I was specially admiring of in both them, when I was old enough to realize this, they NEVER ever played favourites between us two although it is hard to imagine that they really loved both of us EQUALLY well, different as we were in spite of "looking like two eggs". I was what we call now an introvert and Tibor an extrovert. "Erwin is the quiet one and Tibor the mile a minute talker". "Erwin is the neat one, Tibor is the sloppy one." Etc.

I remember tableaux's Norman Rockwell could have painted. Mom had a beautiful grand piano I was reminded of recently when I passed a piano store and there stood a nice black one with the same brand name : Schweighofer. Now, this is no Steinway but it cost a nice hunk of money for Grampa he could ill afford. Mom played well enough for "poptunes" and Dad played very well the mouth organ of which he had quite an assortment from a 4 inch one to a foot long, and we kids sang, sort of. Sometimes Dad did the "Circus" with us kids, hoisting us up on his shoulders in turn, Dad holding us by the ankle, we kids being scared shitless but enjoying it nevertheless like crazy.

Dad was an enthusiastic gymnast from his earliest youth as was the tradition in Sopron which had the oldest gymnastic club in Hungary. There were no "youth gangs" in those days and all the kids hanged out in the club to work out on all the gear like rings, paralell bars, trapeze, horse etc. Dad has shown me a big scar inside his lower lip the result of another kid yanking him off the trapeze when he didnt ^{let} the other kid use it fast enough. The floor was covered with saw dust and Dad got a mouthfull of it mixed with his blood. His Mom and Dad couldnt understand why Dad didnt want to eat supper -an unusual happening. Dad couldnt tell the truth because he was playing hookie from school in the club, which he did often. From what I heard he was no scholar to put it politely. Dad was still going to the club a couple of times a week when he was sixty. If I remember correctly he was not taller then I am, 170cm, but a whole lot beefier and heavier boned. I'm lighth boned like my Mom. Dad had a very short fuse which got him often in trouble specially if somebody made some antisemitic remark. which in Hungary came with the territory. Once he came home when I was already in highschool and ^{said} sheepishly at dinner: tomorrow I have to go to Court. Mom gave him a funny look and Dad said, I was riding the tramway and a young punk told an old jew: get off the seat you stinking jew (büdös zsidó), so I grabbed him, threw him off the tram, jumped off after him and beat the shit out of him. All Mom said was: again?

With all this shortfusedness Dad was also a soft touch. I never saw him pass a beggar ^{without} giving him something and it was a rare traveling salesman who didnt score. Dad had a bunch of books in the bedroom on the shelves but I never saw him read anything beside a local paper. Once I asked him why is he buying all these books from traveling salesman if he doesnt read them. They too must make a living, he said. In restaurants he regularly overtipped. Again not for showing off, in that little town everybody knew him. Mom asked him once when he again overtipped, why? I'm thankful I can tip HIM, not the pther way round.

We kids "chose" our parents and grandparents from both side with great foresigth and terrific luck, which served us well all our life. They were all incredibly healthy. My grampa was never sick a day in his life. I dont think he ever had as much as a cold. When I saw him the last time he was seventy two and had all his teeth and never saw a dentist in his lfe. He had a full head of hair like me but always worn very short since his days in the artillery as a young buck. He wore glasses for reading but his hearing was as good as ever. Gramma was a Battle Ax but also healthy as a horse all her life. We couldnt stand her slobbering kisses and she used to complain to Mom about it that we always bring for Grampa pipe tobacco or a new pipe sometimes, but never bring anything for her. Mom never admitted it of course but the body language was clearly showing that she didnt like her either but loved Grampa as we did. - My Dad had occasionally a "cold" and when he did he retired to the bedroom with a pot of Glühwein (mulled wine) and aspirin

told us to keep out, closed the door - and next day he was OK. Mom was not "robust" being fine boned like me but also in good health. She had trouble occasionally with her teeth but fortunately I inherited Grampa's more and beside an occasional cavity I've very good teeth and almost all of them still. Dad was very health conscious and learned the basic from his brother Zsiga. Every six months he inspected our teeth and if he saw a little black dot we were sent to the dentist, which we hated of course as in those days there were no "local" for drilling cavities or even for root canals. Fortunately due to Dad's six monthly inspections we never needed any of those "nasties". So, as I said we had a good family life.

The "outside world" was another story. Hungary was a rabidly antisemitic country since generations with occasional programs which claimed one of my great grandfathers too. This charming tradition was imported from Poland which in turn imported it of course "from Russia with love." We jews were second class citizens officially. We were "persona non grata" at the military academy (Ludovika Akademia), we were not allowed to join the police force in any status, we were not allowed to farm, and there was a strict quota - numerus clausus - for the universities, specially for medical school and law in proportion with our number to the rest of the population which was about 1% in my time as out of ten million people in Hungary there were some 800,000 jews. No jew was ever admitted to the University of Forestry and Mining which was in my hometown Sopron, whose students with their fancy padded black

jackets with their colourful patches made by their girlfriends, were the first ones to instigate a little periodic jew bashing in the town. I can ^{also} still hear the little hooligans chasing us in the street throwing horse shit at us and singing their charming little ditty: Zsidó, seggéből iszó! (jew drink from my ars).

One of my cousins from my mother's side by the name of Miklós Kuttner was a very talented violonist in Budapest who won the first prize on the Conservatorium of Music (the Hungarian Juilliard in those days) which was a Stradivari violin. His friends took it away from him and broke it on his head! Charming cultured people what they were their artistic inclinations not withstanding.

After the first four years of elementary school which we did in the Jewish school of the Jewish community like all jewish boys we enrolled in a highschool called REAL (pronounced:RE-AHL) which lasted eight years with a curriculum equivalent here to B.Sc. We had four years chemistry, four years physic, four years biology, four years trigonometry, mathematic up to and including calculus, eight years art, two foreign languages, both four years (German and French) four years Hungarian history, four years world history, four years Hungarian geography, four years world geography and even one year philosophy in the last year. I wanted to become a surgeon ever since I was very young but due to the quota system that needed a miracle. As I realized that this dream is just that I was a mediocre student to put it politely. I just studied enough to pass except for the two subjects what interested me, chemistry and biology.

Generally speaking the first four years of highschool were rather happy times. It was an easy going outfit with nice, competent and caring teachers. Our art teacher, Jozsef Horvatah, was a world-class aquarell artist(water colour) who won several first prizes in Paris and who has now his own museum in Sopron.

He was close to seven feet tall and when he walked it looked like he was walking on stilts, the more so as he had a trick knee left over from his days as a "rassler" when young. We called him The Long One (Hosszú in Hungarián). He made the rounds to inspect our drawings to correct them and critic them with appropriate remarks. Seems like art teachers are a happy contented lot in general and as he was a world class aquarell artist who won several first prizes in Paris, he seemed to be content with his lot in life. He was a good natured easy going guy which didnt keep him caning an occasional kid - good naturedly - who cut up in his class. He chose a can from his collection, walked over to the victim saying: bend over your board Pista(pron. Pishtah, for Steve)

Whack, whack, behave yourself!

He used to come over to my board too and looking over my "art" asked me with a benevolent smile: Fuchs... do you LIKE drawing?! Yes Professor (which was actually true enough). It sure doesnt LOOK like it kid!... walking away. He was easy on us no talent guys who tried to do our best but he was hard on the guys like my school buddy Tham Pista, who later was also my boss in the design atelier of the silk factory, where we both worked after our graduation from school. Pista was a terrific graphic artist and cartoonist who did the cartoons for the first page of my Diary

before we left for the LegionThe Long One stopped at his board much more often than the rest of us and every time he let Pista have it from both barrels: Thaaaam, did you go NUTS?! Cant you seeee that greeeen?! and that yelllllloooow?!

The Long One met me once during a walk when I was already working as textile designer in the silk factory and friendly guy what he was, he stopped of course to ask me what am I doing now? Professor you'll never believe me if I tell you! So tell me anyway. I'm a textile designer in the silk factory. Well how'bout THAT he said laughing, so I did teach you a little after all!

He jackknifed his seven feet down to my 5'7", shook my hand, wished me good luck and walked away on his stilts.

Another of our favourite Professor was Uncle Kóbi - dont even remember his real name, probably Jacob - who teached chemistry, whose son incidentaly worked for my Dad and got him fired for embezzling money, the second bookkeeper in a row. Uncle Kóbi was the only Jew on the faculty as far as I remember, but they had to take him on because he was also the boss of the chemistry lab of the town and by far the best qualified for the position. Uncle Kóbi was a sweet good natured Mensch who got me interested in chemistry specially during the afternoon lab courses we could join if we wanted. We had a very well equipped lab due to Uncle Kóbi being able to pull strings with the town bureaucracy. We conducted all kinds of interesting experiments. It was a lot of fun. Uncle Kóbi had a cute trick in class which never failed to bring the house down, regardless how many time he pulled it due to his perfect timing worthy of a stand up comic. When he called up a kid he knew was a dimbulb in chemistry, after he asked his question he feigned sleep.

He closed his eyes, stucked his tongue between his lower teeth and lower lip, holding his baldhead up by leaning on his elbow, and his open palm. After what he felt was a suitably long silence with nothing emanating from the kid's mouth, he suddenly bellowed: LOUDER!!!! I cant hear you! When the whole class busted out laughing Uncle Kóbi had a happy grin on his face like a stand up comic who just scored with one of his jokes.

Our third favourite was our gym teacher. Come to think of it in a town like Sopron where gymnastic was a tradition since generation, a gym teacher should have been a monster not to be liked. His name was Gruber Gyula and we called him Gyulus too as our art teacher. He reminded me a lot of our Uncle Zsiga, doctor and great swordsman. The same ramrod straight posture and walk, the same walking stick with a silver head, the same well trimmed brown moustache and brushcut hair. He was not as young or friendly and outgoing as Cserjóska but a nice guy anyway. He didnt flinch either from using the can if he felt it was needed to reform a kid who was cutting up once too often. He called the kid over: bend over and touch your toes kid. Whack, whack and the kid was left go, yelping and holding his ass. No hard feeling from either side. In those days NO parent would DREAM of complaining to the principal about an occasional well deserved caning and I dont see that it made criminals out of any of us. Au contraire. We were made aware of it that there ARE things we are NOT allowed to do.

It was customary for us kids to dress up in costumes for Xmas called St. Nicholas Day in Hungary and visit our teachers bringing presents for those we liked and whacking on the ass with a switch ^{for those} we didnt, reversing the role of St. Nicolas who brought presents for the good kids and whacks with a switch on their ass for the bad ones. The teachers had presents waiting for us in turn. Dad supplied all the beer we needed and other presents were home made cookies, cakes, oranges, home made candies etc. We had a lot of fun. I think it ~~was~~ an era when being a teacher was a lot more pleasant and enjoyable then now. Teachers were respected if not loved both by most of the students and their parents, at least in Europe. I dont know about here in America.

One year I was chosen to play the role of St. Nicolas and one of the teachers I remember ^{we} were visiting was our gym teacher bringing him lots of goodies and he was very generous with our presents in turn as we knew he will be from past exeprience. He was not as outgoing as Cserjóska but there was no doubt he liked us kids. So ^{after} we gave him all the presents we brought I went into my spiel as St. Nicolas disguising my voice as all of us did taking our mask etc off before we left. It seems I did alrigh because Gyulus was genuinely surprised when I took my gear off exclaiming, Well, I'll be damned! I would have never guessed it's YOU, the quiet and serious kid all the time!

Gyulus had a mole on his righth cheek which must have turned into a melanoma later because when Tibor went home after the war he heard that Gyulus died at the age of sixty from a skin cancer on his cheek. Another of our Professors Tibor met by chance during a walk was our Professor of French Lit who didnt think a lot of our linguistic ability. I think he was also a closet antisemite

which was not exactly a rarity in Hungary as I mentioned. Tibor walked straight up to Professor Böröczfy and greeted him in fluent French. Professor Böröczfy just stared at him in obvious surprise before he blurted out: Zut alors Fuchs! Où t'a appris Français quand même? When Tibor told him, continuing in French of course, that he is a former sergeant of the Légion Etrangère Böröczfy was duly impressed for both reasons, that he spoke fluent French and that he could hack it in the Legion well enough to become a sergeant!

We often went on excursions to other parts of the country which was famous for something or other, like the ceramic factory in Herend which made worldfamous tea sets and other similar stuff, with a special multicoloured finish which changed colour according to how the light struck it which process was a wellkept secret. I still see some of them in the posh department stores here. Then after the first four years the first "tragedy" of my young life struck. I was fourteen at the time and my Dad was transferred to Szombathely, a similar size of town as Sopron, further to the South. I was a "sensitive kid" and I was heartbroken to become separated from Grampa and my schoolfriends. I remember crying so much that my parents got worried. As if all this wouldn't have been bad enough the school was also a lot stricter with a completely different atmosphere, less friendly, less easy going and all around less fun.

My worst subject was always mathematic and algebra even in Sopron, but I managed to pass my exams without trouble. In the new school the roof fell in on me. (On Tibor too who was not any better student than I was and likewise hated math.) The new math professor literally terrorized us kids. In those days slapping and caning kids came with the territory of course but most teachers specially in Sopron used both sparingly. First of all the standard of this new teacher was much higher. Incidentally his name was Szomorú which means SAD in Hungarian and take my word for it he not only made us sad but scared shitless to boot. He had stomach ulcers which he acquired as prisoner of war in Siberia during the IWW. As if all this wouldnt have been bad enough he

an amateur "rassler" in his younger days and built like one. He used to slapp us kids around with the fastest righthand in the business. He had this cute trick of keeping his righthand in his pocket while watching the current victim writing on the blackboard some equation or other and the next thing we knew ^{CLACK and} the kid was falling off the podium! I hated mathematic and ^{had} everything that anything

to do with numbers and the last thing I needed was this MANIAC in a new school where I had no friends and where I was "The new kid on the block" and we all know how clanish kids can get. And we were jewish to boot, never a recommendation in Hungary.

What saved me from flunking my final exam in my last year in 1934 and thus forfeiting my Diploma or at least repeating the class - too horrible to contemplate - was that the daughter of this maniac, who was an ugly little dumpling, had a crush on me and wanted to play tennis with me,

Needless to say I was not in the position to decline the honour. I put my pride in my pocket and graduated, but barely.

The fact that we were identical twins was a constant subject for some kind of circus. Even our grandparents were not able to decide who is who if only one of us visited them. "WHO are you" was their first question. In school it was of course the same story only more so. Fortunately for the teachers our abilities - if any - were the same, but some of teachers didnt want to take chances and questioned BOTH of us in turn just to be sure that we didnt pull any fancy trick on them. This "looking like two eggs" was sometimes to our advantage sometimes not.

When we moved to Szombathely we realized that all the boys were carzy about planes and flying because the largest military airfield was on the outskirts of the town. They knew all the planes and wanted to be fighter pilots and fly the Star of the Show, the FIAT MACCHI. That the pilots got all the best looking girls in town didnt hurt either - for the future. They had the fanciest uniforms, with dress daggers etc which they wore with great panache. We knew nothing about all this stuff so to get accepted faster we started to read up on all this and I realized that aerodynamic is fascinating stuff. Szomorú who also taught physics not only math noticed that I seem to know about it more than what is in the textbooks and to make up for being a moron in math his question at my final exam was about aerodynamic. The only trouble was that he asked the righth question of the wrong twin, Tibor who barely managed to muddle thru while my question was: Telephones and microphones about which I was barely able to muddle thru. Szomorú realized of course what was the problem but by that time it was too late.

The saving grace of this accursed school were three of the professors. Our sweet, funny art teacher, our gymclass and fencing teacher and our chemistry professor. Our art teacher was from the North of Hungary with their cute accent which make the Hungarian "A" like in awful, come out like "A'" in Alex. He was a ^{tall} handsome man about fifty, with a little pouch, a beautiful brown beard and a twinkle in his eyes. As he had a terrific sense of humour and never ever lost his temper or patience with us kids we pulled all kinds of dumb stunts on him. The school was brand new, we were the first inmates, and the art atelier had all the latest conveniences, with curtains to pull between the rows of drafting tables etc. We had those stools with a round seat hollowed out ^{in the middle} for more comfortable sitting. Gyulus (for Gyula) used to make the rounds between us kids to critic our masterpieces and correct them with appropriately funny remarks. One of the kids had his watercup filled with water, waiting for Gyulus to come around. When he did the kid was standing respectfully behind him waiting for Gyulus to sit down, holding his cup in his hand. Between the time it took to Gyulus to "get in position" and actually sitting down the kid poured some water in the hollow of the chair! Gyulus jumped up of course and with a wicked grin on his face said: so you little snotnose you think you are so smart huh? He took the cup and poured the rest of the water in the hollow of the stool saying: *Ülj le drága kis fiácskám!* (Sit down my darling little son!) Needless to say this brought the house down as they say in show biz. How can you NOT love a guy like this? Another time when the curtain was drawn between the table of my school buddy Horowitz Muci, who was later "instrumental" in getting me to Israel for my first Aliya, and the next row of table, Muci noticed the curtain bulging in front of him with

the obvious outlines of somebody's ass. Muci was something of a cut-up in school and also had a rep for being a competent brawler in town not exactly approved for the son of the rabbi, which he was. Muci considered that outline of an ass too good to miss, hauled off and gave it a terrific whack with his open palm. The curtain parted and Gyulus sticking his bearded face thru asking: Huruwitz, te hárag-szol rám?! (Horowitz are you angry at me?!) Gyulus was also playing the cello in the school band. Whenever at rehearsal his part was due he hushed the whole crew: QUIET! This is my SOLO: Voom, voom.

Our chemistry professor was about thirty five, a tall lanky fellow, very easy going and good natured and something of a World Citizen who was a fanatical follower of IDO the other Esperanto. He taught IDO after school and anybody who wanted to get on his good side had better to join. As chemistry was one of my better subjects, as I mentioned, I didn't have to but did anyway as I liked the guy and I thought what the hell one of those days it might come in handy. I forgot his name.

Our gym teacher was a real hotshot. He was also teaching fencing of course as it was usual in Hungary and he was a great swordsman in both sense. He was a handsome blond guy, well built of course and a big hit with the gals. Twice a week he was holding gym class for women in the afternoon to make a few extra pengő. (The Hungarian money). In these instances he used to wear skintight white pants for our gym class. The above mentioned Horowitz Muci was a terrific fencer who could fence rings around Cserjóska, which was our name for him "abbreviated" from his real name Cserjessy József. One day before fencing class when Cserjóska was again wearing his tight white pants, clearly outlining his family jewels, Muci told

me, watch the fun today. I'm going to whack Cserjóska's balls. It was of course strictly against the rules in fencing to hit below the waist, but accidents do happen, right? Cserjóska took all of us kids in turn for a few minutes and when he got to Muci he asked him half in jest half sarcastically, so what are you gonna TEACH me TODAY Horowitz? Oh, I'll just wait for an opening said MUCI. As the classic fencing stance leaves the genitalia wide open in harms way Muci didn't have to wait "for an opening" long. After a few minutes of the usual warming up feints etc he gave a slight glancing cut with the end of his sabre which has a slight knob on it ^{to Cserjóska's balls.} Cserjóska let out a "primal scream" and catapulted himself in the air a good five feet swearing like a Hungarian topkick, while Muci whipped off his mask apologizing profusely and sounding VERY sincere too. -

from Vienna

Once a professional skating team came visiting Sopron which included a very well known lady skater who was also gorgeous and built like most lady skaters are. Cserjóska decided to take the gym class to the show. We were all standing around the skating ring waiting for the show to start. Soon enough the skaters started to come out from the dressing room taking off their coats at the edge of the ring. When Cserjóska saw the lady Star of the Show coming to the edge of the ring to take off her lovely furcoat he RACED over there like a madman succeeding to hold her coat. The gal was highly amused of course and noticing that Cserjóska, big macho what he was, wore only a light pullover, his tight cotton pants and no headwear of any kind with the cold Hungarian winters, she asked him whether he isn't cold? Cserjóska was not from Sopron where almost everybody spoke German also, he put both of his hands on his heart a troubadour indicating that his heart keeps him warm! The gal got a big laugh out of it and Cserjóska must have

had a worldclass hard on the way he was learing at the gal with a lecherous grin on his face.

Cserjóska used to call me the equivalent of Herr Doctor in German because I was in charge of first aid of the soccer team of course and also during excursions of the class to other parts of the country as I mentioned. He also put me in charge of collecting and keeping the fees for the private fencing classes because as he said "jews have a good head for handling money". If he would have ^{only} known the sad thruth and the saw that exceptions make the rule stick.

Ever since I can remember I wanted to be a surgeon. As I knew that getting to medical school in Hungary needed a miracle and going to another country we didnt have the money I was a very mediocre student in highschool. I was pretty good in the couple of subjects which interested me like chemistry and biology the rest I studied enough only for passing to the next year's class which I always managed to do. Tibor also. Neither of us was in any kind of trouble during the eighth years, as a matter of fact "Personal Conduct" was the only "subject" where our grades were "Exemplary". However at the second half of the last year of the eighth years my luck came very close to running out. As I mentioned before antise-mitism was endemic in Hungary and the officer corp was consistently showing good example and needles to say their kids grew up with the same attitude. One day I got into an argument about something with the son of a Colonel and he called me ^{the} traditional and time honored "stinking jew" - bűdös zsidó - and although I was generally speaking a very easy going and good natured guy - as I still am - I long ago learned from Dad that THESE are figthing words! We were standing at the top of the stairs.

I slugged him and he went stumbling down the steps. There is an old law that drunks and fools have their own god watching over them and fortunately for BOTH of us no serious harm was done to him.

Nevertheless the Principal called me in of course ^{to} chew my ass out asking me why of all people I've to pick the son of a Colonel to tangle with in my last year and making it perfectly clear that if it wouldnt be for the fact that we both had a spotless record AND that it is the last year he would have had no choice but to kick me out. I didnt doubt for a second that what he said was god's truth because in a feudal country like Hungary the Army officers are god's Chosen People and for a "stinking jew" to knock the son of a Colonel on his ass was Lèse Majesté' with a vengeance!

While we lived in Szombathely grampa came periodically to visit us of course, as he missed us as much - or more - as we missed him. So one day our doorbell rings and I hear my Mom letting out a scream: APUS! (Pron: "A" like in awesome, "PUS" like in push) meaning something like Daddy. I rush to the door and Mom is standing there white as a ghost and shaking and grampa is standing there WITHOUT his handlebar moustache neatly waxed as it was custom in those days and also without his neatly trimmed BEARD but with a big grin on his face instead! Nobody EVER saw grampa without shrubbery. He had it ever since he was a young buck in the artillery and as Mom later said I just couldnt figure out WHAT is wrong with him? My first reaction was that something TERRIBLE must have happened to him! Grampa couldnt see what all the big excitement was about?! I thought it will make me look younger, said grampa.

I guess he must have been about sixtyfive. He got strict borders from all of us to start growing everything back in a hurry and of course he complied and sweet guy what he was he also apologized for all the excitement he caused.

After all the commotion died down, caused by Grampa's missing shrubbery my Mom told Grampa we've very good soup would she like some? Grampa said of course yes, as he always did for good Hungarian food. So Mom brought him a big plate of soup. Tasting a spoonfull he said, Mancsi, soup and kisses I like only HOT and sent it back. My Mom's official name was Magdalena, which was abbreviated in Hungarian to Magda (like in Magda GABOR). Thisⁱⁿ turn became in the diminutive Magdi or Mancsi. (Like James-Jim-Jimmy).

Grampa loved the good heavy simple Hungarian food and the Old Battle Ax was a good cook, that much I must admit. He also religiously drank ONE glass of good red wine, Sopron was famous for. He was seventy six I saw him last time and he never put on a pound - or rather a half kilo - of weight since I knew him. When I say "religiously" I meant that he used to imitate his Dad's Northern accent who told him: one glass of red wine you should drink my son. The fame of Sopron's red wine went back at least to the days of Marie Therese - Maria Antoinette's mother - and Hungary's Queen during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and incidentally one of History's worldclass roundheel together with Catherine The Great of Russia, whose contemporary she was. One cant help wondering whether astrology has something to do after all with one's libido? Even in my own time, some 200 years later, the stories still went around how she personally handpicked - if that is the word - her palace guard who were "auditioned" one by one later in the day to put it delicately.

We had a very pretty maid who worked in a factory previously so she was a little better educated and better spoken than the average farm girl. I tried to "organize" her but she said much as she would like to she cannot risk it because if my parents will find out she will be fired and where am I going to find another nice jewish family like yours where I am treated righth? So apart from a little necking and groping nothing more happened. (I was incidentaly still a virgin about sixteen). Once after Grampa visited us she came to tell me laughing, Erwin would you believe it? Grampa pinched my ass! I told her I believe it for sure.

As I said Grampa apprenticed in Germany and once during a walk when he told us about those days I asked him, Grampa, how many Brods are running about in Germany? He just laughed. He has shown us a picture in the artillery with his smart uniform with the shoulder lanyard of his unit around his shoulder, with his waxed handlebar moustache and neatly trimmed beard - he was a sharp looking dude!

After graduating from higschool in 1934 in Szombathely we both joined the army for the obligatory one year service chosing the machine gun companie. That it will have to be the infantry was foregone conclusion being jewish. Cavalry ^{was} reserved for the aristocracy which had to bring their own horses. Artillery accepted a number of rich jews who also had to bring their own horses or pay for the upkeep of one. I'll talk in more details about the army later in comparison with the Foreign Legion.

But to get back to Sopron's red wine. Marie Therese authorized Sopron's wine growers to sell the new vintage every year by advertising it with a pole from which hang a wreath made from pine boughs, abundant around Sopron as I said, and to distinguish between the houses selling red and white wine there was a little red or white cloth hanged from the wreaths. This custom was still in use in my days and Grampa became something of an authority on knowing which houses sell the best stuff. Truth to be told the first time I found out this story how this custom originated with Marie Therese was recently when my friends from Holland visited Sopron and sent me a whole bunch of books with the history of my hometown.

And now to get back to Grampa and his still sharp eye for attractive females. In those days everybody but the poorest families had a living-in-maid for housework and cooking. Most of them came from the surrounding villages trying to escape from the drudgery of farm work and the all seeing, hearing and gossiping old hags, all villages are cursed with all over the world since time immemorial. So these peasant gals escaped to the towns where they worked for little more than full board and lodging and some pocket money. On sunday they were free to parade on the Korzó, where they were oggled by all the soldiers and once contact was made they lit out for the "wide open spaces" where "nature" took it from there . As Sopron was surrounded by beautiful pine forrests, there was no problem.

After our army service was over in 1935^{we} Dad pulled some strings and we both got a job in the silk factory of the town as I already mentioned. We both worked there till 1939 when Hitler came too close for comfort and the Hungarian Nazis, called Arrowcross

they wore instead of the German Swastikas, started to beat up the jews, starting with the old ones and an occasional younger one they could catch alone while they were with a group, according to time honoured traditions. First we thought that this is just one of those periodic programs we were familiar with, but we soon realized, unlike most of our other friends, that ^{this} is not the same old story but something much bigger. So we tried to figure out what to do and where to go? It didnt take us long to find out after enquiring at several likely consulates that no country, including America, is exactly anxious to give us sanctuary, to put it politely. Soon enough it became clear that the only place where we would be accepted is the very same "Legendary" French Foreign Legion which offered sanctuary to countless others nobody else wanted. We heard on the grapevine in the factory where we worked, that a guy by the name of Linzbauer is a former Foreign Legionnaire and that the sister of a former schoolfriend is married to a Hungarian Adjutant of the Legion living in Morocco. First we tracked down Linzbauer with Tibor and pumped him for all the info we could get out of him. He was nice and as helpful as he could be and told us that he served as tailor and that most what are in the books and movies is garbage. And more importantly, that although he did not serve in the Hungarian army himself, some of his family and friends did and from what

they told him it is obvious that the Hungarian army is harder than the Legion. Then we got hold of the sister of Klein Erzsi, Lili a sexy redhead, and asked for the address of Erzsi and got into a correspondance with her. Again we got the same reassuring answers that most of what the books and movies say are garbage and that for somebody like us two whowere reserve officers in the Hungarian army the Legion wont be much of a problem. As Julius was supposed to have said crossing the Rubicon : Alea Jacta Est! The dice was thrown! We are going to join the "legendary" French Foreign Legion! For all the-not so gruesome-details, keep reading!