



**A MEDVE TÖPRENGÉSE**

*Weöres Sándor*

Jön a tavasz, megy a tél,  
 Barna medve üldögél.  
 Kibujás vagy bebujás?  
 Ez a gondom óriás!

Ha kibujok, vacogok,  
 Ha bebujok, hortyogok.  
 Ha kibujok, jót eszem,  
 Ha bebujok, éhezem.

Barlangból kinézzek-e,  
 Fák közt szétfűrészlek-e?  
 Lesz-e málna, odu-méz,  
 Ez a kérdés oly nehéz.



**BEAR NECESSITIES**

Winter's going, spring's a-near  
 Brown Bear's sitting on his rear.  
 "Crawl out there or crawl back in?  
 That's my problem, huge, I fear."

"Going out I'm shivering,  
 Coming back I'm bickering.  
 Going out I'd get my fill,  
 Coming back I'd eat just nil."

"Shall I peek out from the cave,  
 Looking 'round a glimpse to save?  
 Are there berries, honey too?..."  
 Asks our friend, Winnie the Pooh...

Translated by OVS

**SURVIVING THE SIEGE OF BUDAPEST – SNOWDROPS IN THE ASHES**

*Olga Vállay Szokolay*

*70 years have passed since our last phase of World War II, the Siege of Budapest, was fought.  
 And the magic of Christmases Past changed.*

The Spirit of Christmases Past changed in December, 1944. The Russians were all around the City, the Germans were fighting to their last men and ours. It was about life and death and we had no idea which one would be our destiny. We had been already well trained to rush to the air-raid shelter when necessary, to avoid the bombings. We lived in Buda, near the Danube, next to the Technical University where one of the first bombs had ever hit the City in the middle of the night 15 months earlier, just a stone's throw away from our top-floor apartment.

But on Christmas Eve, 1944, it was different. The shooting became so intense that we had to move down to the shelter in the apartment house's cellar for overnight. That turned out to



be our residence for six weeks, co-habiting with some 150 other tenants.

As per government orders, every residential structure had to have a commander to direct air-raid defense drills, exercises and shelters. In our building, my father was the one in charge. With foresight, he had bunk beds built in the basement beforehand to accommodate the occupants

of the eight-story apartment building, should the need arise to spend nights in the shelter. There was only one bunk that had three stories, with just enough room to squiggle in. Being small and skinny, it was my special nest on the "third floor" of my parents' "second floor" bunk. It was cozy and private but very scary when an explosion startled me out of my sleep and I hit my head in the ceiling.

Christmas Day passed and so did the day after and the days after that. We became underground dwellers. For a few days there was still electricity. Then it turned as dark as it can be inside a cellar. With flashlights, the kerosene supply was located and lanterns lit, then candles, more and more sparingly. We used water from the central heat boiler of the building, rationed for drinking and minimal



*Budapest after the WWII*

hygiene. There was one stove to cook on for 150 people. Dad worked out a 24-hour schedule to give everyone a chance to cook whatever meals they could. Initially the menus were more diversified: in the apartments' pantries, where one could sneak up during occasional quiet times, there were some reserves of sausage, bacon, potatoes, carrots, pasta, rice, flour and lard as well as home preserved fruit, jams and vegetables, even eggs to create satisfying dishes. After a few weeks this dwindled down to mostly beans, split peas and lentils.

The fighting got closer. The Germans broke up the pavement across our street in an attempt to blast a ditch deep enough to provide passage without being seen. It was unsuccessful. But the broken granite pavers were utilized to build a makeshift barricade around the corner. One day a desperate soldier barged in, looking for his lost horse. Not a soul dared to tell him that his poor equine had been found, slaughtered and carved up by the deaf tobacconist. A long queue quickly formed in our gateway for the meat being sold at the butcher shop across the street. My mother and her friends employed their culinary magic to cook up horse bouillon and venison-style horsemeat with dumplings that has remained one of the best meals of my life. The horse's head was displayed on top of the barricade like a trophy...

One of the tenants, a journalist and his wife lost their baby when she didn't have enough milk to feed it. They improvised a small grave for the tiny one in the yard.

Our bodies emitted enough heat to keep us warm. In the corner of each room or compartment of the shelter was a "Porta-Potty", constructed similarly to an outhouse but with a bucket under the seat. Its contents were most likely dumped daily into the catch basin by the curb in the street.

We played cards and I learned to

play chess. When the water from the building's boiler was used up, the men had to dig a well in the yard. The heaps of dug-out dirt became covered with snow one night. My little friend, the seven-year-old Ildikó, received a pair of kiddie-skis, the ones you strap onto your snow boots, for Christmas. On a quiet day, we kids could go up in the yard, try on her skis and slide down from the humps. That little ecstasy, comparable to flying, made me decide I wanted to ski. (Ildikó's mother gave me my first pair of skis the following Christmas.)

Having no radio transmission, vague rumors were the only source of information we had about the world near and far: that Pest had fallen, that all the bridges across the Danube were blown up and in ruins, that it would only be days before we would also fall and it would all end. That a few blocks away, a 14-year old walked for water with a bucket and a stray shell killed him in the street. He was the only child of his aging parents - and as it later turned out - my cousin's classmate and my secret heart-throb.

Some German soldiers requested to be put up but were told we had a full house. Then a small number of Hungarian soldiers appeared in need to be accommodated, and we complied. One of the officers had his young bride accompany them, having left their baby in her mother's care on their country estate but wanting to be with her husband till the end. She succeeded. His unit was captured a few days later and was forced to surrender their weapons in the gateway. They were then taken as prisoners of war to the Soviet Union. One of the saddest moments of my life, we were all in tears watching the disarmament.

By mid-February 1945 it was all over, and we had been "liberated". Constant visits by the "liberators", the typical byproduct of war and uncontrolled occupying forces, necessitated young women to hide, camouflage themselves as old haggards

and do whatever possible to avoid being raped by the raging herds. Even I was told to go up in my bed and keep quiet, though I had no idea why.

We had been hiding valuables in odd places in the shelter to avoid getting robbed. Good watches were a popular item. Much too frequently people either forgot where they stashed them or worse, those goods prematurely and mysteriously disappeared. But gradually we dared to go outside, to the street, up to the apartments, to clean up all the debris and at least pretend to resume life where it had been interrupted. The sun was shining, spring was getting closer and gave us hope to rebuild all that had been destroyed. We were like snowdrops after a hard winter. Because life had to go on...

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## EPILOGUE

The young bride of the captured army officer managed to get across the Danube by some small boat to Pest where she had relatives and, from there, to her family and baby in the country.

A year or so later, her husband made one of the very few successful escapades from the prison camp. A fellow prisoner who spoke fluent Russian managed to acquire a uniform and, having handcuffed our friend, pretended to escort him out of camp, then, by train, to Hungary. He chose a Soviet holiday when presumably most of the country drowned itself in record quantities of vodka.

Thus their mission succeeded.

My husband and I saw them again in 1957, in Darien, Connecticut where they then resided with their two children.

*Olga Vallay Szokolay is an architect and Professor Emerita of Norwalk Community College, CT after three decades of teaching. She is a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online.*

## Bárán László: An Unsung Hero of 1944-45

Erika Papp Faber

*As World War II was reaching its bloody climax in the fall of 1944, and all of Eastern Europe was in turmoil, Bárán László, head of the gas and public sanitation works of Kolozsvár, decided to bring his family from Transylvania to Budapest. This is what happened then, as related many decades later by his daughter Judit*

In the fall of 1944, as World War II was reaching its bloody climax, Bárán László, head of the gas and public sanitation works of Kolozsvár, decided to bring his family from Transylvania to Budapest. But not alone. He commandeered 14 of the public works' trucks and transported as many Hungarians as wanted to leave and as could be squeezed into them.

The mayor of Kolozsvár had directed him to contact Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat in Budapest, who was issuing hundreds of provisional Swedish passports to Jews to save them from being sent to concentration camps by Adolf Eichmann's orders. Bárán placed the 14 trucks at Wallenberg's disposal, who was elated with the offer. (A film about Wallenberg's rescue mission includes a scene when he receives the phone call about the trucks.) He became Wallenberg's chauffeur.

These trucks were used to accompany the columns of Jewish people being marched to Germany. They offered food and tea, and picked up anyone who fell and could no longer drag himself along. Although few in comparison with the enormous number of victims, they did save thousands of people in this way.

Bárán László was wanted by the Arrow Cross, the Hungarian Nazi government that had engineered a coup in October of 1944 and taken over the country. But they did not know him by sight. He would call his wife every night before coming home, and by means of a code they had agreed on, she would let him know whether the coast was clear or not.

One day, two Arrow Cross officers showed up at his home, looking for him. His wife told them that László

had gone to Sopron, and she did not know when he would return. They said, "That's all right. We have time. We will wait for him." When he called that night, she gave him the signal not to return, and so he stayed at the Swedish embassy. The Arrow Cross officers stayed in the apartment, taking turns, **for six weeks!** Two days before Christmas, a friend from Kolozsvár came to the apartment. Not knowing anything about

the situation, he sadly informed Mrs. Bárán that her husband's car had been hit by a bomb in Sopron, and that they had buried him. Although she knew this was a mistake, because László had just called her ten minutes previously, the strain of the situation made her break down, and she became hysterical. The two Arrow Cross officers were convinced and finally left.

Thus László was able to come home for Christmas Eve, to his wife's obvious relief. And then the siege of Budapest began. Together with the rest of the population of Budapest, the Báráns spent the next six weeks in the cellar. Although strictly forbidden (Hungary by then was under martial law), László had two pistols. This came in handy when one of the women in the cellar screamed out, "Help! There's a rat!" He pulled out a pistol and killed the rat.

That same afternoon, two Arrow Cross soldiers came into the cellar, looking for him.

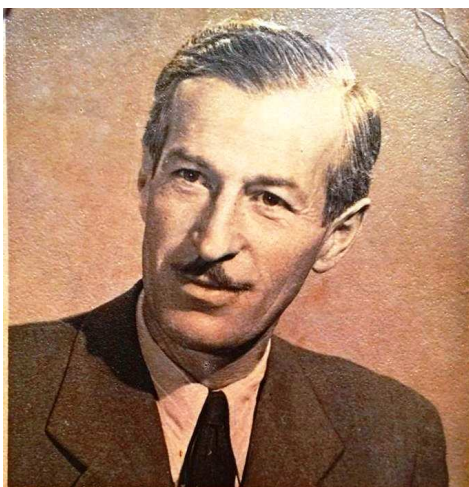
They took him to the police station, where a captain received him. "You know that according to martial law, I must have you executed!" he said.

"You mean you would have me executed for shooting a rat?"

"No, for possession of an illegal weapon!"

László realized his was no joke. He was a charmer and started to talk, until the captain said, "All right, you can go home if you give me your word of honor that ten days from now you will report to the front."

At that point he would have gladly agreed to anything! He gave his word of honor that he would report



Top: Bárán László

Bottom: Bárán László and Gabriella in NYC, 1976

to the front (he had been exempted because he had ulcers), and the captain told him he could go home.

Then László said, "Two soldiers brought me here. Have at least one accompany me, because otherwise they will shoot me before I get home." To which the captain replied, "I will accompany you myself." As they started out, the captain reached into his pocket and handed over the pistol. "Here is your weapon. You may still need it. And don't tell anyone that you have a weapon, or about what happened here between us, because you were reported to the police by someone from the house!"

When his daughter Judit reached this point in her recital, she commented: "Imagine, someone with whom we've been sitting together in the cellar actually went to report my Dad! I think they were somewhat surprised when he arrived home." He said nothing to anyone, except to tell his wife he had to report to the front in ten days.

Ten days later the front was at the corner. He reported to the police captain and said to him: "This is going to be finished in three days. If you still insist that I go to the front and have myself shot to pieces, I will, because I gave my word of honor."

Judit continued: "Dad said the captain had tears in his eyes. He told him, 'You've given me back my faith in humanity. Because I thought I would never see you again and you would never report to the front. That would have been all right with me. I'm a Hungarian, and this was a very good way out for me to do justice to my service as well as to my humanity. That you came back here gave me back my faith in mankind. Go home, and I hope we both survive this.'"

"Once it was all over," Judit continued, "Dad went to look for him, to see whether he was hurt or needed help of any kind. Unfortunately, he had gone to the front and died."

"The things that happened in my parents' lives were fantastic," concluded Judit. "How often Dad found himself in situations where there did not seem to be any way out. The good Lord certainly helped him because he saved so many people. This was his reward."

P.S. On January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945, the Russians sent word to the Swedish embassy that they wanted to talk to Raoul Wallenberg. Everyone, including Judit's father, tried to dissuade him from going. But he insisted. Bárán László tanked up his car. And that was the last time Raoul Wallenberg was seen as a free man. Later there were unconfirmable reports of prisoners having encountered him in various Russian prisons. But his final fate remains a mystery.

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## ***A kő marad: a Tribute To Wass Albert***

*Charles Bálintt Jr.*

*This month marks the 17th anniversary of the death of the Transylvanian writer Wass Albert. We take this opportunity to remember his life and work.*

This month marks the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the prolific writer, Wass Albert, at the age of 90. He was born on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1908 and shares his



birthday with Elvis Presley, Stephen Hawking and our own dear friend and colleague, Olga Vallay Szokolay.

He was just under 4 years older than my father. They were childhood friends as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins (most of the Transylvanian aristocrats were somehow related to each other). The two of them did occasionally go hunting together, but they also shared a great fondness of the outdoors; the lovely mountains, beautiful forests and varied wildlife of the region. The Wass family actually had a couple of tame wolves that would at times join them for a meal in the dining room; of course, this was over 75 years ago. So it seems quite fitting to me that his first published novel was titled "Farkasverem" (The Wolf Pit).

The death of his second son at the age of 3, led to his book "Csaba". A lot of his work has been about suffering and loss and the many misfortunes of life. In his final years, his writings became a little darker and maybe more bitter, but this is understandable, considering what he went through in his own life and the additional time he had for reflection in his later years. When he was born, Transylvania was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He loved Transylvania deeply and passionately. My father had the same feelings. When my father left home for boarding school in Vienna, and later at the Hungarian Military Academy, and while in Russia and Turkey during World War II, he always kept a small sack under his pillow filled with Transylvanian earth. He could thus always feel like he was sleeping on Transylvanian soil. I have only been there twice but I too can understand this profound affection. Transylvania is truly a magical place. It would be hard to find a more beautiful area on this planet. My wife is Serbian, and she fell in love with Transylvania too. It is easy to see why so much of Wass Albert's writing is set in this region of the world. Wass Albert's book "Adjátok vissza a hegyeimet" (Give Me Back My Mountains) was inspired by these feelings. Sadly, he left Transylvania in

1944, never to be able to return.

I never met him and only knew him as “*Albi bácsi*”. But during many drives to Sarasota, Florida starting in the late 1970’s and through the 80’s and 90’s, my parents would always drop in to see him at his home in Astor Park, Florida either on the way to Sarasota or on the way back. On one of their last visits, my mother asked him whether he would write any more books. He told her he would write one more book, to be titled “*Voltam*” (I Was). It was quite a surprise to my mother when, about 15 years later, a young nephew from Transylvania arrived at her home for a week’s stay and gave her an unexpected gift: the book “*Voltam*”. This was assembled by Albert’s sons from the dossier he had compiled just for that purpose.

In June of 2013, I attended a fabulous lecture at the Hungarian House in New York City by Takaró Mihály entitled: “*Wass Albert Igazsága: A gróf emigrált, az író otthon maradt*” (Wass Albert’s Truth: The count emigrated, the writer stayed home). If any Hungarian-speakers ever come across this professor from Hungary, they owe it to themselves to go to one of his lectures. He told the story of the life of Wass Albert by quoting from his books and reciting his poems. He captivated his audience for about 75 minutes, but I would have gladly listened for many more hours.

There was some controversy in Wass Albert’s life. I’ve read some not so flattering things about him. But I also know that these were written by his enemies. It is true that he had no admiration (to be kind) for Romania or the Romanian leadership. (The feeling was mutual since he and his father were both sentenced to death if they ever returned). But it would be difficult for anyone to accept having their homeland taken out from under them. It is quite a shock to be born in one country and then, without moving, to find oneself in a different country with a different government. (This loss of homeland was by far the greatest factor in the death of my grandfather. He smoked and drank away the last years of his life, saying “*Vae Victis*” – Woe to the defeated – to whoever would listen.)

When someone writes so much and puts his opinions out there for everyone to dissect, of course, some people will find fault with it. But Wass’ writing has and continues to inspire and make people think about the many hardships and occasional triumphs we all face in our lives.

When his dogs became old and ill with little time left, Albert would take them out into the woods and give them a large steak. While the dog was eating this delicious meal, he would shoot the dog to put it out of its misery. It seems that this was pretty much how his life ended as well.

He leaves behind him a tremendous legacy of writings. People will be enjoying his works for many years to come. So in conclusion I will use his words: “*A víz szalad, de a kő marad, a kő marad!*” (The water runs, but the rock stays, the rock stays!). Wass Albert was a rock that will be among us for a very long time.



## Tavaszc-várás

Wass Albert

Érzed? Jön a tavasz,  
a fák alá  
már tarka-fátylú verőfény havaz.  
A messzeségből hírnök érkezett:  
madár lebeg a rónaság felett  
s fény szállt a holt avarra: Hóvirág.

Ugye testvér  
csábítanak most halk melódiák,  
ezer kis visszatérő róna dal,  
s ugye neked is tarka a világ,  
s az álmaid megannyi könnyű lepkék:  
már nemsokára zöldül a levél,  
és visszazáll a tavasz és a fecskék,  
és a fecskékkel ő is visszatér...

Ha jönne már...  
úgye testvér megálmodod mi lenne?...  
S egy kis meleg  
belopózik halkan a szívedbe...

*Charles Bálint Jr. is a working Customs Broker in Lawrence, NY and a member of the Magyar News Online Editorial Board.*



*Count Albert Wass de Czege (1/08/1908 – 2/17/1998)*

## Hospital in the Rock – a reminder of World War II

EPF

*Walking around Castle Hill in Buda, admiring the old houses, the Coronation Church, and the view, one would not suspect there is a reminder of something more sinister under one's feet.*

Many government buildings were located on Castle Hill in the 1930's and '40's, and civil defense considerations prompted the construction of a hospital in the natural caves below the surface. Begun in 1939, the *Sziklakórház*, or Hospital in the Rock, was completed by February of 1944. The hospital was furnished with its own electric generator. It was thus able to take X-rays even when, during the siege of Budapest, most of the other hospitals in the city had lost power.

Originally planned to accommodate 300 people, it was meant to provide emergency care for those injured in air raids. The facility was placed under the supervision of the Szent János Hospital, and was staffed by six doctors in rotation. (Later, during the siege, many more doctors volunteered their services there.) The nursing staff consisted of Red Cross volunteers. Among these was the widow of Horthy István, son of the Regent, who perished in an air plane crash, and several countesses.

During the siege of Budapest, the hospital was completely filled with the injured, military and civilians alike, and eyewitness reports speak of 650 to 700 patients jammed into the limited space. Women were accommodated in a separate ward. German soldiers were also attended to here, but most of them went into their own section of the caves. When Russian troops entered, some of the wounded German soldiers used their weapons, and were killed by flame-throwers.

Jewish doctors also worked in the Hospital in the Rock. Their lives were saved by the local police captain, Dr. Koppány Kálmán Imre, by having them change into Hungarian military medic uniforms. (His name has been added to the "Wall of the Just" – a monument to those who helped save victims of Nazi



*Top: entrance at the time of the Siege; 2nd row: hospital ward; 1956 ward; 3rd row: lounge; stretchers at the ready; bottom: Ganz diesel generators; air circulation equipment*

military medic uniforms. (His name has been added to the “Wall of the Just” – a monument to those who helped save victims of Nazi persecution.)

Shortly before the end of the siege of Budapest, on the day of the attempted sortie (February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1945), the ambulatory patients left. The rest continued to be transported home or to other above-ground hospitals until May, when the Hospital in the Rock ceased its operation. All the equipment was removed, and a private company rented the facility to produce typhus vaccine.

Eventually, as a result of the Cold War, plans were made to refurbish and reactivate the hospital. By the time of the Revolution of 1956, it once again opened its doors to the wounded. Following the defeat of the Freedom Fight, the facility served as a prison hospital. Next, the hospital was extended and rebuilt, to serve as a bunker in case of an atomic or chemical attack.

Today, the Hospital in the Rock contains the Nuclear Bunker Museum, having the largest wax figure collection in Central Europe – a peaceful exhibit of a very unpeaceful past.

For more detailed information, see the following link:

[www.hospitalintherock.eu](http://www.hospitalintherock.eu)

## About the Ice

*Remig A. Papp*

The ice has opened, old and young can indulge in the healthiest of winter sports, which they have not been able to do for years. The military band is playing on the ice, the many brightly colored sweaters sway rhythmically. They are dancing in the center. It's so good to watch them. Man who is relatively clumsy on solid ground here seems to be more perfect. The many flushed faces, the ringing laughter are a beautiful, joyful thing.

The tumble. If someone falls, those around him consider it their unflinching duty to call out: “Come here, I'll pick you up!” And they still consider this to be a good joke. Or: “The ice is slippery.” But no matter. With time, everyone learns to skate and then has acquired the right to laugh about the stumblers because people used to laugh about him too.

A high school student proudly explains to his friend: “Just imagine, I had a terrible fall right in front of that girl in the green dress. They thought I had it!”

“And you're proud of that? That doesn't indicate a lot of skill!”

“Yes, but she said, ‘How quickly he got up!’” and happily races off.

Somebody runs into a girl, then dashes off, politely yelling “Sorry!” After a few unsuccessful balancing maneuvers, the girl sits down. A boy in a white sweater helps her up and introduces himself. They get acquainted, and before long they are skating curves together. The boy undoes her skates. They go home together. The next day too. The third day they come together.

And by the time the ice melts?...

By then it will be spring!!!

*Remig A. Papp was born in Budapest, of Transylvanian Armenian stock. He obtained a diploma in Civil Engineering from the Technical University of Budapest, and worked in Germany and France before the Depression. Returned to Hungary, he designed the winter harbor of Budapest, among other projects. He left with his family to escape the siege, and emigrated to the US in 1949, where he worked his way up to Associate in an engineering consulting firm, designing dams and other structures.*

*In his youth, he was the moving force behind the family publication Spéci, from which this piece about the skating rink was taken.*



*Entrance to the Hospital in the Rock (Nuclear Bunker Museum) today*





## Winter Complaint

Áprily Lajos

Winter, why should I delight in you?  
Your snow, your ice do not beckon.

Once upon a time how I awaited you,  
thirsted for you, frost and snow.

On every road-side slippery spot  
I cut a dashing figure as I slid.

On ringing skates I would do curves,  
and my companion was a girl of old.

Happily I held and squeezed her hand  
in the warm den of her muff.

Where is that boy now, happy and brave?  
Where is that ice? Where is that hand?

"Be careful, avoid the slippery ice",  
they tell me.

Winter, should I delight in you?

## Téli panasz

Áprily Lajos

Miért, örüljek, tél, neked?  
Nem hív havad, nem hív jeged.

Valamikor, fagyok, havak,  
hogy vártalak, szomjaztalak.

Minden csicsonkát délcegen  
kihúztam utca-széleken.

Íveltem pengő korcsolyán,  
és társam volt egy régi lány.

Kezét meleg muff-oduban  
Fogtam, szorítva boldogan.

Hol a fiú, a víg s vitéz?  
Hol az a jég? Hol az a kéz?

– Vigyázz, kerüld a sík jeget –  
mondják. Örüljek, tél, neked?

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*Áprily Lajos (1887 - 1967) was born in Transylvania as Jékely Lajos. His family lived in great financial straits. Lajos went to study in Paris, but soon returned on account of his aging parents. He taught at Nagyenyed, and later became editor of the literary magazine "Erdélyi Helikon". He first used his pseudonym "Áprily" in 1918.*

*To be able to support his family, he resettled in Hungary and became principal of a prestigious Protestant boarding school for girls in Budapest. He was a member of the Kisfaludy literary society, the Academy of Sciences, the Hungarian Pen Club, and editor of "Protestant Review". His poems deal mostly with Nature.*

## Celebrating a Century:

Margit Hericz

EPF

*St. Stephen's Church in Manhattan was the scene of two joyous celebrations this January as Margit Hericz observed her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The following week, she graciously allowed me to interview her by telephone, proving what a friend had said of her: needing neither cane nor walker, she does not seem to be more than 60!*

Margit Hericz was born in Bakonyszentlászló, a village in western Hungary, located between Veszprém and Pannonhalma, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1915. She had two younger brothers, one of whom died early; the other died later as a prisoner of war in Russia.

In 1937, Margit emigrated to America, to an aunt who lived in New Brunswick, NJ.,



Margit Hericz

and did housework. Three years later, she moved to New York City, and at St. Stephen's parish, joined the St. Cecilia Choir directed by Mr. Miklós Kleiner. (Several decades later, Mr. Kleiner was the organist at my wedding!)

She married her husband József in 1943, and they lived in the Yorkville (Hungarian) section of Manhattan. They opened a dry cleaning and alterations establishment on 96<sup>th</sup> Street, which they operated for over six years. Then, at the urging of friends, they moved to Los Angeles, and spent over five years there. But people in California wore only blue jeans, Margit told me, so they returned to New York.

By that time, prices had increased. They lost what they had invested in California, and could not open another store. So Margit went to work at Swingline, the staple manufacturer, in Long Island City. Then her mother-in-law became ill,

and Margit stopped working to take care of her.

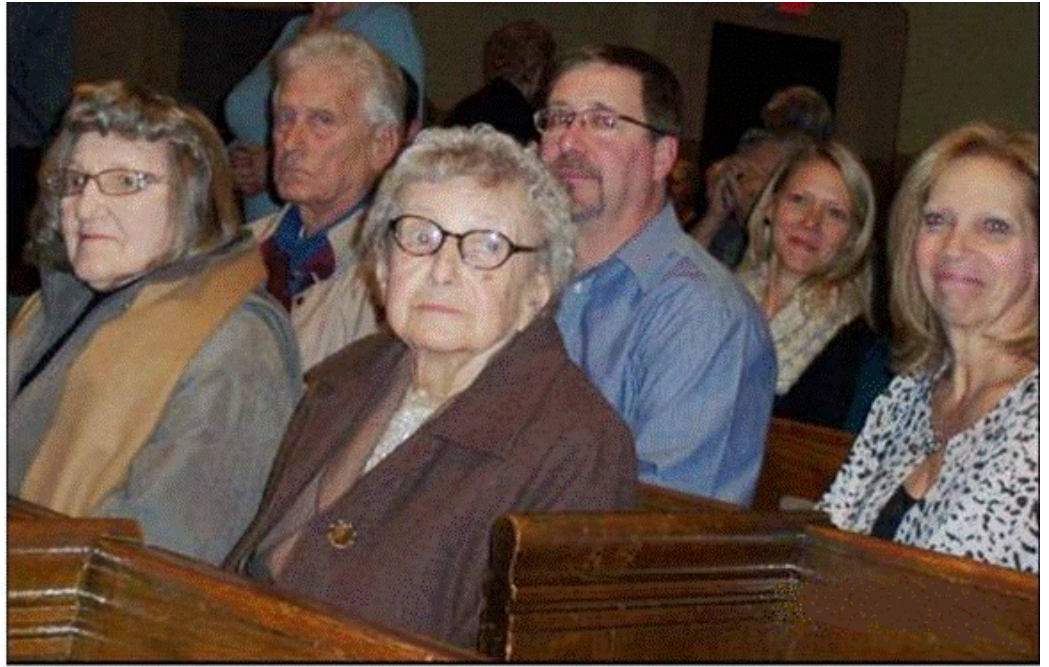
Later, she went to work at Special Surgery in New York Hospital, sewing and taking care of the linens and the uniforms. She retired from there in 1977, the same year her husband became sick and died. Then her in-laws needed help, so she was still working.

“When I was 14 years old,” related Margit, “an elderly lady told me, ‘Let your hands always be busy, then your mind will be too.’ So I went in for embroidery.” It was therefore natural that she took her share in embroidering the altar cloths for St. Stephen’s in the 1970’s.

Between 1964 and 1984, Margit was President of the St. Clare Altar Society, in which she is still active today. Today, the Society provides “coffee and...” once a month after Mass, serving parishioners who now come from a distance, since the old ethnic neighborhood has metamorphosed into an upscale part of town.

“Margit was always there, helping in the kitchen, when any of the various church societies had their luncheons,” recalls a friend from church. She would also visit people in hospitals and nursing homes, bringing them small items like hand soap. Another friend, Elizabeth Gyenes, says Margit Hericz “feels like she is a mother or grandmother” to her. They frequent the same hair styling salon, and so Elizabeth called them to let them know about the big birthday. As a result, they provided Margit with a full beauty treatment, compliments of the shop, for her celebration.

On Saturday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, the “English” parishioners gave Margit a little party with a birthday cake after the 5:30 Family Mass and the children sang for her. The next day, following the 2 PM Mass offered by Fr. Imre Juhász of New Brunswick, NJ, the Mothers’ Club had a luncheon in the church hall, attended by a hundred people. There were lots of flowers and good wishes, and a large cake decorated with red-white-and-green. Józsa Harkay gave a tribute to Margit, who not only thanked each table of guests, but went around to each individual to express her appreciation.



Margit Hericz during Mass on her 100th birthday; Margit with Margie Bauer, who supplied the photos. The Birthday Girl with members of the Mother's Club.

As Elizabeth says, “Margit is a very pleasant person. There isn’t anyone in the community who does not like her. This celebration brought the whole community together.”

We too would like to add our voices:

*Isten éltesse még soká, Margit!*

## Tapolca: a town that sits on top of a lake

Karolina Szabo

*The thermal waters which are ubiquitous in Hungary sometimes manifest in very unusual forms. Here is one of those found near Lake Balaton.*

The town of Tapolca is located in South-west Veszprém County, near Lake Balaton and Zala County. A settlement was already formed here as far back as the Neolithic period. The word “Tapolca” comes from *toplica*, meaning *hotwater*.

Under the center of the city lies the three-story deep *Tavasbarlang*. The *Barlang* (Cave Lake) was discovered in 1902 by the bricklayer Németh Ferenc and the baker Tóth Pál during construction of a house. They were digging a well, when the ground caved in.

The caves were created about 13.7 million years-ago by the emerging hot water in the Sarmata era. The limestone that surrounds the cave was formed from the Sarmatian Sea sediments.

The water is heated by post-volcanic activity; temperature may reach 40° C (104° F); mixing with the colder water from Tapolca Brook, the average water temperature is 19-20° C (70-72° F). It is much warmer than the well water in the city; therefore the air temperature is warm in the cave, and the humidity hovers near 100%. The air is clean and high in carbon dioxide content, which makes this cave very beneficial for people with asthmatic and respiratory diseases.

The length of the cave is 4 km (2 ½ mi.); of that, 2 ½ km (almost 2 mi.) can be accessed. The green-colored water can be visited by boats in a circular pattern for about 300 m (900 ft.) In Hungary, the Tapolca *Tavasbarlang* is fourth in length after the *Budapest Szépvölgyi Barlang*, the *Aggtelek Baradla-Domica barlang* and the *Pilis Ariadne-barlang*. Recently, it was discovered that the Tapolca *Tavasbarlang* is connected to the *Kórház-barlang* and the *Berger Károly-barlang*. The largest lake-cave, 20 m under the town, has also been found.

The largest room in a cave is 20 m (60 ft) in length, 3-5 m (9-15 ft.) wide and 8 m (24 ft.) high. From street level, 75 steps take you there. The most beautiful crystals can be seen in the *Maximum* room. The only living things in the cave-lake are the minnows, which somehow swam through crevices from the stream, and they adapted to the environment.

In 1928, electric lights were installed in the caves (first Hungarian Cave with electric light), and in 1942 it was declared a natural monument. In 2011, 70 million Ft were spent to replace the lighting system; modern LED lamps were installed, that use 70-80% less electricity.

A *Malomtó* (Mill-Pond) is connected to the cave-lake. The pond has many hot water springs, and had been used by the ancient Romans, and was also used for the mill.

Near the Mill Pond is Church Hill. Here stands a church which was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Romanesque style. After the Turkish invasion, it was rebuilt in the Baroque style. On an ancient Roman wall nearby stands a beautiful sculpture entitled “Our Past” by Marton László (1925-2008) a native of Tapolca, and the statue of King Stephen.

If you visit the town, remember to see Republic Square, the Main Square, School Museum and the Garden of Ruins.



Captions: Roman Catholic Church; Roman ruins; Malomtó (Mill Pond); Statue of King Stephen; *Múltunk* (Our Past); In the *Tavasbarlang*

# Calling Your Love

EPF

If your sweetheart happens to be Hungarian, you might want to surprise her (or him) by using a typical term of endearment on Valentine's Day. Here is a handful from which to choose. Although using different terms, basically they all refer to a sweetheart.

Perhaps the most common term is "rózsám" – my rose. (Pronounced "roe'-jahm") As in "Elment a rózsám Ámérikába, de én nem megyek utána..." Those are the first two lines of a song: "My sweetheart went to America, but I'm not going after her..."

Then there is "babám" – my doll. (Pron. buh'-bahm) As in the song "Szánt a babám, csireg-csörög sej-haj a járom..." That is: My sweetheart is plowing, the yoke is jingling...

Of course there is "édesem" – my sweet. (Pron. ay'-desh-em) As in "Maros vize folyik csendesén. Borulj a vállamra, édesem..." The waters of the Maros flow quietly. Lean (your head) on my shoulder, my sweet..."

Or you might call her "galambom" – my dove (Pron. guh'-lum-bom) As in "Megyen már a hajnalcsillag lefelé. Az én kedves galambom most megyen hazafelé..." (The morning star is already going down. My dear dove is now going home...)

Another nice term is "csillagom" – my star. (Pron. chill'-uh-gom) As in "Csillagom, virágom, szökik már az este..." (My star, my flower, the evening is fleeing...)

This one is always used with the modifier "kis", and is used as one word: "kisangyalom" – my little angel. (Pron. kish un'-dial-om) As the song puts it: "A csitári hegyek alatt régen leesett a hó. Azt hallottam, kisangyalom, véled esett el a ló..." (Under the Csitár Mountains the snow has fallen long ago. I have heard, my little angel, that the horse fell with you /on it/...)

This last one is a more general term of endearment from Transylvania: "lelkem" – my soul. (Pron. lel'-kem) It can be ap-

plied to anyone close to you, not just a sweetheart, although it is used for a sweetheart in a World War II song: "Jóska lelkem, én édes vitézem..." (Jóska, my soul, my dear brave soldier...)

We hope this is helpful, *lelkem!*



Photo from Magyar Kincsestár

## Fatima, a story of love, self-sacrifice, fidelity, and the strength of the human will.....

Éva Wajda

When in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries much of Europe was occupied by the Turks and the Ottoman Empire reached Vienna, the northern part of Hungary remained free. For 160 years, the crescent and the cross were locked in battle. The Turks often attacked without warning, burning and laying waste centuries-old cities, villages, destroying irreplaceable historical relics, and killing hundreds of thousands of people. The young were sold at Oriental slave markets. Christian troops would launch surprise attacks on patrols, garrisons, and the bodyguards of Turkish officials. During such attacks noblemen and officials were captured who were to be used later to ransom their own men held by the Turks.

On such an occasion the Hungarian soldiers captured a beautiful girl of fifteen who was traveling from one city to another, just across the border, accompanied by her servants and guards. She was of noble blood, and the betrothed of a high-ranking officer, a relative of the Sultan. She was taken to a fortress called Tren-

csén at the base of the lofty Tatra Mountains. The Hungarian commander, Zápolya István, was convinced the Turks would send envoys to negotiate her release.

He was not mistaken.

Three weeks later, a Turkish delegation, 31 strong arrived, led by Omar, the fiancé of the captive beauty. Bowing deeply before the commander of the fortress, he spoke reverently as he described his mission, saying that the Sultan had empowered him to negotiate the release of the captive Fatima, and in exchange for her he would release ten noblemen from Turkish captivity and would also pay ransom in gold.

In silence, the commander gave no sign of acceptance. Seeing only indifference, Omar continued making proposals. He added more gifts to the price – costly rugs, the finest silk, rare spices, delicate perfumes, aromatic oils, incense, and similar things.

The commander gave no sign of acceptance. Either he did not hear or understand the proposal and stared mutely at his ring.

"Your Excellency," continued Omar, we will give you swords forged from the most delicate steel, jewels, pearls, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, tamed tigers, lions, panthers, thoroughbred Arabian horses, or if you like, their tanned pelts, or would you like talking parrots?"

Silence.

Omar continued, adding more and more to the proposal, and they brought no sign of emotion from the chief of the fort. His silence was becoming nerve-wracking and frightening. Omar suddenly cried out, begging him to say something and ask whatever price for Fatima, and swore he would fulfill it.

Finally, the chief, rising from his chair, said, "Very well. I have heard and considered your proposals carefully, and I say sincerely that I do not

need any of the things you have offered me. I need something else. Rather than what you have offered me, I would have water."

Omar and the 30 delegates stared at the commander, and then at each other. After a long silence, Omar asked if this was a trap or trickery to ask only for water for Fatima, a simple liquid, clear, odorless, tasteless water? The commander confirmed he only wanted water. After a short meditation, Omar exploded in laughter, and so did the members of the delegation. When Omar dried the tears from his eyes and became calm, he apologized. He said they will bring water, only provide the leather bags, barrels and carts. "We will bring you enough water to fill every cistern and vessel that you have in the fortress."

"I am afraid you have misunderstood me," said the commander. "I did not ask you to bring water into the fortress; we have servants who can do that. The answer is simple. I need a well, here in the courtyard of the fortress." He explained that it is not always possible to bring water from springs in the surrounding area. "All reserves within the fort might spoil or be exhausted in the summer heat during a long siege. Lack of water causes epidemics which will kill off more of our soldiers than the enemy. Lack of water is the Achilles heel of the fortress. Enough fresh water must always be available. That is my wish."

Heavy silence fell in the room.

Suddenly Omar demanded whether it would not be wiser to accept the treasure they offered? It would suffice to dig any sort of well, using Italian



*Trencsén fortress; Szerelemkút, or Well of Love*

well diggers, the greatest experts. The commander replied that that was not possible.

Omar and the 30 Turks, at first beyond words, then after a long discussion agreed to dig the well. But first, they insisted that the commander swear by his religion that he will liberate Fatima at the completion of the task. He did so by putting two fingers of his right hand on the crucifix which stood on the table and solemnly swore to give back freedom to Fatima the moment sufficient water came into the well to be dug by the Turks.

When the location of the well was decided upon, work began immediately. They worked in shifts of eight hours, ten men to the shift around the clock. Omar hardly slept more than four hours a day, for he had to super-

vised and look after the material needs of the working men.

Days, weeks, and months passed. The well became deeper and deeper, and work ever harder. Seasons and years passed, and still no water. The cherry blossoms had returned nine times (some sources say only three times) since the digging began. Meanwhile, Fatima had been made a lady-in-waiting to the wife of the fortress commander.

Then early one morning Trencsén was awakened by great shouting from the central courtyard. People came running from all directions and found the well diggers leaping about and crying with joy. There were only 18 left of the original 30, the others died of weakness or accidents during the years of digging.

After a while they fell on their knees facing East, bowed their heads and repeated, "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet." Their excitement was caused by the crystal clear pure drinking water in the well, now 1,030 feet deep – drinking water, the price for Fatima.

Centuries have passed. Trencsén fortress still stands, and is now a museum. The 1,030 foot well is still in the courtyard, with a marble tablet on its rim in memory of Fatima, Omar and his men. It has therefore been called *Szerelemkút*, or Well of Love.

*Éva Wajda is a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online.*

# A macska felugrott az asztalra / The Cat Jumped Up on the Table

by Vaszary János  
Reviewed by EPF

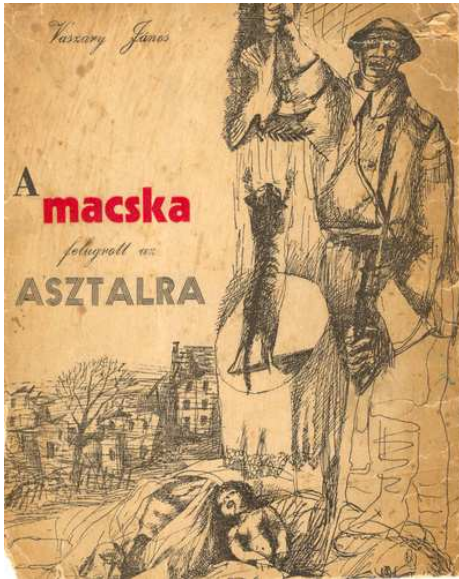
As we were working on the February issue, someone sent me a third edition of this old book, published in Toronto in 1959 (first published in Buenos Aires in 1950). Although purporting to be a novel, and written in a light literary style, it is as much a documentary of the end of the siege of Budapest and the Russian occupation of the country.

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money as a means of exchange, when the price of one egg was a gold ring; of the evacuation of Budapest ordered by the new government; of the strafing of civilians on the roads by enemy aircraft; of the total absence of personal safety, as each person became the enemy of everyone else.

the leaves are large, they can be cut into two.

Put a good spoonful of meat on each of the leaves; roll then, so the ends are empty, which you press in with your fingers, so the stuffing won't come out during cooking.



As the author says, it took many thousands of years for the emergence of human culture, but a few days sufficed to return to the prehistoric age. The protagonists of the story, Julia and Peter, are even stripped of their clothes and left lying there naked by two air-men who had jumped out of their burning aircraft and now needed to change into civilian clothing.

As for the title, it is the first sentence of the book, setting up the scene of an air raid which leaves the hotel dining room empty, an unspoken invitation to the cat to taste the partially eaten breakfast of the guests. It is an indication of the style, which, though slightly humorous, is not offensive.

Place a layer of sauerkraut on the bottom of a pot, put the stuffed cabbage on top, and add another layer of sauerkraut. Cover with water, put it on the stove and cook for two hours.

Remove the stuffed cabbage, so it doesn't break when you are mixing it with the roux.

Make a thin roux with chopped onion and paprika. Add to the cabbage, mix well and bring to the boil. Before serving, check the sauce. Make sure it is not too thick. Put back the stuffed cabbage; add a few tablespoons of sour cream and a bit of chopped fresh dill green.

Russian occupation of the country, and finally the end of World War II, which came to Europe only in May of 1945.

If it were not for the light style, one would hesitate to plod through the horrific events – of the young woman caught on a piece of flooring still suspended between heaven and earth after the front, back and lower floors of the apartment building collapsed; of the total destruction of the water and electric supply, as well as the breakdown of the telephone and radio communications systems; of people shot on sight by the occupying forces; of the constant hunger and search for food as the primary occupation of the populace; of the uselessness of

For anyone wanting to have an authentic glimpse of the time, this book is to be highly recommended. I hope you can still find it.

## Stuffed Cabbage

*There is nothing as iconic of Hungarian cooking as stuffed cabbage. This recipe was published in a cookbook adapted to the American system of measurement, in 1947. Just typing it makes my mouth water!*

Take 1 lb pork, cut it up small with a piece of bacon; add a handful of rice, 1 chopped onion, 2 eggs, black pepper and salt, mix well.

Take 1 head *sour* cabbage, remove leaves, thin at the center borders; if

Place the stuffed cabbage in the middle of the serving dish, and put baked *kolbász* or pork chops around the edges.

(This recipe is taken from “Nagy magyar szakácskönyv és cukrászat (amerikai mérleg rendszerrel)”, New York, NY



## It's a Small World!

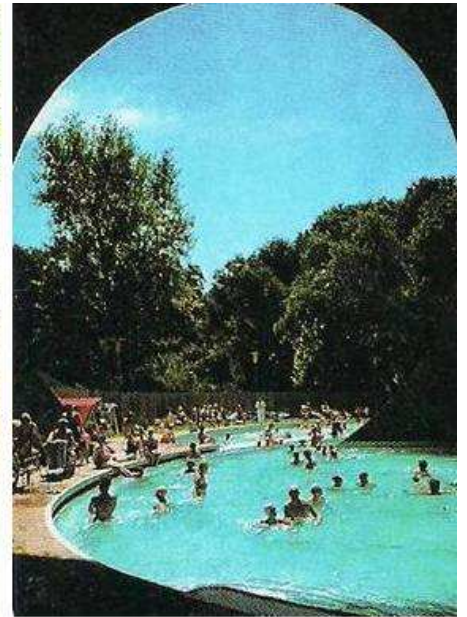
EPF

*This is not a story about a face-to-face encounter with another Hungarian in an unusual place; rather, it proves that character can have long-range effects.*

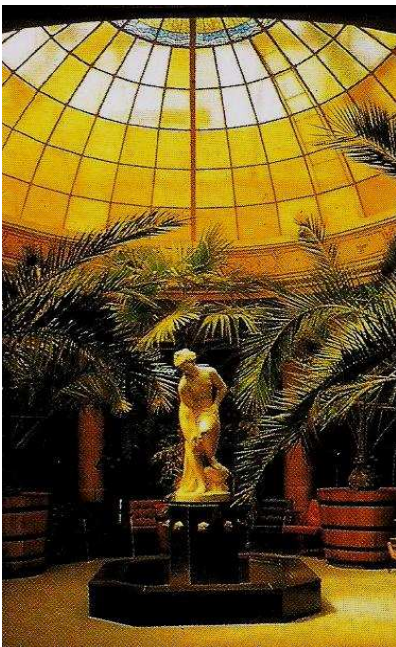
The time was 1949, and we had just arrived in this country. After working as janitor at Princeton University, my Dad, an engineer, was searching for a job in his field in New York City. He was interviewed by the owner of a private engineering firm, who looked at his credentials and decided to hire him.

But in addition to his qualifications, there was another reason he was hired: when the firm's owner was young, his family had a Hungarian cook! She had been honest and reliable, and so he felt comfortable with hiring a Hungarian engineer! What a testimony to that Hungarian lady!

What are the chances of this particular man having had a Hungarian cook? It IS a small world!



*The Lake, The Spa Cave, Looking out to the outdoor spa and the swimming pool*



## Did you know...

*... that Hungary has Europe's only cave spa? The dome pictured here opens up in good weather, giving a view of the sky. I have wonderful memories of visiting here in my twenties.*

It is located in Miskolctapolca, a suburb of Miskolc. It is an unmatched experience to swim and bathe in the indoor pool of nature, in the thermal water of pleasant temperature springing from the depths of the mountain, and to enjoy the clear air free of any

contaminants. Many also believe in its healing effects, primarily due to the pleasant, curative climate of the cave, and its warm karst water.

The water here contains calcium, magnesium-hydrogen-carbonic, iodine, bromide and radon. Thus the spa is recommended for those who have motor disorders, rheums, some backbone problems, or heart and blood system disease.

*Karolina Szabo*

Lilla Heinrich Szász, Soprano

*Metropolitan Opera Audition Winner*

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