

CORNELIA BALAN, 1997

(Ed: My mother was born on November 2, 1906 in Budapest.

Her paternal grandfather was Ignac Grossman.

Her father was Leo Grossman; he had four siblings, Theodor, Julius, Gisela, and Elsa. Her stepfather was Kornel Pollak.

Her maternal grandfather was Mihalyi Nagel, her maternal grandmother was Bertha Csendes.

Her mother was Therese Nagel; she had three sisters - Irene, Sidonia, and Nina, and three brothers - Szigmund, Mihalyi, and Ignacz.

Since some of them are mentioned in the text, the Nagel family is described in greater detail.

Irene's children were Imre, Eva, and Magda.

Sidonia's children were Miklos, Imre, Hugo, and Rozsi.

Nina's children were Janos, Lenke, Piri, Edith, and Anna.

Szigmund's children were Bandi, Boriska, and Agnes.

Mihalyi's children were Eva and Janos.

Ignacz's children were Kati, Ivan, and Bandi.)

TAPE ONE, "CHILDHOOD TO FATHER'S DEATH, 1910-1920"

You wanted me to reach back into my memories and tell you mostly about the missing years. There are many things I told you about already and there are many things on the Spielberg tape so I might repeat some of them, but I should think that the best thing might be to do it chronologically. So I will try.

Thomas Stewart's grandparents (Ed: Tommy Stewart, who died several years ago in England, was the son of Imre, and the grandson of Irene) and my parents rented a house on the shore of Lake Balaton every summer. It was a group of three houses. Ours was in the middle and we went there every summer until the First World War broke out. I remember two little girls in one of the houses and we played together and one day we played in the sand and suddenly their mother burst out of the house, picked the two little girls up and said that they have never, never to play with me again because I'm Jewish. I didn't know what that meant. I thought it must be something bad. How really bad it was I found out later.

I must tell you something about Lake Balaton. Lake Balaton is a very large lake, it is the second largest in Europe. But it has something unique, it has high and low tides. So legend has it that is somehow connected with the sea. After I lost these two playmates, I found another one in the other house and we played together for the rest of the years that we were there. Forty years later I was sitting at the sewing machine at Saks Fifth Avenue. It was terribly hot in the summer and the store didn't have air conditioning yet, but when the temperature reached 90 degrees outside they closed the doors and let us go home. We were sitting there and waiting for the bell to ring. Suddenly one of the girls who sat pretty far from me stopped and she said "oooh what would I give now for a dip in the Balaton", so that was the magic word for me and we started to talk. It turned out that we were the two little girls who played together

forty years ago. She lived in the US now and was the ex sister-in-law of a very good friend of ours. It's a small world.

At this time we still lived on Liszt Ferenc Ter. My father was in the forest and lumber business and he joined an Italian company and it must have been a good deal because we moved out and bought a beautiful apartment with the view on the Danube, and the castle in the hills in Buda. It was very beautiful. It was at this time when I was supposed to go to school but my parents didn't want it, feeling that I might get children's diseases, which I got anyway many years later when John got them. So I was tutored at home. This lasted, I think, about two or three years there, and then the bubble burst. I don't know whether the company was bankrupt or whether it was because of the war. Italy was our ally at the beginning and then they turned coat and joined the Entente. So maybe that was the reason, I don't know but we had to move and we had to move to Tatra Utca Six. But the house was not quite ready yet so Father joined the Armed Forces Volunteers and mother and I got a furnished apartment on Lipot Korrut Five, on the back yard of the house. All the men in the family volunteered. Even Apu and Thomas Stewart's father volunteered and lied their age because they were too young to go but they all wanted to save the fatherland. When all the women and children were left alone because the men left, Grandmother came from Galgocz , now Hlohovec, rounded us up and we all moved to Galgocz. She had a very large house. it was a big court yard with buildings around it. One of it was a two story one, which was two complete apartments so we all had plenty of room. She had three gardens, she had a rose garden with a gazebo and that was her pride and joy. She had two other gardens which were vegetable. We had some berry bushes there. There were chickens, ducks, and geese. And we played around. We children had a wonderful time.

I don't know whether my Grandfather was a little senile or not but he wandered off and didn't want to come home. Maybe he was senile, maybe the commotion was too much for him. I was the only one who could bring him home because he called me "my angel" and took my hand and came home. There was only Grandmother but she was a strong woman and she ran a tight ship. Everybody had a chore to do, I had to clean the dining room, no vacuum cleaner, no sweeper. It was really hard work for a child but I managed as we all did and there were a lot of mouths to feed. We had a good wholesome food. Today it would be called organic and when we had a chicken for instance or fowl, every body had a certain part of it. My part was the neck. And to this day I cannot look at the chicken neck.

She took care of our schooling. We went to school, were always bombarded by a few stones by the peasant boys and ugly words were thrown at us. The expression "ethnic slur" was not en vogue yet but we went to school. The strange thing is that I remember almost nobody else in that classroom just us. We had a teacher, her name was Zala Jolan. We loved her, but I don't remember any report cards or exams. I don't know how Grandmother managed that. We had private lessons in, we had piano lessons by Miss Krauss from Vienna. We hated her because whenever we made a mistake she dropped the cover of the keyboard on our fingers. Then we had French lessons. The teacher smelled of mothballs. And then Grandmother told that a little religion would be healthy for us too and she engaged Mr. Galgoczi who was a retired teacher and he taught us the Hebrew alphabet and how to read but we had no idea what we read and what it meant. And then he taught us some blessings, one I still know but when he taught us what the Father says when the son becomes

Bar Mitzvah, Grandmother had enough and the religious education stopped.

In 1917 my Father was sent back from the war zone and got a desk job in the hinterland. We moved back to Budapest, at this time we could move into town closer and we lived there. Food was very scarce. We had sort of a corn bread. The whole corn was in it so to make it edible because it tasted like sawdust, we spread some mustard on it, and Mother made frequent trips to the country with bed and table linens and brought food back. It was in 1918 that we lost the war, though I prayed for the Kaiser and for our victory every single night. And the Spanish flu came, we all had it but we survived except my beloved governess. She couldn't make it and she died two weeks before her wedding. We were very sad.

At the end of 1918 the Moscow trained Hungarian Communists descended upon the country. It was a short but bloody revolution and the people were unhappy about it. It was then said that all of them who came were Jews and the anti-Semitic Hungary didn't like that very much but there they were and they formed a government. Worked somehow like the NKVD and the KGB, and later the Gestapo. They picked up people in the middle of the night and they were never heard of again. In February 1919, my parents and their friends decided to be baptized. It had nothing to do with their religion because in my whole life, you know, I don't remember any holiday observed. It was supposed to be a statement that you don't agree with the way they run the country and as I say it was just a statement and I think that they had quite some courage to do that because surprisingly nothing happened to us afterwards. And that was the time after the Treaty of Versailles and Hungary was cut up. And as I say Father was in the lumber and forest business and his job was in the newly found Czechoslovakia, now Slovensko. So we decided, no, uh, what I mean by we decided, that they decided that

it would be better to move to Bratislava. But there was one thing before that I want to mention. At the beginning of the school year I was supposed to go to a very prestigious school and I had to take the tram to go there and come back. Once I was sitting in the tram and a young man stood before me and squeezed my knees between his and then he tried to squeeze one knee of his between my legs. When I came home I told that to my mother and that was the last day I went to school. But anyhow, I had to be tutored again because I had to make two grades before we left for Bratislava, in the three months which were left. I did it and in December 1919 we left Budapest by steamer and went to Bratislava. I remember the first time I saw whipped cream. I was so touched I think I had tears in my eyes. We lived in a hotel and it was just wonderful. After a while Father sent mother and me to Vienna to get new clothes and then to Semmering to put on some weight. When we came back we moved into a very lovely house which the company of my Father provided. This summer we spent some time Francensbad. This was one of the three famous Czech spas. Tessa was there with her mother who was the youngest sister of my father, and Mother and I. My father was supposed to join us and stay for a little while with us. That was on the first of August in 1920. He came. He arrived. He came into the house and five minutes later he collapsed. His last words were to my mother: "Anyukam, I am very sick." And although our landlord was a doctor he couldn't help and my father died.

I forgot to mention that grandmother's house had an attic, which was a treasure chest for us. There were magazines about geography, history, and mythology and we just devoured them. Then she had old fashion magazines. We cut out the pictures and we played with paper dolls. Maybe I should mention too that when we lived in this beautiful apartment my parents had a very, very full social life. I remember mother in evening gowns. She looked so

beautiful, and father, who always traveled anyhow very much, whenever he went to Paris he brought her silk stockings in the colors to match her evening gowns. She looked beautiful in that.

Another thing which I remember, the house that the company bought for us that we had moved in just for a short while before my father died was just a few yards away from the house , where we lived Apu, you, John, and I many years later. (And another thing that I think I will remember. Little tidbits. In Budapest we had a maid. Her name was Suzy and she was responsible for the whole house during the Communist period, and when the Communists wanted open elections Suzy went to vote and she came back and we asked her for whom did she vote she said well, naturally for the King, who else?)

After Father died we had to go back to Bratislava and take his luggage also. It was a small suitcase. When we opened it we found in it different little bottles of different pills, drops, everything from drugstores in Prague. He was sick for a long time and he didn't say anything about it. Maybe that was the reason that in 1917 when we realized that we are losing the war and every man counted, he was not kept in the front line but was sent back to a desk job in the Hinterland.

My father was a very interesting man. I was positively awe stricken before him. He always looked wonderful. I never saw him in a pajama. I think at that time they wore nightshirts or a robe. He was always impeccably dressed and he was very, very, serious about manners and behaviors. For instance, how a table was set was very important for him. How the food was served. There had to be flowers on the table and no slipcovers on the furniture. No nothing. Maybe I mentioned it already, only good china, no everyday china. Only good silver, no everyday silver. He always said he was his most important guest in this house. And I had the

main meal, which was in Europe at noon, with them. I had my knife and my fork, and my spoon in a smaller size than theirs were but I had to use them. I was five or six years old but I knew that a used plate was taken away on the right side and you were served on the left. These were very important things for him. There were things which were never talked about. That's why he maybe never mentioned that he was sick.

We never talked about sickness or body functions or sex. These are all subjects we avoided. I was nineteen years old when my mother went to Vienna and had, as I was told, an abdominal operation. I was her attendee, but I never knew what it really was. If you were sick you tried to go into another city like Father to Prague, Mother to Vienna. When I got my period I thought I am going to die. That I am so sick. I had absolutely no idea what's going on, what's happening to my body. Nobody ever talked about such things. I think I was fifteen when I went once to Budapest to call on Papa's sister who had a very nice family there. There were three nice boys and two girls. And one of the boys I think I liked, and he liked me and he kissed me in the ear. And when I went home I asked my cousin who was five years older than I whether I am going to be pregnant. She gave me a very brief answer. Maybe she didn't know too much about it herself. That's how we were brought up.

I'm going to leave this tape in because maybe I remember something else that belongs to this period of my life and then I'm going to change to my teenage years.

TAPE TWO, "TEENAGE YEARS"

We went back to Bratislava. The company was very generous to my mother but we had to vacate the house. We found a very nice apartment and we moved in. Mother's oldest sister Irene, who is, who was the grandmother of Thomas Stewart, moved in with us. The two sisters had golden hair. They made the most fantastic embroidery and different things. They made drapes, they made fancy cushions and they were the first ones who made patterns and directions for knitted suits and sweaters.

I went back to school and graduated in the equivalent of the twelfth grade. Mother was only 39 when she was a widow and after two, three, I think two years, she met Kornel Papa. They started to see a lot of each other and he came even up to the apartment and they seemed to be getting closer to each other. When he asked my mother to marry him it couldn't have been easy for him because he was a bachelor of forty-five years and there was a widow with a teenage daughter. Though my teenage years were not rebellious as they are here, but they most probably had other worries about us. For instance, I remember much later when I was already grown up and I got a beautiful basket of flowers and I was asked why I got these flowers and I said I don't know! So what did I have to do to get such flowers. I didn't have to do anything and then I asked Apu why he sent me the flowers he said just to thank you for a very lovely day. On the other hand, for instance, I got from one young man a book of poems and I had to give it back because that was what I was taught was the thing to do. So they had the worries about us, not drugs and alcohol.

In the summer we went usually with Kornel Papa to Italy. We always had wonderful times, especially I, because I loved the Italian boys. And seemingly they loved me too. I had always some around me, and Mother was crazy about shopping in Italy. She bought the most beautiful silks and brocades for drapes. We had at that time

very large pieces of luggage which were placed in a special car on the train and when somebody crossed the border we had to get out and go to this special car. We had to open it for the duty officer. That was something very exciting for Kornel Papa because he was so very, very, correct. Once when mother bought a lot of silk and a lot of brocades, and that trunk was even bigger than two coffins. I don't know how these immense things were moved, well they were, we had people for it and we had carts for it and that was the way you traveled. We didn't have small baggage and luggage like we have today. And I remember once we were at the Italian-Austrian border and mother was asked to come and open the trunk. She went and meantime Kornel Papa walked up and down and up and down very, very excited. So excited and so conspicuous that he was stopped and he was fined for one unopened pack of cigarettes, which he didn't declare, which he smuggled, poor thing. He was a very, very lovely man. He spoke fluently Latin. When we went to Italy he just hung one I and O at the end of Latin words, and he got along very well. Like he was Italian himself.

Now that I think of the basket of flowers again, I remember that I got the (that it really doesn't belong to this tape but it is too complicated for me, just for one sentence, to change the tapes on the other one) first flowers from my life from my father when I was eleven years old. They were three white chrysanthemums. I think that is the reason why chrysanthemums are still my favorite flowers. I felt like a grown up, I had my period at that time already and I thought that I was a young woman and that I was not a kid anymore, though I think I was very much a kid and I think I was very, very immature. When I was engaged to Imre he was very young, I was very young, and I really married him for the wrong reasons, he was not the right one.

(There will be long pauses on that tape because I just didn't realize that when I turn it off it has to click and I just heard the click the first time.)

That was something else that added to our education in art. It was a time when the so-called Stengel post cards came out. These were regular postcards but they were made of stronger, harder paper, were gold and brass embossed and had the beautiful art objects on them. It was paintings and sculpture, buildings and different things. And on the other side it was always the description of the object and the artist and some of the artist's life. It was very educational and at the same time beautiful. I collected them and had a big album full of them. It was a pleasure.

I remember now that in the summer when I was at the Grossman grandfather I met a young man, I think, yes, Rosenberg, Ali, was his name and he introduced me to the modern Hungarian poets. It was very exciting and very beautiful. I even have two volumes of my favorite one. I know even today some of his poems by heart. He lived a long time in Paris and many of his poems are about Paris. Well, it was very interesting and he was a very interesting young man and he added to the pleasant stay during the summer in Grandfather's little village. I don't know whether it is not ridiculous to mention that but in the summer when we were in Scheveningen, and once we went to a dinner dance, Imre and I danced a waltz. We were both excellent dancers and suddenly we realized that we were the only ones on the dance floor. Everybody was standing around and when the music stopped we got such an applause that we were really embarrassed but it was really a very good feeling.

The North Sea was very, very cold. It was not a pleasure to go in and to swim. The sun was not so warm, it was not so nice as our summers used to be in Italy. But it was interesting. It was

something new and the Dutch cooking was very interesting and a new experience for us. The different kinds of bread, once we counted about ten different kinds what they served in the morning for breakfast.

This tape should be about my teenage years. I had somehow the feeling that something was wrong with it and when we listened to the tape from the beginning I realized being not very technically minded that I pushed the wrong button and I recorded something on the tape which was already used. So this way quite a few years slipped by and I would like to come back to them.

I think it is the graduation from high school and that summer my mother wanted to keep in touch with the Grossman family because of Father's sake and sent me to my Grossman grandfather who lived in TvrDOSin. That was a little township all the way north in Slovakia, close to the Polish border. My grandfather lived, I mean he and his wife, my grandmother, who was not really my father's mother, lived in a very nice apartment but no house in the whole township had plumbing. So to wash ourselves we had to use big bowls of water. The same what you have in an antique piece in your apartment now in New York, this kind. For a toilet we had an outhouse. I hated it but that was the only way. Grandfather had a thriving general store. It was very, very interesting. Everything what you could imagine was in that store. It had such a special odor which I loved. But behind the store was a little cubby hole where he had his office. In that office he had the most wonderful chocolates, silks, and wools. He kept that there for his special customers. It was a nice summer and I think that I mentioned it on that part of the tape, which was not quite in order, that I met a young man by the name of Ali Rosenberg and we read together the modern Hungarian poets. Our favorite was Ady Endre. He was somebody who lived many, many years in Paris and quite a lot of his poems

are about Paris. Then there is a volume about, the title was Blood and Gold. It was mostly earthly and economic things. Then there were his good poems which were absolutely beautiful. Some of them I even know today by heart. I have two volumes of his poems among my books. I sometimes take them out, I read some. It is very nice. He was a very, very interesting man.

Now after I came back from grandfather I enrolled in the Academy of Commerce. That was still a Hungarian school but we still had to have Slovak lessons, and as a foreign language I chose English. It gave us a good all around education and as far as commerce is concerned you had stenography, typewriting and bookkeeping. Apart from that we had a so-called self-improvement circle which was headed by one of the teachers. It was mostly about art. This was the time of the Stengel cards which I mentioned before. Each of us had to choose and research a subject and then write about it by the end of the year and read it to the class. I don't know why I chose the pre-Raphaelites. I don't know one single name anymore or one single art object. I think they were painters, ha, that part that I know.

Apart from that I had piano lessons and private English lessons. We were kept pretty busy with homework and were held on quite a short leash. For instance when we wanted to go to the movies it was not enough that our parents gave us permission for it, we had to ask the school principal if he give us the OK or not. But I was sixteen, boys appeared on the horizon. At first they were my classmates. That was absolutely nothing impressive, and I knew them too well and then maybe I was just not interested with them at our age. And then when we started to have dancing lessons, then we met the older, not boys, but young men. That's how I met Apu. And the two societies would say the Jewish and the Gentile did not mix. The only place was sometime in sports while we played

together. We went together skating or playing tennis and otherwise we just stayed by ourselves. We didn't have boyfriends. The men courted us. Which meant that they walked us to our private lessons, they walked us home from the private lessons and carried our books and carried our packages. It was very innocent and very lovely. Then we went to the dancing school event I said, and sports, and we had a lot of parties at home, me and my friends. We had a very, very lovely time. It was a nice part of being a teenager.

(I have to think, I don't want to forget anything.)

I don't know whether I destroyed that part of the tape before when I said that my mother met Kornel Papa and they started to see each other quite often. I think I mentioned that. Then they got married. The way I was told that mother was going to marry was a very strange one. In the First World War, we learned that everything has to be used, nothing has to get thrown away. My mother had never worn flannel bloomers. It was decided that I should have flannel panties and they made, my aunt and my mother, made some for me and I absolutely refused to wear them. So there was peace about it for a while, then once my Aunt Irene said that she has to tell me something very serious. She said "you know your mother is going to get married". And I said, "oh, that's all? I don't have to wear the panties?" So I liked Kornel Papa very much and I saw that mother was really alive again and was very happy for her. He looked always very earnest but he had a good sense of humor. We loved to kid him about his mustache, which was black, but he had a bush of white hair. He said, yes, his mustache is twenty-five years younger than his hair. He loved opera and we had our collection with beautiful long playing records. He knew the words of nearly every aria and usually when he listened to the records he sang along. It was a pleasure to hear him. It was nice for us to know more about opera, which before it

was really little. His favorite was Rigoletto. By the way, that was the first opera I ever saw.

Mother picked him up, every single day at six o'clock at his office. Then they went for a walk, hand in hand like young lovers. Mama dear was very happy and I was happy for her. She was only thirty-nine when she widowed. A very, very young age. She was a beautiful woman. Very gifted in every respect. They fitted perfectly together.

As I mentioned before, I met Apu at the dancing school and we sort of liked each other from the very beginning. Then we saw each other quite often. In the winter we saw each other at the skating rink. In the summer he picked me up every morning at six o'clock and we went and played tennis. Well, after a while it got serious and he asked me to marry him. I said that is impossible because I'm still at school. So he wanted to elope. I said again I can't do that to my parents so he was very upset and just turned his back to me and I didn't see him anymore. He sent me a beautiful black leather book by Dostoyevsky, Crime and Punishment, and that was the end of it. I was very, very unhappy and I ate myself to the biggest weight I ever had. That was the summer when I went to see my Grossman grandfather.

The next summer after I graduated with Cum Laude from the Commercial Academy we went to Alasio, that was the Italian Riviera, and I met Gino there. He was a very nice person, not very exciting. Not like the other Italian boys were but he seemingly had a liking for me. In fact he visited, he came to Bratislava, we couldn't talk to each other. My cousin Miklos, who was the older brother of Imre, translated our conversations which were very, very funny and I mean not adequate. Gino sent me beautiful silks from his factory and mother made wonderful dresses out of them, and after a while he asked me to marry him. Which was impossible because we

really didn't know each other, we couldn't talk to each other. Then when I wrote him that I was Jewish, then somehow the romance faded. I didn't hear from him for a while which I will mention a little later.

After graduation from the Commercial Academy it was decided that we go to Holland to Scheveningen with my other older Aunt Szidi and her daughter Rose. She wanted to meet her son who lived and worked in Hamburg. Her son was Imre. Imre couldn't come home to Czechoslovakia because he didn't want to serve in the Army and went AWOL, so that way he could never return. So mother and son met this way somewhere else. That's how we got to the North Sea, which was cold, and not pleasant. We were used to the warm climate of Italy and the sunshine. We didn't like it too much. But we spent there, I think, two weeks and during these two weeks Imre came from Hamburg. This was the time that was Rudolph Valentino time, and every young man wanted to look like Valentino. The strange thing was that Imre really looked a little like him and he looked very, very handsome in evening clothes. He had a cape, he didn't have a top hat but he had a cape, and he swept me off my feet. He was very charming, very good looking he seemed to like me too. I mentioned I was in one of the restaurants with dinner dances, which I mentioned on the tape before. When he asked to marry him I said yes, out of all the wrong reasons, because I was just thinking to get out of Bratislava, the small town, and see him and the way he lived. A new horizon began to open before my eyes and I said "yes". And we were engaged. We were engaged for one year. During this one year we met twice, each time for two days. Once in Vienna, once in Budapest. We never were alone, one of the mothers was always present, and then it was decided that we will marry on the thirty-first of July. It was 1927 and we went on our honeymoon to Montreux, and I think that from now

on I will take another tape because that is all about the teenage years I wanted to talk about.

That was a funny little thing I wanted to mention. I said that the Gentile and Jewish mixed in other sports, but this was tennis and then there was a young man by the name of George Norgauer who became a very good friend of ours later when I was married to Apu. He was a champion player, he was playing in Paris for tennis matches, and in Canada, and he was a very nice guy. Sometimes he gave us a few balls. He was in love with a girl, the girl didn't want to marry him, so he wanted to commit suicide but people said he just pulled the skin away from his chest and shot it through. But for us it was very, very romantic that somebody should kill himself just out of love, and with a friend of mine we both sent flowers and when visiting him in the hospital. I think it was very funny and he must have had a good laugh and sent us away. But for us it was an experience and very interesting and very romantic.

I'm sorry I repeat the words again and again. Maybe I remember later some other things about my teenage years but at the moment that's all I can think of. They were very beautiful, very carefree years. Czechoslovakia was blooming at that time. It was still under Masaryk, who created the real democratic society. Life was good and pleasurable.

As I mentioned my engagement to Imre, I think I will say here what I still wanted to tell. When I came back to Bratislava my mother started to buy things for my trousseau, to buy carpets and pictures. Tommy Stewart's father designed my furniture. He did a fantastic job. They were very, very beautiful, exquisite I would say. My dream to have a three-way mirror materialized. Next to the mirror were two little tables with drawers, and the tables had shelves which could be pulled out, with a hole cut in the middle for a little dish for warm water for manicuring. Everything was done to

perfection, it was not a closet, it was an armoire, the inside was for hats, another place for hat holders, and then drawers in different sizes for different sheets and shirts and whatever. The furniture was cherry, and the lamps he designed were alabaster, I don't know what you call it in English. There was another small room which was furnished out of pear wood, and it was just very nice comfortable arm chairs. It was like a little salon, I would say. Then there was the living room. The living room was mahogany with red silk armchairs, and the dining room was walnut. Everything was very, very beautiful, and when I got finally an apartment in Berlin (but that comes under the heading of Berlin) my mother made a beautiful little apartment for us, but that I will mention later when we come to that part of my life.

(I see that as I am speaking, that I just remembered so many things which are not even important and just try to tell that what I think it would be interesting for you to know.)

I wanted to use nice words when I decided to do this tape, but somehow in speaking they don't come into my mind. To my mind comes that we always said that Apu speaks like the New York Times and I speak like the Daily News, and I think here I speak like the Daily News. But when I think about it, good and nice words come into my mind but when I keep on talking, well, they just won't come.

There was no such thing as going out to the store and buying a ready-made dress or coat. If you had money then you went to a so-called fashion salon. You looked at the models and what you liked you said you would like to have it, and then it was custom made for you. Otherwise we had dressmakers and seamstresses who came into the house. A dressmaker was somebody who already had training school behind her, and I remember that is really something that I should have mentioned on my childhood tape. I remember

that one dressmaker fitted me once a dress and instead of using a pincushion for her pins she kept it between her lips. It was very interesting for me and I told her that I would like to try it myself. But thank God I didn't find a pin, but I found a closed safety pin. It went down my throat very easily. What was not so easy afterwards was a bottle of castor oil.

TAPE THREE, "BERLIN"

As I mentioned on the last tape we were married in Hungary, we went on our honeymoon to Montreux. Then after a stopover in The Hague to see Renee whom I met in Switzerland, we went on to Brussels, where Imre had his new job. He had a very good job in Germany with Siemens in metals, but Germany was in the throes of a very bad inflation and people sort of took up an inflation behavior, that is that they made the money and they immediately spent it because otherwise next day it could have been only half of its value. So he was looking for another job and he found one in Brussels. We took lodgings in a boarding house. The room was nice and clean as everything in Brussels, spic and span, but the bathroom was two flights below. So Imre started to work and I started to look for an apartment. He worked about eight to ten days and suddenly something terrible happened. His boss, new boss, shot himself. So there we were stranded in Brussels. We had no money, I had some money that Kornel Papa put into my hand when the train was already moving and he just said "Don't ever sign anything." That was the money we had.

Imre thought that the best thing would be to go back to Germany and maybe the old connections, pick up something or find a job or find any kind of living. So we went to Germany and found a very nice boarding house. Even we had a private bath. But it didn't last long because it was very expensive. Then we found something that was a little more modest. Unfortunately the old connections didn't work out because they were more or less in the same situation as Imre was, or just about ready to collapse. It just didn't work out. So we tried other things. We tried something new which was "photomat". It was instant pictures, it was new at the time but we had no money to back it up. And then there were the Roehr brothers. They made cars and they were the first ones who used the four-wheel drive. But it was again, they couldn't produce because there was no money so that was nothing either. So then he tried to be on his own in sheet metals. That didn't work out very well either. The only positive thing was that his old friends were married in the meantime, and it was a very nice circle and they accepted me, and they were very helpful. Especially Odette, who was a French girl. She was from Paris and she sort of took me under her wings. She was not even pretty, but she had charm and she was sort of very alive. She was a very good friend of mine.

It was no way of living at a boarding house, we spent more money than it was necessary, so we found an apartment. My mother came out and she brought all the things what she collected in this last year and made the apartment a little jewel box. It was very, very, very beautiful. Everything was perfect. I really had just nothing else to do but move in.

Slowly we realized even with that we really didn't have the chance to know each other, and we didn't know each other. I couldn't understand his way of life. For instance that we had to take a taxicab and then we had to watch the meter and when it reached

a point what we had in money than we stopped, got out, paid the taxicab and went on foot. I was still too bourgoise to understand that. We had many other things that just didn't work out. Our sex life was a disaster. He had somebody, I knew that he had somebody. We got into debt and he started playing the horses. Later, much later, I found out that Kornel Papa bailed him out quite a large amount and it just didn't work out. It hurt his pride that he couldn't provide for me, that I was disappointed with him. Finally he got a job as a traveling salesman. He was very much away and then he suggested that the best thing would be to get a divorce, and when he's on his feet again he'll come back for me. Which he really did, and it bothered him very much too that I had to take a job. I found a job as a model but at that time the models were not stars as they are today. In fact they had a pretty bad reputation. After three months I left the job and I found another one with an English company, the Tecla & Ciro Pearls. They made beautiful pearls. They were not real pearls, they were really artificial pearls but they were beautiful. They had a wonderful shine. They made custom jewelry, exquisite custom jewelry. They wanted to open branches in Berlin, and that's how I got the job and I was sent with another girl to London to learn the trade.

We went by first class cabin. It was a very, very bad experience. We were so sick that I couldn't even imagine it! We had to get out of there, we tried on the deck, we tried in the cabin, we tried every "ninth wave", they told us, but nothing helped. Finally we arrived in Harridge. We were just happy that we had solid ground under our feet. Two of the officers, when they looked at my passport, said "congratulations". I said I don't know why, because I just thought he said congratulations because I am still alive. But he said "you have a birthday today". So it was a nice welcome. So

after that we boarded that wonderful breakfast train to London. That was my first English breakfast and it was just, just wonderful.

They placed us in a boarding house and it was nice. I had some references to people. Some people were called or wrote to contact me and they were very nice. I was invited for lunch, for dinner. Once I was invited even to the famous Embassy Club, which was very elegant, very interesting, but never in a home. At the beginning we had problems with measurements and money. We had problems with the heat. We had these little heating units in the rooms. You had to put some coins in it and then it gave heat for a little while. When you were close you were burning in the front and freezing in the back. But that was the only way and I always heard about the Black Fog of London, but I never could imagine that I would live and see it. But I saw it. I had my windows a little bit open and the fog came in. It was like you could have touched it, it was so thick. It was a terrible thing. You could hardly breathe and not even the lamps shone through. But it was interesting to see because I heard so much about it.

The atmosphere in the store was very lovely and we made very interesting things. We made for instance copies of jewelry, most of them copies of pearl necklaces. By the way, I modeled a few pearl necklaces for a little booklet for our customers. Then in the afternoon we had half an hour tea time, so in the back of the store there was an old woman in a room who made very good tea and had scones and, well, we had tea time. The store was closed Saturday afternoon, so Saturday and Sunday I went around and just tried to see the sights. Sometimes I was sad and maybe I looked even sad because once I wanted to go down to the Thames and I asked a Bobby how to go there. He looked at me and he said "well, the way you look I'd rather not tell you". But anyway, he told me and then I found my way. We were very chaperoned, and if we

were out we had to say where and with whom. Eleven o'clock we had to be home anyway. So I was there six weeks and was happy to go back to Berlin again. They opened the store, it was very nice, very lovely. There were three other girls who were sent to Paris, and two of us who went to London, and the store began to flourish.

Imre moved out and I kept one room of the apartment for myself. The other rooms I rented to be able to pay the rent. I loved my work and was content. I was spending a lot of time with Odette. Odette insisted that because everybody had to have a boyfriend, that I should have a boyfriend. So she introduced somebody to me. Today I don't even know his first name, but everybody called him "Dicker", though he was not fat. Well, we had an affair and nothing special, nothing interesting.

My first vacation, on my first vacation, Odette took me to Paris. Her parents and her sister lived there and Dicker came along. So the funny thing is Odette suddenly got a very great liking for Dicker, and when Odette liked somebody she usually got the man. After a little while they became very, very friendly. They had an affair. I was in the next room watching that nobody should disturb them during the time that they made love. It really didn't interest me at all.

Paris was very interesting. I met a lot of her friends, well it was very nice. We went to some little places on Montmartre. There was one especially which was very nice. Lapin Agile was its name, and it was a little place. We had to walk down, it was a cellar. At the door you got one drink, I don't know what it was. It was one drink, a cherry was in it, and that was all. You couldn't get anything else and nothing more. The entertainment was the public. Some sang. Some played some instruments. But it was very, very, nice, very French. We always had good times there.

When we came back to Berlin, maybe that's when I really realized it that Berlin changed very much. It was really like Cabaret.

You saw more and more “brown shirts”. There were unpleasant incidents. Everybody was sort of waiting for something to happen, for some change. It was very, very unhealthy. From home I got one letter and one phone call after the other to come home, to come home, and finally I realized really it would be the very best to leave Berlin now. On January 18th in 1931 I left for Bratislava.