Three Silver Spoons

A true history of a border crossing in 1949 and of what happened afterwards

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The author and her husband in 1929

Preface

My mother-in-law, Irén Kövesi, who died in 1986, wrote this account of her escape with her husband from Communist Hungary in response to an article in the Hungarian magazine *Nök Lapja* ("Women's Journal"), inviting expatriate Hungarian women to tell the story of how they came to leave the country.

The fact that it was written in the 1970s for a Hungarian readership, at a time when the country was still under Communist rule, may explain why only two characters in the story are mentioned by name, neither of them Hungarian, and then only by their first names. In a happier time we are not constrained by the need for such caution. The writer's sons, and indeed their wives and the writer's sister-in-law, who appear in the second part of the story, can now emerge from anonymity. The elder (and taller) of her two sons was Paul (Pál), and his younger brother, my own late husband, was Julius (Gyula). The "beloved sister-in-law", Clara Kövesi, paid a long visit to Perth in the mid-50s, and considered settling there too, but decided to return to the familiarity of Vienna. In 1955 the writer's mother was also able to leave Hungary, after overcoming formidable bureaucratic rather than physical obstacles. On her own, and speaking no language other than Hungarian, she negotiated the journey by sea to Australia to be with her daughter.

Paul and Julius, accompanied by Paul's future wife Julia, had escaped from Hungary during the winter of 1948/49, and their mother describes in her memoir how deeply she missed them, and how she determined to rejoin them. Paul, with great courage and resourcefulness, returned to the country in order to make arrangements for their journey which, after an encouraging start, did not go according to plan. He himself, after managing to cross the border once again into Austria, had to wait anxiously in Vienna, not knowing where they could be, or when, or even if, they would arrive. (Other refugees have told how this scenario, of returning for some reason to the country they fled and then fearing that they might be unable to escape again, was the stuff of recurring nightmares.)

The memoir covers a period of just over fifteen years, during which this middle-aged couple escaped from Hungary, spent some months in the Austrian Tyrol, were accepted by the Australian authorities as migrants supported by their two sons, and travelled to Australia. Starting from nothing they eventually made an independent living for themselves in Perth running boarding houses for students.

They tackled house moves, a great deal of home renovation and hard domestic work. Shopping was necessarily done on foot; cooking, for some of the time at least, was done on a wood-burning stove and laundry was done in a wood-heated copper. There was no domestic air conditioning in Perth during the 1950s. After a few years they retired to a small suburban house opposite the lake in Shenton Park. This was a bitter-sweet retirement for the author, overshadowed by her husband's failing health and then his death in 1964, followed by long grieving, but consoled by her joy and pride in her grandchildren.

It was the author's passionate devotion to her family which prompted the whole adventure, as she says herself.

Her account, written in Hungarian, was first translated by Tamás Pummer, a family friend, and more recently by Olga Demeter, to whom I am enormously grateful for fitting this demanding project into her busy academic life. I have drawn from both versions to make what I hope is a coherent and readable account of the story, though I acknowledge that it is unlikely to do full justice to the original. If I have sometimes taken liberties and made my version too free, I apologise to both translators and to the author herself. I am also grateful to my daughter Clare, who supplied the title, and made many valuable suggestions for the text, and to my youngest daughter Nicola, who designed the cover.

I have appended, as an alternative view of the migrant experience, an article written by my late husband Julius, which was published in 1960 in the Australian periodical *The Observer*, which for a short while was amalgamated with *The Bulletin*. It ceased publication many years ago.

Finally, as always, my grateful thanks and appreciation to Chris Ulyatt for his patient and skilful photo-shopping, typesetting and layout. Evelyn Waugh said of his own books: "I seek to make a pleasant object", and I am sure that Chris feels the same way about those books on which he works.

Janet Kovesi Watt

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"O man, strive on, strive on, have faith and trust!"[1]

I leaned out of the dining room window. It was a single-storey house; in front was the industrial rail siding to the factory, and beyond it, extending beside the main road, a smallholder's orchard. I have been looking out upon this same orchard for 24 years. As I muse, I ask myself: what lies behind those 24 years? A young woman, newly married, and all her dreams of grace and happiness; the building together of a beautiful home, brightened by the clear sparkle of two happy pairs of eyes, the eyes of my two sons. In those years I felt like the happiest woman in the whole world. But then came the thunderbolt which shook the world, killed millions of people, destroyed borders and forced upon us air raid shelters, the fear, the horror. We saw planes firing at each other, then crashing; defenceless humanity driven along the roads by brutal thugs; a soldier's body lying on the road, buried completely by snow during the night, run over next morning by a tank, then after more snow run over once more until finally a small frozen hump was all that remained as a record of a young man's life. We called this the World War, and we had to experience all its fear and horror. The war was followed by ruins and silence, as well as the birth of an entirely new kind of life.

I could understand why this formidable new beginning could not progress smoothly. It did not start smoothly for us either. My wonderful and beloved husband, in his position as factory superintendent[2] (in those days superintendents were called "exploiters of the workers"), was dragged for a whole year through a Calvary of nerve-racking accusations, trials and self-justification, which killed in me all possible vestige of faith in justice. Finally, however, the unimaginable miracle happened, since the workforce cleared him of the charges and demanded his reinstatement. Those same workers had for three generations grown up under his management, and he was not only fully aware of their work capacity, but of the most minute details of their family lives and circumstances. What was more, he knew about their joys (regrettably few) as well as their sorrows (sadly many), and they recognized in their turn that in him they had someone who would listen to them, understand and help them. Now that everything had been

1 Imre Madacs, *The Tragedy of Man*. (Ember Küzdj és bizva bizzál!) Trans. István Sötér.

2 He managed a brick and tile factory in the clay-rich town of Tata, west of Budapest.

honestly restored, they repaid him by continuing their familiar daily work under his direction.

I could feel that the people of the whole nation were entering on a new path, but those in charge at the outset were not even themselves sure of the main direction to follow. Still others were unprepared for the change that was to come. It was our bad luck to be caught up in the beginning of the new beginnings. I remember with gratitude, however, those of our workforce who had the awareness and courage to stand up for my husband in the face of the waves that broke against him.

Eventually I was able to overcome countless feelings of disappointment, but unfortunately I also became aware of other feelings that had lain deeply suppressed during turbulent times and that now came to the surface. What was more, at present our home now seemed a lonely place; a sense of emptiness pervaded everything since our two children, with their noisy liveliness, their happy chatter and their two joyful pairs of eyes were absent. I missed my two sons, who were not small boys any more, but grown up young men, now coping alone, far, far away from us in a foreign university, bent over their books, studying hard. I kept asking myself motherly questions: "Do they have clean shirts? Who is cooking for them?" and right then and there, as I was leaning on the window sill, burning emotions rose up in me, and staring at the neighbour's fruit trees I asked them: "So, is this going to be the purpose of my life from now on? To look out upon you, trees, and abandon my dear sons to their fate? No, and again no. This is not life; I cannot live like this, and I will not live like this!"

It was this sudden realisation which became the driving force that determined the entire future of our family.

"How did you come to think of this just now?" asked my husband.

"I didn't only think of this just now; it has been gnawing at me subconsciously for some time, but other worries have suppressed it until now. You have been restored to your former position, and are liked and respected as before, so nobody will be able to say that we must have committed some wrongdoing to explain why we are fleeing."

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to go to our sons, to be able to see them again, to help them in whatever way we can."

"What would you do over there? You don't speak the language, don't know the local customs, so what can you do there?"

The snow was falling outside in thick flakes as I answered: "I could sweep the snow."

He smilingly answered: "There are so many snow sweepers."

"But I'll sweep more snow and do it better than the others, and they will employ me."

I can still remember this conversation, but he didn't contradict me. We never, ever argued, and we always tried to understand each other. This time he was also aware that here was something very different, something that could not be argued about, that no discussion could help or change.

Thus it came about that one misty dawn, late in the autumn, we set out with only two bags that we could carry, leaving everything behind with which we had lovingly made our home. We left all our belongings,[1] without casting a backward glance. I did not want to look back! It did not even cross my mind that we might be going into uncertainty, nor what our fate might be from now on. I was certain that where other people could survive and live, we too could do so. Of course we would be able to find our place.

Waiting for us in Budapest was a young woman whom we had never seen; she was to be our guide. She explained to us that we would be setting off in the afternoon, in order to reach our destination under cover of night. I learned many things during our difficult journey: among others, how important darkness could be, and the timing of the new moon; how it was possible to walk completely silently on unfamiliar paths, how to wade across flowing water without splashing, as well as how it feels when, after walking on a strange road, the unexpected barking of a dog causes a door to open suddenly, and a flood of blinding light to appear, then what a relief it is when later the door closes, as though with understanding.

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1 They were able to sell a few items, as we were reminded by an extraordinary coincidence, years later, after the writer had died. My husband, the writer's younger son, answered a request for Christmas stamps from a Hungarian subscriber to an international philatelic magazine. The new Australian Christmas stamps had just been issued, so my husband sent him a first day cover as a gift. To his astonishment he found a receipt for the sale of a piano, in his father's writing, included with the collector's note of thanks. He had wanted to know if that had indeed been their family's piano.

Once we were at the station the young woman gave us two train tickets and instructed us to watch for her movements as she prepared to get off the train – she was sitting three rows in front of us. She said that we should get off there too, and that it was important to walk fast to catch the bus, because it tended to fill up very quickly, leaving some passengers behind. Unfortunately we did end up being left behind with other passengers, and there we were, stranded, in an unknown place with a crowd of unknown people. We had no time to wonder what to do because a huge lorry stopped beside us, with high wooden side boards. They opened the tailgate, and we and the crowd swarmed onto it, packed in like sardines. The lorry was transporting car tyres, and luckily I was standing in the middle of a pile of them, and so was able to sit on a rim. It was impossible to see anything in the surrounding darkness, not even any details of the road, or if the road was bordered by trees or not.

What was to become of us? Where were we going? The lorry had been driving fast for about half an hour while payments were collected, when it finally slowed down and stopped. Within seconds it had emptied, and we too got down. It immediately roared away, but we could not see any of the passengers, our former companions. It was as though the earth had silently swallowed them up. I was filled with a strange uneasiness, but could make out that we were standing in the middle of a village street. The whole village was asleep in a night as dark as a tomb. There was deathly silence around us, and yet I felt as if behind those dark windows the buildings were full of moving shadows, and the air was full of whispers. Could it be that our sixth sense is at work in times like this?

I shivered when the whispering reached our ears from quite near by and became audible. It was someone asking for our names. He was a tall, well-built young man, whose features we could not make out in the darkness. Still whispering, he prompted us to follow him. He led us into a completely dark kitchen, where he suggested that we should sit on a bench against the wall and told us that we would have to wait for a while. He then went into a dimly lit room from which no light escaped. Later I remembered the scene and thought that the villagers had probably made arrangements for these occasions, and had agreed on a roster, deciding between themselves the times when to set out with their charges. At last he reappeared with a woman who was to be our guide, and we learned that she was the young man's wife. He picked up our bags and instructed us to follow him in single file; we should not talk, and should walk without making a sound. We travelled along a rough track for about an hour and a half until we arrived at the edge of a brook. He took off his shoes, and rolling up his trousers, took hold of my bag and told me to get on his back. He took me to the other bank, carefully sliding his feet one centimetre at a time, so as to avoid splashing. After that he

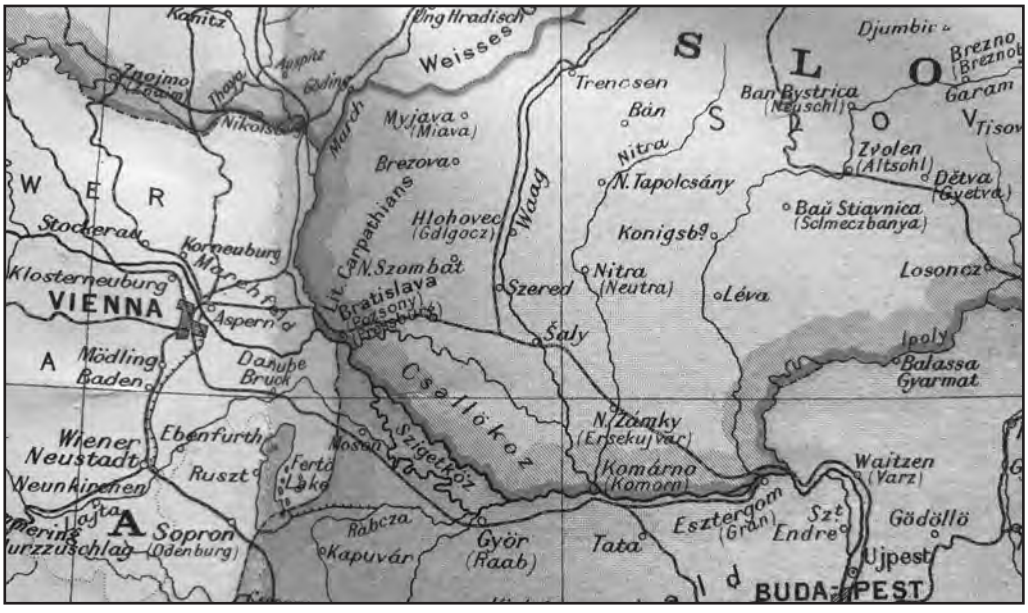
went back for my husband in the same way. We arrived at the garden of a village house, where without a word he guided us to the door. Nobody talked to us, and our new host took us into a spacious room. Here at last it was light. At one side of the room there was a married couple, on the other a single person, and so on. Everyone seemed to be asleep although one could sense that they were actually awake but trying to escape notice. So we too settled together in a corner, on some low seats, and I immediately fell into a doze.

At dawn the woman woke me up, telling me to hurry up and collect our belongings so that we could catch the first bus. We did not know which bus; all we knew was that we should not talk, and much less ask questions. We followed her to an unknown local bus stop where, while pressing the bus tickets into our hands, she said that the bus was going to take us to Poszony [Bratislava], and then left. Everything happened as she had told us, and when we were able to get off in the streets of Poszony I was suddenly filled with optimism, because here it was agreed that we should wait for yet another unknown person who would take us to Vienna next morning, and there we would meet our sons! I wanted to shout for joy, but it is just as well that we do not have the gift of foreseeing the future!

The weather was a bit overcast now, and it was still very early in the morning, so we turned into a café as their first breakfast customers. We tried to spend as much time as possible there, since our meeting with the new stranger was not scheduled to take place until ten o'clock. This meeting duly took place and turned out to be with two pleasant middle-aged men. Once again we were given the usual standard instructions: that we would leave for Vienna late in the afternoon, and arrive there the following morning. They would accommodate us somewhere where we could wait for them undisturbed and in safety until the afternoon. We were led to a two-storey building which looked like a school or a barracks, enclosed by a brick wall. There were fifteen policemen and a crowd milling around. "I am certainly not going to go near that place!" I protested. "Where do you think you are? Are you afraid of the policemen, for God's sake? They are here to keep order and protect everyone so that they come to no harm" explained one of the men. "But what is going on? Why are there so many of them?" I got no answer to this, however, because my husband prompted me, and so we stepped in.

The forecourt and the whole building were tightly packed with people speaking a foreign language. Once inside, we learned that the building was the gathering place for legal Jewish emigrants from Poland, for whom the Americans had paid a pre-arranged fee for their visas. From this place they were to be transported to their desired destinations. As we came to learn, this had been going on for months. If the agreed amount was not reached, onward transportation was halted,

Main street, Bratislava old town today



and haggling started about the tariff until an agreement was reached for new fees. The negotiation could take weeks, and no sympathy was shown for the emotional and physical state of the impoverished multitude living in such uncertainty. So many sad scenes that I witnessed in that building were deeply etched in my soul! I needed to write about all this in some detail because it is necessary to explain the unexpected turn our lives were to take from now on.

In one of the offices we were only required to give our names, since they were interested in nothing else. Right away we were shown the way to the dining room and to where we were to sleep. We thanked the person who directed us, but did not mention that by the evening we were expecting to be miles away, travelling to our destination in Austria.

At noon we were given a substantial and well-balanced meal served in a huge dining room, in the company of a crowd of people, but we could not finish our lunch because an anxious commotion broke out among the people – there were frightened voices and running feet. We were told that the gates had been closed, that the policemen had been replaced by armed soldiers, and that nobody could get out or in. Many family members were stranded outside in the city, and countless visitors were trapped inside. We were trapped likewise, and nobody was to be allowed in or out until the new fee had been agreed on.

We also learned that we were not the only non-Polish people in the building: there were around a hundred more who were housed in the attic, supplied with two rows of folding camp beds with blankets and pillows, and given adequate meals. What about hygiene? We had one tap and two tin wash basins for a crowd of a hundred people, including small children. The toilets were on the landing of the first floor and were blocked almost every day. All this did not really bother me; what I did find bothersome and acutely painful was the awareness that our elder son was right there, in the neighbourhood, anxious and worried, waiting impatiently for us. What was he thinking, why hadn't we arrived, why was there no news of us? One morning we received a visit from some Sisters of Charity, asking what they could do for us. We sent a letter for our son with them, telling him not to worry about us, since we were well, though for the time being confined in an attic.

For ten days we had been breathing the oppressive atmosphere of insecurity in these lofty quarters, when the courageous director of this institution tried to help us by declaring that we were all Polish citizens, and we learned by heart our unpronounceable surnames, first names and places of birth, etc. The hitch occurred when a Polish delegation came up to the attic, and not one among the

one hundred of us could speak a single word of Polish. Well, I do not remember how things worked out, but I was sincerely worried about the director of the institution. I have unfortunately forgotten his surname, but his first name was Max. I remember him as a tall gentleman with an authoritative bearing. I liked to think that he belonged to the breed of anonymous great men who at those sad, chaotic times would generously dedicate time and care towards those countless individuals who were devastated by the ordeals and uncertainties of war, regardless of their race, birth, religious convictions or age, because he considered only individual human beings. This is what I have to say about him though I know he deserves much more!

Everything continued without change in the attic until after a week or two, late one afternoon, we received orders that next morning, very early, everybody had to present themselves in the yard, with their bags. Obeying the orders, we were ready, standing in the yard, shivering in the foggy early morning. There were groups of policemen standing round us, talking cheerfully; we must have been a familiar sight for them. Nevertheless, the hours passed, and nothing happened. In the meantime the sun rose, shining brightly; already it was past ten o'clock, and everybody was nervous and impatient, when suddenly movement erupted and news rippled through the crowd: "We are waiting for a bus, and everybody is to be sent back to the place they came from."

Where did the rumour come from? Who said it? Was it believable? I still do not know, even today, but we saw how with acrobatic agility some young men scaled the high brick wall in panic, to where there was a steep street with a stairway. We from the other side of the wall could see how they climbed two or three steps at a time towards freedom. At the same time I looked at the policeman standing in front of me, who at that moment prodded his partner with his elbow, nodding his head towards the fugitives, while his companion smiled sympathetically as if to say: "Enterprising, aren't they?" I think our guide must have been telling the truth when he said as he left us here, that the policemen were there to protect the inmates so that no harm would come to them.

After a while my husband said: "Don't touch anything, leave our bags where they are, and come with me." He took my hand, and looking in the eyes of the aforementioned policeman, who stepped aside to let us pass, drew me to the other side of the building where there was a gateway leading to the street. As we reached the other side there was an armed soldier sitting there, leaning on his rifle. Instinctively we pulled into the space behind the door, not knowing what to do, because now we seemed trapped, unable to go forwards or back. Those were very difficult moments, and the thought flashed through my mind that if only we

could have arrived one day earlier than that crucial day, how different our fate would have been.

Some steps sounded in the hallway; the tall figure of Mr Max appeared. He noticed us, but we did not dare to say a word or make a sound, and I impulsively put my hands together as if praying, signalling a plea for help. He walked past us as though we didn't exist, without moving a single muscle on his face which would give us any hint of encouragement. "I have been disappointed in him", I thought bitterly, thinking that he had let us down. At that moment I felt my husband's hand, as he murmured: "Be careful; hurry." At that instant I realised that the armed guard was not in his station, but was leaning far out of the front window, with Mr Max earnestly explaining something important to him. Within seconds we were out on the streets of Poszony. So after all I was not disillusioned. Where to now?

We no longer had any luggage, since all our possessions remained in the yard, although I still had my small handbag. Its contents: two handkerchiefs, a comb, a toothbrush and three small silver-gilt coffee spoons, with delicate filigree ornament on their handles. How did just these get into my handbag, and why three? I do, however, remember reaching towards the drawer of our cabinet, but why did I take just these with me? I have no answer. (We still have two of them; sometimes I still wonder what became of the rest of the set left at home.)

On the pavement opposite I saw two elderly gentlemen strolling, deep in conversation. My husband crossed the street to consult them and I saw them shake their heads. They continued talking, and finally my husband came back with an address, an address of someone they knew only by hearsay. We should try our luck with that someone, a young man. So we tried. He lived in an unpleasant neighbourhood, was between twenty-five to twenty-eight years old, and did not look trustworthy. There was a spacious, ample room, the familiar scene of people sitting apart and very quiet, and the familiar instructions: we shall be leaving at about five or six o'clock and until then we must wait here.

Instead of walking with us he walked ten or fifteen steps ahead of us, and we had to watch him. We arrived at a small river jetty, swarming with a crowd of people, and there the man surreptitiously put two boat tickets into our hands; this was how we realised that we needed to cross the river. In the meantime, it was getting dark. The passengers stormed the ferry in a disordered rush, and it got so tightly packed that it was impossible to move. We soon crossed the river, and just as quickly the boat emptied near some woods, and the passengers disappeared.

Where was our guide? We could just make out a line of people moving towards the trees; we hurried after them, and we all walked into the ever-darkening woods. As time went on we could only sense the whereabouts of our companions by the faint rustling of their steps, so dense was the darkness by now enveloping the forest. Someone took my hand and made me sit on a wooden bench next to my husband. I could not distinguish whether it was a man or a woman, but I could sense that there was someone else sitting on my other side, although I did not dare to fumble around. For a long time we stayed sitting there, and now and again heard some faint rustlings, but then, silence. My impression was that there might have been a round clearing near to us, judging from the occasional sounds, with benches placed around where they grouped the emigrants and then sent them on in batches.

At last it was our turn, and someone touched me, giving me the signal to start walking. When we walked out of the pitch-dark woods (I have not been in such total blackness since) some light seemed to suggest the approaching dawn, though it might have been the rising moon. I could now clearly see that we were walking in single file on a fairly narrow path along a high river embankment. At a bend in the path I could count that there were twenty-eight to thirty of us. Beside the embankment there was a field of long-stemmed harvested corn. On the other side of the water I saw a huge Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round and the shapes of some circus tents. There must have been a narrow bridge across the river, because a man appeared from that direction, and passing us by, walked with a purposeful stride towards our guide. After a few minutes we stopped and gathered together, and at that moment I saw on the side of the embankment, facing the water, that there was a huge hollow full of people, probably assembled earlier.

At that moment the man who had just arrived stepped forward and in a harsh and strident voice shouted orders that we should form lines of four – and everybody was to go back to Poszony! There was a sudden noise of splashing coming from below the embankment as the younger men jumped into the cold late autumn waters and swam rapidly to the opposite bank. The majority however, no doubt taken by surprise, obeyed. I was not at all frightened, not for a second. On the contrary, I flew into a rage, because I had already judged this man to be more like an underworld crook than a person of standing, and what was more, I suspected that the guide himself was his accomplice. Yet what did they want? Instinctively I started to yell furiously: “Here we are, seventy or eighty of us, are we afraid of just these two?” There was a great confusion and commotion, but the people started to react, and the man tried to take control of the situation by grasping my arm, leading me after the guide, so that we were at the front of the line.

I realised that if we moved beyond the corn field there would be no possible way of escape, but if I were to suddenly wrench my arm free from his iron grip and dart into the corn field he would either have to run after me and chase me, and give the others a chance to escape, or he might not bother for only one prisoner, and therefore I would make it myself. I was successful! But where was my husband? I started to shout his name. Here and there I could sense the movements of others who had also taken refuge in the cornfield during the confusion, and also the reassuring sound from nearby of a voice urging me to be quiet, my husband's. So after this sudden and not very pleasant interval we were together again, with no idea about what to do, or where to go.

On a dimly lit road we could distinguish the line of people snaking towards the city. After a while we crept cautiously out from the blessed protection of the high corn stalks. Deciding to trust our own judgement we started out on a wide main road, with the faint hope that it would be the way to Vienna. Of course we walked in the almost impenetrable scrub beside it. We were glad when after a while a man appeared, and since he was alone, we resolved to approach him. We asked for his advice, so he told us that the road to Vienna was half an hour's walk away, on the other side of the town. He was a little late coming home from work that day, but being a decent person he very generously offered to accompany us, since he understood that our fate depended on it. A big crowd came pouring out of the movie theatre in that part of the town, so I assumed that the time was around midnight, and we were rather uneasy at having to push our way through a mass of people in a brightly lit square. Nevertheless, we were soon able to reach the road which was our goal. The man gave us further advice: over there, the three lights in the distance mark the check point; avoid those. There, behind that row of bushes by the riverside there is a cart track; we should follow that. Everything worked out according to his instructions. I thought the river was the Morava, but this was just a guess.

Feeling almost safe we continued our trek along the easily-negotiable cart track, protected by thick scrub, until in one hollow a frightened strange-looking man appeared, covered in mud. Since both parties were taken by surprise, we tried to reassure each other. We learned that he was also Hungarian, and that just a few minutes before he had been walking with seven companions when a patrol captured them, but he was able to fight his way clear and throw himself into a swamp. It occurred to me that on this other occasion, too, the guards had not thought it worthwhile to pursue a single person, so luckily he was able to escape. For him it was a matter of life and death, since he was hoping to rejoin his wife and children in Vienna. I sympathised with him from the bottom of my heart.

So now there were three of us on our journey, but we decided that it was wiser to travel in the ploughed fields, to avoid the possibility of the guards returning to search for him. We were only able to move across the fields crouching down or on all fours, since the full moon was just rising, mocking us with its light, which would make us visible from afar as three conspicuous moving figures. It seemed to me the longest field in existence, and it was just our bad luck that it was also cross-ploughed. The newest unpleasant surprise was about to come: a seemingly bottomless ditch, bordered by a line of posts, fortunately without wire. If our God-sent muddy companion had not been with us, we would have been completely stuck here because I would not have been able to cope with such an obstacle in my worn-out state. Even with his help it was very difficult, because he and my husband had to cling on to the sides of the pit themselves as well as supporting me. After a hundred more steps the torture was repeated, then that also was past. At last we encountered a pasture which was easy to cross, and we soon left the ploughed land far behind, and the check point and the two dreadful deep pits.

Where were we now? My husband was trying to orient himself by the stars, since it was a bright starry night, so we went on, following my husband's instructions, or trusting to luck, until we reached the outskirts of what looked like a typically Hungarian village, bordered by acacia trees. There was a sign post giving the name of the village, but for a second none of us dared to go nearer to read it. Our muddy companion was the bravest, and coming back he fell on my neck with tears streaming down his face. From the name we could tell that it was an Austrian village, some kind of a Dorf, but I cannot remember which Dorf from among the countless others. My only desire was to lie down in a hayloft, to sleep on the hay, or even on the straw of a warm stable, anything, just to be able to lie down and sleep. The whole village seemed silent and dark, but finally we did find a house that was lit, with signs of people moving around, and we decided to knock. A man came to the window and we told him who we were and what we wanted. He answered: "If you want to go to Vienna, then you should leave as quickly and as quietly as you can, because this village was occupied by the army this afternoon and if they find you here, it will be very difficult for you to get to Vienna." However, he described to us the shortest way to get out of the village, and how we would be able to reach a neighbouring town, from which we could take a train to Vienna. I could not take in one word of all this important information; I only knew that I could not lie down, yet I was not able to stand on my feet any longer. But then I suddenly remembered, our elder son was waiting for us in Vienna! What a tremendous power can be hidden in one simple sentence.

After passing the vineyards on the outskirts of the village, now banked up with hay in preparation for winter, we reached a tall haystack. "Look at your watches, and let me lie down for ten minutes", I pleaded. I fell asleep before my head had even touched the hay. The cruel awakening came, but those ten minutes of complete oblivion filled me with new strength. After crossing a small wood we reached the town we had been told about. Shutters were closed; there was complete silence; the whole town was asleep. We could not sit down since everything was wet with heavy dew. We walked back to the fringe of the forest, where my husband leaned back against the broad trunk of an enormous tree, drew me towards him, and with me resting my head against his shoulder we fell asleep. By the time we regained consciousness our muddy companion had disappeared. Perhaps he thought that he would be more successful in reaching his goal on his own, or fate had brought him to us for a few hours so that he could help my husband as they both freed me at the hellish ditch. Who can see into the designs of Providence?

We walked into the town, reaching the main square, which was wide and spacious, but silent and deserted. The only sound was that of an approaching bus, which in a few moments stopped at the square, and was so fully packed with passengers that the ones standing in front had to get out in order to leave space for the ones wanting to get off. Just when the passengers were stepping back on the bus, to my amazement, who should I see, neatly dressed and freshly shaved? It was our guide. So great was my surprise that impulsively I shouted out, calling him by his name. His conscience must have pricked him, because he jumped off the bus when it was already moving. We challenged him about the events of the previous day and he hastily gabbled in explanation that he himself had so many troubles, and it was so difficult for him to extricate himself, and so on and so on. We knew that every word was a lie, but we managed to tell him that we did expect him to honour our agreement.

He then tried to placate us with grand promises – that he has a friend who owns a hotel, we were to go with him, and then he will wake him up and there we will be able to rest and tidy up. Then after breakfast he will take us to Vienna. He started throwing pebbles at the upper storey window of a small hotel, and then suddenly looked back. We did so as well, and saw a railwayman at the top of a railway embankment. Our guide sent us under the porch, telling us to keep out of sight, and we obeyed, and waited there patiently. However, after waiting and waiting we started to feel suspicious and decided to look out: there was no railwayman, no guide. We had been duped by this shameless swindler. What is more, I suspected that we were dealing with a member of a gang, and this was confirmed by a gentleman who had been captured in the cornfield, whom we met again later in Vienna. He told us that they were herded back to Poszony,

where the two swindlers actually collected a bounty from each captured escapee, even though they had already pocketed an agreed sum in payment for the border crossing. This gentleman was one of the lucky few who found an escape route, and in that way was able to rejoin his family. It is hard to comprehend the depths of money-grubbing to which the scum of the earth can descend in such a topsy-turvy world.

Here we were again, in the main square of the still sleeping town, duped, exhausted, but still hopeful. We started out to explore the place, and when we reached the church we saw a light in the presbytery window. "We can safely go in here" said my husband, "They can't possibly cheat us here." So in we went. The parish priest was just returning from visiting a dying parishioner, after administering the last rites, which was why he was up so early in the morning.

We told him about our travels, and asked if we might tidy ourselves, and pleaded with him to lend us just enough money to buy a rail ticket to Vienna, since we only had Hungarian currency with us. The parish priest promised us all he could, and had already brought a basin of warm water, but no money. He asked us to understand that he kept receiving a great many needy and unfortunate people, and helped everybody according to his means, but then he was denounced and accused of profiteering, and narrowly avoided arrest. Meanwhile, however, he took away our muddy shoes, bringing them back cleaned, and while we finished tidying ourselves, the housekeeper brought us some food, and two big cups of coffee on a tray. Never, ever, have I drunk such delicious and aromatic coffee as at that parish at daybreak; in vain have I tried to prepare coffee in countless ways since then, but have found it impossible to get that heavenly taste. In other ways, too, our parish priest proved to be truly God's servant; he could not resist the impulse silently to put the amount of money we had asked for next to our tray. What is more, when he accompanied us to the door he dug deeply into the pockets of his cassock and pressed into my palm all the loose change he could find.

We were able to buy our tickets at the railway station without any trouble and boarded the train a little while later. Soon we were speeding towards our destination and clattered into Vienna! We had the name of a hotel in which to stay, so we took a taxi, and the first thing we did, as soon as we had arrived at the address we gave, was to notify our elder son, who was staying in a student hostel. At last, the reunion with our son! His eyes were the same, but with dark circles underneath, and overall the boy looked worn out and exhausted by the anxiety and turmoil of the previous weeks, working night and day in order to try to trace our movements and get news of us. But as soon as we embraced one

another we were able to forget everything in a moment, and I could feel that the extraordinary longing that had come over me at the dining room window, which knew no fear or limit, was finally satisfied.

We spent just a short time in Vienna, as one more border crossing awaited us. I mean the border of the French zone, which I liked to call the "salon crossing".[1] One sunny morning we boarded a train, and after a short journey arrived at a grove of trees which we crossed on foot, and reached the church square of Mariazell. My first thought was to write a postcard to my dear mother, to reassure her that we were safe and well, here at Mariazell, her old place of pilgrimage. I also wanted to go into the church to say a quick prayer of thanksgiving, but we were prevented by the arrival of the bus which was to take us to Buch an der Mur, arriving at nightfall. We stayed there at a small Tyrolean Inn. Our room was like a tiny doll's house, with traditional Tyrolean-style wooden furniture carved with roses, even the picture frames and wooden shutters. The crisp mountain air was clean and pine-scented. Next day we still had to complete the last stage of our journey towards Innsbruck, where our younger son was waiting for us!

This journey was unforgettably beautiful. On both sides of the train there were infinite pine woods on snowy mountains in an ever-changing scene. I kept looking out in both directions, from my own window and from the windows on the other side of the aisle, where the landscape glittered in the sunshine. It was evening by the time we arrived at Lans, and moonlight succeeded the sunshine, lighting the sign on the station saying: "Village of Lans", and a lone figure standing on the snow-covered platform – our younger son! Embracing him speechlessly I realised that my former ambition to have our family reunited once and for all had been achieved. From Lans we could see the city of Innsbruck in the valley, and Sistrans above Lans. We had to walk up, crunching on hard-packed snow. Beside the track was a pine forest, also thickly covered with snow, the whole scene dazzlingly lit by the moonlight.

We arrived at the one and only single storey gasthaus of Sistrans, where a spacious room and a smaller one were waiting for us, warmly heated by an iron stove with round lids on top. It occurred to me that it looked like the one we had had in our maid's room back at home, but ours was heated with coal, while this one was heated with fragrant pine wood. Well, the sight of it kindled memories which reproached me: "Are you dwelling on the past again, just at the sight of this small

1 Austria and the city of Vienna had been divided into zones controlled by the occupying forces of the United Kingdom, the United States, France and the Soviet Union. France controlled the western part of the country, which included Innsbruck.

iron stove?" "Why shouldn't I warm to the memory?" I answered myself, with a sort of new-found joyful freedom. It was my past, the place where I was born and brought up by my beloved parents. There we lived with the usual joys and sorrows of middle-class people, there I was a student and spent the happy years of my youth, and there my children were born. These memories are not to be erased by anyone or anything as long as I live. That was my past, but this is my sons' future. I also asked myself: "But where will this future be? And what will it be like?" So I looked upon the little iron stove as a warm-hearted old friend. Later I cooked on the same stove for nearly half a year, not only for my family but also for some young Hungarian student refugees who came to visit us on weekends. Here they were greeted by a pot of gulyas, or a pan of poppy seed noodles or stuffed cabbage, nourishing traditional food for young people which reminded them of home cooking.

The following week my husband went to Innsbruck, and immediately found a job with the French authorities as a German and French interpreter, which brought some relief to our precarious financial position. Meanwhile, the boys continued to attend the University of Innsbruck.[1] Each late afternoon I impatiently waited for the arrival of the bus which stopped in front of our window, bringing my family home. Usually on weekends, with their ski gear on their shoulders, they headed towards Igls, where a ski lift would take them to the crest of the Patscherkofel, from where they could explore boundless snow fields glittering in the sunshine.

During those times my husband and I walked in the pine forests and pondered our still uncertain future. We investigated and examined all possibilities, but the only problem was that nobody seemed to want us. The countries that would admit us required a wait of several years, and we could not wait that long. In this way the months went by in a quiet, peaceful, picturesque Tyrolean village, but nothing realistic came up.[2] I was on the verge of despair (oh no, not that!) when one day my darlings came home with the news that finally they had found a place on earth that would accept us, though it was a long way away. Even so, they themselves were prepared to go – so what did I think? I said that we would willingly go where people were willing to receive us, and we would prove to them that they had not welcomed us in vain. What was the name of that land? It was Australia.

1 Special scholarships enabled students to study.

2 They considered Argentina, but family members already there advised against it, and themselves returned to Europe. Countries like the United States and Canada were not accepting older refugees, and the family was determined to stay together.

The family at Lans

Julius on the Patscherkofel

This was how we ended up at the port of Bremen, where the Skaugum[1] refugee-transport ship was waiting for us in the harbour. By the time the identification of two thousand people had been checked, and the last one had been processed, night had fallen. (It seems that ships follow the unwritten rule that refugees can leave only at night.) The cabins on one side of the ship were reserved for men, and on the other side for women. Mine was four decks below, deep in the hull, shared with thirty-eight other refugee women. I luckily had the lowest of one of the three-tier bunk beds, the one nearest to the door. Once I had settled in and stored my little bundle under the blanket, I climbed the narrow steel stairs to the ship's deck, where I was completely alone. I leaned on the rail and looked at this bleak part of the harbour; it was obviously not reserved for luxury liners, but dedicated to other purposes, with only one dim light winking, and not a soul to be seen. When the ship almost imperceptibly slipped its moorings, there were no streamers, no confetti, not a single hand waving me good-bye or wishing me a good trip and a warm welcome at my new home. I stayed unmoving on the deck until only a narrow ribbon of the land which I was leaving was visible far away, and its name was – Europe. By the time I arrived back at the cabin I found everybody else fast asleep after the very hard day, and I readily followed their example.

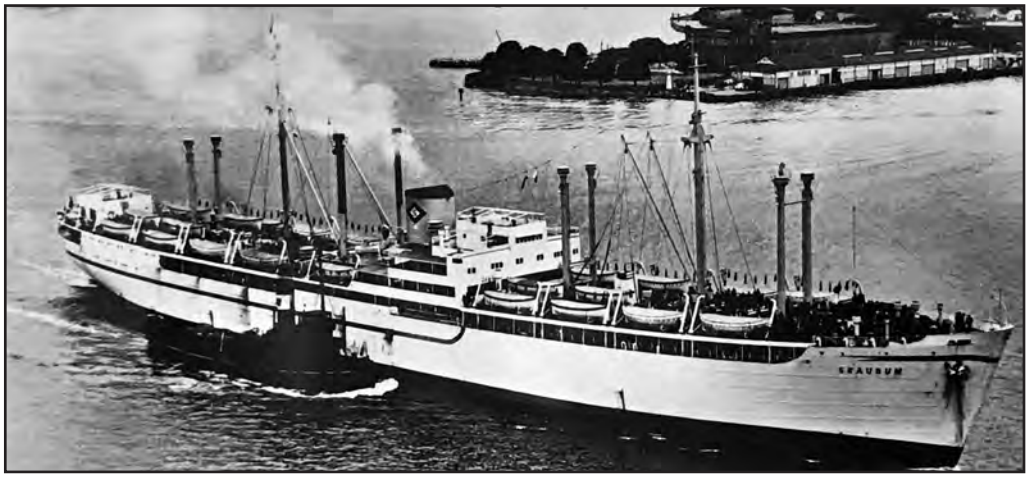
During the first day groups started to form, and actually there were a number of Hungarians, many of them intellectuals, among whom a companionship developed, along with warm and lively friendships, which really helped everyone to cope with the long journey. Moreover, the relationships formed there evolved into strong and stable friendships that have lasted to this day. I was able to enjoy the sea journey until we reached the Red Sea, and shall never forget the magnificent sunsets that can only be seen on the ocean, and the catering which was generous and without fault. I only visited my cabin in order to get some sleep and had no idea who my bunkmates were.

Unfortunately, while we were sailing through the Red Sea I became seasick and remained unwell for the rest of the trip. Fortunately, I was the only sufferer among family members. I could not tolerate the slightest whiff of food and spent my days on deck in the company of a similarly afflicted Hungarian woman, whose husband was a butcher, working as a volunteer in the ship's kitchen. When he had the chance he would secretly, as it was forbidden to eat on deck, bring us some rolls filled with sliced meat, which tasted like home made ones. The wife

1 Skaugum was a Norwegian cargo ship, converted after the war for carrying refugees. This was the second of nine such voyages, carrying 15,819 passengers in total. She had a sister ship, renamed "Kormoran" by the Germans, which, equipped as a raider but disguised as a freighter, engaged in a memorable and fatal battle with HMAS Sydney off the Western Australian coast.

Keeping the children occupied during the voyage

Julia and Paul at rear, Julius in the foreground with a friend



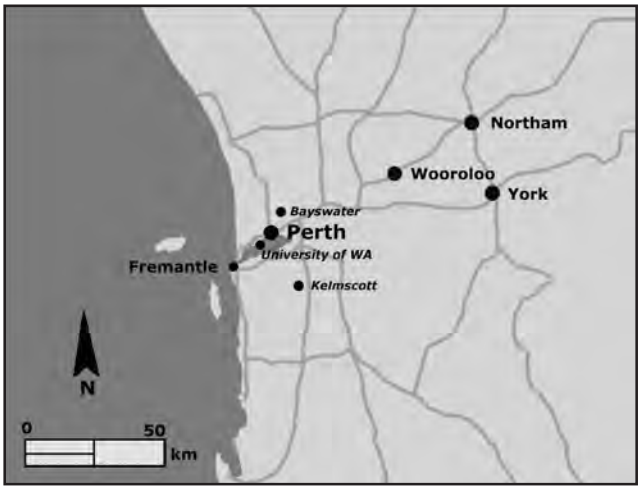
The Skaugum. Since she was a converted cargo ship there are no portholes for the new accommodation decks fitted into the hold

of another friend of ours, who volunteered to help in the children's dining room where fresh fruit was served at every meal, brought us one or two apples or oranges, so I lived on these, and faded away.

Meanwhile, every afternoon, right beside us, the crew emptied enormous containers of leftover food: meat, sausages, ham, cheese, vegetables and bags full of bread into the sea. Despite my own lack of appetite this daily event greatly disturbed me. I thought that the poor people of a whole village could live on what they threw out every day to fatten the fish. I could not help asking the captain about this. He explained that it had to be done, because before departure the ship was always supplied with plenty of food for each passenger, which he distributed every day accordingly. One can work it out: if among the two thousand passengers two or three hundred did not eat each day, the leftovers would pile up three times over. He could not put the scraps back into cold storage, because when he arrived at his destination his store would show a surplus amounting to a quarter of the allocation. As a result, he could be suspected of not fairly distributing the passengers' rations and would be questioned, and perhaps even lose his job. He was probably right, but I spent the rest of the voyage trying to solve this perplexing problem.

On June 13th, a Friday,[1] we finally arrived at our destination, Fremantle. Again, it was not at the part of the port reserved for luxury liners. As soon as I trod on solid ground all my seasickness instantly disappeared. I even felt hungry, and was glad that we had all received a generous food parcel before disembarking. All the same, right there, I resolved never again to embark on a sea voyage. However, we cannot see into the future, and it did happen later that I should twice more sail around the globe, without being seasick, and on a luxury liner.

1 The record of the voyage gives the date as July 14th. This was indeed a Friday in 1950.


Northam
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AUSTRALIA

"The fates gave you two lands to call your own..."[1]

Here we are, docked in the cargo area of the port of our new home country. Wheat must have been loaded onto ships here previously, for there it was spilt thickly onto the ground. I gathered a handful of the grain mixed with earth and smoothed it with my index finger on my palm, as the farmers did back home during the harvest, reaching into the first sack to forecast the quality of the coming year's bread. So, this was going to be our land, and this our daily bread. The earth was neither black nor loam, just sand, but the grain was firm and plump.

There was a long railway train next to the ship, and leaning against it piles of sacks filled with oranges, which were being distributed by smiling women speaking encouraging words. I could only understand the smiles and the oranges, but I was very much touched by both. The train transported us to Northam, from where we continued by bus up to a hillside covered with semi-tropical forest. The place used to be a military camp and had now been converted into a temporary refugee camp to receive five thousand of us.

The buildings were long and wide, constructed mainly from tin, not only the roofs but the walls as well, with big windows. The young unmarried women were housed apart from the unmarried men, as were the married couples. The most convenient was the area reserved for families with children, who were placed in separate houses according to the size of the family. I called our house "The Blanket Castle" because blankets were hung so as to create a central corridor. There were small cubicles made for bedrooms or living spaces, furnished with two beds, ours separated by our travelling case which served as a night-stand or table. On the beds there were clean sheets, which were changed weekly. The partitions were also made of hanging blankets, so that if I were to turn vigorously during the night I would knock my neighbour in the shoulder or ribs. She was also Hungarian, a landowner's wife. This actually happened, and we kept up a close friendship to the end of our lives, as well as my husband with hers and their son with our two sons. He used to come to visit his parents with his violin each night, and softly play a melody by Bach or Mozart, or old sentimental Hungarian songs.

1 "To the Stork" "Neked két hazát adott végzeted." Mihaly Tompa, trans. Yakov Hornstein.

At the camp, once a week, the men were selected for work. This was the season of the sugar cane harvest,[1] and we were anxious that our sons should not be selected for this work, so they signed a two-year work contract instead to do work assigned to them under conditions and pay similar to Australians doing the same job. There was, however, complete freedom at the camp: anybody could go to the city, or to nearby farms, and if anyone found a suitable job, he was allowed to leave the camp. This was how our two sons got their first jobs at the Wooroloo hospital as nurses.[2] (I was wondering how it was possible to use so many "oo" sounds in a place name, and was told that in the native aboriginal language there are a lot of "oo" sounds, but the Australians did not change the original place names, and that is why there are other places originally named by Aborigines with even more "oo" sounds in them.) In this way our sons were saved from the sugar cane harvest.

Meanwhile my husband visited the nearby businesses, where he met a manager who immediately invited us to stay at his home until we found suitable occupations for ourselves. He said that from their house it would be easier for us to travel by train to the city, and be able to look round and get information, than from the camp in the hills. Besides that, we could live in a more civilised place. Yet, if I think back, I could not find any fault with the refugee camp life. We had plenty of good meals, meat three times a day (or eggs for breakfast instead of meat); at midday and dinner there were three courses, and there were second helpings for those who wanted. The showers were basic, but provided hot and cold water, and were housed in a separate building. We were able to attend daily English classes. Otherwise everyone was free and independent, and on top of it all we each received some weekly spending money.

We accepted the invitation, however. They lived in a suburb called Kelmscott, and our host was waiting for us that evening in his car at the station. When we arrived at the gate, his wife welcomed us warmly with hugs and kisses as though we were her own family. Inside the house the table was invitingly set with a freshly cooked and generous English dinner. We were also offered the use of a fine proper bathroom, and next, a really nice bed with a spring mattress. It was a long time since we had been able to sleep in such comfort. We fell asleep straight away, and it was late morning by the time we woke up. To our astonishment, in the morning we found the whole house wide open; even the front door was unlocked. We looked into the garden; there was nobody there either, and we noticed the line of

1 This remains puzzling, since sugar cane is not grown in Western Australia.

2 The writer's elder son worked on the telephone exchange, despite his rudimentary English, and would tell callers that the line was bad, so that they would repeat themselves slowly and give him a chance to understand.

trees with thick trunks bordering the street that led up to the house, which was on a two-and-a-half acre block of land. We did not see the sort of kitchen garden or orchard that would have been usual with us, but ornamental shrubs grown only for their beauty, and a scattering of lemon, orange and grapefruit trees, as well as the usual lawn, with some uncultivated areas at the back.

When we got back into the house, we discovered a note from our hosts on the kitchen table saying that we would find milk, butter, eggs and ham in the fridge, and the toaster was on the table, as well as honey and marmalade with which to prepare our breakfast. There were cold meats and salads for lunch, and we were invited to help ourselves. They would be back home in the evening. My husband and I looked at each other with amazement; this was the first time we had found ourselves face to face with real, local Australians. We saw not only their boundless readiness to help, but their loving friendship and measureless trust towards people they had only met the evening before. Today they had left their whole house open as though to their closest relatives. If this was true for all Australians, I thought, then someone who is willing to work honestly with them will not be let down.

How much faith the attitude of these good people inspired in us that morning! On top of everything, when they came back that evening, they even gave us their apologies for having left us, explaining that they both had jobs in nearby suburbs, and needed to leave at half past eight in order to reach their workplaces by nine. We continued to enjoy their warm hospitality for a month, and so during the day we travelled to the capital city in order to get information about possibilities, as well as to get acquainted with the environment and try to find our way around.

The most difficult thing at those times, it seemed to us, was how to afford a place to live. Everybody lived in family houses with gardens, and the deposit for even the smallest one of these was estimated to be between £80 to £100. We could not even dream of being able to afford such a sum. Finally we managed to rent a huge empty room on the upper floor of a house. I found those times the most uncomfortable of our expatriate life. The reason was probably that I had never lived as a lodger, not even when I was a young unmarried woman, much less as a married one. What bothered me most of all was that I was obliged to use the owner's kitchen on the ground floor if I wanted to cook, and share a bathroom with the other residents, and so on, but I know, we had to start somewhere.

My husband had a job as a draftsman in a big construction company, and I worked as a housekeeper for an unmarried businessman. My employer, after having his breakfast at half past eight, left the house and arrived back home at half past

five in the afternoon, to a prepared meal waiting for him. After dinner he used to hurry out to amuse himself. My work was undemanding, but unfortunately it only lasted for three months, because our sons succeeded in moving to the city. There was a room next to our own rented room which had recently become vacant, and we rented it for them. I too came "back home" because three men found it difficult to manage under such living conditions, but then so did I.

My husband came to our rescue. He had got to know a businessman who had been commissioned to have a survey done of a huge building, a factory or commercial building of some kind, to make measurements and draw plans, and complete the job inside a week. He offered my husband a deal: If the work was accomplished in one week, he would provide us with a small family house and garden without the need for a deposit. I remember my husband leaving before five in the morning and returning exhausted late at night. The work was demanding and difficult; nevertheless he succeeded in the task. So he was given the address of the promised house. It was a pleasant little house in a nice neighbourhood, with four rooms and a modest garden.

We moved into our new house in a cheerful mood, with all our belongings, which consisted of just a trunk and a few small bags. At the new house we again experienced the nature of the Australian character. When we arrived at the address we had been given, the first thing we did was to knock on the door of the open verandah; no answer. We went round the house and knocked on the window; still no result. We could not see anything through the drawn curtains, so we decided to try the handle of the front door... and to our surprise, it was open. We went into the house, where not a soul was to be seen. It was fully furnished: there was wall to wall carpeting in every room, there were inner-spring mattresses in the bedrooms, and pillows and blankets; in the wardrobes there were sheets, pillowcases and towels. In the living room I saw comfortable armchairs and a sofa. The kitchen cupboard was full of glassware, cups and plates; there was a drawer for cutlery; another held kitchen utensils. On the lower shelves there were saucepans, a mincing machine, vacuum cleaner, dustpan and brush, and the larder was stocked with flour, salt, sugar, ground coffee, tea, and an incredible variety of other provisions. It all seemed like a dream, or like the fairy tale of "The Wishing Table" after having had to cope with that awful former rented room.

We soon met our neighbour, a pleasant gentleman of the same age as my husband, the manager of a timber yard. He told us that the owner of the house was a widower with two student sons who were at present living in college. Our neighbour also told us that our landlord was living in another house nearer to his workplace, but "Not to worry; he will soon get in touch".

By this time our sons had already enrolled at the university, and my elder son's fiancée, whom he had known since they were both at the University of Budapest, was also continuing her studies here. Two of his Hungarian friends asked if we would rent them our small room, with board, and their request was a godsend, because the fact is that I not only like to cook, but it is actually my hobby, and this meant that we might get some help with our expenses. This arrangement also contributed to our later way of life.

We started to get used to our surroundings as well as our new home. Besides that, in the good old Hungarian way I began to do some farming in our back yard. In a small fenced area my chickens started to scratch and provide us with fresh eggs. I must mention that one day, when I went out to feed them – what did I see? In the middle of the back yard there was a huge pile of chopped wood, enough to fill a large truck. At first I was a little cross that the delivery men, instead of leaving it at the neighbour's place, had unloaded it in our yard without even asking permission. I begged my husband to go and speak with the neighbour about the mistake and tell him that we were willing to help throw the logs into his yard. In reply, our neighbour cheerfully answered that it was he who had ordered the wood for us, but the delivery men had been in a hurry and had not had time to stack it in the wood shed. So he added, if we wanted to help, we could carry the logs ourselves into the wood shed, and then we would not be worried about not having enough wood for heating. This was another typical Australian gesture! We still could not get used to it; we were repeatedly swept off our feet. All these episodes, as well as our own simple faith, gave us the energy to make our home in this strange and unknown land, and to love its people.

Now we had a nice little home, which was the most important thing. What was more, our sons were at university, and it was entirely up to them how to manage their lives. At the same time I was also wondering what our own future would be? My husband's drawing activities among a bunch of other young draftsmen could not be a permanent solution and was probably not personally satisfying for someone who for almost a quarter of a century had been accustomed to being in charge of hundreds of employees and office staff. I thought this job would not prove to be very absorbing, but he never mentioned or gave any indication of this. On the other hand, we were both happy that he had got the much-needed job so quickly.

Meanwhile I was considering a thousand different projects. I was on the lookout for something which we could do together, independently. At last I accepted that many of my schemes were not altogether appropriate for the local conditions. Then unexpectedly one day my two boarding students gave me an idea. Why don't

we open a student boarding house? This little house would not be big enough, however. Many rooms and a large dining room would be the first essentials. All this time I had been corresponding with my sister-in-law in Vienna, who was the same age as me, keeping her up to date with our plans for our future. When I told her about this last project, she, knowing me and my enthusiasm for cookery, thought that this idea of mine was the best yet, and that the most appropriate thing she could do was to send me a cheque enclosed in her letter. She was not aware that with this gesture she had laid the foundations for our whole future! If I think about what the real amount was, however, not enough to cover our most basic needs, I could have spent it all in half a day. We thought hard about the project, and decided to deposit the cheque in an account dedicated to the purchase of our own house.

To describe my husband, I should say that there were very few fields of knowledge that were foreign to him; he could speak discerningly and judiciously about almost all subjects. I could hardly imagine him without a book in his hands; he was interested in all branches of the arts, especially music. Not even his best friend, however, could say that he had any business sense at all. In this confusing new environment where we were now, however, if it was I who had all the plans and entrepreneurial ideas, it was he who efficiently and ingeniously put them into practice.

In the present case, he didn't simply consult a real estate agent, but approached the president of the real estate institute in the capital city, who was slightly his senior, a very serious and professional gentleman. We were able to discuss all our projects with him, together with our financial situation. This gentleman called us a few days later, offering to come and pick us up in order to show us a building which he would try to get for us if we found it suitable. The neighbourhood in question was not a fashionable one. The house was built of brick, but neglected and abandoned, in the middle of a neglected garden. Nevertheless I liked what I saw, and realized the importance of the six big rooms, the spacious enclosed glass veranda next to the kitchen, which could serve as a dining room, as well as the huge store-room adjoining the house (which would later be converted into two more rooms). Within a week we signed the contract! We also engaged a Hungarian farmer, who was living somewhere in the north and working on the roads. He earned good money, but since he had no opportunity of spending it there, he had organised his life by working for one year and taking the next year off as a holiday to live in the city. He was enjoying his holiday year now, and arranged that if he could board with us, and especially share our home-cooked meals, he would help us to renovate the house.

This was a great arrangement for us; in this way four men could start work at once on first restoring the inside of the house, the walls, windows and doors. Then came the more difficult problem: to get the necessary furniture. Fortunately there were at least as many second hand furniture shops here as banks, but only the furniture could be bought on credit. The extras such as mattresses, linen, sheets and pillow cases had to be paid for in cash, because if the instalments were not met it would be useless for the dealer to repossess anything damaged and torn. Here again my husband took charge; he contacted a wholesaler and explained our situation and our project, so next day I had to go with my husband to search through the huge stock, looking through several floors and down to the basement in order to choose the things that we needed. There was everything there, and I was able to equip the kitchen as well. The dealer delivered all the merchandise, the furniture and accessories, the following day, after we had signed the agreement. My husband was able to accomplish all this thanks to his serious, reassuring and trustworthy personality, but success was fifty per cent due to the Australian businessman's benevolent and trusting attitude towards us. So, finally, here we were, we had achieved our own house, fully furnished and ready to receive its tenants.

On the other hand, what should we do now with the other house, which had been earned by such hard work in difficult circumstances by my husband? Here is the young couple, who have been waiting so long for each other, what is the point of waiting for their degrees when now is the best moment for them to start their life together? The house was fully equipped, and they would only have to worry about paying the rent. They should get married now and take this great opportunity. We talked things over with our son, and soon words became deeds. They exchanged vows at a quiet wedding in a local church, with only family members and a few close friends present. For me it meant that my elder son, having left the shelter of the family home, had started his independent life, which had good prospects, though not rosy ones from a financial point of view. Anyway, they were healthy, hopeful and happy young people.

In the meantime, our house was filled within a week. We could accommodate seven undergraduate university students, all of them from overseas. Australian students did not suit me, because as soon as term was over, without even waiting for their exam results, they sped away home in their cars, while the overseas students could seldom afford the expensive fare to travel back home by sea. They chose rather to look for a summer job and so earn what they needed to cover their expenses for the following year. For our business it was important not to miss a single week. My first guest student's name was Robby; he stayed with us for eight years.

One of the Hungarian families who tackled their own home-building in Bayswater

Buildings start to go up on Drake Street, now a major suburban thoroughfare

Images reproduced by permission of the Bayswater City Council from "Changes They've Seen; a History of Bayswater" *by Catherine May*

I shall give the details about how we were able to manage our life despite being deep in debt. In those days the weekly rent for one student's room with board was three pounds, so our weekly income from seven students was twenty-one pounds. (I don't count the Hungarian because we were paying him.) On the other hand our weekly expenses were: five pounds for the mortgage repayments on the house, and five pounds for the furniture. Gas, electricity and water cost one pound, so subtracting what was left over, to cover the meals of eleven people, I was left with an income of ten pounds. I never took more than that with me when I went shopping so that I could not spend more. That amount had to be enough to cover three meals with meat, with a satisfying side dish, desserts or fruit, all with suitable variety. One had to be a good manager to accomplish all this. If I had had the time to think about it I would have been proud to have been able to do it all, but unfortunately I had even less time than money. I had to rigorously allocate the jobs for every minute of the day if I wanted to fit everything in. The cleaning of the big house, the cooking, washing up and shopping were all hard work, but my husband helped with everything. Even so it was half past ten by the time I managed to get to bed, and from having been on my feet all day my legs kept cramping for five or six minutes. When I was finally able to relax, I organised in my mind the next day's duties, which I dealt with systematically in order to be able to carry on.

At that time the city was developing a new suburb, Bayswater, and Hungarian refugees immediately invested heavily in land, taking up whole streets of these newly available blocks. But Hungarians are not Hungarians to stay satisfied with just land, so they also built houses on the blocks. One of them found out that my husband was an architect, and got in touch with us to ask if he would design a house for him. My husband did indeed do this for him, as well as completing the legal details and documentation, which was a great help for people who did not know much English. Now they only needed a shovel in order to start work on the foundations. They usually first completed the bathroom, which was mandatory, followed by a big garage. The family then moved into the garage. If the family was large they built it themselves; if not, then two or three families worked together and soon had a roof over their heads. You can see about a dozen houses in that suburb which were designed by my husband. This undertaking did not give us a significant financial boost, however. When I asked my husband whether the professional fees he was charging for so much work were unreasonably low, he answered in his typical way that these people too are immigrants, people of modest means, who work as hard as we do; if we benefit from a little help they also benefit from not being ripped off. He was right, after all; with this little help we were able to make ends meet.

Our students were a bunch of cheerful, good natured and contented young people. Despite coming from different countries, they soon became friends, and we came to like them as well. I realised that we had finally achieved what I had longed for, since we were now our own masters, dependant on nobody and not having to adapt to anybody. Soon our little business was running smoothly. It was also a great comfort that both our sons and our daughter-in-law had finished their studies with outstanding results.

Then, however, we learned that in the university area foundations were being laid for three residential colleges, and that there were plans for two or three more. This disconcerting news stuck like a thorn in my mind. If the colleges are to be built, then in two or three years there will be enough accommodation for most students, and who would be willing to come to our place, such a long distance away, travelling for half an hour? Something must be done, and urgently, but how? The more I thought about it the more I realised that even if it seemed financially almost impossible, the only solution would be to move the boarding house to the other side of town, nearer to the university. The problem was that the area was one of the most expensive suburbs, compared to the modest and unpretentious one where we were at present. When I discussed my concerns with my husband, he was also of the opinion that we could not expect to have lasting success in our present location, but he was very doubtful about our chances of being able to move to a new place. We should still try, however, because it was up to us to control our fate.

After this conversation my first step towards carrying out the plan was to go first thing every morning to collect the newspaper from the front garden. (Early in the morning they would throw the newspaper you had ordered into the garden from a car.) I scanned through the "For Sale" advertisements for houses which interested me, which fortunately were arranged in alphabetical order, by suburbs, and altogether could take up eight or ten pages, especially on weekends. In the morning, when our students had left, we hurriedly tidied everything, and set out to look at the houses advertised for sale. Even if we found several that met our requirements, however, whenever we contacted the agent we found that they had already been sold. We also needed to find an owner who was willing to wait until we had sold our own house, so that we could pay the deposit. Our case was not simple, but I did not despair, since we had triumphed over several other difficulties before arriving at this stage.

Several long weeks, and yet more weeks passed in this manner. I fondly remember the particular Saturday when we went looking for one of the advertised houses. From the main road leading to the university we reached a pleasant side street;

we passed well tended gardens and attractive houses shaded by trees, until we reached the advertised house. It was on a half acre block of land, with a park-like garden, and a winding path leading to a huge-looking house built upon a high stone foundation. A wide stone staircase led to the entrance, and it was surrounded by a verandah supported by pillars. The double entrance door was made of jarrah wood, with a handsome brass handle and knocker, and shaded by a spreading palm tree. I thought we must be mistaken, and went back to check the house number: yes, this was it. Again, in the usual Australian fashion, the doors were unlocked and half open, and the house was empty.

We stepped into a spacious hall; to the right there were two rooms with big bay windows, and each room had a French window opening out onto the verandah. There was a good-sized bathroom with white tiled walls, and to the left a big salon, at least eight to ten metres long, also with a bay window and an independent exit as well. From the hall there was an L-shaped corridor from which all the bedrooms opened. At the end of the corridor was the dining room and a big kitchen and two bathrooms. At the back of the building there was a covered verandah more than ten metres long, where traces of paper streamers and other decorations showed that it must have been used as a dance room by the younger people who had lived here. On the other side there was a similar seven-metre-long enclosed verandah. In the back yard there was a separate building and wash house. I was so excited that I could not remember exactly how many rooms there were, and kept getting confused and unable to find my way round the house. I gathered that the building must have been lying empty, because everything was thickly covered with dust; the garden was dry, and the lawn, which must once have been very well kept, crunched under our feet.

I said enthusiastically that this place would make a proper student boarding house, and would also provide a reliable income for our old age. My husband only smiled, and did not discourage my great ambitions, my hopeless dreams, since I would come to realise for myself if they were unrealistic. He did not get in touch with the agent, but on the next day, even though it was Sunday, he went to see his old friend, with whom we had kept up our friendship, and who had visited us from time to time. He told his friend about our worries, and our daring plans for the future connected with our discovery of the house. His friend knew about the building, as well as the man who had built it. He told us that the owner was a well-to-do bakery owner, who had had it built for his family with no expense spared and including the best that money could buy. The heirs were four wealthy farmers who did not spend much time on its care and did not have the time available for it. A consideration was that only wealthy people would be interested in this kind of house, but they would want something already finished and ready

The big house as the family first saw it

The entrance hall in 1989

to move in, and not have to take the trouble of renovating such a large house and garden. On the other hand, the property was too big for a small family, and for both those reasons the house had been on the market for a long time.

My husband's friend could not promise anything, but next day would go to talk to the agent in order to find out what the situation was and what could be done. In the meantime, the next afternoon my husband went to the abandoned property and turned on all the lawn sprinklers until the garden was soaking, and repeated this daily. "Don't you regret all the pointless trouble you are taking every day after your hard day's work?" I asked, and he replied: "If nothing comes of the deal then I did some good for the garden, but if the deal does come through then it is all the better for us".

I won't go into detail about the suspense which filled the following weeks, but our friend put our present house up for sale, and actually sold it within a week, while we signed the contract for the purchase of our new "palace". All this seemed like a dream come true in our adopted country, after having been living here for only about three years. As for the garden, my husband was right; nobody could now quote to us that there was "not a single blade in the stubble, not a sprig of green in all the broad meadows."[1] Countless new blades of grass had sprung up from the dry turf, and when we moved in, the following year, there was a beautiful flourishing green lawn all round the house, that could have been the envy of any Englishman. Nevertheless, here we were; it was just like beginning all over again. We decided to paint the students' rooms first and then to move in, but now this was a serious undertaking, done by professional removalists. Our students happily joined us, and some of them helped. One of them paid a whole year's rent in advance, in order to guarantee his place with us. This came at a good time, because after the wall painting, my husband with our Hungarian transformed the big back verandah into three rooms, and the other into two rooms, each three and a half metres wide, with a corridor to provide separate entrances. This work was the most financially demanding, because it needed a lot of timber and asbestos sheeting, in addition to an enormous amount of physical labour. We needed new sets of furniture, but since I was better informed by now, I went to auctions and was able to buy everything at a reduced price.

We had twelve student guests, which amounted to a serious small business. We kept the three large front rooms of the house for ourselves, and one of the bathrooms. I planned to make these rooms cosy with carpets, cushions, armchairs and other

1 "Nincs egy árvá füszál a tors közt kelöben" from *Töldi* by Janos Aranyi.

comfortable pieces of furniture, so that by the fourth year of our arrival in the country our home was suitably set up, and we had achieved all this by ourselves.

Meanwhile, the family were overjoyed by the news of the birth of our first grandson! My elder son obtained a position teaching French at one of the high schools, while still continuing his university studies, while my daughter-in-law stayed at home for one year on maternity leave. I would have liked to help them, but under the circumstances, it was completely impossible. On the other hand, my younger son had an easier life, since he lived in the family home, provided with board and lodging and clean clothes; the most important thing was for him to study seriously and complete his degree, which he diligently did. Besides, he always took jobs to cover other expenses he might have.

In his final year he gained his degree with honours, and achieved the highest results in Western Australia. As a result he was awarded the prestigious Hackett scholarship, despite not having been born in Australia and not even being an Australian citizen. This privilege was formerly reserved for Australian-born students. I cannot describe his joy and that of the whole family. The next day his picture was published in the newspaper over the headline in bold: "What can be done in five years." The next dilemma was which university to choose, but he finally decided on Oxford. He was also the first member of the family to be naturalised as an Australian citizen, out of turn, to enable him to get his passport. He also received from the university his ticket on (this time) a luxury liner. After having been given a big farewell party by his fellow-students, and having said good-bye to us, he embarked to start his new life. Now he also was independent. We were proud, and increasingly confident about our son's future prospects.

At the same time his absence left us with a huge feeling of emptiness which was fortunately filled by our little grandson's presence. We gladly agreed to take care of the child during the day, in order to help our daughter-in-law to finish her studies. His parents brought him at about half past eight in the morning, and collected him in the evening. Naturally, from now on the child directed our domestic life, because a baby requires complete attention, even more so when he started to walk. With him it was a case of: "In the beginning was a garden", which was his favourite place of course, with its winding paths, leafy shrubs and mysterious hiding places, all of which he wanted to explore. Soon came the days of kindergarten, when grandpa took him to the nearby nursery school in the morning, and grandma went for him in the afternoon. Meanwhile, the parents finished their studies, not at the same time, but waited to graduate until both could do so together. This took place in a great hall with solemn ceremony, and when they stood on the stage wearing their academic gowns and square caps

Family group, probably taken in 1955. Irén's sister-in-law, Clara Kövesi, is in front, at left

Family group taken in 1959, when Julius and his wife Janet, back left, had just arrived from Europe

to receive their diplomas they were greeted with the loudest applause, not only because they were popular, but because they were a married couple (actually there was one other) who had brought their young child along. Nowadays he too has graduated.

This son of ours did not lag far behind his younger brother, because he was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge University, and when he graduated from there, he went on to the University of London in order to obtain his master's degree. He was then appointed to a lectureship at Monash University in Melbourne, and his wife worked as a dentist. With the help of a university loan they were able to buy a house with a garden, so to our great satisfaction they attained a secure and comfortable family life.

As for our younger son, he not only graduated from Oxford, but won the hand of a fellow student, and so they became engaged. Now he only needed a job in order to be able to get married. The wish soon became a reality when he was offered a tutorship by the University of Edinburgh. The girl was the only daughter of her family. Her parents arranged a wedding reception for 150 guests in Bath, where the marriage was celebrated in the city cathedral.[1] After the ceremony the young couple went for a whirlwind honeymoon trip through England up to Scotland. This first appointment was only a launching pad for our son, so that he could get married, because he soon applied for jobs back in Australia, and by the following year he was lecturing at the University of New England in Armidale. Already while at Oxford he had written his philosophical dissertation.

At that time, in New England, our second grandson was born, and he was later followed by three grand-daughters. I cherish the memory of how on the day of our second son's marriage I experienced an emotion I had never experienced before, of serenity mingled with bliss, realising that having attained my aspirations, or even surpassed them, my mission was now accomplished. Both of my sons had found marriage partners who suited them in every way, both have warm and beautiful homes and families, and so will not be alone when we are gone.

Our lives were also running smoothly, now that we had skilled help. During the evenings, while sitting on the veranda outside our bedroom, which because of the angle of the wall was a completely secluded place shaded by flowering shrubs, my husband spoke of his strong desire to see our son's book completed, and that a publisher might be found who was willing to publish an unknown writer's work. We received an answer to this as well, because a well-known London publisher

1 The wedding was actually held in the family parish church. There would not have been as many as 150 guests at the reception.

contacted him independently, saying that they would be interested in publishing his book when it was finished.[1] So again, everything was on the right course, and I felt again that I was the happiest mother, grandmother and wife.... until another unexpected dark cloud overshadowed our house. I mean my husband's illness. As I later learned, he had not been well for some time, and had been visiting the doctor for a long time, disguising his absences as business errands so as not to worry me, until the time arrived when surgical intervention was unavoidable. The surgery was luckily successful, thank God, but he never regained his former strength. On my own, I could neither physically nor mentally cope with everything.

We decided therefore to rent out the whole property and go into retirement. We found a small corner house with four rooms which met our needs, surrounded by a well-kept, nice little garden. The neighbourhood was quiet; in front of us was a big park, and right in front a large lake with wild ducks and black swans, and flocks of migratory pelicans resting on it for two to three weeks at a time. There were all sorts of things here which could make life pleasant for a retired couple: there was a verandah facing the lake, half enclosed by glass on one side and fully enclosed on the other, and from here my husband, sitting on his sofa, used to watch the ever-changing activity of the lake life. In the garden there were rose beds, and an arbour covered with a grape vine, lemon and orange trees, and above all, peace.

As for the student boarding house, we found a married couple who wanted to continue managing the business, and we rented them the whole house, furnished, and complete with students. We only brought with us our own sturdy, comfortable and attractive furniture, as well as the carpets, curtains and so forth. We officially let the appropriate authorities know that we were no longer working and went into retirement. Two weeks later, to our great surprise, not only did we both receive the pension, but an unexpected retrospective sum, since we were past the usual retirement age.

I remember our last evening at the student boarding house, when I stood at the end of the long student dining table, looking at the familiar faces. They were a cheerful, friendly group, who came from all corners of the world, representing all skin colours, races, religions and customs. There was the handsome, tall, elegant black Indian, and beside him his friend, also tall, but more heavily built, a flaxen-haired Dutchman, a short, kindly Chinese, one from Singapore, another from Jakarta, one from Kuala Lumpur...and I could go on and on, naming the twelve

1 The writer paints a charming picture of peaceful evenings in the secluded corner of their verandah. She has telescoped time, however, as the conversation she describes could only have taken place some years later.

different nationalities that lived there for years in beautiful close friendship. At that moment I wished I could have displayed my table, just as I saw it, in front of the world out there, to show how little is actually needed for people and nations to live calmly and at peace together. All it takes is a little love, and the desire to understand one other. We bade farewell to each other, but not for ever, because even now, after fifteen years, they still send me Christmas cards or other greetings, giving me news about their lives and families.

We came to like our new little house and neighbourhood. During our daily walks we got to know the waterfowl, and befriended each pair of swans, feeding them from our hands. They had small islands reserved in the reeds, where they could rest and breed. We observed how devotedly the bird couples of this species take turns sitting on the nest and taking care of the eggs and cygnets. When the mother bird leaves the nest the male immediately takes over, to keep the eggs warm. We watched with great interest to see how many fluffy golden cygnets hatched in each nest. They swam cheerfully behind the proud long-necked swan parents.

Our younger son was able to move from New England to the university here in Perth, to everybody's delight. Here there are two or three streets of houses, with gardens, owned by the university, which provide accommodation for new staff, especially those with families. This way, the worry of looking for a place to live is taken care of until they find somewhere suitable later on. The university also assists, through its bank, with the necessary financial arrangements. I just mention this in order to highlight the local situation regarding new staff members. In our case we were able to rent the house next door for them until the lease for the big house expired, so that later they could move in there. Now there were two inquisitive little people interested in finding out the garden's hidden secrets. When they moved in, the eldest of our grandchildren was able to toddle across the garden in order to visit his grandpa sitting in the big bulky sofa. His grandfather was by this time too frail even to walk. His pastimes were books, the local and international news, and music, provided by the radio at his side. He used to eagerly await the visits of two good friends, whom he liked very much, although they were more our sons' contemporaries in age. One was a university librarian and the other a lawyer, who is now a member of Parliament and government minister. My husband would discuss the week's events and talk over the wide range of his favourite topics with them.

The highlight of his day, however, was when they brought our youngest grandchild's playpen over.[1] The child was extremely lively and intelligent for her

1 We have now moved on two years.

age, and grandfather watched her every movement. One day he surprised me with the observation: "Mark my words, this little girl is going to become a musician". When he noticed my doubtful smile he answered: "Don't think that I am doting; I have been watching for a long time how this little creature listens with all her being to music, and how intensely she reacts to rhythm." I mention this because of our six grandchildren the others either never finished or never even started studying music, but this little girl at the age of twelve played both violin and viola in the university youth orchestra, and plays Bach, Beethoven and Mozart on the piano like a little prodigy, with the utmost poise and seriousness, and by heart. She is now over sixteen, and is a student at St Mary's Convent, Ascot, in England, where her elder sister is in her senior year. She is by far the best pianist in the convent. Her most fervent wish is to finish her matriculation and to drop all other subjects so as to devote her time at University to her favourite subject, music.[1]

My dear husband was able to witness the success of his sons, and how both of them had been blessed with exceptional wives, with sensible, healthy and beautiful children, warm homes, and financial security. All this gave him a foundation of joy and serenity. Unfortunately, however, he did not live to see the fulfilment of his prediction about his grand-daughter's musical talent, nor the publication of his son's book (though it had already gone to press) nor the remarkable eminence he achieved in philosophical circles. Almost fifteen years after leaving his home country he silently left us too, leaving in me an unfathomable void and darkness that nothing could fill.

After a time, following the advice of a Hungarian psychiatrist, I travelled to Melbourne to see our elder son, who was waiting for me at the station. When we arrived at their house, there, waiting for me at the gate, was an angelic curly haired little girl in a white dress, toddling towards me and stretching out her arms, as though in a painting by Murillo, saying: "Amama". I felt as if the deep spiritual darkness I was living in had been instantly pierced by a sunbeam as I realised that this angelic baby that I had never seen before was my grandchild, as was her brother, now eleven years old, and the other beautiful four left at home. Our grandchildren, the continuation of our life, they are the future, the next generation. When I lifted up this lovely dear little baby, who could not talk yet – she had only learned that one word – and hugged her, I not only embraced her but literally clung to her, as I felt that I was embracing all our descendants. My six grandchildren are the meaning and reason for the time that remains to me.

1 The author's grandmotherly pride has led to some effusiveness here. Her grand-daughter did indeed study piano and violin to an advanced level, and she occasionally played the viola. It was not until her university years that she played in the Western Australian Youth Orchestra.

(After fifteen years I can now proudly and joyfully write: it was worth it.) I know my elder son made an enormous sacrifice, because he dearly loved his work at Monash, but he applied for a job in Perth, and a few months later, at the start of the academic year, he was already teaching here. For me it was a joy beyond description to know that they were all nearby.

My sister-in-law in Vienna had been encouraging me to take a trip to Europe, and when I got home from Melbourne I found several pressing letters from her waiting for me. At the same time both of my doctors encouraged me, as did my family. It happened that when I did decide to take the trip it was too late to book a passage on a ship and I had to travel by aeroplane. I have always felt an aversion to this form of travel, and after this experience I never boarded one again.

On May 14th, 1966, I was finally able to meet my beloved, generous sister-in-law at Rome airport...

Editor's final note.
When Irén returned from this journey her family jokingly asked her the standard question addressed at the time to all visitors to Australia: "And how do you like Australia, Mrs. Kövesi?" To which she fervently replied: "Very much."

Why Migrants Say No

The Observer, August 20th, 1960

It was ten years ago that I first left the continent of Europe for Australia. As an introduction to our future country we were shown two films. One was about the Flying Doctor Service; I can still remember the fear it created in us. We were to leave our continental cities, well-staffed with doctors and nurses, well-provided with hospitals, and go to a vast land where we should have to pedal a radio and wait for a far-away doctor. For the film was not presented as a curiosity about Australia but as something "typical". The other film was introduced – and this is perfectly true – as a film on cultural activities. It showed lifesavers marching on one of their festival occasions. Not all of us who saw the films came to Australia; the rest still remember these pictures and pity me.

There were about 20 Hungarian students studying at Innsbruck University at that time, living on scholarships provided for refugee students. Of course, it was not just because of these films that the rest decided not to come to Australia. They did not have quite such a decisive effect. The secret lay somewhere else. A very kind interpreter at the Migration Office who knew all the ropes was rather anxious that we should have a try, and provided us with advice as to how to succeed at the interview. Her main piece of advice was that we should not say we were students. With a smile she said: "The officers won't accept useless citizens. Think of some practical trade you could manage and present yourself as a worker of that trade." She not only meant well but she was right. From long experience she knew the prevailing policies of immigration authorities.

My fellow students were reluctant to give up their hope of further studies, however meagre their emergency scholarships were. They did not fancy a country which apparently needed only tough manual workers, a country which gave the impression that you should keep silent about your bookish interests if you wanted to get there. So they regarded me as someone who had sold his soul: I was leaving all that we had lived for, for the sake of some material benefits. But they did not condemn me completely, for they knew that I was selling my soul for the sake of my parents, whose age did not qualify them for migration. So I and my brother sponsored them as dependents, we two supplying the working force of the family.

So we piled into the Immigration Office. In the waiting room large posters stared at us. On one of them was a hefty character with a shovel: "There is a job for you," the caption read. I was nervously holding my driving licence as the only tangible evidence to show that I was a truck driver. But it was easier than I expected; even my brother, a medical student, succeeded in passing himself off as a shoemaker. The officer then pointed to a little flag on his desk and asked through the interpreter what flag it was. Had I been a truck driver the question might have taken me aback, but having been a student of philosophy I assumed that an Australian immigration officer would hardly keep a Brazilian flag on his desk to quiz people with, so I confidently answered that it was the Australian flag. Then the same question was addressed to my brother, my father, and then to my mother, and through the interpreter they all gave the same answers. This established that we would be good citizens, and so we were established as both physically and mentally fit to go to Australia.

On board ship I had dreams about huge trucks driving through wide-open spaces. Perhaps I would drive through a little township where my brother was hammering away in a little shoemaker's shop. (Between the interview and embarkation he had attended some classes on shoemaking.) The fear of an accident happening to either of us hung over my thoughts; the flying doctor's aeroplane kept buzzing in my dreams. At daytime I continued my dreams, dreams of a different kind, of working in Australia to save up enough to return to the continent. The migrant attitude of being sceptical about Australian values and painting the continent of Europe with rosy colours started to develop on board ship. It was not the result of Australian experiences – unless you regard that outpost of the Immigration Department in Innsbruck as Australia.

Though this may not be quite relevant, I must add as a postscript that after our arrival we stayed in a camp for about a fortnight, and then both of us were sent to a sanatorium as nurses. To this day I have never driven a truck. It took several years for Australia to live down her reputation in our eyes. But she did. I never had to pedal a radio, but listened to concerts on the ABC, and I did not see a single kangaroo, but met several Balliol men.

Now I was anxious that my friends back in Innsbruck should change their minds about Australia. Writing them letters was not the most effective means of persuasion, but soon the opportunity came to talk to them. After graduating at one of the Australian universities in 1956, I got a scholarship to spend two years at Oxford. I planned to spend the Christmas holiday in the Tyrol, revisiting old friends. As it turned out, the visit was not under peaceful and quiet circumstances. The Hungarian revolution broke out, and I was given leave from my college to

go down to Austria with a group of British students to give what help we could to refugee students. It was in emergency kitchens and first aid stations on the frontier, in refugee camps and student hostels, that I met my old friends again as we worked side by side. At last I was able to talk about Australia, and not only to these former friends but to hundreds of refugee students, for as part of our work we gave talks about the various countries of the West we were acquainted with so that these students would know something about the new world now open to them. But words have little weight if the facts are against you.

The number of refugee students grew to alarming proportions. This sort of thing kept happening: we would send off fifty of them to West German student hostels, when next morning the telephone would ring: "Two hundred and eighty students crossed the border last night, and half of them are allocated to your hostel, so prepare for their arrival." As days and nights went by, we were more and more desperately depending on whatever help was offered from the various countries of the West.

There was a University of Forestry in a town not far inside the Hungarian border. Staff, students and administration all came over the border one day. As a body they were taken over to Canada. Switzerland asked for refugees suffering from T.B., and Sweden especially asked for blind people. Great Britain gave over 250 scholarships to students who had already begun their university studies, and this number was, I believe, increased later on. The Oxford colleges took a student each, and they turned out to be a great success both academically and socially. West Germany did not specify a limited number, but took a certain percentage of the increasing number of refugee students. America waived immigration restrictions and students poured into American colleges. Earlier this year [1960], when I was in Perth, an American oceanography research ship called at Fremantle on its way to Albany. On board, as a research scientist, was one of these Hungarian students who went through one of our camps to an American university. There is plenty of research to be done around the Australian coasts, and this young man could have been working on an Australian ship if only Australian immigration authorities had a bit of imagination.

As our hostels, like clearing houses, were sending out young men to Italy, France and as far as South America, I was trying to steal some talent for Australia. Getting together a small group, I told them to go up to the Australia House in Vienna. "Don't tell them that you are students. Think of some practical trade that you think you could master and present yourself as a worker of that trade." I was ashamed that in the midst of the generous response from countries poor and rich I had to steal students for Australia. But I went further than our interpreter

six years previously. I told them also that after a few years they could save up enough money, not to come back, but to go on with their studies in Australia. So off they went to Vienna. Next day they were back. They half decided to come back when they were told to get on to a weighing machine. The medical examination gave them a strong suspicion that they were not just being checked for hidden illnesses. They gained the impression almost of a slave market, and felt very humiliated. Whatever the truth is, the impression that these students got about Australia – and not only these but many others I spoke to – was that the immigration authorities did not regard the tragic lot of refugees as a challenge to help, but as an opportunity to get more manpower. They were not even attracted by the prospect of better material well-being, for not only did they not think that Australia was the sort of country for them culturally, but they did not even believe that Australia could possibly be prosperous. How is it then that Italy and Spain can offer scholarships, that Sweden asks for blind people, that no country checks on your physical fitness to see whether you will be a liability or not, but Australia is so pressed that there every muscle counts? All the same, these students were grateful for my efforts. When I was back in England a month later, one of them invited me to lunch at the London Polytechnic.

I spent the last ten days in Austria as an interpreter at the Australia House. It was like flying back to six years ago, as if nothing had happened since. There were the same or similar posters, showing tough men with shovels, wide open spaces, kangaroos and mobs of sheep. I was asked to translate the question: "What flag is that?" and even lorry drivers answered that it was the Australian flag. So ended the long-awaited opportunity to talk to my friends and improve on Australia's reputation. On the way back to England I did not stop at Innsbruck to face them again.

There is another postscript I should add, this time a postscript to my second arrival in Australia. I got married in England, and my parents were eager to meet my wife at the port for the first time. For the occasion Mother got a beautiful bunch of flowers to greet her daughter-in-law. Nice Australian flowers they were, the sort you might see on posters in Immigration Offices. She came on board for a few minutes, a few yards inside the foyer of the ship to greet us. On the way out an Immigration Officer took away the flowers, for no flowers are allowed into Australia.