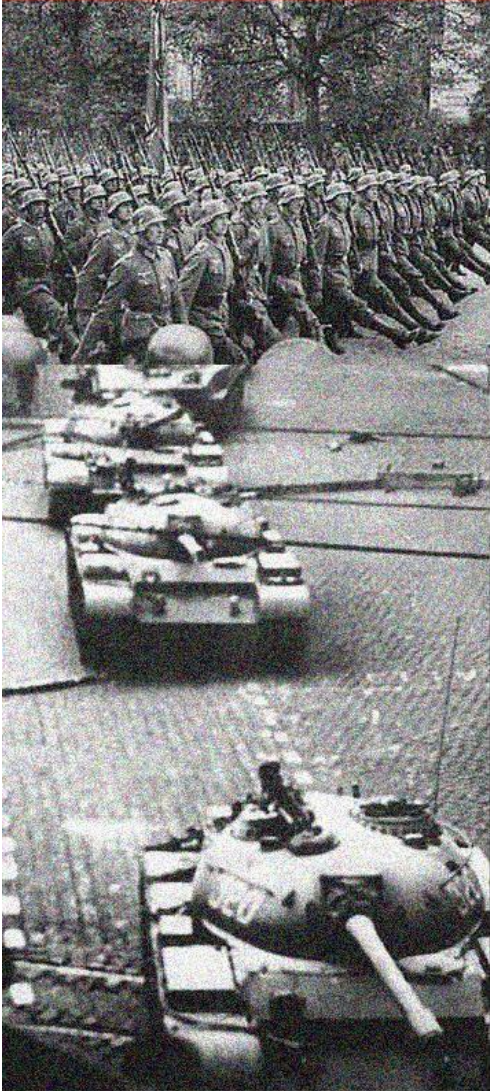


Hurdling to Freedom



A Hungarian's Escape to America

Volume 2_rev

A memoir by
Les Besser

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by

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank my wife for her encouragement, patience, and assistance in writing this book. Our children have also provided reviews, editing, and graphic support. Without my family's help, I could not have completed the work.

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Hurdling to Freedom (download a free Internet version)

This is a story of survival. And accomplishment. It is a gritty tale of growing up in a Socialist country after surviving the physical dangers of the invasion by Germany, the later re-conquest by Russia, and the rapid conversion to a Socialist government. And yet, it is a fascinating account that keeps your interest as Les and his mother somehow survive the grinding conditions and danger of WWII that all civilian populations face as giant armies move across their lands.

No one gets to choose the year or place of their birth. But if you could, you would not choose Les' birth year of 1936, in the potentially troublesome part of Eastern Europe, just about the time that Nazi Germany decided to move East. Les' life story here is divided into two parts. Volume 1 tells about his boyhood at the outset of WWII, living in wartime conditions, and growing up in a problematic Socialist society. He grabbed education as he could, found rewards in athletics, and ultimately became a real fighter in the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Volume 2 is devoted to his emigration to Canada and later to the United States to complete his college education and embark on his remarkably fruitful microwave career.

*The HPMemoryproject.org archive of remarkable essays is mainly devoted to Hewlett-Packard careers and the HP work culture. In Les' case, HP shared his technical career with Fairchild, Farinon, and COMPACT Engineering (later renamed Compact Software), the company he founded that revolutionized microwave component design in the 1970s. (COMPACT: **C**omputerized **O**ptimization of **M**icrowave **P**assive and **A**ctive **C**omponent**T**s). All totaled, his time at HP was a mere three-and-a-half years. Yet, his microwave career was rooted in the HP Computer-driven Vector Network Analyzers, profoundly changing microwave component engineering and design in the late 1960s. The combination of a microwave designer being able to MEASURE the performance of his actual component and the COMPACT automated design software revolutionized that period of microwave history. Jack Browne, Editor of the trade magazine Microwaves and RF, awarded Les the well-deserved title "Father of Computer-Aided Engineering Software." Les ultimately accounted for MAJOR sales of HP equipment, even as he built his own company.*

Les' two books form a fascinating and gripping life story. Once you get started, you will likely be pulled into his story to see how it turns out. The Curator and I decided it would be appropriate to provide downloadable files of both books, AS LES WROTE THEM, for readers who wish to read all the details. If you want to read Les' remarkable tale of childhood in trying conditions, carrying a gun in the Hungarian Revolution, escaping that reign under dangerous situations, and eventually reaching ultimate achievement in high tech, be sure to download them at:

https://www.hpmemoryproject.org/timeline/les_besser/hurdling_to_freedom_00.htm

John Minck
HPMemoryproject Moderator

Prologue

In Volume 1, I described the first 20 years of my life, including my mother's struggle to raise me and later her sister's child. Removed from school during fourth grade to help her family survive, my mother worked as a live-in domestic during the aftermath of World War I and the Depression era. Although her working hours lasted from early morning into the evening, she supplemented her formal third-grade education by learning from her employers and their children's governesses. Still living in the small city of her birth, by her mid-20s, she had developed good communication skills and had become a gourmet cook.

While she worked as a housekeeper for a bachelor, he impregnated her but had no interest in having a child. When she refused to have an abortion, the man fired her and sent her to live in Budapest. That is where I was born in 1936.

Unable to find a live-in domestic position where I could be with her, she found the Dancsa family, who took me in as a foster child. Their younger son, Pista, and I were nearly the same age, and his young mother nursed both of us during infancy. In the next three years, Pista and I developed a close friendship throughout his life.

In 1939, when my mother realized that emotionally, I was becoming part of the Dancsa family, she desperately tried again to find employment that would allow us to live together. But she failed. Influenced by the infamous Hungarian suicide song of the 1930s, *Gloomy Sunday*, she contemplated jumping into the Danube—holding me in her arms.

Literally, in the last hour, a kind Jewish man, József Braun (*Braun bácsi*), hired her and allowed both of us to move into his home. During the next three years, he became my mentor and helped me to develop a keen mathematical ability. Mother and I lived there happily until the pro-Nazi regime sent Mr. Braun to a forced labor camp. After finding another place to live, she supported us as a laundress and housecleaner.

My public-school education began in 1942, just as Hungary entered World War II on Germany's side. Because I was a skinny and sickly child, Mother had me excused from physical education. I excelled as a student, but my classmates considered me clumsy and unfit for sports. Even so, my secret hope was to become a soccer player somehow.

As soon as the Hungarian Army recovered most of the territories lost after World War I, the Regent of Hungary declared neutrality and ordered its troops to withdraw from the fighting. Hitler's swift response was to arrest the Regent, order the SS occupation of our country, and halt the withdrawal of the Hungarian soldiers. A new Fascist government took over and remained in control until the end of the war. Our disheartened troops suffered devastating losses on the Russian front.

Living through the last year of the war was extremely difficult for everyone in Budapest. Drastic food shortages, frequent aerial bombings by the Allies, and strict regulations imposed by the new government affected all residents. Mother, always sympathizing with the underdogs, helped Jews to obtain fake documents. We provided refuge in our tiny apartment to two elderly Jewish men. In addition to the already difficult living conditions, we also feared that the Fascist authorities would discover our two guests.

When the Red Army's 102-day siege of Budapest ended, our once beautiful city lay in ruins, but most Hungarians greeted the victorious Soviet troops as liberators. In a few years, however, we saw one form of dictatorship replace another. Our country became part of the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc as the Cold War developed.

Following the war, two significant changes occurred in my life.

First, my mother allowed me to participate in physical education. I worked hard to catch up with the other kids and became a decent soccer player. With the encouragement of our neighbor, a former international Marathon champion, I also began to run daily.

Second, an eleven-year-old cousin who lived in the country lost her mother during a bombing raid. Her stepfather passed her care to my mother. Initially, I resented her and how she had been dumped on us, but we soon formed a close kin relationship. No longer was I an only child.

During my seventh-grade physics class, I built a crystal detector radio. My achievement directed me toward a career in electronics. After completing eighth grade, I was admitted to a four-year technical high school specializing in electronics. A high school degree was already beyond the highest education level in my mother's family. Although the college path would have been free in the socialized school system, I never took advantage of it.

At 14, I joined a track club and, under expert coaches, became a top-notch hurdler. Setting a new record and winning national championships in my age group gave me hope of competing one day at the Olympics. I sacrificed most of the typical teenage activities to succeed with my goal.

After graduating high school and receiving a technician certificate, I began to work in a factory. The same company also hired my "milk-brother" Pista, and our close friendship further developed as we worked in the same department. My sister was also employed and contributed to our family's income so my mother could lighten her workload.

Then, a completely unexpected event exploded in our typically tightly controlled country. The 1956 October demonstrations by university students led to a full-scale rebellion. The Communist government called for Soviet help, and the Red Army intervened. After days of heavy fighting, the superior firepower of their army put down the revolt. More than 200,000 Hungarians escaped the West within a few weeks to find freedom.

Even though I had only a minor role in the revolutionary activities, I escaped to Austria with a former classmate and his wife to avoid possible reprisal. By good fortune, the three of us received immigrant visas to Canada. Arriving there without a penny and not speaking English or French had made the start of our new lives difficult. Although my first name, László, was anglicized to Leslie and later to Les, I still looked and behaved like a typical foreigner.

This second book describes how I adjusted and learned to survive in the new world.

Chapter 1: Managing Life in My New Country

During the first twenty years of my life, I lived at three locations in Budapest, all within a three-square-mile area. In barely one month, the turbulent aftereffects of the Hungarian Revolution resulted in my being about 5,400 miles away from my homeland. I arrived in Canada full of youthful enthusiasm but without family, money, or knowledge of the local customs. I had wanted to be far away from Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe, but once I was in British Columbia, though I felt safe from the *ÁVO*¹, a new set of problems faced me.

After the first few days in my new country, the future uncertainties began weighing on me. Although my Canadian host family was extremely kind in making my life as comfortable as possible, I knew I would soon need to stand alone. *How will I learn English? How will I find a job? Where will I live?* These thoughts kept me awake for long hours through the night.

The small Hungarian-Canadian community on Vancouver Island rallied to help the newly arrived refugees. One of them lent me a Hungarian-English dictionary. Others canvassed the region to find jobs for those of us who stayed on the island. The local priest, Father Bullock, took me to a thrift store and purchased some badly needed clothing, including a half-length coat. Although the coastal region of British Columbia did not have severe winters, I felt cold when walking outside, and the coat was most welcome. Mrs. Kirkpatrick, "my host family mom," cleaned the clothing I had worn for the past 30 days. Some items must have been beyond hope because I never saw them again.

Knowing how difficult it would be for us to adjust to Canadian food, a Hungarian-Canadian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Szabó, invited five of us to their home for dinner a few days after Christmas. They promised a sumptuous old-country-style feast. I looked forward to finally having a traditional home-cooked meal.

Mr. Szabó picked us up in a huge station wagon that seated six people comfortably. My two escape companions, Boriska and Gábor, were in the group. We quickly exchanged our first impressions of living in Canada. I learned that the others were also staying with families in lovely homes equipped with what we considered luxury items—clothes, washers, dryers, and televisions. Surprisingly, the owners of the homes were not wealthy capitalists but ordinary workers. We all thanked our good fortune for ending up in such a wonderful country and wondered how long it would take us to become productive and self-supporting.

As we stepped into the Szabó residence, the familiar fragrance of Hungarian food welcomed us. A huge dinner table stacked with delicacies awaited. Mr. Szabó introduced us to his parents, wife, and two teenage children. Another Hungarian-Canadian couple was also there, who had met us on our arrival a few days earlier. The hostess promptly seated us, and I planned to eat enough to keep me full for several days.

¹ The State Security Agency of Hungary, the Hungarian equivalent of the Gestapo and the KGB, established by the Communists in the late 1940s.

"Let's thank the Lord before we eat," said the man of the house. With that, he and his family promptly clasped hands closed their eyes, and began to pray.

Praying before a meal was a new experience for me. I had heard that some families did it in Hungary, but I had never seen it happen. We prayed in church and (before the socialist regime) in school, but we always kept our eyes open during the prayers. I assumed the other young refugees had had similar experiences because we silently looked at each other across the dinner table.

The prayer continued for a long time as our host thanked God for many things. Gábor—who had always been a prankster—made a funny face and pretended to grab some food from the plates. Another refugee followed his example, and soon, all five of us had to fight to hold back our laughter. Fortunately, our hosts were too involved in praying to be aware of our silly activities.

After what seemed an eternity, Mr. Szabó finally said, "Amen." We immediately stopped clowning, and by the time they opened their eyes, our young group looked dignified. The following feast was worth the wait—goulash soup, roast duck, Wiener schnitzel, and several side dishes. As we finished with a dessert of homemade cake, I decided that was my best meal of the year. Our hosts watched us eating incredible amounts and commented on how happy they were to see us enjoying their food.

When the meal was over, Mrs. Szabó asked if we would accompany them to their church service. Although it was not Sunday, we thought it must be a special service as part of the Christmas season. Besides, how could we refuse anything they asked after that fabulous meal? We walked to their large station wagon, and they took us to "cleanse our souls." The children stayed home.

We sat in wooden pews and 30 to 40 congregation members inside the modestly decorated church. The minister at the altar spoke to the group in English—I had no idea what he said. When he finished, the congregation stood up and sang for a while. Suddenly, they began to act strangely. The congregation, including the Szabós, quivered, shook, jerked, and started making strange noises. After a while, they left the pews and rolled on the floor. Some of them were making incomprehensible sounds with their eyes bulged open.

I was terrified and did not know what to do. My friends seemed to be equally bewildered and frightened. Out of respect for our host, we stood in amazement until the commotion ended, and the worshippers returned to the pews. After the service, we all stepped outside the church.

"Under socialism, the government most likely did not allow people to express their true feelings as they can here," said Mr. Szabó. "It probably looked strange to you, but you don't know the feeling of total spiritual freedom until you experience it."

We tried to be polite and agreed with whatever he claimed. However, we declined the invitation when he asked if we would join them again for their service the following week.

After returning to my host family's place, I attempted to explain the unusual spectacle I had seen in the church. "Oh, they're the Holy Rollers," said Mr. Kirkpatrick, throwing his arms into the air. "We don't go to their church." He did not elaborate further. Later, I learned

that the group represented a form of the Pentecostal Christian faith and that most people considered their ways of worshipping highly unusual.

Looking for work in Canada

The next day, a member of the Hungarian-Canadian group came to see me with unexpected news. "A friend of mine has a radio-TV repair shop in Nanaimo. I heard that he needs an additional technician. He will talk with you to determine if you could do the job."

With fear and excitement, I followed him to his car. The trip to Nanaimo took about half an hour. During that time, he prepared me for the interview and offered to be the interpreter. "Mr. Leahy is a good man, and I told him about the technical high school you attended in Budapest. If necessary, he is willing to train you on the job—as long as you're willing to learn," he commented.

By the time we reached the shop, I was extremely nervous. Although I had confidence in my ability to repair radios, my limited English vocabulary worried me. Having an interpreter with me during the interview was helpful, but my friend would not be at my side if I were hired. *How would I communicate with my boss?*

Another concern was the distance between Parksville and Nanaimo, where my host family lived. I asked if there was public transportation that I could take to my work until I earned enough to rent a place near the shop. My friend told me there was a regular bus service, but it did not run during commuting hours. *How would I go to work?*

With those questions on my mind, we entered Leahy's Radio and TV Service. Standing behind a counter, Patrick Leahy was a tall man, probably in his forties. He held a coffee cup in one hand and offered his other hand to me. "Welcome! You must be Leslie," he told me after greeting my interpreter. He seated us around a small table and began the interview.

First, he pulled out a schematic diagram of a radio and had me explain the functions of various sections. Satisfied with my translated answers, he led me into the repair area. He handed me the actual table radio of that schematic and asked me if I could fix it.

I had some difficulty removing the unfamiliar mounting of the back cover. Once it was off, I used the schematic to troubleshoot and quickly located the problem—a defective radio tube. When I inserted a replacement tube, the radio worked fine. Mr. Leahy was impressed, and I silently thanked my school in Budapest for the thorough training it had provided.

Next, Mr. Leahy showed me some routine maintenance tasks, such as testing the other tubes' life expectancy and cleaning the set's tuning mechanism. "We don't want the customer to bring the radio back again with another problem," he explained. "That would give my store a poor reputation."

His attitude impressed me immensely. The customers' feelings had never been a concern in the socialist economy. People were happy to receive the scarce goods and services. It was their bad luck if a product failed or broke down repeatedly.

Finally, Mr. Leahy wanted to know if I could also repair televisions—a question I had hoped he would not ask. I had to admit that although I knew the theory and operation of

televisions, I had never seen the inside of an actual set. He thought for a while and said, "On our island, it is hard to find TV repairmen. I'll hire you and teach you how to fix televisions. You'll never be hungry as long as you know how to do that."

He offered me a job. He would pay me \$60 weekly—the same amount his other technician received. I could start working the following Monday, on the last day of 1956. Of course, I gladly accepted his offer.

Then he added, "My wife and I have one child and are expecting a second one in a few months. You could stay in the room we have set up for the baby until you find a nearby place to rent." My worries were melting. He continued, "My wife is a retired English teacher. She could even help you to learn our language."

At that point, I could not stop my tears rolling. I did not know that such kind people existed in the world. Taking me on with my limited language skills, paying the same rate as he paid his other employee, and inviting me to stay in his home were kindnesses beyond my wildest imaginings. I thanked him profusely before my driver and returned to the Kirkpatrick's in Parksville.

Something Mr. Leahy said, however, puzzled me. During our drive, I asked my friend, "What did he mean by saying that if I know how to fix TVs, I'll never be hungry? How could anyone be hungry in Canada?"

"We have people who are unemployed."

I could hardly believe his answer. Under the socialist system in Hungary, we always had full employment. Being new to Canada, I thought that unemployment in such a rich country was just another piece of Communist propaganda. It looked like I still had much to learn.

My host family was exuberant when they heard about my successful job interview. Mrs. Kirkpatrick cooked a special meal for me that night. Before dinner, we had cocktails—something I had never had before. Her husband proudly showed me his well-stocked liquor cabinet and made us whiskey sours. I did not think I would like whiskey, but the mixed drink tasted good. By the time we sat to eat, Mr. Kirkpatrick had enjoyed several refills and appeared to be in a very good mood. He was tipsy! He talked about his first job, where he disliked his boss. Although I understood only a small part of his story, I smiled and nodded politely. His wife had probably heard the story often because she tried to stop him, but he was eager to tell me everything.

This time, when the hostess offered me seconds at dinner, I immediately accepted without waiting for additional offers. I had an enjoyable evening and promised to visit the Kirkpatricks one day after my language skills improved.

Word about my new job in the repair shop quickly spread through the Hungarian-Canadian community. Miklós, the elderly Hungarian who was present at the refugees' arrival, phoned with congratulations and offered to take me on a city tour of Vancouver. He showed up Saturday, and we drove to the Nanaimo harbor. When the ferry came, he drove onto it and parked his car on the bottom deck. We then walked up to the passenger area. I was concerned about the ferry ride, remembering my seasickness the week before. This time, however, the channel was smooth, and I had no problem.

Miklós wanted to know where I was during the Hungarian Revolution. "I saw pictures on the television news, but you are the first person I know who lived through those horrible events," he said. "Tell me everything."

I gave him a quick rundown of the fighting during the ride, including my experiences. When I told him about the young Russian soldier who had possibly saved my life, Miklós had tears in his eyes. "*Jótett helyébe jót várj*" (Expect good in return for a good deed), he said, quoting an old Hungarian proverb that meant, "You were repaid for letting that Russian officer escape."

Once we landed in Vancouver, he drove us around the city and pointed out some interesting landmarks. Then he said, "My throat is parched. Let's have a beer!"

We walked into a pub in downtown Vancouver and sat at one of the tables. The place was dark as a cave and smelled like a brewery. When the waitress approached, Miklós pointed to both of us and then raised one hand with two fingers forming a "V." When I asked him what that meant, he explained that he had ordered two draft beers for each of us. "You get two for a nickel," he laughed. When the waitress set them on the table, he quickly gulped one down.

As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I noticed a shabbily dressed man in the middle of the pub, holding a bottle and wiggling his body. It looked like something was wrong with him. Miklós saw my puzzled expression. "He is a Native Indian. He dances for anyone who buys him two beers," he explained.

"You mean he is a real Indian?"

"Yes. He probably lives on a nearby reservation."

I was stunned. My image of what a native American should look like was instantly destroyed. After reading the Karl May stories of Winnetou in my childhood, I expected him to wear a traditional native outfit and wave a tomahawk instead of a beer bottle. Seeing this stumbling drunk left me disillusioned. Present-day Indians were quite different from the braves of my storybooks.

I was still working on my first beer when Miklós ordered two more for himself. He explained that beer helped his circulation, and I took his word for it. When we finished, I was concerned about his driving ability but did not want to offend him by bringing up the subject.

As we walked through the park toward the car, I noticed a small crowd listening to a man standing on a bench. Some of the listeners cheered loudly. I became curious.

"What is he talking about?" I asked Miklós.

"He is denouncing the government, saying that the Prime Minister is a senile imbecile unfit to govern."

I looked around in panic. "Let's hurry to the car."

"What's the rush?"

"When the police arrest them, they'll pick us up too."

"Why would the police care?"

"That man insults the Prime Minister, and the people agree with him."

Miklós laughed. "You lived under Communism too long! In this country, you're allowed to express your opposition."

He sounded convincing, but I was still nervous. Only after we reached his car and drove away could I relax. I had trouble believing that people could openly speak out against the government.

That evening, I wrote a long letter to Mother, letting her know that I had already found a job and giving her the address of the repair shop. I also wanted to tell her about the man speaking freely in the park, but after some thought, I decided not to include it. If my letter were censored, such information could lead to trouble. I had not heard from her for over a month and could only hope that my illegal escape had not caused any retribution to her or my sister.

Sunday evening after dinner, Mr. Kirkpatrick gave me a small carrier bag to pack the few clothing items I owned. The following day, he drove me to the repair shop in Nanaimo. Before we said goodbye and parted, he reminded me I was always welcome to visit them.

Mr. Leahy introduced me to Herb, the other technician. We were to share a large workbench with several test instruments. The boss also showed me the file cabinet where he kept documentation and schematics of commonly used radios and televisions. He walked me into a small component room behind the repair area stacked with spare parts.

The organization of his shop was impressive. I assumed he must be doing well to be able to buy all the test instruments, service diagrams, and components. The factory where I worked in Hungary had thorough documentation of its products. However, in my occasional radio repair business at home in the evenings, I had no access to product information or test equipment other than a simple voltmeter. It was always up to me to figure out how the radio was supposed to function by tracing through the wiring of the components. Mr. Leahy's small shop was so well equipped that troubleshooting and repair would be much easier.

Although his business sign showed only radio and television repair, he told me they also handled car radios and audio systems. I was familiar with the latter but had never used a car radio. I knew that converting the car's battery supply to the high voltage required by the vacuum tubes was challenging, and I was eager to learn about those types of radios.

I looked forward to having five-day workweeks in Canada because, in Budapest, we had also worked a half day on Saturdays. However, Mr. Leahy kept the repair shop open on Saturdays. In the past, he and Herb had rotated their days off so that one would always be there. One of the reasons he wanted to hire a second repairman was so he could stay with his family every weekend. Of course, until my language skills improved, he would not leave me alone in the store long. Once I learned to speak English better, though, he planned to stay home.

My first day at the shop went by quickly. Every product brought into the shop was tagged immediately. I had to keep track of the time I spent, the parts used for each repair I performed, and provide a summary of what had been done. That last task was difficult, but Herb helped me compose the proper descriptions.

At the end of the day, Mr. Leahy drove me to his house. A little girl, not much older than a year old, rushed to him as we entered the garage. His wife, a good-looking blonde lady with lots of freckles, greeted me with a big smile. She spoke slowly to me, using

simple words. I could understand her best of all the English-speaking people I had met in Canada.

She first showed me where the bathroom was, then led me to a room with baby furniture and a mattress on the floor. "You'll sleep here until our new baby arrives." She pointed to her protruding tummy and said, "Patrick hopes it'll be a son." She opened a closet door. "Put your stuff here. We'll eat soon."

The Leahys also prayed before dinner, although not nearly as long as the Holy Roller family did. Mrs. Leahy asked about my religion and told me later that they were also Roman Catholics. I learned she was born in Canada, but her husband emigrated from Ireland after World War II. "I taught him how to speak Canadian English, so I could probably do the same for you," she said with a smile.

It was New Year's Eve, and the Leahys invited several couples to celebrate. They introduced me to all the guests, some eager to hear what the Soviet Army did to us in Hungary during the revolution. Without a translator, I could not answer most of their questions. Trying to understand them and then produce answers was an exhausting process. After a while, I just wanted to be alone.

When the party was over, and we all retired, I reviewed how much my life had changed quickly. If someone had predicted three months ago that by the end of the year, I would not have believed I would be living in a foreign country, far away from my family. Now, as we entered into 1957, it was a reality. I thanked God and Saint Anthony for guiding me safely through my journey and asked them to stay with me in the future. I also prayed for opportunities to resume my running soon.

At noon on my first Friday at the shop, Mr. Leahy handed me a brown envelope. "Here is your first week's pay."

Inside the envelope, I found six crisp Canadian ten-dollar bills—equivalent to what I had earned in Hungary in three months! Although an exact comparison of the dollar and the *forint* was difficult due to the government-subsidized Hungarian living conditions, I suddenly felt rich. That was the first time I held so much buying power in my hand.

Although Mrs. Leahy packed lunch for me every day, with all that money in my possession, I could not resist the urge to splurge. I went to the corner coffee shop to eat. While looking around to see what other people were eating, I suddenly remembered reading about an unusual American food item in Hungary. "A hot dog, please," I said to the server when she came to my table.

She wanted to know if I also wanted a Coke. Recalling how awful that warm drink had tasted back in Vienna, I firmly replied, "Oh, no."

Perhaps I made a funny facial expression because she began to laugh. "Why don't you like Coca-Cola?"

It would have taken too long to explain my reason. "It's like medicine," was the best short answer I could give. She seemed to be puzzled, but she brought me a 7-Up instead. Later, I learned that the price of the hot dog included a drink.

The hot dog did not look at all like a dog. The meat reminded me of the *Virslis*, a thin wiener commonly served in Hungary at New Year's Eve celebrations. I liked it and decided to eat more of them in the future.

Back at the shop, I asked Herb how the hot dog was named. He did not know. Mr. Leahy thought it had something to do with German dogs, but he was unsure. In my letter to Mother, I wrote about my latest strange food experience. I reassured her, however, that it had nothing to do with real dogs.

I loved my job—with one exception. When the boss and Herb occasionally drove to make "house calls" on defective television sets, they left me alone in the store. If a customer came into the store, I usually managed to make myself understood, even if I had to use gestures or my dictionary. Responding to telephone calls presented far more difficulty. When I was alone, I prayed that the phone would not ring. All I could do was apologize and take their number when it did.

A week later, Miklós stopped by the shop with my friends Boriska and Gábor to tell me that the young married couple had also found jobs. The owner of a Nanaimo motel had hired Boriska to serve as a maid and Gábor to maintain the facilities. In addition to their wages, they were given a one-bedroom unit in the motel.

"You could live with us now," offered Boriska. "I'll cook and take care of both of you."

Although I had significantly benefited from Mrs. Leahy's English tutoring, I knew I needed to leave their house before her second child arrived. It would be good to be with my friends again. The icing on the cake was the promise of enjoying Boriska's home cooking. "Thanks. I'll move there tomorrow," I replied.

The small apartment of Motel Horseshoe served as home for the three of us. I slept on a sofa bed in the living room and walked about twenty minutes to work. My two friends were busy with their duties at the motel. We spent the evenings watching television. We could not understand much, but we loved the Ed Sullivan and Perry Como shows because they were easier to follow.

Nanaimo had no track club, but Father Bullock knew of a group of young men from his parish that had formed a basketball team. They played weekly against other teams from the neighboring towns. He took me to the gym where they practiced. After hearing that I had played for a club in Hungary, the team captain agreed to let me join.

"Where do I get the uniform and shoes?" I asked him, assuming the club would provide everything, just like in Hungary.

"You buy them from the store," he replied.

I suddenly realized then that living in a socialist country provided some benefits unavailable in the West.

Another part of my new life in Canada involved the Catholic Church. My upbringing in Hungary had not been particularly religious. During my elementary school years, I attended mass because it was mandatory with our catechism classes. I did not understand the Latin liturgy, so I followed the adults when they stood, knelt, or murmured expressions. The rigid sermons went far over my head. I cannot recall having any positive feelings about being in church when I was young.

After World War II, although the socialist regime tolerated religious practices, going to church was clearly against the atheist stand of the ruling Communist Party. I gradually phased out going to mass because I did not feel a special attachment anyway. I maintained

contact with God, as well as with St. Anthony, by always praying in bed before going to sleep.

In 1955, shortly after the Party officials bullied me into buying bonds to help "our North Korean brethren," somebody told me about the great sermons the priest delivered at the nearby Rókus Chapel. My curiosity took me to the church the following Sunday to hear him speak. To my amazement, that day, he preached about compromising under pressure without sacrificing one's beliefs. His message had a hidden political undertone. It helped me to let go of the frustration I had faced since caving into the Party's demand to buy the Korean War Bonds. After that day, I attended his early mass every Sunday and found his sermons spiritually uplifting. At the end of each mass, the congregation sang our national anthem. The combination of the sermon and the patriotic song filled my heart with joy.

Those uplifting services were why I responded to Father Bullock's invitation to Sunday mass at his church in Nanaimo. My boss and his wife worshipped there and were happy to see me. After my experience with the Holy Rollers only a week before, I was glad to see the familiar setting of a Catholic church. However, by the end of the mass, I did not have the same emotionally charged spirit I had found in Budapest in my late teens. I could not understand the English sermon, and the Canadian congregation did not sing the Hungarian anthem. Still, I did not want to admit my disappointment to my two benefactors. I continued attending Father Bullock's mass for the rest of my stay in Nanaimo.

After several weeks of anxious waiting, I finally received a letter from Mother. "I am so unhappy that you left me without saying goodbye," was the opening sentence. *I knew that part was there in case her letter was censored.* She was relieved I was safe and had already found work in my profession. Then she dropped some unexpected news about my sister. "Éva and her husband have also left the country. They are now in Vienna and plan to immigrate to Brazil."

I dropped the letter in astonishment. *Éva is married! She is in Vienna! My mother is now alone! How could all this happen?*

Being a beautiful, personable young woman, Éva had no problem finding dates. I had met several of her past boyfriends, although not the one she had been seeing lately. The word "marriage" had never come up. I was glad to hear she was safely out of Hungary, but I was concerned about Mother—how would she manage to be alone? Also, why would Éva want to go to Brazil? I was puzzled and confused.

The rest of Mother's letter described how much she missed us and explained that my old girlfriend Julika had moved in with her. The young woman could no longer stomach her domineering Communist father's control and had decided to distance herself from him. Mother hoped that by having Julika officially registered in the apartment, the government would allow her to keep the entire place instead of putting her into a smaller one. She did not mention any repercussions from the authorities for our escape.

I felt better learning that she did not have to live by herself and that, so far, our illegal departure had not caused any trouble. In the past, if someone managed to escape from Hungary, the family that had been left behind had to face the wrath of the Party. Any suspicion of collaboration—even without proof—led to severe charges. However, because

about 200,000 of us had escaped to the West after the revolution, I hoped that persecuting the remaining relatives would be an unmanageable task for the officials.

The thrift store where Father Bullock had previously taken me offered an amazing selection of lightly used clothing items for low prices. It became my favorite place to shop. I picked up an entire sports outfit for a few dollars but found no used basketball shoes. After buying them new from Sears & Roebuck, I began playing with the church team thrice weekly. Even though I was not the best player on the team, they utilized my speed for fast breaks. Interestingly, my Hungarian track coach had never regarded me as a natural sprinter, but on the basketball court, I was the fastest.

Being among English-speaking people at work and on the basketball court helped me to improve my understanding of my new language. However, Boriska, Gábor, and I always spoke Hungarian back in our motel unit. Mr. Leahy suggested that I should try to speak English in the evenings. We tried it once, but our conversation became so slow that we gave it up after a while.

The boss and Herb brought a large hi-fi cabinet with a loudspeaker problem to the store one day. While on their service call, they learned that the movers had dropped the cabinet during the customer's recent relocation. Since then, the speaker had sounded scratchy. After the initial inspection, Mr. Leahy informed the customer that the expensive speaker had suffered irreparable damage and would have to be replaced.

The customer was more concerned about the time required to receive a replacement than the cost of the speaker. I asked Mr. Leahy if I could help by attempting to fix the defective part. "When a speaker makes scratchy noises, nothing is to be done," he replied. "It is a problem that cannot be changed."

I explained that the factory where I worked in Budapest produced large, high-powered speakers for concert halls and sports facilities. I frequently saw the technicians repair defective speakers in the assembly area. "Let me try it, please."

"Well, we have nothing to lose," answered the boss skeptically. "Go ahead."

It took me less than ten minutes to repair the speaker, and it sounded new. Mr. Leahy happily passed on the good news and took me to deliver the unit to the customer's beautiful home. After the man heard that I fixed the speaker, he pulled out his wallet and offered me a tip.

Although I felt highly insulted, I did not show it. Instead, I smiled and politely refused the money. The man seemed surprised while putting the money away. As we were leaving, however, he shook my hand and told me how happy he was to have his hi-fi back so quickly.

In the car, Mr. Leahy asked, "Why didn't you accept the money?"

"Only taxi drivers and waiters take tips!" was my proud reply. "I am a professional."

The boss shook his head and laughed. "The next time someone offers you money for honest work, take it. There's nothing shameful about accepting a reward for a job well done."

That was another lesson I learned in Canada about capitalism.

When Father Bullock heard that I did not know my sister's status, he suggested we seek information through the Red Cross. He called on my behalf and told me to wait for the

reply. I hoped Éva would not emigrate to South America. It would be hard for me to visit her that far away.

News from Hungary

Several weeks passed by without any news. Then, just as I was giving up hope, a message came via the Red Cross: "Eva and her husband have arrived in Montreal. They must stay in a refugee center outside the city until someone offers them work."

Good news and bad news! She had landed in Canada instead of Brazil, but she was 2,300 miles from me. It sounded like there was no way for them to come to the West Coast. Then I remembered the old proverb, "If the mountain doesn't go to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain."

With the haste of a 20-year-old, I decided to move to Montreal!

After work, I shared the news about my sister with Boriska and Gábor. They were as surprised as I was to hear that Éva was married and had left Hungary. In addition, of all the places in the world, we had ended up in the same country.

When I shared my plan to go to Montreal, they expressed concern about being separated after all the experiences that had bonded us so closely. Finally, Boriska said, "You check it out and let us know. If you like it there, the three of us will find a way to follow you later."

"The three of you?"

"Yes, Gábor and I are expecting a baby in July," she announced, to my surprise.

I quickly did the math in my head. Apparently, during those frequent times last November when they had encouraged me to play chess in the Austrian *Gasthof's* lobby, they must have been doing something other than "resting" in our room.

I asked my teammates' opinions about Montreal at basketball practice that evening. Their responses varied. Some had heard good things about it, while others would not want to live there. None of them, however, had actually been there.

"It's cold in the winter, hot and humid during summer," said one.

"Most people there want to speak French only," added another.

"I've heard that the French-Canadian girls are gorgeous," was the most interesting comment. I had already seen beautiful young women in Nanaimo. If the ones in Montreal looked even better, it sounded like an excellent place to live.

I had one more compelling reason for wanting to live in a large city—to join a track club. Playing basketball had been fun, but I was eager to find a track coach to train me properly. I ran early mornings at a nearby park for several weeks to maintain my conditioning. I wanted to start competing during the summer, and Nanaimo was not the right place.

The next day, another letter came from my mother. She had received a postcard from my sister with the news that they had obtained immigration visas to Canada and transportation to Montreal. By a strange coincidence, one of my teammates from the Budapest track club, John Fischer, had already been in Montreal for several weeks and had secured a job. He was staying with relatives who had lived in Canada for some time.

Mother gave me his address and asked me to write to him. Perhaps he could visit Éva at the refugee camp.

Now I had another reason to go to Montreal! John and I had been close friends for the past four years. He was the top Hungarian junior sprinter; we had been part of the national junior championship 4 x 100-meter relay team and were both on the national Track Squad. If I were in Montreal, we could join a track club and continue running together. I immediately wrote to him about my plan.

The next evening, one of the Hungarian-Canadian couples who lived in Nanaimo, Mr. and Mrs. Nagy, stopped by the motel to see how we were doing. I told them about my sister and my desire to go to Montreal. Neither of them liked the idea. "You should be happy that you have a good job in your profession. There are too many unemployed people in Montreal, and you may not be lucky enough to find such a job again," Mr. Nagy said.

"You'll find Montreal very unpleasant in the winter," added his wife. "Stay here until the summer."

I knew they meant well, but my mind was made up. Seeing that they could not convince me to stay, Mrs. Nagy offered to take me to a travel agency to find out the cost of transportation. She recommended I take the bus because that was much less expensive than the train or an airplane. After hearing that ground transportation would take several days to reach Montreal, however, I was eager to fly.

The following day, I met Mrs. Nagy at lunchtime. She took me to a travel agency, where I learned that a one-way airplane ticket was out of my reach. Although I had saved about half of my earnings, I could not save enough to buy a ticket for several weeks. Mrs. Nagy also informed me that giving at least two weeks' notice at work was customary. I would have to wait for a while before going to Montreal.

We ran into a woman Mrs. Nagy knew as we left the agency. She introduced me casually in English to her acquaintance, "This is Leslie, my friend."

I was embarrassed and did not know how to react. In my native Hungarian language, "friend" had a double meaning. Between two men, it means the same as in English. A male "friend" to a woman, on the other hand, represents a "lover."

A few days later, when I was alone with my boss in the shop, I told him I wanted to quit and go to Montreal. I must not have expressed myself clearly because he asked, "How long do you want to visit there?"

"I'll stay with my sister and won't come back."

He seemed confused and telephoned Mrs. Nagy to help translate. They talked for a while, and she must have told him my reason for the move. Finally, he turned the phone over to me.

"He is very disappointed but understands that you want to be with your sister," Mrs. Nagy related to me. She told me Mr. Leahy planned to teach me television repair very soon. "He hoped that by the end of the year, you'd be able to run the shop for a few weeks while he took his family to Ireland for Christmas."

After his many kindnesses, I felt awful about letting him down, but I did not change my mind. We agreed to stay until I had enough money for the airfare and a few weeks' living

expenses in Montreal. Although I did not know my friend's relatives, I naively hoped to stay with them.

Near the end of February, my friend John replied to my letter. He was glad to hear my plan and promised to help me initially. "My relatives have had enough of me, and I need to find another place to live anyway. I'll have a room for us by the time you arrive here," he assured me. "Please send me your flight information. I'll meet you at the airport."

I told Mr. Leahy that my friend would have a place for us to stay in Montreal. He then took me to the travel agency and helped me reserve a flight departing two weeks later. The agency even sent a note to John in Montreal with my arrival information. Preparation for the trip was complete, except I still did not have enough money to cover the ticket and living expenses.

Knowing about my tight financial situation, my boss offered me a loan of \$150. "You can repay me by sending me ten dollars monthly," he said. "I'll also give you a letter of recommendation. Perhaps it'll help you to find work more quickly."

For a moment, I considered changing my mind and staying. However, thoughts of reuniting with my sister, plus the chance to continue with my hurdling, helped me stick to my plan.

Spring weather arrived at the beginning of March 1957 as I prepared to leave Vancouver Island. The night before I left, Mr. Nagy invited some Hungarians over for a formal dinner so we could say goodbye to one another. The following day, Mr. Nagy took me to the Vancouver airport, where I boarded a large four-engine plane for my transcontinental trip. The aircraft landed in several cities to pick up and drop off passengers. By this time, however, I felt like a seasoned traveler, and nothing about the flight worried me.

Life in French Canada

The short walk from the airplane to the Montreal passenger terminal quickly made me aware of the big difference between spring weather in British Columbia and Quebec. Vancouver's temperature was in the low 50s when I boarded the plane. In Montreal, it was well below zero. Even though I wore the light coat Father Bullock had given me, I shivered in the freezing weather. I did not have gloves but soon realized they would be a necessity.

My friend John Fischer was waiting for me in the arrivals area. Heavy snow covered the landscape as we made the hour-long bus trip to the city terminal. During the trip, he informed me that he had already rented a room for us from a German bachelor. We boarded a local bus in the city that dropped us off a few blocks from John's residence. After a short walk in the crisp white snow, we arrived at the building where he lived.

John introduced me to our landlord, Herr Weiner. "You may call me Klaus," he said. "Leave your wet shoes and coat in the hallway. I don't want you to track water through the apartment."

John knew the rules and had already taken his shoes off. After I removed mine, he led me to our room. Passing through the living room, I noticed a large picture of German troops marching in Berlin on the wall.

In our bedroom, John whispered to me, "I think Klaus is a former Nazi. Be sure not to say anything bad about them."

"Does he know that you're Jewish?" I asked. "Why did you rent the room from him?"

"No, he mustn't know, or he'll boot us out. This place is within a ten-minute walk of my newspaper office. It was also the cheapest room I could find for us."

My friend's wavy chestnut hair and blue eyes made him look like a young Paul Newman. If our landlord judged ethnicity by appearance, we did not have to worry about him learning the truth.

John gave me the address of the Employment Bureau of Montreal and recommended I go there right away. When I was ready to leave the following day, our landlord noticed I did not have gloves. He lent me a pair as well as some galoshes. "Wear these over your shoes. It'll prevent them from becoming soggy," he advised. His thoughtful generosity touched me.

Carrying Mr. Leahy's letter, I took the bus downtown and proceeded to the employment office. A long line of people stood outside the building, and I took a place at the end. It was bitterly cold and snowing. The sidewalk was slushy due to the heavy salting. I was thankful to have the warm gloves and the galoshes.

The line progressed slowly. By the time I stepped inside the office, my feet felt frozen. People around me spoke French, and I remembered my basketball teammates' predictions about the cold weather and possible language problems.

Finally, I reached the inner office and entered a vast hall containing 50 to 60 desks. The people seated at each desk were busily talking. Next to the door sat a clerk holding a tablet in his lap. Without asking any questions, he pulled a number from the tablet and sent me to the desk corresponding to that number. The man behind the desk spoke to me in French and pointed to a chair to indicate I should sit down.

"I'm sorry, but I don't speak French."

He switched to English and asked me several questions. I had trouble following his rapid talk and asked him to speak more slowly. He complied but was noticeably annoyed. Taking my Canadian immigration document, he typed my personal information onto a form.

"What kind of work can you do?" he asked next.

"I'm an electronic technician. I worked in a radio repair shop in Nanaimo for two months. I want to do something similar," I replied while showing him my letter of recommendation.

"Were you laid off?"

I did not know what "laid off" meant and asked him to explain. He did, but his raised voice indicated increasing annoyance.

"No," I replied once I understood his question.

"Then why did you leave?"

"I want to live in Montreal so I can continue running."

The man lost all control and exploded in rage. "Look around! All these people are without work, and you quit a good job so you can run?" He pulled the form out of the typewriter and ripped it in half. "Go find work yourself!" With that, he dismissed me.

Mr. Nagy's warnings echoed through my ears. *He was right. Why didn't I listen to those who advised me to stay in Nanaimo? I should have appreciated what I had.* However, it

was too late. I went outside the building and retook a place at the end of the line. *Hopefully, I will be sent to a different agent next time, and I will know what to say.*

After a long wait, I reached the inner office again. Before stepping inside, I removed my coat so the clerk wouldn't recognize me. It worked. This time, he directed me to another agent on the other side of the room.

The first couple of minutes with the second agent, a tall, thin woman, followed a pattern similar to the first interview. She was also a French Canadian, but I could understand her much better. She also asked if I had been laid off.

"Yes, and I could not find other work there," was my prepared answer. "I hoped that there would be more jobs for technicians in a big city."

"Well, let me see what we have." She flipped through a folder and pulled out a sheet. "This company needs someone to wire, assemble, and test large electrical boards. Do you think you can do that?"

"Yes, I have a lot of experience in that kind of work," I replied, my heart pounding rapidly. "I am particularly familiar with testing."

She made a phone call and wrote an address on a piece of paper. "Go to see Mr. Ward at the Standard Electric Time Company. He'll interview you."

Standard Electric Time Company was founded in 1884, only six years after Edison invented the electric light bulb. The company grew and, in the 1930s, developed the first hospital communication system. Two decades later, the firm pioneered automatic nurse-calling stations. This product became very popular in hospitals, and the company needed more people to build and test the systems.

Mr. Ward, a gray-haired gentleman, was the production foreman of the company. After reading Mr. Leahy's letter, he walked me through a clean production area that seemed to be brand new. I saw people working on large panels measuring about three-by-three feet. The panels had electrical components mounted and wired on their backs. On the front, they had colored monitor lights and switches. Mr. Ward explained that the boards would be installed at the nursing stations of hospitals. The boards were wired to switches in the patients' rooms, allowing the patients to have instant communication with the nurses.

Mr. Ward had me sit at a workbench at the end of our tour. He handed me a couple of electrical components plus two diagrams—one showed the placement of the components and the other one the wiring schematics. He asked me to mount the components on the board and complete the wiring.

The task was elementary, and I completed it in a short time. Satisfied with my performance, he told me I could start there the following Monday. My pay would be \$45 per week.

I was happy to find a job so quickly. The work seemed repetitive, but I hoped to advance to a better position later. The wages he offered, however, bothered me.

"I earned \$60 per week in Nanaimo," I told him, pointing to the part of Mr. Leahy's letter. "Would you pay me the same?"

He did not like my question. "That was in British Columbia. In Montreal, we don't pay that much to assemblers," he snapped. "Particularly when you don't know much English! If you want more, you can find a job elsewhere."

I wished I had kept my mouth shut. "I'm sorry. Forty-five dollars will be fine."

When I left the building, it was still snowing. Except for the major boulevards, all the streets were covered with ice. It certainly did not look like spring. That evening, when I asked our landlord how long the cold weather would last, he said the snow might stay on the streets through April. His answer dashed my hopes of being able to start running hurdles on a track right away.

After sharing the news of my job with John, my next task was to find a way to visit my sister. John suggested we ask the owner of the nearby Hungarian delicatessen. "The owner has lived in Montreal for a long time and probably knows where the refugee center is." We needed to buy some food anyway, so we walked over to the deli.

We soon learned that Hungarian refugees without sponsors stayed in a former Army camp in Joliette, located about 35 miles away from Montreal. Regular bus service was available from Montreal's central station to Joliette. The next day, I boarded the bus and headed to the camp.

Stepping off the bus in Joliette was like arriving in another country. I heard only French spoken on the streets. When I asked people for directions to the camp in English, they answered in French. Still, I managed to find my way to the place and asked for Éva at the entrance. A helpful guard directed me to a large waiting room. About 30 minutes later, my sister appeared, holding hands with a middle-aged man.

Seeing me, she dropped his hand and rushed to me. We hugged each other joyfully. Then, pointing to the man beside her, she said, "This is Tibor, my husband."

I had trouble hiding my surprise. Éva had always dated good-looking men of her age. Although I had heard Tibor's name mentioned at home, this was my first time meeting him. He looked more like her father than her husband. There was nothing to do but greet him. "Szervusz and congratulations," I said to him, not too enthusiastically.

Once we began talking, I found Tibor to be pleasant and friendly. He and Éva told me briefly about their escape from Hungary nearly a month after mine. Their journey had proven far more difficult. The border patrol caught them on the first try. After they bribed the guard escorting them back to Budapest, he let them go. Their second attempt to cross into Austria was successful, and they stayed briefly at the same Eisenstadt refugee center where I had been. Tibor spoke German and French fluently and acted as an interpreter in Austria.

They had no idea where I was. By the end of 1956, Brazil was the only country still accepting refugees. Fortunately, just as they were applying for immigration to Brazil, Canada opened its doors to another wave of Hungarian refugees. They flew on a troop carrier to Montreal amid one of the coldest North American winters on record. Tibor, a mechanical engineer, hoped his knowledge of French would enable him to find a job soon.

I reported to work the following Monday. To my relief, everyone in the assembly area, including the few French Canadians, spoke English. My job was interesting at first. I spent three days completing the first large control panel assigned to me. However, to my disappointment, I had to turn the panel over to a technician for the electrical tests. When I told Mr. Ward that I could also perform these tests, he told me it would be long before I

could transfer to the testing department. I worked on the same products during the next several weeks.

It was a new experience for me to punch a time clock in the morning, at the beginning and end of the lunch break, and the end of the workday. When I asked why we had to punch in and out during lunch, I learned that the half-hour we had for lunch was unpaid. I was surprised because we had paid for lunchtime in Hungary. In addition, I also found out the company did not provide paid medical insurance. That benefit had been given automatically to all workers in Hungary. I began to realize that not many things in Canada were free.

Lunchtime, although not paid, was the best part of my day. The factory was located only a block from a busy commercial street called Rue St. Catherine. After punching the time clock, I would gulp down the sandwich I had prepared the previous night and rush over to Saint Catherine Street to look around. People in Montreal were much better dressed than were those on Vancouver Island. My Nanaimo basketball teammates were right about beautiful young women parading on the streets. I wished that I had longer lunchtimes to observe them.

A few weeks after we moved into our rented room, Klaus knocked on our door one evening. He was highly agitated, holding an airmail letter in his hand. "Who do you know in Israel?" he demanded, handing John the letter.

I remembered John telling me about a cousin who lived in Israel. If Klaus found out, he would naturally suspect that John was Jewish. He would immediately kick us out of the apartment, ending our cheap rental. I looked at John anxiously, waiting for his answer.

"I don't have any idea," said John calmly while taking the letter from our landlord. After reading the sender's name, he exclaimed, "It's from our Jewish neighbor's son. How could he be in Israel?"

He opened the envelope and began to read the letter. After finishing the first page, he turned to Klaus, who was still waiting. "He is asking me to find his lost uncle who immigrated to Canada after World War II," he continued.

Klaus did not look convinced. "How does he know where you live? Why would he contact you?"

"His mother in Budapest probably heard that I am in Canada. She could have asked my mother for my address."

"I certainly hope you won't help him. Jews have lots of money. Let him hire an investigator."

"Of course. I won't even reply to him," said John after crumpling up the letter. "He was never my friend."

Klaus mumbled something approvingly and left us. After unfolding the letter inside our room, John whispered, "That was close. It was dumb of me not to warn my cousin about our landlord. Do you think Klaus believed me?"

"I'm not sure. Let's buy food and discuss what to do next."

We asked the deli owner if he could recommend a nearby place to live. He promised to look around for us. On our way home, we decided to play it safe in case Klaus suspected

something. Beginning that night, we barricaded our bedroom door to protect ourselves while we slept.

A few days later, I received good news from my sister. Tibor had found employment with an air-conditioning company at a monthly salary of \$250. Éva had been hired to work in a small import-export shop through the local Hungarian-Canadian community. She received 50 cents an hour for packing and addressing orders. The three of us planned to find an apartment as soon as we had enough money for the rent. John had arranged to rent an apartment with three other young men. In the meantime, he and I stayed with Klaus, trying to convince him that we had nothing to do with Israel.

Eva and Tibor moved from the Joliette camp to Montreal, where they stayed in jail for a few days. As in Vienna, where Hungarian refugees were allowed to sleep in unused jail cells, Montreal's mayor had opened jails for people who left the refugee center for new jobs.

As I waited until Eva, Tibor, and I could afford to find a new home together, I continued to be haunted by recurring dreams. In my dreams, I would sneak back into Hungary using a variety of challenging routes, only to find another revolution underway. During the fighting, I kept asking myself how I could have been so foolish as to return after successfully escaping. Awakening from these nightmares, I was always soaked with sweat. These dreams stayed with me for a long time.

Another chronic problem I had was the steady pain inside my upper lip, resulting from my tripping over the cobblestone barricade back in Budapest. When I told the deli owner about it, he recommended a Hungarian dentist whose office was not far from where I worked. I was concerned about the cost, but the owner assured me the dentist's fee would be very reasonable. He telephoned and made an appointment for me.

Perhaps my family's dental genes were weak. My mother lost all her teeth when I was only seven or eight years old. She had upper and lower dentures, and I remember how difficult it was for her to chew hard food. Although she kept a clean home and ensured I had a bath in a washtub weekly, dental hygiene was not high on her priorities. I don't remember using a toothbrush until my late teens. As a result, my teeth were in bad shape, and I visited the dentist in Hungary frequently.

During lunchtime, I walked from work to my dental appointment. Hearing the soft music in the dentist's spacious, nicely furnished waiting room helped to calm my nerves. I was the only patient, and the receptionist took me to the dentist a few minutes after my arrival. I was impressed with the short wait. Back in Hungary, the government-owned medical offices did not offer appointments. Patients would show up and wait for their turn. If the doctor were very busy, the wait could take hours.

The doctor greeted me in a friendly manner. His Hungarian parents had immigrated to Canada when he was a young boy. After completing college in Montreal, he decided to become a dentist. During the past few months, he had seen several newly arrived refugees. "I'll take good care of you," he assured me. "Now, let's see what your problem is."

After a short examination, he informed me that my teeth looked dreadful. Seeing the condition of my gum inside the upper lip, he suspected some of my upper front teeth were

damaged. “The X-ray will tell us what I need to do. Come back tomorrow, and we’ll review your condition.”

The next day, I went back to see him. “Your mouth needs lots of work. Three of your front teeth are cracked, and they must be removed. I am surprised that an infection hasn’t set in. The lower teeth we can save, but some need fillings.”

“How will I look without my front teeth?”

“I’ll make a good denture for you that will last for a long time.”

I was confused and concerned. “How long will it take before I’ll have teeth again? How much will it cost?”

“I’ll have a denture prepared to replace your natural teeth before I pull them out,” he replied. “As for the cost, I’ll only charge for the material, and you can pay it off monthly.”

I had not heard about the immediate replacement of teeth. “I thought my mouth would have to heal before I could be fitted for a denture.”

“Not anymore! This way, your gum forms around the denture during the healing period. It will work almost as well as your natural teeth.”

That was almost too much for me to absorb. However, he convinced me that, considering my financial status, it was the best alternative for me. I agreed, and he made an impression on the upper portion of my mouth. He set another appointment for the next step.

I shared the information with John and our landlord that evening. John doubted it would work, but Klaus said he knew someone who had had the same procedure done. According to him, it worked well. I decided to go along with the plan.



Photos taken in Montreal mid-1957. Left: Éva and I with her husband, Tibor. Center: Éva in a relaxed moment. Right: I was wearing the same jacket used during the escape from Hungary.

Now that I was more experienced at work, my job became boring. The company had a large order for the panels I worked on, and I completed a panel every two days. Mr. Ward would not let me switch to a different product. He told me I would be doing the same work for several months. One afternoon, being utterly bored with the repetitive work, I dozed off with some tools in my hands. Although the boss did not notice, some of the assemblers

saw me nod off. One woke me up, but another must have reported me to Mr. Ward because he appeared on the scene.

He lectured me booming, saying that the company did not pay me for sleeping. "If that happens again," he warned me, "I'll write you up." With that, he stormed out of the production area.

Some other workers snickered after witnessing the scolding, making me realize I was unpopular among them. I carelessly bragged about my technical education during my first few weeks of employment. Naturally, they resented the fresh-off-the-boat smart-aleck who wanted to be at the head of the line. I promised myself never to be so insensitive again.

On the day of my tooth extraction, I asked Mr. Ward to let me take the afternoon off to have my teeth pulled. He did not want my work to fall behind schedule but allowed me to be away for two hours—without pay. Fearful of what I faced, I headed to the dental office.

After the dentist shot my mouth full of Novocain, he removed all my upper teeth. He placed the new denture, took a picture of my head, and let me go. He instructed me to keep my mouth shut tight to minimize bleeding.

When I returned to work, my swollen face created quite a bit of interest. I hoped that Mr. Ward would allow me to go home. He gave me a disapproving look when I pointed out that I was not supposed to talk and sent me back to my workbench. For the rest of the afternoon, I continued working while swallowing blood. Being only twenty years old, I did not make a big thing out of the matter. However, later in my life, I frequently considered how heartless it was of my boss not to let me take the rest of the day off.

For the next several days, I lived mainly on yogurt. Gradually, my new teeth became functional, and I could eat soft food. Even chewing hard food did not cause problems in a month or so. The dentist had been correct about the excellent fit of the denture.

One of the import shop owners where Éva worked told her about a vacant two-bedroom apartment where he lived. My sister, her husband, and I looked at the place and decided to rent it. If we signed a one-year lease, the landlord offered a free month's rent. Not knowing that was a standard rental practice, we gladly accepted the offer, thinking we had received a special deal.

The apartment had major appliances, but otherwise, it was empty. One of the local newspapers advertised a special sale: furniture for two bedrooms, living room, and kitchen for \$99. The ad also mentioned easy payment plans, something we were not accustomed to in the cash-only Hungarian system. We visited the store the following Saturday to buy the complete package.

A smiling salesman greeted us at the door. We showed him the ad and stated our intention to purchase the furniture. He led us to the advertised furniture, offered seats around the coffee table, and said, "Allow me to get to know you better first. That way, I can serve you better," he suggested.

The man asked many questions about us and showed a remarkable interest in our background. He told us that Western nations should not have let the Red Army put down the Hungarian Revolution. We liked him for being so sympathetic to our country.

After a while, he said, "I want to be your friend and give you honest advice. This advertised \$99 special is not good enough for sophisticated people like you. Let me show

you something much better.” He directed us to a different section of the store. “The furniture here is well made and will last you long. This will serve your needs much better.”

We agreed with him and selected the set we liked the most. The price came to \$499. Seeing a number much higher than we had expected, we did not want to buy. “Let me bring the owner over to see what he can do,” he offered. “I want you to have the high quality you deserve.” He went into the office at the rear of the store.

In a short time, he reappeared with another smiling man. The slick salesman said, “He is my boss, and I explained your background to him. He understands you don’t have much money, so he will work out a payment plan you can afford. In addition, he’ll add a gift for you.”

The boss led us into his office and offered us coffee. After doing some calculations, he pointed out that we could have all that high-quality furniture by paying only \$25 monthly for the next two years. Since he liked us so much, he would even give us three free pillows! Everything would be delivered to our apartment the following day without extra charge.

How could we refuse such generosity? We signed the contract and took the streetcar to our new home. In the building, Éva introduced us to her boss, Sanyi. We told him about the nice salesman and the special deal he had arranged for us.

After looking at the contract we had signed, Sanyi was not impressed. “What happened to the \$99 price? You’ll pay \$600, including \$100 for interest.”

Tibor replied, “The advertised special was not very good quality. He told us this was much better and even gave us three free pillows.”

Sanyi became angry. “He took advantage of your inexperience. Let’s return to the store, and I’ll straighten him out.”

He drove us to the furniture store. When we pointed out the salesman to him, Sanyi yelled at the man. “How could you trick these people into paying such a high price? I want you to give them the deal you advertised!” Sanyi was not a big man, but his voice boomed through the store.

Customers stared at us. The salesman became alarmed. “Let me take you to the office to discuss this,” he whispered.

Sanyi did not budge. He was waving the contract in his hand. “No, I want everyone to hear how you tricked these people. They came to spend \$99, not \$600. Give them what they asked for!”

The store owner appeared in a hurry. “OK, OK! We’ll change the order to please you,” he said reassuringly while smiling at everyone. “I’ll take care of everything.”

He ripped up our contract in his office and wrote a new one. “Since there has been a misunderstanding, I’ll give you a higher-priced set for \$99. Of course, the free pillows will still be included.”

Sanyi proudly took us back to the apartment. “Before you sign a contract, let me know about it. You must be very careful with those fast-talking salespeople.”

Another lesson we learned in Canada!

The next day, we moved into the apartment. After the furniture arrived, Sanyi and some other Hungarian-Canadians donated many essential household items to us—the rest we purchased at the Salvation Army store. In a few weeks, we had accumulated almost

everything we needed. Éva cooked for us. Tibor and I took care of the shopping and cleaning. Our little family lived together quite happily.

Chapter 2: Joining a Canadian track club

The harsh winter ended in late April when spring weather finally arrived. I learned Montreal had two large track and field clubs, St. Lambert and Mount Royal Athletics. The latter was closer to where we lived. I stopped by to visit there as soon as the snow melted.

The head coach greeted me warmly. After I filled him in about my running background, he told me, "I'll be glad to work with you. But our club has no outstanding hurdlers for you to practice with." Seeing the disappointment on my face, he added, "Our sprinters, however, are among the top in Canada. You'll enjoy being part of our team." He stepped next to me to compare our feet when he heard I did not have spike shoes. "Looks like we wear the same size," he said. "Tomorrow, I'll bring you my old shoes from home. You can have them. My running days are over."

I began working out the next day. After several months of inactivity, I had to start up gradually. Coach Carroll, a former Canadian 440-yard champion, was extraordinarily patient and understanding. He prepared a separate training schedule for me. I hoped to work out with the team members in a few months.

The following week, the coach waved me over. "I have something you'll enjoy reading," he said, handing me a Montreal newspaper. He pointed out an article in the sports section with my name in it. "I talked with one of their reporters yesterday and mentioned that you've joined our club. Now, you have to live up to their expectations."



Portion of the article that appeared in the *Montreal Gazette's* sports section.

I was happy to see the article and proudly showed it to my boss the following day. Knowing that he was an ice hockey fan, I assumed he would be happy to see he had an elite athlete working for him. Perhaps he would even allow me to leave work a little earlier every day to be at the track sooner. The factory was located south of downtown, about 40 minutes from the Mont-Royal track by streetcar. I was always one of the last to arrive for practice.

Mr. Ward was not impressed. "Be sure it does not interfere with your work," he grunted. "Running hurdles is not like playing ice hockey. You can't make a living from it." He handed back the article, shaking his head disapprovingly. His reaction was far from the praise I expected.

A week later, my friend John Fischer also joined the track club. His fastest 100-meter time back in Budapest, 10.8 seconds, was respectable even in Canada. However, he had not worked out for over six months, so he also had to begin carefully. I hoped that by the end of the summer, we could be part of the same relay team again.

The first major track meet occurred in June in Valleyfield, Quebec, along with the Scottish Highland Games. Instead of metric distances, all races were measured in yards and miles. One of our club sponsors drove us to the meet.

After changing into our tracksuits and walking to the small stadium, John and I had a big surprise: the running track had been laid on the grass! The only hurdle event for men was the 120-yard race with 42-inch-high hurdles, and the coach did not want me to run that on the grass. Instead, he entered me into the 440-yard sprint. Although the coach was not entirely convinced that John was ready to compete, he agreed to let John run the 100-yard dash.

I expressed my concern about not being able to run a good time on the soft grass. Coach Carroll, however, reminded me that everyone else would have the same handicap. "Don't worry about the time. Run to win!" he said.

I was uncharacteristically nervous before this track meet, my first in Canada. John's event was first on the schedule, well before mine, so we warmed up separately. Finding a quiet place to concentrate on the busy field was challenging. Scottish bagpipe players were everywhere, practicing their instruments. The strange sound bothered me, and I struggled to block it out. I wanted to stay close to the track to observe John's race so I could not escape from the pipers.

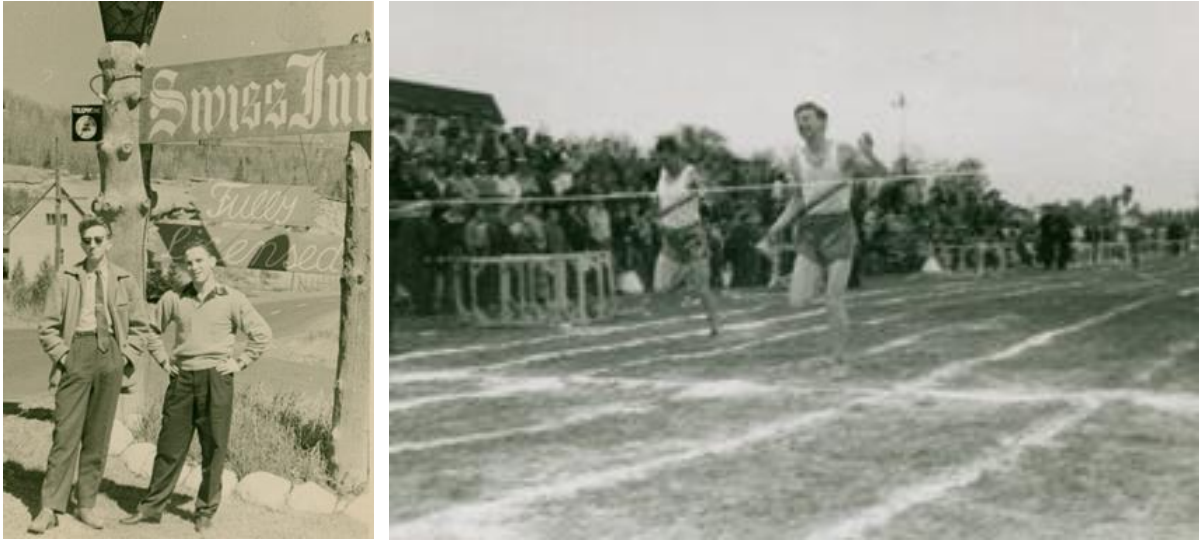
John had a good start, leading in his heat for the first 50 yards. Suddenly, his legs buckled, and he fell. As the other runners passed him, his facial expression showed he was in pain. I ran over and helped him stand. "My hamstring is hurting. I think I tore a muscle," he told me as I helped him off the track.

Our coach rushed to us with a trainer. They tied an icepack to the back of John's thigh and had him lie down in the grass. The coach was blaming himself for letting John race with so little preparation. I was praying to St. Anthony to protect me during my run.

The 440-yard race had timed heats. The officials put me into the first heat based on my fastest time. I did not know any of the other runners except for George Gluppe, who was also a club member. George and I had trained together during the past weeks, and I knew he was the faster of the two of us. I was to run in Lane 3, and George had Lane 5. My strategy was to stay close behind him.

After the starting gun sounded, George took off very quickly. Halfway through the race, he was at least 15 yards ahead of me, and I gave up any hope of staying close to him. By the 330-yard mark, his lead had increased. I felt surprisingly strong, however, and began to stride faster. George faded in the last 50 yards, and I passed him!

After the race, he told me that he had underestimated the effect of the soft track. “The fast pace of the first 220 took so much out of me that I could hardly lift my legs at the end. This is probably the only time you’ll beat me,” he said with a smile. He was right. I could never beat him again in the 440 dash.



Left: John Fischer and I during a stop on our way to the track meet. Right: Winning the 440-yard race held on a grass-covered track. Finishing a close second is George Gluppe, who became another long-time rival and friend.

A few days later, John showed up at the track, walking with a limp. “I tore my right hamstring, which will take months to heal. My running days may be over,” he said with sadness.

The news hit me hard. We had been running on the same Hungarian team for four years. We were both national junior champions—John in the 100m sprint, and I won the 400m hurdles. I ran the third leg, and he was the anchor of our champion 4x100m relay. The experiences we had shared cemented our friendship. Now, that camaraderie might not be as strong. I expressed my sorrow and the hope that his injury would not prevent him from running again. Unfortunately, my wish did not come true.

In August, our coach informed me of a significant two-day track meet soon in Toronto. He planned to drive several of us down on a Thursday so we could compete on Friday and Saturday. Toronto was Canada’s track and field capital, and I looked forward to running at the famous East York club.

The next day, I asked Mr. Ward if I could take two days off for the track meet. He was not happy to hear my request. “You don’t earn any vacation until you’ve worked here for a year.”

“This meet is crucial. I’ll have a chance to run against the top Canadian hurdlers,” I protested.

“What is more important, your work or running?”

“Running. Someday, I hope to compete in the Olympics.”

“Well, in that case, I’ll just have to let you go.”

“Thank you very much,” I replied happily, misunderstanding his statement. “I’ll work extra hard after coming back.”

“You won’t be back. You are fired!”

I was unsure what “fired” meant, but his facial expression told me it was not good. I was correct. He led me to Personnel, where I received my pay that day. Then, he walked me out of the plant.

What am I going to do now? If I return to the Employment Bureau, I must admit that my boss fired me. They may not help me find another job. I did not know what to do next.

That afternoon, I told my coach what had happened. He was sympathetic but reminded me that track and field was an amateur sport. “Some of our club members have well-to-do parents, so they don’t have to worry about paychecks. Some of the others attend American colleges and only come home for the summers. Those who work must coordinate their jobs with their sports activities.” He advised me to look for work in the newspaper’s classified ad section.

For several days, I called different companies without any luck. Then I saw a promising advertisement for a technician-foreman experienced with record changers and audio amplifiers. “Apply in person,” the ad stated. Although I had only worked with single-record players and not record-changers, I went to the company the following morning with high hopes.



A single-record player compared to the record-changer, where multiple records could be stacked for an extended period of play.

The Norel Electric Company was a relatively small operation constructing portable record changers. The owner, Mr. Kucharsky, walked me through a small production area and assembly line. Next, he took me to the test station and explained that his technician was leaving soon. “His children live in Toronto, and he wants to be near them. I need someone to take his place.”

I confessed that I had no record-changer experience but assured him I would learn fast. The rest of the job—electronic circuitry—I could handle immediately. He asked me to come and work with his technician for a few days. After the trial, he would decide whether to hire me or not. He would not pay me for the trial period.

For several days, the technician trained me to operate record changers. They used two different British-made products that handled up to twelve records. Troubleshooting their mechanical operation challenged me, but I was determined to learn enough to work there independently. At the end of my trial, the owner hired me at a monthly salary of \$200. In addition to supervising the production people, my responsibilities included the final testing and repair of the products. Because the other technician was leaving soon, there was no way the boss could let me have time off for the Toronto track meet. It was hard to skip the meet, but I did not want to risk losing another job.

The change of employment was most fortunate, though. My work was no longer tedious. Solving problems that occurred on the production line, as well as testing and fixing the products, kept me very busy. In addition, I picked up some French words and expressions. All the women working on the line were French Canadians who always spoke in French among themselves. I had more trouble understanding their rapidly accented conversation than understanding English.

My brother-in-law was fluent in Parisian French, which was quite a bit different from the dialect used in Quebec. He and my sister had only a limited understanding of English. On Sundays, we usually went to see Hollywood movies, where I acted as a “translator.” Talking during the movies annoyed others in the audience, and most of the time, we had to move away from the other people. We could watch three movies for 25 cents per person!

Not far from the movie theater was a steakhouse on Saint Catherine Street. We saw two chefs near the window preparing the steaks over open flames. One day after the movie, we decided to try it. The restaurant offered a complete meal with steak for 99 cents. None of us had eaten a steak before.

The person taking orders asked us how we wanted our steaks prepared. Not knowing what to answer, we asked him what choices we had. The man replied, “Rare, medium, or well done.” At that point, I suddenly recalled what I had heard about steaks a few years earlier.

After the Hungarian national soccer team defeated England 6-3 in London in 1953, one of the players gave a talk in our clubhouse about their stay in the British capital. He was impressed with nearly everything except the English cuisine. He described his worst experience when their hosts ordered the specialty of the fancy restaurant—beefsteak served rare—for the team.

“After the waiter brought the huge piece of meat, I cut into it, and blood oozed out on my plate,” the soccer player said. “It was repulsive. Naturally, I refused to eat it.”

Hearing that, most of us in the audience looked at each other with disbelief. How could civilized people eat raw meat? That topic had been the subject of discussion for a long time.

Not wanting to have blood on my plate, of course, I ordered my steak well done. Tibor and Éva followed my example and asked for the same.

Our 99-cent steaks were disasters. They were hard and badly burned. The three of us concluded that we would never try steak again. After that awful experience, with a few exceptions, such as when we splurged in a Hungarian restaurant, we ate the food Éva cooked for us at home.

I competed several times throughout the summer and gradually bettered my previous personal records (PRs) in every event. Several of my teammates became good friends. Most of them had cars, and I looked forward to having one. Saving money, however, was not easy. Every month, I paid to the dentist and Mr. Leahy, my former employer in Nanaimo. In addition, I occasionally sent money to my mother in Budapest. I did not have much left after paying one-third of the rent, utilities, and food.

Attending one of the gatherings of newly arrived Hungarians, I met a man my age, Tom Wollitzer, who had already purchased a car. Tom was very good-hearted and offered to teach me to drive his car, equipped with a manual transmission. During the following months, we practiced in a large parking lot. I had trouble manipulating the clutch and gas pedals simultaneously and often stalled his car's engine. After I obtained a learner's permit, he allowed me to venture out on the streets. Gradually, I learned to drive.

Snow began to fall in late October, and the track season ended. By November, snow covered the already icy pavement. The major thoroughfares received heavy doses of salt, but it was treacherous to drive elsewhere. Running outdoors was also dangerous. Our coach arranged for the team to work out on the upper walkway of the Montreal Canadiens' large ice hockey arena. In addition, I joined a dozen other young Hungarians to form a club basketball team.

I did not know much about ice hockey, although I once saw the Soviet team play an exhibition game in Budapest after their return from a North American tour. After interviewing the team, a reporter asked their impression of the Canadian team. The players' unanimous response was, "They were brutally tough." After watching the Soviet team play a tough physical game in Budapest, I could not imagine how another team could be even rougher. However, when I watched the Montreal team's hard body checks during practice, I agreed with the Soviets.

In December, I received a letter from Boriska and Gábor, who stayed behind in Nanaimo. Their four-month-old baby's crying bothered some of the motel guests. After repeated complaints, the motel owner fired the young couple. Because Gábor had experience with electronics test instruments, they hoped he would find suitable employment in Montreal. We offered to let them stay with us until they found jobs. Before Christmas, after driving their old car across Canada, they arrived with another refugee couple. Boriska, Gábor, and baby George took my bedroom. I moved into the living room. The other couple moved in with their friends.

Having five adults in the apartment was tight. Gábor also had trouble finding a job. After nearly two months of unsuccessful searching, he began to drive a taxi. He learned to drive during his military service in Hungary and obtained a driver's license in Montreal. Within a few weeks, they rented an apartment and moved.

In early 1958, an advertisement in the local Hungarian newspaper caught my eye.

"1953 Ford sedan with low mileage, in excellent shape. Manual transmission, radio, heater, and whitewall tires. Price: \$850. Easy payments can be arranged. Call Mr. Silverman!" The ad also showed a picture of the car.



A 1953 Ford, similar to the one advertised in the Montreal newspaper.

With \$50 in my pocket on the weekend, I asked Tom to drive me to the dealer. I fell in love with the car the moment I saw it. Mr. Silverman prepared the contract, I signed it, and the car was mine. That over 95 percent of it still belonged to the finance company did not bother me. I had an automobile! That was something that had been far beyond my wildest dreams in Hungary. There was only one problem. I only had a learner's permit, not a regular driver's license. The salesman assumed that I was legally licensed and gave me the key.

After Tom left, I carefully drove the car out of the dealer's lot and headed home on the snow-covered Côte des Neiges Boulevard. Driving slowly and carefully uphill, I reached an intersection where the traffic lights were not operating. Two police officers directed traffic. They stopped my car to let the vehicles move in the other direction. When they waved me to start, I stalled the car and could not move it upward on the steep slope.

Cars behind me began to honk their horns. One of the police officers noticed my plight and yelled something to me in French. I desperately tried to engage the clutch again without success. One of the policemen came to my car, opened the door, told me to move to the passenger side, and drove us across the intersection. I was petrified that he would ask for my driver's license. *If that happens, I could be arrested and lose my car!* Fortunately, he was too busy handling the traffic jam I had created. I managed to drive home without any further problems.

At first, Éva and Tibor could not believe I bought a car. Tibor was concerned that I had too much debt. He was correct. I was barely able to pay the operating expenses and insurance. However, the most important thing to me was that I had a car!

I passed the driver's license exam a few days later and was ready to drive to work. First, however, I had to find a parking place downtown. I learned quickly that parking in the downtown area was expensive. An uncovered parking lot a few blocks from my workplace offered space at a monthly rate of \$25, equal to one-eighth of my salary. I knew riding the streetcar would cost much less, but a car owner must drive!

My next problem was parking the car overnight on our street in winter weather. After every major overnight storm, the snowplows cleared the center of the roads by throwing the snow sideways—on top of the parked cars. When I stepped outside our apartment building in the morning, all the cars were covered with snow. I borrowed a shovel from the building manager and looked for my car. I was half frozen when I cleaned the snow off the top and scraped the ice off the windshield. Shivering, I sat in the car and turned on the ignition.

The motor made a painful grinding noise while slowly turning over a few times. Then, it stopped completely. My additional efforts to start the ignition were fruitless. In the meantime, well-heated taxis passed by, their drivers looking for easy fares. Already late, I swallowed my pride and flagged one of them down to take me to work.

“Why did you buy a car in the winter?” my boss asked after hearing my story. “You should have waited until the summer when the roads are clear. But even then, you should not drive it to work and pay for parking.”

He was right. I should have asked for advice before deciding, like purchasing a car. Gradually, I was beginning to learn that it is unwise to make hasty decisions.

On the days when the ice hockey arena was unavailable, our track team ran cross-country in the snow. Winter temperatures in Montreal often dipped well below zero degrees Fahrenheit. Breathing was painful in such cold weather. I remember that after running several miles outdoors, it took some time before I regained my normal voice.

Playing basketball was fun, and my friend Gábor joined our team. One of the older players did the coaching. He found a prominent sports institute to sponsor us. We took on their name and used their spacious indoor court for practices and home games. One of the added benefits of the facility was its attractive receptionist—a young, blonde French-Canadian girl with a mesmerizing smile. Several of our players had asked her out without success.

During one of the practice sessions, as I was in the air shooting for the basket, the player who covered me tried to knock the ball away. He missed the ball, but his elbow sideswiped my nose. I heard a crunching sound. When I landed on my feet, the other boy looked at me with an alarmed expression. My face was numb, and blood poured from my nose. One of the boys quickly removed his shirt and held it to my face.

Our coach guided me out of the court to the front desk. The receptionist was ready to go home but offered to take us to the nearest hospital. She showed genuine concern and escorted us into the emergency room. A doctor stopped the bleeding and informed me that my nose would need surgery. He made an appointment with the hospital for the following day and sent me home. Before leaving, I looked in the mirror and saw my flattened nose taped to the right side of my face. I looked like the boxer who lost the fight.

The coach took me home in a taxi from the hospital. When Éva saw me, she nearly fainted. “What happened to you?”

“One of our players accidentally elbowed me,” I answered. Then I gave her and Tibor the details of the accident. “Tomorrow morning, a surgeon will fix my nose. In six weeks, I can be back playing basketball again.”

Éva was noticeably unhappy to hear that I planned to return to playing after what had happened. Tibor was concerned about how I would pay for the hospital expenses. I had no insurance, and until he brought up the subject, the thought of medical bills had somehow escaped my mind. Back in Hungary, every citizen had national insurance coverage. In 1958, that kind of coverage did not exist in Canada. I went to bed worrying about the hospital charges—in addition to the actual surgery.

I took the streetcar to the hospital the following day. Everyone stared at me when I boarded. It was strange initially, but it no longer bothered me after a while. Attracting all that attention made me feel like a celebrity.

When I checked into the hospital, the clerk said, "The sports center's insurance will cover all your expenses." His statement lessened my concern, although I still worried about having surgery. Next, the staff took me to the operating room area and prepared me for the operation. Within a short time, I was asleep.

"Wake up, Mr. Besser, wake up," I heard a woman say. When I opened my eyes, they gradually focused on a pretty nurse. "Your surgery went well, and your nose will be fine again."

I touched my face and felt something covering my nose. "That protective mask will stay on for a while," she told me. "We don't want you to touch your nose."

As the anesthesia wore off, I remembered I had not gone to work that day. Although my brother-in-law had promised to call my boss and explain what had happened to me, I became concerned about my job. "How soon will I go home?" I asked the nurse.

"If all goes well, you can leave in three days, but you must wear a nose guard for six weeks." She also told me she would help me call my work after the doctor saw me. Later, I phoned my boss and apologized for not being there. He was very understanding. "Don't worry," he comforted me. "I'll take your place while you're in the hospital." He sounded much kinder than my previous boss, and I appreciated his support.

That afternoon, I had a surprise visitor. The sports center's receptionist, Pierrette, stopped by. "I'm going to work now, but I wanted to see how you are doing," she said with her cute French accent.

Suddenly, I felt great and assured her that everything was fine. We talked briefly, and she promised to return the next day. Éva and Tibor visited later and smuggled in a piece of Hungarian pastry. My first day in the hospital had gone well.

Pierrette kept her word and visited until the hospital discharged me. I built up my courage and asked if we could go on a date later. "I want to see first what you'll look like when that nose guard comes off," she said jokingly. However, she agreed to go out with me.

I was thrilled and already thought about how my teammates would envy me. It turned out to be true. After hearing the news, one of the boys said, "If I knew that she would be so sympathetic, I would have asked someone to break my nose!"

The nose guard came off six weeks later, but the doctor still taped my nose for a while. I started to play basketball again, and the other players showed extra caution not to touch me. It helped my scoring. I took advantage of their concern and wore the tape for the rest of the season, even when the doctor no longer required it.

Pierrette and I began to date regularly, and I quickly learned that her father did not like me. The first time I arrived at their house and knocked on the door, he opened it and stared at me. "Bonjour, monsieur," I greeted him in French. Not wanting to risk saying something incorrectly, I introduced myself in English. Before I could say anything else, he yelled back into the house, "L'Anglais est ici!" (The English guy is here!). Then he slammed the door in my face.



Left: Part of the Ivan Cutue Institute basketball team, showing me with my nose taped. Right: two photos of Pierrette and me (still with a swollen nose but without the tape).

Pierrette apologized for her father's behavior. "Please don't take it personally. He is frustrated about my dating someone other than a French Canadian."

Nothing I could do would change his mind. The door-slamming routine remained the same when Pierrette and I saw each other.

By the end of April, milder weather arrived. Before my spring running training began, John and I drove over 300 miles to New York City during a long Easter weekend. He had distant relatives living in Brooklyn who offered us a place to stay.

With our escapes from Hungary still fresh in our minds, we could not believe how simple it was to pass through the Canadian border. The uniformed guard waved at us as we passed by. The U.S. border agent wanted to know how long we would stay and wished us a pleasant visit. John looked at me and said, "Laci, we're now living in a different world."

We saw the skyscrapers, Harlem, and Times Square in New York. It was a busy trip, but we both wanted to find out if there was any difference between Canada and the United States. At the end of our journey, we concluded that the Americans lived more hectic lives than the laid-back French Canadians did. What we immediately liked about the U.S. was that people spoke English. John and I could handle conversational English well by then, but French was still difficult. We commented that perhaps one day, we would have the opportunity to move to the States.

The most exciting part of our trip was seeing Harlem. Before that day, I had seen only a few black people and never had talked with one. We could walk in downtown Montreal all day and only see white faces. On the streets of Harlem, John and I stood out.

During our walking tour, we stepped into a shop to buy film. After we said a few words, the clerk wanted to know what country we came from. We talked with him for a while and learned he had been stationed in Austria with the U.S. Army. He remembered seeing the menacing guard towers on the Hungarian side of the border. When we left, he told us, "You two are the first Hungarians I've met." I did not dare to say to him that he was the first black man with whom I had had a conversation.

After our return, seeing Niagara Falls was next on my list. Éva, Tibor, and I took time off in July and drove to the Ontario side of the Falls. They were fascinating—far beyond our expectations. We could walk through caves to an opening behind the largest waterfall that flowed at a rate of 65,000 cubic feet per second. The thundering noise of the water hurt my ears. We could not hear each other even when we shouted.

After staying overnight in a motel, we headed home on a different route to see more of the Canadian countryside. About halfway home, we stopped to refuel. In those days, the station attendant automatically checked the oil and water levels of the car. He informed me that the oil was dirty and needed replacing. “This week, we have a special for an oil change and a complete lube job,” he added. I agreed to finish the work while we had lunch in a café next to the station.

Following lunch, we continued our journey. During a long section of road repair, the highway's surface changed to gravel. We returned to the paved road after driving on the rough surface. Then, I heard a strange noise coming from underneath the car. I pulled off the road and looked under the hood. Everything seemed to be OK. As I continued driving, the grinding noise remained, and the car felt sluggish. Tibor recommended stopping.

We were within sight of a small town. I walked there and asked for help at the nearest service station. They dispatched a tow truck that took me back to our car. The mechanic lifted the hood and looked at the radiator and the fluid levels. “Your car has no transmission fluid,” he informed us. “Most likely, your transmission is gone.”

“We just had an oil and lube job a few hours ago,” I protested in disbelief.

The man placed a jack under the rear bumper, hoisted the car, and climbed under it. In a few seconds, he reappeared. “The transmission fluid plug is missing. It probably came loose on the rough road.”

“What can we do?” Tibor asked.

“I’ll tow you into our garage to see what’s wrong with the transmission.”

Finding no alternative, we agreed. He asked us to sit in our car and towed it facing backward to the service station.

He and another mechanic spent some time diagnosing the problem. The owner of the shop told us that our transmission was dead. A replacement would cost around \$200. The bad news devastated us. We did not have that kind of money.

“How much do you have?” the owner asked.

We added up what we had jointly, and it came to \$44.07.

The owner scratched his head. “That won’t do it.” Seeing our dismay, he added, “There is a junkyard not far from here. I will send my man over to see if they have a Ford like yours. If so, we could take out the transmission and put it into yours for forty bucks.”

That sounded promising. “Please go and take a look,” I said to him. I silently asked St. Anthony for another miracle.

Two men left with the tow truck. We waited anxiously for the news. They returned smiling. “We found one for you,” one of the men announced. “Come back in the afternoon.”

We wandered aimlessly around the small town. Knowing that four dollars would have to be enough to cover all our expenses for the rest of the trip, we decided not to eat anything

and save our money for gasoline. Of course, everything depended on the transmission of a junk car.



Left: Éva and I at Niagara Falls. Right: On our way back when the car problem developed.

The two men finished the work as we returned to the station around mid-afternoon. One drove the car around and announced that the transmission replacement worked fine. We handed \$40 to the owner, thanked him for being so helpful, and left. Although he did not tell me to do so, I kept the speed at 50 miles per hour. Our money was enough to fill the gas tank, and we made it home without problems. The next day, I went to church and thanked St. Anthony for his help. After payday a week later, I put two dollars into the collection box before his statue.

“Cousin” Pista and I kept up our regular correspondence via postcards. I was careful not to write anything that could have led to problems with the Hungarian authorities. Instead, I carefully described my new experiences in Canada. Occasionally, I even discovered events that we had always believed to be Communist propaganda turning out to be true. One of them was when I first saw an armored car in Montreal.

As I strolled along one of the major boulevards during my lunchtime, admiring the pretty young women, I noticed an unusual van parked across the street. Two uniformed men stepped out of the vehicle, carrying large bags in one hand and revolvers in the other. I assumed it was a movie set and looked for the cameras, but I did not see any. The two men entered the bank.

“It looked like they were making a film on the street,” I told my boss after returning to work.

“What makes you believe that?”

When I explained what I saw, he shook his head. “No, those men are guards delivering money to the bank.”

“But why do they carry guns?”

“So they won’t be robbed.”

I had difficulty believing someone would attempt to hold up a bank in broad daylight. When I told him that unarmed “money mailmen” delivered cash in Budapest without anyone bothering them, it was his turn not to believe me. He concluded that if that were true,

Budapest, under Communist control, would be a safer place than Montreal. *In those days, that was actually correct.*

During the summer, I participated in two major track meets in Toronto. In the first one, at the East York track club, I met several American runners from various universities. They told me about college athletics and suggested I consider attending college in the United States. "We have an indoor track," said one of the University of Michigan runners. "You wouldn't have to run in the snow."

"I attend UCLA. In California, we train outdoors all year round," added another boy. "You're crazy to stay in Montreal."

"I don't know how I'd apply. I went to high school in Hungary and don't have any papers to prove it," I replied.

"We have many students from other countries. As for your papers, write the school and ask for a copy," advised the Michigan runner.

Running my fastest time, I finished third—behind the best 440-yard Canadian hurdler and one of the American visitors. In Montreal, I had run that race only once without strong competition. I realized that to do better in that event; I should either move to Toronto or find out if there was a chance to attend an American college.

Back in Montreal, I asked my coach for advice. "You are already 22 years old. Most kids begin college at 18," he told me. "Your limited English would also be a handicap. However, it would help your hurdling significantly, so look into it."

"How should I do that?" I asked him.

"Next month is the Canadian Interprovincial Championship in Toronto. It is a major track meet organized by the Canadian Legion. Many American track coaches come there to scout new talent. Maybe one of them could help you."

I thanked him for his suggestion. Perhaps I could go to college and become an engineer. Although college education had been free in Hungary, the thought of going to college had never entered my mind; being the first high school graduate in my family had been a significant accomplishment.

The next day, I wrote to my mother and asked her to mail me my high school certificate. Having graduated from a four-year technical high school instead of a regular one worried me. However, I hoped a technical school background would be acceptable because I planned to study engineering.

My high school certificate, however, never arrived. I suspected the censors had confiscated it, so I wrote to the school directly and asked for a copy. They did not even answer. I assumed it was due to my blacklisted status. I doubted a college would accept me without proof of high school graduation.

Coach Carroll felt sorry for me and wrote a supportive letter to explain my circumstances. His letter, addressed "To Whom It May Concern," described my refugee status and the reason for my inability to obtain my high school certificate. "Considering your political background, the college might make an exception and allow you to enter," he told me, trying to comfort me. I could only hope that he was right.

I had never heard the statement, "To Whom It May Concern." It sounded impressive, but even with the help of a dictionary, I did not fully understand its meaning. Still, I appreciated the coach's writing this letter to help me.

Before the interprovincial track meet, the Canadian Legion sponsored a one-week-long Olympic Training Plan in Toronto. Business during the summer was slow, and my boss allowed me to take the week off—without pay—to participate.

In Toronto, about 150 young men and women from all over Canada participated in the training program. A Legionnaire escorted a dozen athletes from Montreal, almost evenly split between my club and St. Lambert. We stayed in a college dormitory and used the school track for our workouts. We ate in the school's cafeteria. I liked the food and never went hungry.

In addition to the Canadian team coaches, various American universities also sent coaches "to scout." I talked with several of them about my desire to attend college. They all encouraged me and did not feel my age would be a problem. I still hoped to receive my high school records from Hungary, so I did not mention that subject. I began formulating a plan to become a college student the following year.

I particularly liked a black coach who worked with hurdlers. He gave me several helpful tips to improve my hurdling. I asked if I could enroll in his college. To my surprise, he did not show any interest in me.

At the end of the week, we all looked forward to participating in the Canadian Legion Interprovincial Championship. A two-day meet was initially scheduled, but a massive storm on Friday forced all the events to be held on Saturday. In the absence of the Canadian hurdler who had beaten me the previous month, I won the 440-yard hurdles. After the race, I confidently approached the black coach who had watched the race and conveyed to him my strong desire to go to his school.



Winning the 440 yard hurdles made the headlines in one of the Montreal newspapers.

"Well, that may not be easy, but I'll ask one of our administrators to contact you," he said after some hesitation. "Our school is unique, and you may not fit in," he added.

His statement puzzled me, and I doubted I would hear from him, but he followed up on his promise. After returning home, a letter came from the Admissions Office of Howard University. The first sentence began, "As one of the white faculty members, I want to

explain why Coach W. did not encourage you to apply to our school.” Then, he explained possible racial conflicts that might make it difficult for me to blend into the student body.

After reading the letter, I became more confused and asked our coach to explain what it meant. He laughed first and said, “Howard University is a prestigious Negro school. I doubt that they have many white students. You definitely don’t want to go there.”

Completely unaware of the racial tension that existed in the United States, I still thought it would be unique to be a white student at the school. I imagined how popular I would be with the girls. However, when I shared my story with others on my track team, their replies were uniformly negative. “You’d find yourself in a lot of trouble there,” said one boy who attended college in Iowa.

What kind of trouble is he talking about? My friend John and I had visited Harlem already, and we had not encountered any problems. I was perplexed but did not go into the subject further.

The same boy thought for a minute and then said, “Come to the University of Dubuque in Iowa. It is a relatively small school, but the administration wholeheartedly supports athletics,” he explained. “In a big school, you’ll be just another number, but at Dubuque, most students will know you.”

His recommendation made sense. During the next track meet, he introduced me to others who attended the University of Dubuque. I learned that a significant number of their track team originated in Canada—about half a dozen from Montreal. I thought I would not be alone if I went to school in Dubuque. Although the university did not have an engineering school, it offered a two-year pre-engineering curriculum. They told me that after my second year, I could transfer to a large university to complete my degree. It sounded like an ideal combination to me.

Éva and Tibor liked my idea. A mechanical engineer himself, Tibor agreed that I should study engineering. “When you become an engineer, you will no longer have to repair electronic products,” he told me. “You’ll be designing them and earning much more money.”

That sounded great! I decided to proceed with my plan.

Several teammates returned to American colleges at the end of the summer. Those who attended the University of Dubuque promised to bring up my case to the track coach. They took a photocopy of Coach Carroll’s letter, and I eagerly awaited a response.

A month later, the head coach wrote to me. He suggested I contact my high school again and request a transcript. “I may be able to have you admitted without it, but it would be much easier if you had proof that you have completed high school.”

When I asked my mother again, her careful reply blamed the post office for “losing the shipment.” I was convinced, however, that the Hungarian authorities had confiscated it. My hopes of attending college began to fade.

One of my mother’s letters caught me by surprise. Usually, we both avoided writing about politics, knowing that censors might read our correspondence. In this letter, however, she wrote the following:

My Dear Lacika,

It still pains my heart that both you and your sister left your motherland. I am also sorry that you are not receiving the kinds of athletic benefits the Hungarian Socialist Government

provided to you. Under the conditions in which you live, your dreams of going to the Olympics might never be fulfilled.

By now, you should have realized that it was a mistake for you to leave Hungary. Make me happy by returning home! Your track club teammates and coaches will receive you with open arms. You could also have a chance to study at the Budapest Technical University and try out for the Hungarian Olympic team next year.

Your loving Mother

That did not sound like my mother! She knew how happy I was in Canada. Other than having me there to help her, why would she want me to live under the Communist Party's rules again? I did not know how to respond and had several restless nights trying to figure out how to reply. Finally, I decided not to answer.

About two weeks later, I received another letter from her with a Swedish postmark on the envelope. One of my former teammates, traveling with the national team to Stockholm for a track meet, had mailed my mom's letter from there. Mother explained how a district Party official had visited and told her what to write. She added, "I have been so worried that you would not receive this letter in time and fall for their trick."

Relieved by her clarification, I wrote to her immediately, knowing that she would have to show my reply to the authorities. First, I thanked her for her concern. Next, I explained that running was no longer important to me. I included a picture of Pierrette and told her that we would be married soon. After the wedding, we would remain in Montreal.

The Party officials must have bought my story because Mother had no follow-up letters on that topic. I had to stop writing her about my track participation to be consistent with my blatant lie.

In early 1958, Pista asked his girlfriend's father for the honor of marrying his daughter. The father agreed, and the marriage took place in the fall. Pista sent me photos taken at the wedding. I was happy to hear the good news and wished them a long life together.



Left: Pista and his brother "nagy Laci," celebrating Pista's engagement to Kuki. Right: The smiling young couple at their wedding.

Eight years after the revolution, the Hungarian government issued an amnesty to those who left the country illegally. Shortly after that, I went back for a visit and learned about the harsh questioning my mother and Pista had faced after my escape. Pista also told me that

his water polo team had participated in a tournament held in Amsterdam, but the Hungarian authorities had not allowed him to leave the country. They kept track of our connection and did not want to allow him to defect.

Corruption in a Capitalist Society

Corruption in the Montreal police force was common knowledge. After I began to drive my car, one of the women at work advised me on how to protect myself from a traffic citation. “Keep a five-dollar bill inside your car registration. If you are stopped for a driving violation, hand your license and the registration to the policeman. He’ll take the money and let you go.”

“But if he is an honest policeman, won’t he think I am trying to bribe him?”

“No, just pretend that the bill slipped in there accidentally.”

She sounded so convincing that I decided to follow her suggestion. A few weeks later, a policeman stopped me for speeding on a city street. He walked to my car and told me to roll down my window. He lectured me about speeding and the possible consequences I could face. “You’re in a lot of trouble. You will have to take time off work and go to court. You’ll have to pay a fine when you’re found guilty.” Then, he added sympathetically, “I hate to see all that happening to you.” Finally, he asked for my driver’s license and car registration.

With trembling hands, I handed him both. After unfolding my registration, he saw the money. He quickly handed everything back to me. *I am in real trouble now.* My heart was beating rapidly.

He dropped one of his heavy gloves inside my car and said quietly, “Put the money into my glove and hand the glove back to me.”

I did what he told me. “Next time, obey the speed limit!” was his parting comment as he returned to his patrol car.

I drove away with mixed feelings. Avoiding both traffic court and a fine for a five-dollar bribe made me happy. At the same time, I had become a cheater—something I had always loathed. I recalled what my mother had told me after I stole an apple from a classmate, “We’re poor, but we’re not thieves.” In my eyes, a cheater was equally bad or even worse. My coaches always emphasized fair play without cheating, and I have violated that principle.

After some deliberation, I decided not to tell anyone about this experience and promised never to do it again.

Paying income tax was new to me because the socialist Hungarian government did not collect any. The women at work explained how the system worked in Canada. They also gave me advice on how to save money. “Go to the church and give them ten dollars,” one of them told me. “The priest will give you a receipt for two hundred. You can then claim that amount as a donation to reduce your taxes.”

What I heard blew me away—a priest would collaborate in such a fraudulent scheme? Back in Budapest, I had heard rumors about corrupt Hungarian government officials who accepted bribes. They received severe sentences when caught because the government

wanted to set examples to show it would not tolerate dishonesty. But those officials were ordinary people who could easily be bought. This time, however, the allegations were against the men of God. I could not believe the claim until some other people confirmed it. It shook my faith in the Church.

As the 1958 Christmas season approached, the company where I worked received a large order from a department store. My boss allowed me to temporarily hire an unemployed Hungarian engineer to help me with the final test of the products. The man had also come from Budapest. After hearing what high school I had attended, he told me that he and his wife frequently spent time with one of my teachers, Mrs. X.

“Mrs. X, that dirty Communist,” I stated with disgust.

“Oh, no! She was only putting on an act.”

“What do you mean? She was one of the leaders of the local Communist party cell!”

“After the war, her husband was convicted and jailed for being a member of the Arrowcross Party during the fascist era. She joined the Communist Party and became extremely active in freeing her husband.”

The news shocked me. Because of her solid political stand, most students disliked Mrs. X. Behind her back, we tried to cause her as much trouble as possible. I recalled the day she proudly showed us a large stack of typed sheets representing the manuscript of a new book she had just completed on Marxist-Socialist management. She was called out of the classroom for a short time. One of the students quickly removed several pages from the stack and distributed them among us. We clowned around for days, making fun of her writing while she was no doubt searching for the missing pages of her manuscript.

After discovering that her unpopular behavior had been a deception used only to save her husband, I felt guilty for making her life more difficult. Since that day, I have often wondered how many seemingly devoted Communists only pretended to follow the Party lines for various unknown reasons.

College Plans

During his college Christmas vacation, one of my teammates brought me an envelope containing an application for admittance to the University of Dubuque. “Our track coach convinced the school administration to accept you without your high school transcripts,” he told me. “Complete the forms, and I’ll take them back with me next semester.”

That was good news! I carefully filled out the forms and passed them back to my teammate. A month later, I received a large envelope from the school. In the packet, I found a confirmation of admittance, a hefty college catalog, and, to my complete delight, a notice that I would receive an athletic scholarship to pay for most of my tuition and expenses for the school year. The university wanted me to apply for a student visa at the American Consulate and to show up for freshman orientation in the early part of September 1959.

I shared the information with Éva and Tibor. We celebrated that evening by having dinner at a Hungarian restaurant. At that age, I could eat a complete *Fatányéros*¹ (Wooden Platter) by myself. Éva and Tibor struggled to finish a second one together. During dinner, Tibor agreed to buy my car and the furniture I owned. He would take over the remaining payments for everything.



Photo of a *Fatányéros* meal in present days. It used to have more variety and larger portions.

My dream had always been to be an Olympian, and now I saw my hope rekindled. One day during track practice, I asked our coach, “If I significantly improve my 400-meter hurdles time while competing at Dubuque, could I be considered for the Canadian Olympic Team?”

“I’m afraid not. You would have to be a Canadian citizen,” he said. “It takes five years before you can apply for citizenship. You’ve been here less than three.”

My heart sank; in an instant, his answer killed my Olympic dream. *By the time of the next Olympics in 1964, I will already be 28 years old—over the hill for Olympic competition.* But then my thoughts rebelled. *No, I will not accept defeat so easily!*

The following day, at lunchtime, I visited the Immigration Center to inquire further. “Unless you’ve been a legal resident of Canada for five years, you are not eligible,” they told me.

“But I may have a chance of going to the Olympics,” I argued. “They won’t take me to the Trial unless I am a Canadian citizen.”

“It makes no difference. Even if you want to become the Prime Minister, you still need five years. Come back in 1961!”

I was frantic. The thought of returning to Hungary flashed through my mind. But the price would be high—too high. Pretending to be a devoted Communist was something I could not bring myself to do, not even if it would take me to the Olympics.

Gradually, I had to accept that my greatest dream would never come true.

¹ A large meal served on a heaping 18-inch-long wooden platter. It included two large Wiener schnitzels, two small Gypsy-steaks, two pork chops, two roasted kolbasses, various forms of potatoes, steamed red cabbage, and salads.

In addition to learning to live with that bad news, another problematic task remained: explaining my college plans to Pierrette. I loved her dearly and did not know how to break the news of my departure. I kept putting off the announcement, but the months passed quickly. Eventually, I could not wait any longer and had to admit to her that I would be leaving soon.

“My father warned me about dating foreigners,” she told me with teary eyes. “How can I face him after you leave me?” she added, crying. “Couldn’t I go with you?”

I felt awful watching the tears rolling down her pretty face. I tried to explain that this was a once-in-the-lifetime opportunity to better myself. In college, I would be busy and not have time for dating. Hearing that I might be back for Christmas vacation did not comfort her. Abruptly, she asked me to take her home. After that day, I never heard from her again. I was heartbroken and hoped she would eventually find happiness.

Once I decided to live in the United States, I began to pay more attention to news events in that country. Election fever was running high, and the American voters had to choose who would replace Dwight Eisenhower as president. All the women at work liked the handsome Senator Kennedy, but one of them commented, “He could never be elected in America.”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Because he is a Catholic.”

Her reasoning puzzled me. “What’s wrong with being a Catholic?”

“Most Americans are Protestants. They’re concerned that the Pope would influence someone who is Catholic.”

That reasoning would not have crossed my mind. Because I had spent so much of my life under the Communist regime in Hungary, where religious faith was discouraged, I did not realize how important religion was to most people in North America.

I informed my boss about my college plans at the beginning of August. He understood my reasons for leaving Montreal and wished me good luck. Within a week, he found a replacement for me. I tried to train the new man and pass on all my experience. Two weeks later, I left Norel Electric, my eyes on the future—I was ready to become a college student in the United States.

Chapter 3: College Life at the University of Dubuque

Just after my twenty-third birthday, in August 1959, I boarded the train from Montreal to Chicago. I carried a suitcase and an athletic bag containing all my material possessions. After paying off the dentist in Montreal and my former employer in Nanaimo, I had about \$100 to my name. Knowing that a full scholarship awaited me, I felt pretty happy and unconcerned about my financial status.

After an overnight ride, I arrived in Chicago at midday. The connecting train to Dubuque was scheduled to leave from a different station several hours later. I walked to my transfer point through busy downtown streets in hot, humid weather. When I reached the other station, my shirt was soaked with sweat. Montreal's summer climate had not been pleasant, but the Chicago weather that day was much worse.

I boarded the westbound train and settled in for another ride. Dubuque was 180 miles northwest of Chicago, and the train stopped several times on the way. It arrived in Dubuque around midnight. Only a few people departed the train in the dark at the nearly deserted terminal. Fortunately, I found a taxi to take me to the school.

After finding out where I came from, the talkative driver told me that the city also had another college, Loras, where the Catholic students went. He was surprised to hear that I was Catholic and asked, "Why aren't you going to Loras instead of the U. of D.?"

"I'll be on the University's track team," I answered proudly.

"Yes, I've heard the school has many Canadian athletes," he replied. "But our football team has only American players. My nephew is the star quarterback."

During the remainder of our ride, he talked in detail about his nephew's play in a home game he had attended the previous year. I listened politely without telling him how little I knew about football. Finally, we arrived at the University's administration building, where he dropped me off.

A bright light shone over the main entrance of the four-story building. To my relief, the door was unlocked, and the hall lights were on. I walked in and surveyed the offices on the main floor. Not finding anyone, I took the stairs to the second floor. Once again, nobody was there—I saw only classrooms with their doors open. Walking to the third floor felt like being in a ghost town. All the doors were closed, so I went up to the top level.

Most doors were also shut, but I saw one open farther along the hallway. I walked over and peeked in. It was a large room with four single beds, three occupied by boys sleeping. The fourth bed was empty.

I hesitated for a moment. *Should I wake one of them up and ask for directions? No, most likely, he would not appreciate my disrupting his sleep.* Tired from the long day of travel and not having a better idea, I placed my luggage next to the empty bed, took off most of my clothes, crawled into bed, and slept.

The other three residents were surprised to see someone sleeping in the fourth bed in the morning. Their voices woke me up, and I recognized two from the St. Lambert track team in Montreal. The third one was also a St. Lambert trackman, but I did not know him. Waking up amid people I knew reassured me, and I told them I hoped to become the fourth resident in

their room. They informed me, however, that the space was assigned to an American football player.

The Canadians took me around the campus and introduced me to college life. One of the first bits of information regarded freshmen initiation during “Hell Week.” It did not sound very promising. “You have to wear a beanie for a week whenever you step outside your room,” one of them told me.

“If you’re caught not wearing it, you’ll be in big trouble,” added another. “You must also learn and recite a poem if an upperclassman commands you.” The poem began with *I am a silly, simple, scintillating freshman*. “Then, you do exactly whatever he or she tells you.” The rest of our group then entertained me with some of the awful experiences they had faced when first coming to the school.

My rebellious nature bristled at what I heard, and I wanted no part. Why should I let a 19-year-old sophomore boss me around? However, they explained that freshman hazing was a long-established tradition, and there was no way to avoid it if I wanted to be a student at Dubuque. Defeated, I went to the Student Union to pick up a beanie.

The student in charge of the beanies checked my name on the freshman list. “Looks like you are over twenty-one,” she said. “In that case, you are exempt during the entire initiation week.”

“You mean I don’t have to obey those rules?”

“Right. They changed the rules after the Korean War to honor the veterans returning to school on the GI Bill.”

That was great news! It saved me from the hazing most freshmen faced.



Left: Taking a shortcut to leave the fourth-floor room where I had “crashed” on the night of my arrival. I am pictured with three of the Canadian athletes and a bearded American student of the Dubuque Seminary. Center: In the same room with some of the members of the Dubuque track team. Right: An upperclassman is fitting a beanie on an attractive freshman.

Though I was hoping to room with someone I already knew, the housing office assigned me to a room with another foreign student—a sophomore from Iran. His name was Firouz Ahmir Fahradi, but students called him “Fi.” He had not yet returned from summer vacation, so I had the room to myself for several days.

The food in the buffet-style cafeteria was excellent. It offered a wide selection of menu items with unlimited portions. The Canadian trackmen told me the first day never to stand in line. "The school athletes always cut to the head of the line," said one of them, wearing a letterman's jacket with a large "D" on it. I had nothing like that to show I was a team member, so I was nervous about following his advice. The only time I cut in line was when I mingled with some of the Canadians.

The track coach was also the head football coach. In the fall, he was busy with the football team and told me to run cross-country to stay in shape. Although I did not intend to participate in cross-country and did not enjoy running long distances, I began to work out with the team, whose top performers were all Canadians.

Registration for the fall semester took place a few days after my arrival on campus. The process was strange because all students of the same grade level took identical courses yearly in Hungary. At Dubuque, I received a note instructing me to discuss my program with an advisor.

The advisor assigned to me was one of the English professors. After greeting me in his office, he leafed through my file. "Why don't I see your high school transcript?" he asked me.

I explained the reason and referred him to the letter from my Canadian track coach. He read several papers in my file, and I could see by his expression that he was not satisfied. "I don't see your SAT scores. Where did you take it?"

I did not know what SAT meant and asked him to explain. He became even more frustrated. "Are you telling me you were admitted without taking the SAT?"

"I am sorry, but I didn't know about that. Could I take it now?"

"Wait here," he said and abruptly left the office.

What will happen now? Why didn't they give me the test before? What if I don't pass? Would the school send me back to Canada? My mind raced through various disturbing scenarios.

The advisor returned with another staff member. "We don't understand how this could happen," the other man told me. "Come with me. I'll administer the test to you now."

He led me into an empty classroom. Once I sat down, he handed me a booklet, a pencil, and a sheet with multiple squares to mark my answers. He checked the clock and then told me to proceed.

This was the first time I had ever seen a multiple-choice test. There were both math and verbal questions. In the math section, most of the questions were easy to answer, although I had trouble understanding some of the wording. The rest of the booklet was a nightmare because it was so difficult to comprehend the questions. Initially, the proctor helped clarify what I did not understand, but as time passed, he told me, "If you don't know the answer, simply go to the next question. Don't guess!" At the end of the time allowed, he collected the material and said, "Go to see your advisor tomorrow." With that, he left me.

I was utterly dazed, and leaving the classroom took me quite a while. My morale was low, knowing I had not understood many questions. I blamed myself for being so unprepared. Apart from my first-year high school Russian language course, nothing like this happened to me. How could I pass the courses if every college test was this difficult?

The advisor was unhappy when I went to see him the next day. "You don't have your high school transcripts. Your SAT scores are dismally low," he began. "You should never have been admitted to our school."

I knew I was in trouble. "What can I do now?"

"Because the track coach somehow arranged to bring you here, our Registrar has agreed to let you stay. You will be a part-time student on probation," he explained. "You must maintain a C average this semester to gain full-time status. I'll set up your courses now."

The advisor took out a form, pondered a bit, and then listed three courses: English, Algebra/Descriptive Geometry, and Physics. "Be sure to see me if you encounter any problem with those courses," he told me before letting me go.

Hearing that I could attend classes was a relief. Although I did not fully understand the difference between full-time and part-time, I was glad to hear that they would not send me back to Montreal.

After returning to my room, I met my roommate Firouz. He was not tall but had a robust body, thick, dark, short hair, bushy eyebrows, and "cauliflower" ears. I immediately guessed he was a wrestler.

"Hi, I am Firouz, but call me Fi," he said while giving me a firm handshake. "It looks like we'll share this room for a year."

I also introduced myself, and we talked about our backgrounds. Fi had come from an upper-class Iranian family and was there to study chemistry. He knew quite a bit about the Hungarian Revolution and told me how frustrated he felt when the Western nations had not offered any help to my country. "Too bad that Hungary had no oil," he told me. "If the Russians were to invade Iran, the American Marines would be there promptly to protect the oil."

In our short conversation, I sensed that he did not like the United States. "Why did you come to America to study?"

"The Americans have the best schools. After I learn all I need, I'll return to Iran."

Later, I discovered he had applied to two more prominent universities but did not have good enough grades to be admitted. He planned to stay at Dubuque for two years and then hoped to transfer to the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

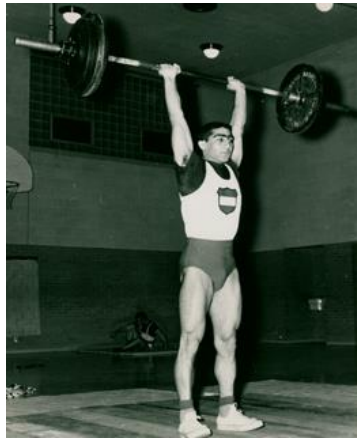
When Fi heard that I was on a tight budget, he went to the bank, where he had a checking account. He returned with a signature authorization form and offered me to sign. "When you need money, use my account," he said. "Just make sure you leave some for me," he added with a smile.

His generosity touched my heart. I thanked him profusely and assured him I would only use the account for emergencies.

The day after I took the SAT, the cross-country coach timed us to see how well we did on the 880-yard runs. I was glad to run after the tension of the morning. When we finished, he came to me and said, "I want you to know that you broke the school record."

The news surprised me because I had finished third behind two other runners. "What was my time?"

"It is not a track record," he explained. "You had the lowest SAT score in the school's history."



My roommate, Firouz, was a wrestler and a weightlifter. He was about five inches shorter than I but weighed a few pounds more. He was capable of lifting 250 lbs. over his head.

My teammates laughed, and I tried to put on a brave face. However, I was embarrassed and tried to explain that I did not understand most of the questions. The coach informed me that my low score put me on probation and I would not be eligible to run track that school year. The league rules specified that an athlete must complete at least one semester as a full-time student before becoming eligible for an interscholastic competition.

Hearing that I could not compete the following spring was a real blow. Then, as if that were not enough, a headline in the sports section of the next day's student newspaper read, "Hungarian Foreign Student Breaks School Record." As it turned out, one of the cross-country runners was a reporter for the newspaper. After overhearing the story at the track, he wrote the article for the paper.

At first, I just wanted to hide in my room. Fi and my Canadian friends talked me out of it and convinced me to look at the positive side of the news. "Your teachers will read the article and sympathize with you," said one of them. "We know you're not a dumb jock. Once your English improves, you'll do well."

Gradually, my self-confidence returned, and being a "record-breaker" stopped bothering me. Actually, it created some notoriety that I began to enjoy. The article was sympathetic to my case; it explained that I had only lived in Montreal for a few years and had not had the opportunity to learn English properly. The story was well-written and engaging to the students and the faculty. Even though I did not wear a beanie, it was not long after the article came out before most of the school's 625 students knew all about the Hungarian freshman.

Instruction began the following Monday. My first class was algebra. I sat in the classroom's front row with 20 to 25 students. When the professor entered the room, I stood up, following the Hungarian custom. To my surprise, none of the other students did. Embarrassed, I quickly sat down.

The professor introduced himself and began to read the class roster. He asked students if he had pronounced their names correctly. I was surprised. He was the professor—why should he care? I thought in the classroom, he would be an unquestioned authority. I began to realize that in American schools, the customs were different.

The outline of the topics we would cover that semester seemed like a review of my high school math classes. The homework he assigned also looked easy. I was confident that I would do well in that course.

I found the physics class more difficult because the teacher lectured most of the time instead of using the blackboard as the math professor had done. However, this class would include labs, and I always liked those. Performing experiments on a bench sounded like fun.

My third course, English, was the hardest. When the instructor returned the first homework assignments the next day, my page was covered with red marks. In that class, I was introduced to something new to me—Webster's Dictionary.

Hungarian is a phonetic language. Once we learned to sound out the 41 letters and digraphs, we always pronounced them the same way in every word. Spelling was easy. I thought that dictionaries only served to find the foreign equivalents of words.

Slowly, however, I began to appreciate the Webster's. At first, it was hard to find a word after hearing someone pronounce it. The instructor recommended that I learn two new words every day. I followed his advice and gradually increased my English vocabulary.

Although I was not eligible to participate in track or cross-country, I could play soccer on the school's team and was soon elected to be the captain. Several of our players came from foreign countries where soccer was the primary sport; we easily defeated most other schools in our conference and won the championship. It was not a varsity sport at the university in 1959, but playing on the team helped me establish close friendships with several boys and a



Under fine weather conditions and with spirits high, the Spartans started rolling early in the game, scoring two goals in the first half. It was Fred Stanger who kicked hard to score the first goal with a 10 yard drive in the left side of Beloit's net. Dubuque's second goal was the result of a smooth combination play which reached its final stage when Les Besser used his head for a pointer in the center of the net. As with Stanger's goal Besser was assisted by Juris Terauds.

Field captain Les Besser thinks that remarkable improvement has been made by the Spartan Soccer club. Reverend Heydinger, who is a devoted soccer fan, gained great enjoyment in attending from Dubuque. Misfortune, however, was on his side when a Beloit fraternity man backed into his car.

The U. of D. soccer team after a fall practice session. I am standing on the left and my roommate is second from the right.

U. of D. was affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. In addition to the regular class curriculum, students must attend Chapel every Wednesday. The school also had a Seminary, dubbed by the Canadians the "Angel Factory." The Seminary students were easy to recognize; they were older, better dressed, and more dignified than the rest of the student body.

Along with several of my Canadian friends, Fi and I frequented the Foreign Student Club. About 30 students from foreign countries attended the university, although most came from Canada and Mexico. In the club, I befriended a Mexican girl, Mathilda, and we began to spend

time together. Soon, she broke up with the seminary student who came from her hometown. She told me that they had dated for almost a year.

One Wednesday, we skipped Chapel and listened to her favorite records in the Music Building. A few days later, I received a note to see the Dean of Students. My friends warned me, "He does not favor bringing foreign athletes to the school. Be careful what you say to him."

"Nice to meet you, Leslie," the Dean greeted me warmly. He was probably in his late 50s, gray-haired, with a "minister-like" smile. He then complimented me on my academic progress. "I've heard you are the top student in your algebra class and progressing in your other two courses."

Perhaps he does not know that I was not in Chapel last Wednesday. I thanked him and waited to see if he had more to say. He did not waste any time.

"Because you are not eligible to run track next spring, we expect you to perform some duties on campus toward your expenses," he began. "You could work in the cafeteria or help to clean the schoolyard."

Working in the kitchen did not sound appealing. I explained to him that I was an experienced electronics technician. "Perhaps I could be useful with maintaining some of the electrical equipment."

"Those jobs have already been filled, but the man who installed the new speakers in our chapel told me he was looking for help. That job would pay you more than the campus assignments." He gave me a phone number to contact Mr. Harrington. "Let me know if he hires you, and we'll talk about your school expenses."

I hoped that was the end, but he switched to another subject. "It has come to my attention that you and Mathilda have been dating. Her father is very concerned about his daughter seeing someone who is not a Presbyterian."

I suddenly remembered that her parents were very religious and had contributed heavily to the school's funding.

"What would you like me to do?" I asked meekly.

"Of course, I can't tell you how to handle your personal life, but I would be much happier if she were dating a future minister of our Seminary."

The man was well-informed. The situation reminded me of the Hungarian Communists who bullied me into buying bonds to help "our North Korean comrades."

"Perhaps it would be better to stop seeing her," I offered.

"It's your decision. I'm certain you'll do what you think is right." He dismissed me at that point. Not wanting to risk my future at the school, I broke up with Mathilda a few days later, making an excuse that I had to find a part-time job and would not have any free time. I did not date anyone else for the rest of the school year.

Following the Dean's instructions, I phoned Mr. Harrington, who invited me for an interview. His home-based business, Sound Unlimited, specialized in audio system installation and repair. He had previously worked alone, but demand for his services increased, and he needed an assistant. After a short discussion, he hired me to work 20 hours a week, paying me \$1.50 per hour. I used half of my income for school expenses and saved the rest for a car.

I planned to spend the following summer in Chicago and join the University of Chicago Track Club. I contacted their head coach after learning about my ineligibility at Dubuque. He told me I could train under him during the school vacation. I figured that an automobile was essential to make my summer plan feasible.

Mr. Harrington was a very considerate employer. He arranged my working hours so they would not interfere with my classes and soccer activities. I helped him install and maintain sound systems in churches and meeting halls in Dubuque and the neighboring towns. When we did not have outside jobs, I repaired stereos and radios in his home. His wife always offered me snacks during work, and I became friends with their two teenage children. The job was perfect, and I worked for him 20 hours weekly during my entire Dubuque stay.

As Thanksgiving approached, I was helping one of my algebra classmates, Kenny, with homework. "Do you have a place to spend the vacation?" he asked.

"I'll stay in the dorm."

"I talked with my parents about you, and they invited you to stay with us for the holiday. Come with me to have home-cooked turkey!"

I had never eaten turkey, which sounded appetizing, so I gladly accepted his invitation. We took the train to Chicago, and his father picked us up at the station. The entire family greeted me at their house and made me feel at home. The next day, we had a fabulous dinner celebrating my first Thanksgiving Day in America.

The following morning, Kenny introduced me to two of his friends who lived in the neighborhood. They carried air rifles. Kenny pulled one out of his closet and said, "Let's go coon-hunting!"

"What's that?"

"We'll look for nigger kids and shoot at them. You should see them run," he said with a satisfied chuckle.

His words stunned me. I had heard that derogatory term on television, but this was the first time someone had used it in my presence. In addition, hearing that a nice, church-going boy would shoot at small children was simply too much. It took me a while to find words to reply.

"No thanks. I have some homework to do," I muttered.

Kenny shrugged his shoulders and left with his friends. He probably sensed my disapproval because he did not tell me the results of their hunting. That incident, however, stayed in my mind and marred the otherwise wonderful long weekend.

A week later, a teacher at the local high school asked our soccer coach if he could provide four chaperones for the school's Christmas dance. My roommate, two other players, and I volunteered for the job. When we showed up on Saturday evening, the teacher explained our duties. One critical task was to admit only students of that school to the dance. "Look out for the Loras College boys. Sometimes they try to crash the party," he warned us.

We took our jobs very seriously, and the dance was going smoothly. Then, sure enough, a group of Loras boys tried to enter. We blocked their way. After some pushing and shoving, one of the intruders challenged my roommate to a fight. "If you dare to step outside, I'll take care of you," threatened the boy, adding some profanity to make his point.

Fi kept his cool. "Let's go outside," he agreed. I went along, wondering if I should call the police. Some of the aggressive boy's friends also followed. I became quite concerned about the outcome.

At the side of the gym, the Loras boy took a hostile step toward Fi. However, before the bully could do anything, Fi grabbed his clothes and lifted him over his head like a barbell. "Do you still want to fight?" he asked the boy softly.

"No, Sir," came the humble reply.

Fi put the boy on the ground. That was the end of the skirmish. The group turned around and left in a hurry without saying another word.

Christmas vacation approached, and I decided to hitchhike to Montreal to save money. I had not done that before, but I heard it was easy. One of the Canadian track team members lent me his letterman's jacket, saying drivers were likelier to pick up students.

A classmate gave me a ride to Chicago early morning after classes ended. He dropped me off at the eastbound freeway and wished me good luck. I carried only my small suitcase; besides some clothing and my workout outfit, it contained food I had hoarded from the cafeteria for the previous two days.

The weather was cold, but I was used to it. Running in sub-zero temperatures during the Montreal winters had acclimated me to the cold. I was also lucky and did not have to wait too long to receive rides for the first half of my journey. By the late afternoon, I was already on the Canadian side of the border after passing through Detroit and Windsor, Ontario. A truck driver took me from there past Toronto. He dropped me off at the exit to a small town that was his destination.

At that point, my good fortune abandoned me. After the last ride, I stood on the side of Highway 401, but nobody stopped for me. The icy wind chilled my body. I realized that even though hitchhiking was cheap, it was probably not the best way to travel. Snow began to fall, and soon I looked like a snowman.

After a long wait, a passenger car stopped and pulled off the road ahead of me. The lone driver opened the passenger door. I rushed over and asked if he would give me a ride. The man waved me in. I gladly obliged. After tossing my suitcase in the back, I hopped into the front seat, closed the door, and the car took off.

After being numb from the cold for so long, it took a while for my senses to return. The car was well heated, but the inside air had a strange odor—alcohol. The driver began talking to me with slurred speech. I realized he was drunk. *Now what?*

I had to make a quick choice between waiting in the freezing weather for another ride or trusting the drunk's ability to stay on the road. I chose the latter but planned to leave the car at the first sign of a populated area. Traffic was very light, and he seemed to have control over his vehicle.

Jacques, a bilingual French-Canadian, was heading to Montreal to spend Christmas with his girlfriend. "Being a traveling salesman, I don't see her enough," he told me. "I'm going to ask her to marry me," he added between deep yawns.

I asked him if he wanted to rest and let me drive. To my relief, he accepted my offer and pulled off the road again. We switched positions on the front seat. "Wake me up when we

reach Montreal,” he muttered, promptly falling asleep. It looked like my guardian, St. Anthony, had rescued me again.

After driving a short distance, one of the roadside signs told me why none of the drivers had offered me a ride in that area. The sign stated, “Millbrook Youth Correctional Centre. Do not pick up hitchhikers!” The warning signs appeared every few miles. Luckily for me, the man who offered me the ride was probably too drunk to read them. Or perhaps he just wanted to have company for the long drive. I did not care. Driving inside the warm car was far better than standing outside in the cold.

It was the middle of the night, and I was pretty sleepy. I rehearsed the new English words I learned in the past months to stay awake. Sometimes, I opened the window and let the cold air hit my face. Jacques was sleeping peacefully, occasionally snorting and mumbling a few words in French.

The fuel gauge was fast approaching the empty mark. I pulled into a service station with a coffee shop beside it. I stopped carefully not to wake Jacques, but he opened his eyes. “Where are we?”

“About a hundred miles from Montreal.”

“Thanks for letting me rest. I’ll take over now,” he told me while paying for the gas. After having a piece of apple pie and coffee, he became a different person—alert and ready to drive. When we reached Montreal, he dropped me off where my sister and brother-in-law lived. They probably did not appreciate my waking them up early Sunday morning, but their friendly reception was heartfelt. I was glad to be there and immediately fell asleep on their sofa.

My vacation passed quickly. I tried without success to contact Pierrette. She no longer worked at the sports center. When I called her home, her father hung up without saying anything to me. I finally accepted that I would not see her again. I met with most of my other friends and told them about my experiences in America. Many were envious, and all wished me good luck for the rest of the school year.

After hearing about my hitchhiking adventures, my brother-in-law gave me a train ticket for Christmas. It was a welcome gift, and the long train ride allowed me to study for my semester finals—something I had neglected to do in Montreal.

After the finals, the advisor happily informed me that my grades—A in math, B in physics, and C in English—would entitle me to become a regular full-time student for the second semester. Unfortunately, they did not change my ineligibility for track. The coach told me I could work out with the team but could not compete at the meets. My only hope was to compete at the University of Chicago Track Club during the summer.

Several of my friends joined social fraternities. They had lots of fun, but I did not have time for that. Taking five additional semester units, working 20 hours per week for Mr. Harrington, and running track nearly daily kept me busy. By Easter, however, I had saved enough money to buy a car again.

Chicago students told me cars were much less expensive there than in Dubuque. During Easter vacation, with \$200 in my pocket, I took the train to the Windy City. After stopping at several used-car lots, I bought a 1954 Ford for \$200. The salesperson filled the gas tank and

assured me it would be enough to take me back to school. Most of the students lived in the dorms and did not have automobiles. Having one made me feel very important.

Buying a vehicle from an unknown used-car dealer turned out to be a very unwise decision. Within a month, my Ford needed a major repair, costing nearly as much as its purchase price. Another lesson learned the hard way!

My report card at the end of the second semester showed a B+ grade average for the school year. Scholastically, I had done well. On the other hand, my finances were not in such good shape. After paying for my school expenses and the car repair, I had about \$40 left. It would have been wise to stay and work a few weeks more for Mr. Harrington, but I was eager to return to track competition. Despite his kind offer, I was too proud to withdraw money from Fi's bank account. So, right after final exams in late May, I packed my suitcase, took my \$40, and drove to Chicago.

Summer in Chicago

After arriving in the city, my first task was to look for a job. The Gudeman Company, a large capacitor¹ manufacturer, advertised in the *Chicago Tribune* for technicians to fill various positions. After an interview, they hired me to supervise one of their final test departments. The job paid more than I had ever made, but exempt² personnel only received paychecks twice each month. I did not have enough money to survive for two weeks.

In a Chicago public telephone directory, I looked for typical Hungarian names (Nagy, Kovacs, Szabo, etc.). Calling them one by one, I asked if they knew someplace where I could stay immediately and pay in two weeks. The first two people could not help, but the third one knew a Hungarian woman who ran a boarding house on the north side of Chicago. I called the owner, and she was open to accepting a delayed payment. She invited me to visit her place.

The boarding house was about 80 blocks north of the Huron Street address of Gudeman. I drove up there on the busy Lakeshore Freeway. After hearing about my financial problem and seeing the job offer letter, the sympathetic owner agreed to take me in. She offered me a room shared with another boarder. Breakfast and dinner were included. I could pay her two weeks later after I received my first paycheck. Mission accomplished: in a strange city, on the first day, I had found work and a place to stay!

Mrs. Szabó introduced me to my boarding house roommate, another Iranian. In sharp contrast to Fi, Amin came from a poor family. His heavily accented English was even worse than mine. He told me how he struggled in his courses at a nearby college.

After a tasty dinner, I hit the bed, but Amin stayed up late to study. Following the Hungarian superstition³, I counted the corners of our room and went to sleep.

¹ Components that are widely used in electrical/electronic circuits for various functions, such as coupling, blocking, and filtering electrical signals.

² Salaried, instead of hourly paid employees.

³ My mother told me that if I counted the corners of a room where I was sleeping for the first time, any good dream I had that night would come true.

Knowing I would encounter heavy rush-hour traffic on the Lakeshore Freeway, I left for Gudeman early the following day. The manager I reported to led me to a large room in the basement and introduced me to the women who performed the various electrical tests. I was familiar with most of the test equipment, but I also had to write daily reports to management. The women had to punch a card at a clock when they came and left work. As a supervisor, I did not have to punch in and out.

Throughout most of the day, I sat at my desk in the corner of the room, learning about the required paperwork. Occasionally, when a technical problem came up, I helped the testers. If I could not figure something out, I asked for assistance from the supervisor of another test group. My job was not difficult, but the conditions in the room were unpleasant. As each day progressed, the temperature of the work area climbed into the 90s. The women wore light summer dresses, but the supervisors had to wear a white shirt and tie. I could hardly wait until the end of the workday to remove the tie and unbutton my collar.

After work, I drove to the University of Chicago campus track to meet the head coach, Ted Haydon. His track club had produced several U.S. Olympians, including Willye White, silver medalist of the women's long jump in 1956, and Ira Murchison, a member of 4x100-meter gold medal-winning relay and the co-holder of both the 100-meter and 100-yard world records.

In addition to being one of the U.S. Olympic coaches, Mr. Haydon was a wonderful human being. One of his "trademarks" was the long list of excuses he carried with him. The list included numerous statements, such as: "*Ate too much*", "*Not enough time to warm up*", "*Warmed up too much*", "*My starting block slipped*", "*I can't run on a muddy track*", "*Started my kick too soon*", "*Started my kick too late*", etc. When one of his athletes did not perform well, before they could say anything, Coach Haydon showed the list and asked the athlete to select the applicable excuse. In the rare case that an excuse was not on the list, he appended it.

Although I did not formally join the club, he allowed me to work out with the other athletes and compete under the "unattached" status. That did not bother me. I was glad to train under such a great man and be part of his distinguished group of athletes.

The athletic conference to which the University of Dubuque belonged did not have 440-yard hurdles; they only ran the 220-yard low and 120-yard-high hurdles. Even though I worked out with their team during the spring, I never had the opportunity to practice my main event.

The 440 hurdles usually cover one lap around the field. At the University of Chicago track, that race was run in a U-shape configuration—two straights with only one curve in between. I had trouble adjusting my running to that layout, but Mr. Hayden was not concerned. "It will be easier to run straight out of the blocks instead of facing the curve," he told me. "I want to see what you can do." He entered me in a meet that weekend, only a few days after I began to run at his track.

All of U. of C.'s track events were measured in metric distances, corresponding to the Olympic standards. In the race that weekend on their track, I ran in Lane 2 next to the club's best 400-meter hurdler. I began cautiously but still won, running my fastest time: 53.8 seconds. Mr. Hayden congratulated me and added, "By the end of the summer, you'll run even better." His praise made me feel great. After running an unexpected PR in my first race of the year, I looked forward to competing more that summer.

Ira Murchison impressed me the most of all the U. of C. runners. His powerful black body was not tall, but his arms and legs moved incredibly fast. His blinding speed right from the start of a running event earned him the name The Human Sputnik. He also had a great sense of humor. After seeing me in a race where I began too slowly, he told me, “Work on developing a suntan like mine. It’ll help you have a much faster start.”



Left: Murchison, the 5’5” Human Sputnik. Right: Runners are approaching the second of the ten hurdles in my first race of 1960. (I am second from the right.) Although, at that point, I was trailing the leader, I caught up with him halfway through and won the race.

On my way to the Lakeshore Parkway after a workout, I passed a movie theater and noticed *Porgy and Bess* playing there. During the week, several women at work talked about the great songs in the movie, so I decided to see it. After finding a place to park my car on the other side of the block, I took a shortcut through an alley to the theater, bought my ticket, and went inside.

The movie had already started. I sat in the last row of the dark auditorium. At first, I did not see anyone else inside. Once my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I realized the room was packed—with black people. Just as I had been on my first visit to Harlem in New York, I was in the minority. This time, it did not bother me. I loved the film. The cast was great, and the songs were wonderful. After the movie, I returned to my car through the dark alley, humming some of the melodies I had just heard.

Three large young black men stood halfway down the alley. They were smoking and chatting. As I approached them, they began walking toward me in a threatening manner. I quickly turned, ready to run from the danger, but saw two more men coming from that direction. I was trapped, and my heart started beating rapidly. I stepped beside the wooden fence with my back against it and hoped the men would pass by. They did not.

The five men formed a half-circle around me. I tried to look cool and smile, but my legs were shaking. All of them were big guys, and none returned my smile.

The one who seemed to be their leader began to talk. “We don’t want to hurt you. Give us your wallet and your watch.” The others laughed, probably noticing how scared I was.

I had no choice. My only possible defense—running away—was blocked. I removed my watch, pulled my wallet out, and handed it to the leader.

He rummaged through the wallet, took out all the money, and counted it. "Only thirty dollars," he announced to the group. He then threw the wallet at me. "You can keep the rest." After that, they ran away, heading toward my car.

Badly shaken, I went back to the theater. After hearing what happened to me, the ticket seller called the police. Within a few minutes, a patrol car with two burly police officers showed up. They asked me to sit in their car and describe the incident. Then, they drove around the neighborhood with me, but we could not find any perpetrators.

When they gave up, one of them asked, "Do you want to file a report at the station?"

I had had enough excitement for the day. "No thanks. Let me go home."

They drove me back to my car and gave me some parting advice. "Don't ever walk in this district after dark."

Their suggestion was not necessary. I had learned my lesson. After that day, I avoided even driving through it!

My first payday was six days away, and I was penniless. Fortunately, I had filled my car up with gas three days before. I could only hope the full tank would last me for another week. As for food, I ate as much as possible at breakfast and dinner in the boarding house and skipped lunch. My landlady was impressed by how much I enjoyed her cooking. I felt embarrassed about the holdup incident and kept it to myself.

Although my car did not have much fuel left by Friday, it did not let me down. After receiving my pay, the first trip was to a gas station. While the attendant took care of the car⁴, he told me the fuel tank was nearly empty. I do not know what would have happened if I had run out of gas on the parkway without a penny in my pocket. My old friend St. Anthony was watching over me again.

One evening after dinner, while we were watching television, Amin suddenly announced, "I have a terrible pain in my belly." When the trouble did not subside, the landlady suggested he visit the emergency room. He said he was afraid of doctors. I finally convinced him to go and then drove him to the ER. After an examination, the doctor diagnosed appendicitis and recommended surgery. The hospital admitted him immediately. I promised to come by to see how he was doing.

On my way out, I stopped by the nursing station and chatted with the nurse in charge. She was a pretty, petite young woman from the Philippines. Her name was Ludie. I asked if she would come to see a movie with me one day. She declined but invited me to a party that weekend. She shared an apartment with her two sisters, who were also nurses. I gladly accepted the invitation.

I found Amin in bed when I visited the following evening. The doctors had informed him that if he had not come the previous night, his appendix could have ruptured. He was very grateful to me for taking him to the hospital. I also saw Ludie again and looked forward to going to her party.

⁴ In those days, as soon as a car pulled up to a service station, the attendant not only filled up the fuel tank but also cleaned the windshield and checked the tire pressures, as well as the oil and water levels.

Sunday afternoon, I showed up at Ludie's apartment. She introduced me to her sisters and several of their friends. All the men were doctors, and I felt outclassed since I was only a first-year college student. However, in Ludie's eyes, I was equal because I came from Europe. We began to see each other regularly.

Sometime later, my coach came to practice holding a *Sports Illustrated* magazine. Pointing to the cover, he said, "Glenn Davis, the world record holder, will be here next month to run two events, only 20 minutes apart. He will run the 400-meter sprint first and then the 400-meter hurdles. Here is a chance for you to look good."

Of course, I had heard about Davis of Ohio State but had not seen him run. He had been untouchable in the 400-meter hurdles since winning the 1956 Olympics. He was also the unquestioned favorite in the event for the 1960 Games, only two months away.

I knew I would never have a chance to finish close to Davis, even after he had run another race a few minutes before. Still, the possibility of being in the same heat with an Olympic champion and world record holder appealed to me. "Yes, I would love to run in that meet," I replied. The coach promised to enter me.

Mr. Haydon was a great coach. Under his guidance, I trained the hardest my entire life, preparing myself for the big race. Two weeks later, I improved my time in the 400-meter hurdles by a second, running 52.7 seconds. Ludie came to see the meet and was very impressed by my hurdling. The big race was only two weeks away. I was ready, both physically and mentally.

An Unexpected Setback

Chicago's summer weather became hotter and more humid. The basement room where I worked had neither air conditioning nor access to fresh air. To make life more comfortable, we had two large electric fans that helped move the hot air around.

One afternoon, a woman complained about the air blowing into her face and asked me to move the fan. I stepped next to the fan, grabbed its base with my right hand, and tried to move it. The fan began to tip. Without thinking, I reached toward the top with my left hand to maintain balance.

I heard a strange noise and felt a sharp pain in my left hand. Some of the women screamed. When I looked at my hand, I saw blood running down my arm. I let go of the fan and brought my left hand closer to my face. My thumb had a gaping cut, and I could see the white bone inside.

Recalling my elementary school first-aid course, I grabbed my left upper arm tight with my right hand to apply pressure to the main artery. A supervisor in the adjacent room had heard the screams and rushed in to investigate. He immediately guided me to the plant's nursing station. The nurse quickly bandaged my hand and drove me to the nearest hospital. Within a few hours, they wheeled me into surgery.

I woke up with a heavily bandaged left hand. A nurse explained how lucky I had been that day. "A renowned hand surgeon was visiting our hospital when you came in," she explained. "Without his special skills, your badly damaged thumb would have been removed." She added

that the surgeon had inserted a long metal pin through my thumb into my hand. "In about two months, if the tendons hold, the pin will be removed."

Apparently, when I tried to move the fan, my left thumb had slipped through the loose wire screen cage, and the rotating blades had mangled it. To make matters worse, the blades of the old fan were covered with grime. In addition to the challenge of rebuilding the thumb, the physicians had to deal with the dirt in the wound. I received heavy dosages of antibiotics to prevent infection.

What will happen now? How will I pay for all the expenses? How could I run under such conditions? There might not be another chance to run against Glenn Davis. I was overwhelmed.

I called my landlady and explained what had happened. She was sorry to hear about my accident and told me she would not charge me for room and board while I was in the hospital. She was such a caring lady.

A man with a broad smile came into my hospital room and introduced himself as a Workmen's Compensation Insurance representative. I had not heard about that organization and suspected trouble.

"It was very careless of you to stick your thumb into that old fan," he scolded me. "It could have been much worse."

I agreed with him and tried to figure out why he had come to see me. Gradually, he got to the point. "Because the accident happened at work, we will cover your medical expenses. In addition, we'll pay your salary until you're fit to return to work."

After hearing this good news, I almost jumped out of bed and kissed the man.

"Please sign these papers to settle your case." He pulled several sheets out of his briefcase and handed me a pen. I gladly obliged. The man said goodbye and left.

Ludie visited me late in the evening. She had tried contacting me at the boarding house and learned what happened. After giving me lots of medical advice, she told me that her father had suddenly become very ill, and she was taking time off from work to see her father. "I'm flying to Manila tomorrow," she said. "Depending on my father's condition, I may not see you before the end of the summer." That was not good news, but she promised to stay in touch by mail. For several months, we corresponded by mail.

The next day, I began to explore the hospital by walking around the hallways, wearing my hospital gown. In a large sitting room, several patients watched the Democratic Convention on television. I sat next to a lady and learned about the candidates from her. Later, when she heard that my accident had taken place at work, she told me she had a lawyer friend who handled insurance cases. "He'll visit me tomorrow, and I'll introduce you to him. He could get you money for your injury," she said.

Her friend, Jason Roth, showed up the next day. "Have you signed any papers?" he asked me after I told him about the insurance man's visit.

"Yes, because he promised to pay my hospital expenses and salary."

"Well, that is still OK. I'll have to work harder. I'll take them to court, and they'll pay more."

He explained that usually, he handled clients on a 50-50 basis—he would keep half of any money awarded. My case, however, would require more work, so he wanted to keep two-

thirds of the settlement I'd receive on top of what had already been promised to me. If he lost the case, I owed him nothing.

It sounded like a good deal. I signed the papers he prepared. He asked me to contact his office after my release from the hospital.

Four days later, the doctors informed me that the antibiotics had worked, and my hand was healing without infection. They discharged me, and I returned to work the next day. My manager was happy to see me because he had had to fill in for me in my absence. The guilty fan had already been hauled away, but I found it in the warehouse. Looking at the grime covering the filthy blades, my respect for the doctors who had prevented an infection in my hand increased even more.

When I telephoned the lawyer, he came over for a consultation. "When doctors want you to exercise your thumb, don't do it!" he instructed me. "The stiffer your thumb is, the more money you'll receive from the court."

"Will my hand still be OK later?"

"Sure, don't worry."

Not knowing better, I foolishly followed his advice.

Several women from my department spent excessive time in the restroom. After coming to work in the morning, they punched the time clock and retreated to the bathroom, presumably to smoke and chat. Twenty to twenty-five minutes before the end of work, they reversed the procedure—disappearing into the restroom first and then coming back to punch their timecards a few minutes after the bell indicated the end of working hours. Despite my repeated warnings, they continued their annoying routine. Some offered excuses, such as "I have an upset stomach," "I have female problems," and "The previous supervisor didn't mind," but most of them just shrugged their shoulders in defiance.

Finally, my patience ran out. One afternoon, when they retired to the restroom 30 minutes before quitting time, I took their timecards and punched them out. Then, I sat at my desk and waited for their reaction.

A war erupted when they returned from the restroom and discovered what I had done. They screamed and yelled at me and wanted me to change the time on the cards. I refused. They ran to the union steward and filed a complaint. Not understanding the power of unions, I was not concerned.

A hearing followed the next day. Several women testified that I harassed them and demanded they work beyond their capabilities. Nobody took my side. The union demanded my transfer, claiming the women did not want to work under my supervision. Management caved in, not wanting a fight before an upcoming contract renewal. They transferred me to work with one of the production engineers. As it turned out, the new assignment allowed me to see the mass production of various capacitors in a fully automated environment. It was interesting and educational, so I appreciated their action. I also learned that picking a fight with a trade union was not wise.

The stainless steel rod still poked through my left thumb. Without the effective use of that thumb, I realized how important its function was. Even little things like tying my necktie or opening a car door were difficult. Following the lawyer's advice, I did not perform the doctor's

recommended exercises. I assumed I could begin doing those after the insurance claim was settled.

While I had trained at the University of Chicago Track Club, I noticed that most sprinters had powerfully built bodies instead of the traditionally slim build of runners. I learned that they worked out with weights under Coach Haydon's guidance. His success coaching runners inspired me to work with weights. I recalled that at Dubuque, the football players used the weight room, but our old-fashioned coach forbade the runners to touch weights.

How could I become stronger without violating our coach's rule? There was no way to use the school's weights behind his back. Buying heavy weights and using them in our small dorm room without anyone noticing was unrealistic. Then, one day, I came across a promising idea.

At lunchtime, I frequently walked to a nearby drugstore to read magazines. One of my favorites was published by the Joe Weider Muscleman organization; it contained success stories on how men developed a "Mr. America" physique. Among the various advertisements, I saw one aimed at runners—a jacket with 20 pockets and 20 small, flat one-pound weights. The ad described how runners could develop powerful legs by gradually sliding more and more weights into their pockets. The idea made sense to me. I ordered the jackets with the weights and planned to start adding them during the winter conditioning season.

I informed my manager in mid-August that I was returning to school in September. He was unhappy and reminded me I had asked for permanent employment in May, not a summer job. I told him that my accident had changed my plans. "I expect to have a significant insurance settlement soon," I explained. "It'll pay my way through another year of school." He accepted my reasoning and began to search for my replacement. At the end of the month, I left the Gudeman Company and returned to Dubuque.

My sophomore year

My first-year roommate, Fi, had transferred to a school in Chicago. Sophomore Bill Day, a promising young Canadian sprinter from Toronto, took his place. Bill had an easygoing personality, and we quickly became good friends.

Although Bill majored in physical education and biology, he had a keen sense of business. When he learned I could fix radios and record players, he proposed we form a business on campus. "I'll be your business manager and find defective products for you," he proposed. "You repair them, and we'll split the profit."

I asked my part-time employer if he approved of our campus-based enterprise. He did not object. "Go ahead, but don't put me out of business," he said with a smile. I bought hand tools, a soldering iron, a multimeter, and a toolbox from Allied Radio of Chicago. **Lebico** (a name derived from the first letters of "Leslie & Bill Company") began operations in September 1960. Bill mounted signs on the dormitory's bulletin boards to advertise, and our business took off. Thanks to the relatively short life of electron tubes, radios needed frequent repair, and our enterprise was quite profitable.

Other students frequently visited our room. Many used colorful language that bothered our ears, so we established "house rules" to curb swearing. We bought a piggy bank and posted a sign on our door listing fines for using foul language:

Accidental	1 cent
On purpose	5 cents
Shameful	10 cents
Sinful	25 cents

Although some of our visitors protested, they always paid. Eventually, the bank became a conversation piece around the dorm. We had enough money in it by the end of the school year to purchase letterman jackets for both of us.

Ever since the Hungarian Revolution, I had wanted to own a weapon for some unexplainable reason. One of the sports magazines advertised a wide range of guns, and I mail-ordered a 22-caliber revolver and ammunition. After it arrived, Bill and I began target practice through our dorm window. Our room on the third floor provided a great vantage point. We aimed at squirrels residing in a large tree about 25 yards away but never hit one.

The irate proctor of our building heard the blasts and came pounding on our door, demanding to know what we were doing. We tried to hide all the evidence, but the cloud of gun smoke still hung in the air when he entered. The proctor wanted to confiscate the gun, but finally, let me keep it after we promised never to use it again in our room. That incident ended our sharpshooting activities. As a token of our gratitude, we did not charge for repairing the radio he had brought us a few days earlier.

My sophomore courses were easier than the ones I had taken in my first year. Perhaps my improved language skills contributed to my studying better. I took calculus, chemistry, English, statics and dynamics, speech, and economics. During the fall semester, I ran cross-country and continued to play soccer. I still worked for Mr. Harrington and repaired students' radios on campus. I did not have any social life.

In the 1950s, the traditional haircut among young college men was the crewcut. My teammates constantly teased me about my long hair. Eventually, I gave in and let the barber make me look like the rest of the team. I sent a photo to my mother, and she was horrified to see me with a one-inch flat top. Gradually, I let it grow longer, and by the end of the school year, my hair returned to its regular length.

Watching the televised 1960 presidential debate between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon was a new experience for all American viewers, particularly for me. In Hungary, during the Communist control, the Kremlin decided who would govern our country. Our "elections" were only formalities, so I looked forward to seeing how they were handled in the United States.

Kennedy's optimistic demeanor left a deep impression on me. He also looked better than Nixon. If I had been an American citizen, Kennedy would have had my vote. When he was elected later that year, I was glad I had supported him.

In late October, a doctor in Chicago removed the steel rod from my left thumb. I did not have to wear the protective bandage after that. But my thumb was stiff, and I was unable to bend it. The doctor submitted a report to the court. Shortly after, I received a letter from Mr. Roth, my lawyer, asking me to appear for a hearing in Chicago.

The big city courthouse was close to the station, so I took the train to the hearing. The setting was entirely new to me. I sat at a small table with my lawyer on the left side of the room. The three insurance lawyers representing Workmen's Comp sat at another table on

the right side. After the judge heard arguments from both sides, he examined my hand. Shortly after, he announced the judgment; "Plaintiff shall receive \$1,000 in addition to what Workmen's Comp has already paid."

I was excited to hear the good news. One-third of a thousand dollars represented a large sum to me. My lawyer began to thank the judge for reaching such a just compensation, but the judge interrupted him. "Mr. Roth, what percentage of the money will go to you?"

"Well, Your Honor, this was a difficult case because Mr. Besser had already agreed to settle for only medical expenses and lost wages," he began. "Workmen's Comp took advantage of his inexperience by not telling him what he should receive for his disability."

"How much of the \$1,000 do you keep?" the judge interrupted him again.

"He receives one-third, and I keep two-thirds for all my work."

"Mr. Roth, I feel you are also taking advantage of Mr. Besser's inexperience," said the judge disapprovingly. "I think the split should be in his favor. After all, he is the one suffering a lifetime disability. Don't you agree?"

I walked away with a check for \$666.67! Except for the inflationary days in Hungary, when it took trillions of *pengős* to buy a loaf of bread, this was the largest sum I had ever possessed. Feeling rich, I immediately decided to fly to Montreal for a Christmas vacation. *Not only will I fly there, but I'll buy my sister the kitchen mixer she always dreamt of having.* Her husband, Tibor, had a thrifty nature and did not want to spend money on what he considered unnecessary. I knew she would enjoy having a mixer. I cashed the check after returning to Dubuque and hid the money in the bottom of my toolbox.

College soccer and cross-country seasons ended in November. Our teams won conference championships in both sports. I was happy that I did not have to run the two-mile races anymore, but I missed playing soccer. After taking a two-week rest, I began the conditioning workouts for the 1961 track season. Dubuque did not have an indoor track, so we continued running outdoors. The climate in the Midwest was not as severe as the Montreal winters. I had no trouble running on the snow-covered roads.

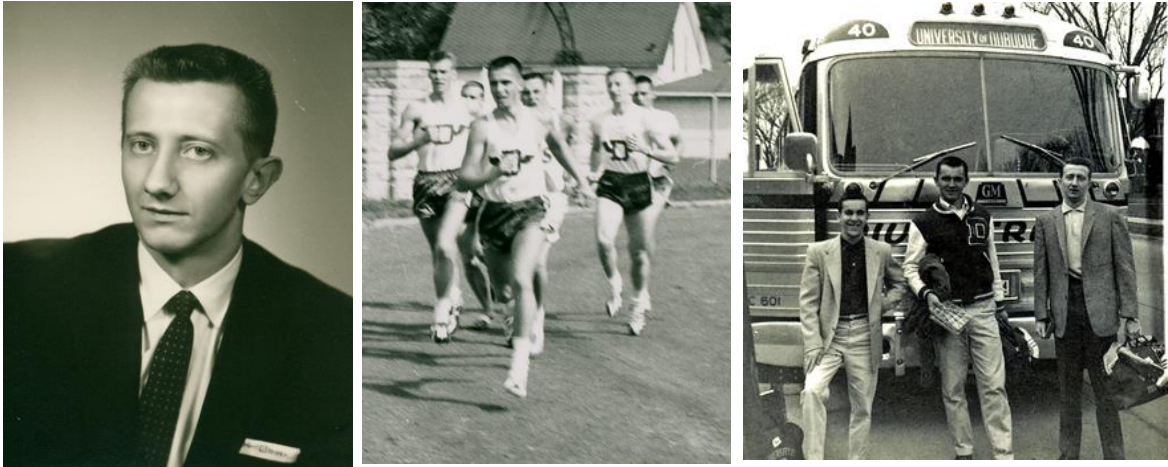
Dubuque's athletic conference did not include my specialty, the 440-yard hurdles. The coach wanted me to compete in the 120-yard and 220-yard hurdles, the 440-yard dash, and the 4 x 440-yard relay. I lacked the speed of a true sprinter, so I had no hope of excelling in the shorter hurdle events. My best chance was to compete against the quarter-milers.

My roommate Bill Day was a sprinter but planned to move up to up the 440-yard race. I did not like the idea at all. If he succeeded in developing his endurance, I would have no chance against his superior speed. However, I had a secret weapon—my weight jacket! I slipped an additional pound of weight into my jacket every second day. Of course, I told Bill about it, but he did not think much of my crazy idea. The two of us followed the same workout routine during the conditioning sessions, except for the extra weight I carried.

I showed my injured thumb to a doctor in Montreal during Christmas vacation. He was astonished to hear that I had followed the lawyer's advice instead of having physiotherapy. "There isn't anything you can do now," he told me. "The money you've received was not worth having a stiff thumb for the rest of your life." I wished I had acted differently, but it was too late. Another lesson learned the hard way.

The indoor track season arrived, and our team's first dual meet was against Coe College in Cedar Rapids. Both my roommate and I were to run the 440-yard race. By then, I carried the full 20 pounds of extra weight during our workouts and ensured Bill knew it daily.

Bill and I warmed up together before the race. I repeatedly told him how great it felt to run without the weights. He looked worried at the start, and he already appeared psychologically defeated. I won the race and set a new track record at Coe. Bill threw up after the finish and was utterly disgusted. "I'll never run another 440 in my life," he told me. His loss did not affect our friendship or business relationship, and I had one less competitor to worry about for the rest of the track season. Buying the weight jacket turned out to be a good investment!



Left: The 1960 yearbook photo shows my crewcut. Center: Our cross-country team leaves the track towards the fields at the beginning of a two-mile race. Right: Traveling with the team to a track meet.

I was as busy during the second semester as in the first. Scholastically, my sophomore grades improved from the first year; I earned A's and B's in all my courses. At the conference track and field championship, I made the finals in both short hurdle races (110y & 220y) and ran on the winning 4 x 440-yard relay team that set a new school record. Our team also won the overall conference championship.

Altogether, it was a good year for me, apart from being unable to run my best event—the 440-yard hurdles, where my previous experience would have been beneficial. Until the late 1960s, the track programs, even at the large universities, included only the 330-yard hurdles—instead of the full 440-yard event. The smaller schools' programs generally only included the 120-yard high and 220-yard low hurdle events, which heavily relied on speed instead of speed endurance. With hindsight, I should have selected a college where I could have been more of a "star athlete"!

One of my former Dubuque track teammates, a friend from Canada named Blair Bowling, also wanted to pursue engineering. After completing the two-year pre-engineering program, he transferred to the University of Colorado (CU) for his BSEE degree. He also continued running. I saw him in Montreal during Christmas vacation, and he told me what a great place Boulder was. Just as he had inspired me to attend the University of Dubuque earlier, he convinced me to finish my schooling at CU.



The University of Dubuque's school record-setting conference champion 4x440-yard relay team (I am the first from the right).

Before continuing college, however, I wanted to obtain Canadian citizenship. It would require two more years of Canadian residency. Facing two more frigid winters and trying to speak French in Montreal did not appeal to me. My roommate, Bill, suggested living in Toronto instead. Not only was Toronto, Bill's hometown, English-speaking and slightly more temperate, but it was also more industrialized than Montreal. "You'll find a good job there quickly," he told me. I agreed to drive there with him.

Eva was unhappy when I wrote about my plan to live 300 miles southwest of them. During the transition to our new lives away from Hungary, the closeness in Montreal gave us great comfort. Sharing meals and time maintained the relationship we had known growing up. Still, I decided to spend the two years in Toronto and promised Eva I would visit frequently. After receiving my citizenship, I planned to transfer to CU and finish my engineering studies.

Chapter 4: Becoming a Canadian Citizen

After a full day of driving, Bill and I reached his parents' house on the east side of Toronto. They put me in their guest room and told me I was welcome to stay there until I found other accommodation. After having dinner with Bill's family, I looked through the classified section of the *Toronto Star* and selected several possible leads. The following day, I interviewed three different companies and landed a job with Philips to work in the final test department of their television production. The job was interesting, and my colleagues were beneficial in teaching me various tasks.

During work, I saw a television advertisement for a health club, Vic Tanny's Gym. The ad displayed several before-and-after pictures of people losing weight or building up their bodies and offered memberships for as little as one dollar per week. I drove to the gym after work to inquire about joining.

An attractive woman, wearing a tight black leotard and a white blouse, introduced herself as Marie, the assistant manager. She showed me the facilities and invited me into her office to discuss a membership. I told her that I came to take advantage of the one-dollar-per-week offer. She then pointed out the fine print—that rate only applied to a life membership. Because "life" was not an acceptable legal term, the contract guaranteed a minimum of seven years. The total cost was seven times 52 weeks, amounting to \$364!

Seeing my reluctance to pay that price, she called in Eddie, the manager. In addition to being a muscleman with 19-inch biceps, he was a master salesman. After listening to him for a while, I visualized myself having a powerful body and signed the contract. Eddie assured me that he would personally supervise my progress. He set an appointment for the following day for my first workout.

At the first appointment, Eddie weighed me and measured my arms, chest, and legs. He planned a six-month program for me, setting a goal to increase my body's muscle mass by 15 pounds. "If you want to gain weight, you must stop running," he told me. "You can restart after you reach the goals we set." His enthusiastic salesmanship had won me over, and I agreed to give up the track during my weight-gaining program. We set up a schedule with three workouts each week.

Although he started me with relatively light weights in the first session, my body was sore for the next few days. Eddie told me the pain pinpointed the muscles I needed to strengthen. Following his instructions, I began to eat even more than usual. By the end of the first week, my weight had increased by two pounds. He congratulated me on my progress and encouraged me to work harder. I enjoyed being in the gym and looked forward to each workout.

A week later, I thanked Bill's family for their hospitality and told them about finding a basement apartment to rent in a house located near the gym. I continued sending money to my mother in Hungary and wished she had a phone so I could hear her voice occasionally. Communicating by mail alone for five years had been difficult for both of us. I hoped we could reunite soon.

Marie waved me into her office one day after my workout. "How much money do you make as a technician at Philips?" she asked.

The question surprised me, but I gave her the amount. “You could make more by working for me here.” My skepticism only encouraged her. “You’d be helping people at the same time.” She explained that Eddie had bought a horse farm and resigned from Vic Tanny’s. Marie had been promoted to manager and needed someone to take her place. “I’d like you to become my assistant manager.”

The idea of working in a non-technical field had never crossed my mind. “What would I be doing?”

She explained that selling memberships would be my most important task beyond supervising the instructors. “In addition to a base salary, our weekly bonuses are determined by the number of memberships we sell.”

“But I don’t look like the rest of the staff,” I said. “They all have ideal bodies, and I am so thin.”

“That’s no problem,” she assured me. “Remember, most people come here to lose weight.”

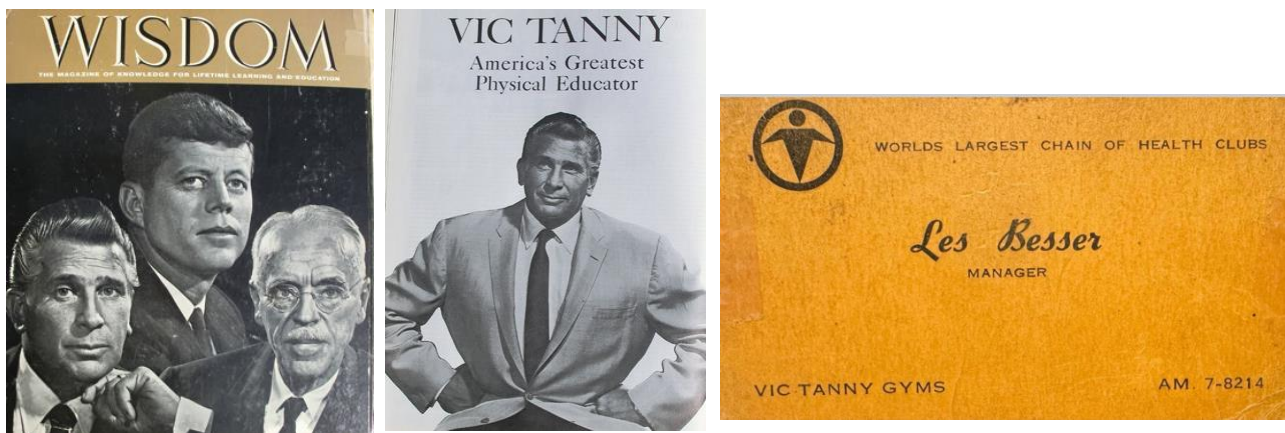
I wanted to learn more about electronics before returning to finish my engineering studies. Working in a health club would be a completely new tangent for me. However, my resistance began to weaken. The base salary she offered was more than I was making at Philips, and a bonus on top would allow me to buy a newer car. The idea of working for a charming single woman clinched it. “I’ll take the job.”

Vic Tanny’s Gym was not an ordinary health club. Following the success of Jack LaLanne, Tanny has owned 120 clubs across the United States. The one I had joined was his first entry into Canada, and he had plans to spread throughout the country. Before his chain opened, gyms were mostly sweaty, dirty places, catering mainly to men. In contrast, Tanny’s gyms, with their wall-to-wall carpets and floor-to-ceiling mirrors, were inviting to men and women of all ages.

Tanny’s gyms did not cater to strongmen and serious bodybuilders. Eddie made it clear these types would not be welcome. “They work out for long periods and make the other customers look bad,” he told me. “We want businessmen who pay cash for their membership and don’t tie up the equipment.”

Selling long-term memberships to people who came to the gym after hearing the one-dollar-per-week TV advertisement was not easy—particularly for someone like me who had never sold anything. My on-the-job sales training was very brief. The first week, Eddie and Marie let me watch their techniques. After that, I was on my own. I was initially petrified, but reading books written by expert salespeople helped me realize that people entering the gym already desired what I was selling. Some wanted to lose weight, while others wanted to improve the shape of their bodies. Regular workouts and improved eating habits could help them. Once I recognized that we provided an essential service to them, my job became more manageable.

One selling tool we used successfully was an issue of *Wisdom* magazine dedicated to health and fitness. The cover showed Tanny along with President Kennedy and a famous heart surgeon. A section in the magazine referred to Tanny as “America’s most famous physical educator and greatest crusader for better health and a more physically fit nation.”



Left: Cover picture of *Wisdom* magazine, showing Tanny with President Kennedy. Center: Tanny's photo in the section about his gym empire. Right: My business card.

One of Vic Tanny's corporate protégés was Tom Sansome, who won the Mr. America bodybuilding title in 1958 (he later also became Mr. Universe in 1963). When Tom visited our gym, I asked how to increase my 145-pound body weight. His reply was simple, "Work out harder and eat more of the right food." He introduced me to Tiger Milk and other high-protein supplements. He also reminded me that if my goal was to run track again, I must focus on a routine that improved strength without adding much bulk. He revised my workout schedule and encouraged me to contact him if I needed help in the future.

Less than two months after I began full-time work at the gym, Marie had another surprise for me; she also resigned to join Eddie's horse farm business. I became the manager in charge of the operation. Alarmed by the changes, Tanny's New York-based headquarters immediately transferred its regional director to Toronto. Within a few days, I met my new boss, John Valentine, whose charter was to open additional gyms in Canada.

Johnny (as everyone called him) was handsome, with an ego to match his looks. He also brought his lady friend, Sylvia, with whom he had lived for some time. They rented a fancy apartment in one of the newly built high-rise buildings. He drove a brand-new convertible and worked out daily before we opened to customers. Part of his morning routine included helping me polish my sales presentations.

Before getting down to business, one of Johnny's first questions was to ask me privately about the "availability" of our female instructors. He warned me to keep the news of any possible future conquests from Sylvia, whose father was a high-ranking mobster in New York. Johnny also showed a keen interest in the workout programs of attractive female members. From the first day of our acquaintance, I sensed that trouble was brewing, and it did not take long to prove me right.

Johnny began to spend time with a Miss Toronto contestant who was a regular in our gym. An affair soon blossomed. Sylvia found out about the romance and called her daddy for help. Frightened by the possible consequences, Johnny disappeared.

Two tough-looking men showed up at the gym the next day looking for Johnny. I had seen gangsters in movies, and these men fit that image perfectly: massive bodies, piercing cold eyes, and dark suits with flashy neckties. Not finding their man, they sat in one of the offices for the rest of the day, staring at the front door.

Later that afternoon, Johnny phoned, and I told him about the scary visitors. He was concerned about his safety. Knowing I had a gun, he asked me to borrow it. Like a fool, I agreed to meet him after closing the gym to give him the gun. The next day, Sylvia told me that the frustrated goons had roughed up the Miss Toronto hopeful, and she was hospitalized. "Perhaps that will teach that bum a lesson," she said.

When Johnny heard about the beating, he called Sylvia and begged forgiveness. She relented. They spent the night together in their apartment, and the mobsters returned to New York. But after that, Sylvia overheard Johnny calling the girlfriend in the hospital. Becoming furious, she attacked him with a knife. He ran away.

Sylvia called the gym to let me know she was at home with a terrible migraine headache. She mentioned chatting with her father. "This time, Johnny will pay dearly," she said. "He is hiding, but I have his gun. My daddy will arrange a crime scene and leave the gun there with Johnny's fingerprints."

"Sylvia, that's my gun!" I said, panicking. "I bought it in the States and brought it with me. I will be in as much trouble as Johnny. Please give it back to me," I begged.

She was enraged, and my reasoning did not calm her down. I drove to her place and continued pleading my case while massaging her aching head. After a long time, she finally gave in and returned my gun. I went home and hid the weapon in the bottom of my toolbox.

Later, Johnny called Sylvia and asked for another chance. She agreed, and they drove to Niagara Falls for the weekend, coming home like two lovebirds. As far as I know, Johnny behaved himself after that incident. He appreciated my loyalty and continued mentoring me during the rest of the time I was employed at the gym.

In addition to improving my salesmanship, Johnny was also eager to have me upgrade my appearance. He was unhappy to see me wearing inexpensive Simpson-Sears slacks in the gym and took me to a custom tailor shop in downtown Toronto. "Lou is a friend of mine, and he'll outfit you properly," he said when introducing me to the owner. Two weeks later, I had two new suits, additional black slacks, several shirts, and an overcoat. They were several times the cost of ready-made clothing, but they fit better. Wearing my new clothes, I began to feel like a different person.

The next thing on Johnny's list was my car. "You are the manager of a famous health club. It would be best if you drove something more appropriate than that junk," he said, pointing to my eight-year-old Ford. After we visited several new car dealers, it took me only a moment to fall in love with a two-seat, fire-engine red 1962 Triumph equipped with whitewall tires. Although Johnny cautioned me about the poor reliability of British sports cars, I was ready to buy it for whatever price the salesman quoted. Then, I saw a new side of Johnny—the master negotiator.

In the gym, I witnessed his great salesmanship many times. He immediately knew what would appeal to potential customers. He was prepared to overcome whatever objection they could raise if they resisted. He never lost a sale. He also came to my rescue several times when I could not close a sale. Now, he was playing a different role—demanding a lower price! The car salesman and his boss were no match for him and sold me the car for a sum far below the original asking price. Leaving my Ford behind, I drove the Triumph home in ecstasy. My admiration for Johnny's ability grew even more.

Of course, after obtaining my new clothing and car, I could no longer live in someone's basement apartment. The next improvement was to move to a nicely furnished apartment in a high-rise. I also found a girlfriend. She and I ate out regularly and began to visit the city's night spots. Johnny was satisfied with my progress.

My new purchases and fast lifestyle were expensive. I was spending money faster than I was making it. When I became concerned, Johnny told me to relax. One day, he told me confidentially of his ambition; he planned to buy the franchise rights to Tanny's gyms in Canada. "In a few years, I'll have several gyms open in Ontario and Quebec," he predicted. "Then, you'll have my job to look after the East Coast while I expand to the West. You'll have more money than you can spend."

His ideas were seductive, but deep inside, I still wanted to be an engineer. My goal was to work in Canada for two years, apply for citizenship, and then return to a large university to finish my studies and resume my track career. With a more muscular body, I hoped to run much faster. Knowing Johnny would disapprove of my plans, I kept them to myself.

When everything was going so well, a new problem suddenly appeared. During my workouts and occasionally at night, a cramp and sharp pain in my left chest began to bother me. Remembering my mother's heart irregularity, I started to worry about my own heart. Concerned about a possible heart attack, I went to the library to read up on the subject. After seeing that the symptoms of an impending heart attack were similar to my chest pains, I became alarmed.

I remembered that my sister's next-door Montreal neighbor was a heart specialist. Because I had already planned to drive to Montreal to show off my new car, I contacted Éva and asked her to schedule an appointment with the doctor. I took a few days off from the gym and headed to Montreal late one afternoon.

About halfway through my drive, the chest pain suddenly appeared, and my left hand became semi-numb. I pulled off the road, expecting to die. After massaging my chest, the pain eventually subsided, and though being shaken, I reached Montreal safely.

The following day, I attended the appointment and explained my fear to the doctor. After various tests, he had good news. "You have a perfectly healthy heart," he began. "Although your heartbeat is lower than normal, that's common for athletes. Don't worry anymore."

He sounded reassuring, but I knew that my chest pains were real. "What else could cause those cramps?" I asked.

After a lengthy discussion, the doctor finally pinpointed the most likely cause. "The weight training has expanded your chest, irritating some nerves. I predict that your body will adjust to its new form after a while, and the nerves will no longer bother you."

He was right. I do not recall ever having those pains after our discussion.

When the Canadian winter arrived, the Triumph did not adjust well to the cold weather. Although its mechanical problems were covered under warranty, it soon spent more time in the repair shop than with me. I wished I had listened to Johnny's warning, but it was too late. Then, late one evening, when I came out of the gym, I found my parked car badly damaged. Some large vehicle had lost control in the snow and slid into the Triumph's left side, crushing its door. Not having all the parts in stock, the dealer took nearly two weeks to repair my car. In the meantime, I had to rely on my girlfriend to chauffeur me around.

The winter eventually ended. The car's problems, unfortunately, did not. As it was reaching the end of its one-year warranty period, the potential repair bills began to concern me. I visited a Mercury dealer and traded the Triumph for a car built in Canada. I was not going to endure another winter with that British-made lemon. This time, the lesson I learned was costly.



Left: My only picture of Johnny, taken at an office party, does not do justice to his good looks. Center: Reporting our gym's daily membership revenues to Vic Tanny's headquarters. Right: With Éva and my dream car during the visit to Montreal.

I went to the Mercury dealer to pick up the new car. The salesman told me that beginning with the 1962 models, all Canadian vehicles had to be equipped with seat belts in the front seat. The lap belts were identical to what airplanes used, and I did not bother buckling in on my way home. Later that evening, I wanted to see how the car drove on the highway. That time, however, I decided to see what it felt like to have the seat belt buckled. Highway 401 was only a few miles away, and I headed in that direction. It was already dark, so I turned my headlights on and listened to the radio. After entering the freeway, I stayed in the right lane, following the break-in instructions not to exceed 55 miles per hour.

After driving for about five minutes, I noticed a set of headlights rapidly growing more prominent in my rearview mirror. Then, I felt a sudden jerk from the rear.

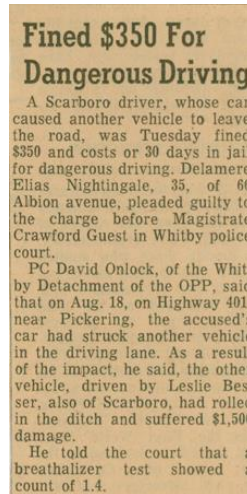
I may have lost consciousness for a short time. The next thing I remember was finding myself hanging by the seatbelt inside the car, which was resting on its roof. The driver's side door was missing. It took me a few seconds to realize I had been involved in an accident. The car's engine was still running. My first reaction was to turn it off to prevent a possible fire. After fumbling with my left hand in the dark to find the ignition key, I suddenly remembered that I was in the new Mercury. The ignition key of this car was on the opposite side of the steering column from where it had been in the Triumph. Finally, I managed to stop the motor.

I unbuckled the seatbelt and fell to the roof of the inverted car. After climbing out, I was still somewhat dazed. I saw headlights nearby but did not know what was going on. Witnessing the accident, other drivers had pulled off the elevated road and offered assistance. More and more people crowded around me, eager to learn what had happened. A woman fainted after seeing my car upside down, with its missing front door and dangling seatbelts.

The flashing lights of an ambulance appeared. Two attendants rushed to the scene. Seeing the woman on the ground, they hovered over her and eventually took her away. At that point,

nobody paid attention to me. Finally, a highway patrol car showed up to investigate. The patrolman told me another police car had been following the vehicle that hit me after observing its erratic driving. The driver had attempted to pass me on the left but had misjudged the clearance. His right front bumper hit my car's left rear side. The impact tossed my vehicle off the elevated road. After nose-diving into the lower field, it flipped on its top. The police had already apprehended the intoxicated driver. At the station, his blood-alcohol level was measured at 0.14—nearly twice the allowed maximum!

The highway patrolmen drove me to a nearby hospital to be examined for injuries. During the trip, they told me that wearing the seat belt had undoubtedly saved my life. Thanks to my guardian angel, I was unharmed except for a few minor bruises and a sore neck. The car, however, was a total loss.



Left: The front of my car after the accident.
Right: An article in the *Toronto Star* reported the incident.

After junking my car with less than 30 miles, the insurance company replaced it with a 1963 model because an identical 1962 model was unavailable. Since my accident, I have advocated for seat belts, always buckling them immediately after entering an automobile.

The Great Impostor

One of the men to whom I sold a new gym membership was Frank Frankfurter, another Hungarian emigrant to Canada. After he arrived in Toronto, he worked as a salesman and later established a distributorship for two large Japanese electronics companies, Sharp and Pioneer. By the time we met, he had a thriving, successful business. He usually worked out during the day when the gym was relatively quiet. I had opportunities to hear about his company's operation during those times. Not having any experience with an import business, I was amazed to learn the challenges and regulations required to import products into Canada.

In the late 1950s, Japan began to export electronic consumer goods to North America. Due to their low prices, the products quickly gained popularity in the U.S. and Canada. Soon after their purchase, however, many of the buyers experienced performance and quality problems. The expression, "Sounds like a cheap Japanese transistor radio," was frequently heard.

The two firms Frank represented manufactured quality, high-fidelity sound equipment and sold the items slightly below the prices of domestic goods. They also developed innovative new items not available in Canada. One announced by Sharp was a Citizen's Band walkie-talkie, available at an affordable price. Frank's company received the first samples from Japan and planned to place a large order.

Japanese-made walkie-talkies had been marketed in the U.S. for several months. Their relatively low power output did not require FCC approval or user licenses. Due to their small size, ease of use, and low cost compared to the expensive and bulky mobile phones, they gained immediate popularity. Only after a large number had already been in the hands of consumers did TV companies learn about the occasional interference caused by these products in the reception of Channel 2. There was no easy way to fix the problem.

The Canadian government swiftly passed regulations to prevent the problem from occurring in Canada. They ordered testing of every model before it could be approved for the domestic market. The samples Frank submitted to CSA (Canadian Standards Association) for testing were rejected because they exceeded the maximum level of unwanted radiation.

Frank was devastated and shared his frustration with me at the gym. "There is a large potential profit," he said. "Japanese companies don't react quickly. It could take months before they come up with a modification. By then, my competitors may already have other products on the market."

One of the gym members I knew was a ham radio operator. I visited his home once and saw that he had a nice assortment of high-frequency test equipment. When I heard about Frank's problem, I offered to help him.

"Let me work on one of the samples to see if there is a quick way to solve the problem," I suggested, knowing that the ham operator would not turn away from an opportunity to see the insides of a new product.

Frank had heard about my Hungarian technical high school background and two years of college in the U.S. Still, he looked doubtful. "It doesn't sound like a simple problem to me. How could you fix it?" he asked.

"I'm not promising anything, but you have nothing to lose. Of course, you should still let Sharp know the test results."

"You're right," he replied. He returned later to the gym with a pair of walkie-talkies. "See what you can do, but don't let them out of your hands. CSA placed a stop order on their use in Canada."

I had already contacted the ham operator at his work, and he agreed to let me use his equipment. Later that evening, in his basement, I began to tweak the components of the radio while monitoring the radiation. Somehow, without deeply understanding what I was doing, I found that changing a component significantly dropped the unwanted radiation level¹. I changed both units and returned them to Frank the following day. He immediately shipped them to the CSA central laboratory in Ottawa.

¹ The change reduced the bias current of the transmitter's oscillator that led to a drop in the second harmonic.

Three days later, an excited Frank showed up at the gym. “You’re great! They’ve approved the product for import,” he said while handing me a check for \$100. “Please accept this as a token of my appreciation,” he added. Then, he invited me for dinner that evening at a Hungarian restaurant.

During our meal, Frank told me he had built a successful sales organization, but the only technical person on his staff was a technician. “He can fix defective equipment by following service instructions, but I need someone like you to do the higher-level work. I want you to be my chief engineer,” he concluded.

“But I only have two years of college,” I responded, without even thinking of how Johnny would react to my leaving the gym.

“Nobody will know except the two of us,” he responded.

The truth was that for several weeks, I had been thinking about leaving the gym. As much as I admired Johnny’s salesmanship, the people he associated with and his questionable lifestyle scared me at times. *I might eventually become like them. No, I wouldn’t want that!*

In addition, the idea of working for a more respectable organization appealed to me. Returning to the technical field made it sound even better. “What would I be doing in your company?” I asked.

He already had a plan for me. My primary responsibility would be the technical evaluation of the various electronic products available from his two principals. It might even involve taking occasional trips to Japan. In addition, I would represent his company to the Canadian government agencies for product approvals. The walkie-talkie radiation issue was unusually complex, but every item that had an AC power connection had to be checked and approved by CSA.

The job sounded exciting and challenging but also risky. I would undoubtedly learn much, but I would always have to be alert and pretend I was an engineer. “What happens if someone finds out I don’t have a degree?” I asked.

“Nothing. I’ll return to using an outside engineering service, as I’ve been doing. You can become a salesman and sell our products.”

During the next hour, we agreed on the details. I was to report to his company in two weeks. The next day, I resigned from the gym.

My timing was not the best. Johnny was opening a second gym in Toronto. In addition, Vic Tanny indicated that he was open to selling Johnny the rights to operate throughout Canada. Depending on a successful financing arrangement, Johnny hoped to achieve in Canada what Tanny had done in the United States. If he succeeded, I had a bright future in his operation. Hearing that I wanted to leave his team, he became extremely frustrated and tried to change my mind. However, I was determined to leave and stuck with my decision but agreed to help part-time. I ended up working at the gym three evenings a week.

The employees at Importhouse of Canada greeted me wholeheartedly. They had heard about my simple but successful solution to the walkie-talkie problem and assumed I was some technical guru. They went out of their way to help the person who saved Frank from a major headache. The technician told me he appreciated having an engineer assist him when “something was over his head.” A cute secretary offered to help me with any business

correspondence with Japan. The sales manager told me about his connections that could save me money when buying furniture or household goods. "I know most of the big store managers in the city. They'll give you great discounts."

I couldn't have asked for a warmer welcome.

The following year represented one of the most challenging parts of my life. I rapidly learned more about a wide range of sound equipment and radios, improved my English language reading and writing, developed a way to communicate with Japanese engineers who frequently visited us, and worked on behaving with the authority expected from a chief engineer. When I had some spare time, our sales manager took me on sales calls and taught me about technical sales. Frank approved all of my activities and was highly satisfied with my performance.

The scary part of my job was visiting the Ottawa-based Canadian Government laboratories to approve newly imported products. Most of the time, they ran measurements to verify my test results and asked questions about the test setups we had back in our company. I could handle the technical parts, but occasionally, they asked about American colleges. That was a potentially dangerous subject.

"From which college did you graduate?" asked one of the older engineers during a coffee break.

"University of Iowa," I replied because I had visited that school twice during track meets and knew it had a complete four-year engineering program (the University of Dubuque, the school I had attended, only offered a two-year pre-engineering curriculum).

"Oh, I graduated from there, too," he said joyfully. "Is Professor Jones still teaching?"

I did not know what to say. Hoping his question was not to test if I was a graduate of that school, I answered. "He only taught occasionally. I didn't know him well,"

Trying to anticipate his next question, I prepared myself for the worst. *If they discover I'm a fake, all my submitted test results could be invalidated. In addition, Frank's company and perhaps even I could face legal action.*

Fortunately, he did not suspect anything and told me stories from Professor Jones during his courses. I just listened and laughed at the appropriate times. He liked me as an appreciative audience.

The following weekend, I visited the University of Toronto's library and studied the catalogs of "my alma mater." My confidence level significantly increased after memorizing the names of several engineering courses and professors. No more problems occurred after that incident.

Immigrants had to reside in Canada for at least five years to become eligible for citizenship. Although I had arrived in Canada at the end of 1956, I had spent two years in the US attending college. Therefore, I had to wait until 1963 to apply for citizenship. After going through the formalities, I became a naturalized Canadian in August 1963.



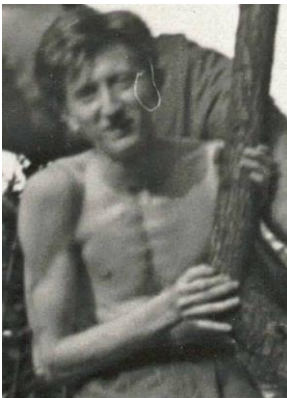
My Canadian citizenship certificate.

On my way to the ceremony, the reality hit me—in a short time, I would no longer be able to call myself a Hungarian. *How can I deny being part of the country where I was born and raised? How could I face my countrymen if I ever had the opportunity to visit there?*

At City Hall, I shared my concerns with an older Hungarian waiting to become a Canadian. “Don’t worry,” he said. “As long as you can speak our language, you’ll always be a Hungarian deep inside. Nobody will know the difference if you ever go back to Budapest.”

His advice helped ease my conscience. I promised myself never to forget my native language. After the citizenship ceremony, I took my girlfriend to a Hungarian restaurant to celebrate. Despite all the beautiful things Canada had to offer, I concluded that Hungarian food still tasted the best!

My dedication to weight training in the gym had paid off; I no longer felt embarrassed to wear swim trunks at a pool. I began to run track again. Although I had gained 35 pounds during the nearly two-year track layoff, my sprinting had actually improved. I was optimistic about running hurdles at a major university. Following the recommendation of a former track teammate, I applied for admission to the University of Colorado at Boulder.



Left: Picture taken at age 19, six feet tall and weighing 145 pounds. Center and right: Thirty-five pounds heavier after 18 months of weight training. Even though I had not become a bodybuilder, using my before-and-after photos helped convince men to buy gym memberships.

The nearly two years I had spent working in the gym and at Frank’s company had opened my eyes. For the first time, I looked beyond becoming only an engineer and considered the opportunities that sales and marketing might offer. In the CU catalog, an exciting combination major caught my attention: a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and Business Administration. The double major would require taking courses in the Business School, adding at least one semester before I graduate. Still, it would allow me to advance into management

sooner. I decided to follow that path. After receiving acceptance and the promise of an athletic scholarship at CU for the 1963-64 school year, I resigned from Importhouse at the beginning of August.

Frank was not happy to hear my plans. He could not understand why I would want a degree when I already had a well-established engineering career. After a long argument, he angrily told me that I let him down. We did not part as friends.

After a lengthy preparation, I finally built up my courage to face my girlfriend with the news. It was possible that after seeing the college catalogs in my apartment, she expected me to leave for school one day. However, reality has now set in, and we have had several emotionally charged discussions. "If you promise to marry me, I'll wait for you until you graduate," she offered in one of them.

Her offer put me on the spot. I liked her very much, but I did not feel that overpowering love I read about in novels so many times. "Three years is a long time," I said after hesitation. "Let's wait a while to see how we both feel then.

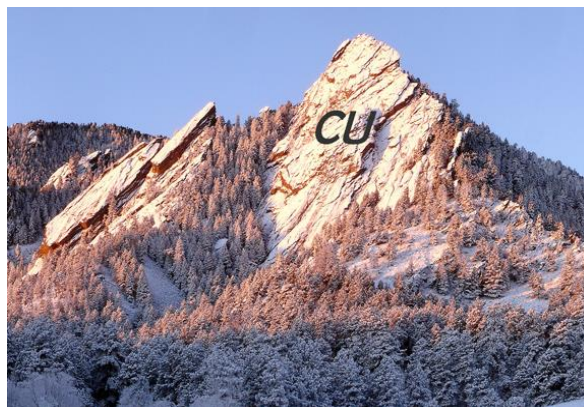
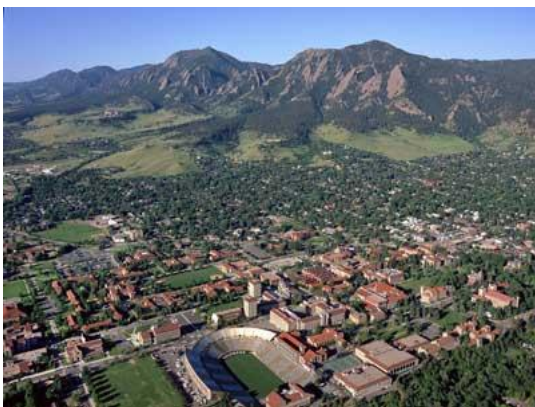
It is evident from the tears in her eyes that my answer was not the one she wanted. When she composed herself, we agreed to stay in close contact and see each other during Christmas vacation. After our talk, it felt like a heavy weight had been removed from my shoulders, and I bought her a beautiful necklace as a parting gift. She promised to wear it frequently.

Saving money had not been a practice in my family. As far back as I can remember, the little money my mother earned was spent almost immediately on our necessities. During my three years in Montreal, I lived paycheck to paycheck. When I received a raise, there were always new things to buy. In my school years in Dubuque, the scholarship covered my tuition and living expenses. The part-time repair jobs helped me to purchase and maintain my car. At my jobs in Toronto, I earned far more than ever before, but my expectations also increased significantly, and my new lifestyle cost much more. Consequently, after two years of working in that city, after paying for my airfare to Denver, I had only \$500 left. Still, I was not concerned. After all, the university gave me a full scholarship to cover my basic expenses. During the summers, I would find jobs to earn more spending money.

I subleased the apartment, sold my car, packed my belongings, and flew to the mile-high city of Denver in late August. From Stapleton Airport, I took a bus to Boulder, ready to begin the next segment of my life—as a student at the University of Colorado.

Chapter 5: Life at the University of Colorado

The bus ride on the four-lane expressway connecting Boulder to Denver was unexciting until we reached the top of a long rise. Then, as we passed the crest, a breathtaking view appeared—the city of Boulder backed by the snow-capped foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Seeing the glorious sight in person was far more impressive than what my former teammate had shown me in his CU yearbook. I silently thanked him for recommending this school to me.



Two photos of Boulder. Left: Part of the university campus with foothills in the background. Right: The famous “Flatirons” peak with the letters “CU” painted by students (I added the letters in this picture). Before a home football game against Oklahoma University, some visiting pranksters rounded the “C” to an “O” to look like OU!

It was mid-afternoon on a gorgeous sunny day. I left my luggage at the Student Union and went to the office of the head track coach to find out about housing and my scholarship. After introducing myself and handing him the letter I had received from him earlier, he looked at me with a puzzled expression. “How old are you?” he asked.

“I’ve just celebrated my 27th birthday,” I replied.

“Uh-oh. You had better sit down, son. We have a problem.” In the next minute or so, he explained what it was.

The U.S. had long dominated the sprint, jump, and hurdle events in track and field. European and Australian runners excelled in middle- and long-distance running. Some American colleges had begun to recruit foreign distance runners, who generally peaked in their mid-twenties. The college alumni responded unfavorably to squeezing out American students, so the Big Eight Conference had set an age limit for foreign students. Under that rule, eligibility for foreign college athletes began at age 18—even if they did not attend college. Therefore, when I turned 22, my eligibility for a Big Eight school ended. Somehow, no one had thought about to check my age.

The coach felt almost as bad as I did. He had assumed I was the same age as my friend Blair, who had transferred to CU from Dubuque earlier. Trying to cheer me up, he told me that the soccer team did not have the same restrictions. “You can try out for the team,” he offered. “But there are no scholarships for soccer.”

During my high-flying lifestyle in Toronto, I had saved only about \$1,000. Out-of-state tuition at CU was \$720 per semester. Room and board in the dorms cost about \$120 each month. My funds would not even be sufficient for the first semester.

Fortunately, the coach thought of a way to help me.

He explained that the assistant in the electrical engineering lab had just graduated, and the professor in charge was looking for a replacement. Professor Wicks, the head of labs, was happy to find someone with circuit and test equipment experience. He hired me the same day to work there at half-time. The pay was not great, but the job enabled me to pay tuition at the in-state level—only \$180 per semester.

The coach also sent me to investigate the cheapest place in town to live, the Men's Co-Op. The three-story house with a dozen rooms was conveniently located at the edge of campus, adjacent to the home of the University President. There was an opening in one of the double rooms for \$50 per month. The cost was low because all the residents shared duties, including cooking and cleaning.

My would-be roommate, Eric, was a junior and an early hippie. A native of Colorado, perhaps he was inspired by the grandeur around him. Maybe he was rebelling against the norm. In any case, he told me immediately that he rarely cleaned his clothing or cut his hair. In addition, he declared that he only washed his bedding once each semester. Because this washing had just occurred, the room did not smell too bad.

As a money-making venture, he had decided to brew beer that year and had already stashed many bottles of his concoction on one side of the room. Once it fermented, he planned to sell the beer for 25 cents a bottle.

Eric's slovenly habits were probably the reason for the vacancy at the Co-op. However, I could not be choosy and felt relieved to sign the nine-month agreement. Once again, my financial problems were resolved on the first day of my arrival in a new place!¹

With an aching heart, I had to accept that my decade-long track career had ended. Even if I began to work out independently and could again join a club the following summer, at 28, I would no longer be competitive. My dream of going to the Olympics one day faded away. I decided to give up track and concentrate on making the school's soccer team.

After settling at the Co-Op, I went to the soccer field. Although I considered myself to be in good shape, my regular one-mile warm-up jog nearly exhausted me. Others reminded me of the effect of the high altitude, and it took me a few weeks to adjust entirely to being 5,400 feet above sea level. The coach was impressed with my speed and soon put me on the first team. For the next three years, I played soccer for CU. I became the team's co-captain in my last year.

Registration for my academic courses brought an unpleasant surprise. Although my transcript showed good grades, the math professor who processed me was not impressed with my small-school background. When he heard what book we had used at Dubuque for calculus, he told me, "That book is outdated. We teach the new math here, using *my* textbook." After disallowing my sophomore math courses, he put me in his class. "You need to learn the

¹ Just as had happened in Chicago in 1960.

Set Theory,” he said. “It’s a new method of math.” I had never heard of that term before and instantly disliked the professor. His course sounded intimidating.

I no longer have the textbook the professor wrote, but here is a similar “simple introduction” to the Set Theory from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*².

The fundamental concept in the theory of infinite sets is the cardinality of a set. Two sets A and B have the same cardinality if there exists a mapping from the set A onto the set B that is one-to-one, that is, it assigns each element of A exactly one element of B. It is clear that when two sets are finite, then they have the same cardinality if and only if they have the same number of elements. One can extend the concept of the ‘number of elements’ to arbitrary, even infinite, sets. It is not apparent at first that there might be infinite sets of different cardinalities, but once this becomes clear, it follows quickly that the structure so described is rich indeed.

This paragraph speaks for itself and explains why American students have so much trouble learning mathematics. After being the top student in every math class I had ever taken, I struggled through both semesters of the “new math” and learned very little. Fortunately, the professor who taught the higher-level course the following year did not use the same approach and saved me from being completely turned off by the subject. In my 40 years of successful engineering practice, I never encountered a practical application of Set Theory!

In addition to the standard electrical engineering program, I also took accelerated core courses in the business school for three hours weekly. Learning the principles of accounting, finance, management, marketing, statistics, and business law was extremely interesting. How much easier it would have been to manage employees at Tanny’s Gym had I known what I was now discovering. The more I learned, the more I realized how little I knew about running a business.

One business course required extensive reading. Our Business Law professor, a fascinating lawyer, asked us to read a book each week. We also had to memorize terms and events, which was never easy for me, even in my native language. Of course, I understood that a lawyer had to remember all those facts, but I preferred the more analytical homework assignments.

Perhaps the most interesting business course was Statistics. In our first session, the instructor asked the class to predict the population of Boulder in 20 years. Like everyone else in the course, I researched the past growth of the city and extrapolated it to the future. All of us received F’s for our work.

The instructor lectured us at the beginning of the next class. “You forgot to include the effect of IBM’s opening a plant in Boulder next year. Many of those employees will come from other places,” he began. “In addition, the presence of IBM will result in new startups related to computer peripherals. Re-do your work!”

² <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/set-theory/>

Considering such a growth spurt had never occurred to us. The following week, we proudly presented our new projections but received the same disapproval from the instructor. “You did not consider that the baby boomers will have more children. Do your work again!”

The following week, he told us we forgot to include the effect of Boulder’s climate. “We have at least 300 clear, sunny days each year. That will attract people from those gloomy Eastern cities,” was the next clue. And so on. Every week, he gave us another hint on how to improve our prediction. By the end of the first semester, we had a sophisticated model and learned much about forecasting. I wish I had kept my final result to see how close my projection came to the city’s actual population.

The Friday before Thanksgiving vacation, I returned to the Co-Op for lunch and found several boys sitting in the living room, somberly staring at the television set. “What’s happening?” I asked.

“President Kennedy was shot in Dallas,” replied one boy quietly.

The news shocked me. The President and his pretty wife had been in the news the previous night, looking happy and healthy. “Is he OK?” I asked.

Nobody knew, but ominous news began to come from the local Dallas station. After a short time, Walter Cronkite, his voice shaking, announced that the President was dead. We all sat and stared at each other in disbelief.

The front door opened, and Henderson, one of our housemates, entered. Seeing us sitting quietly, he asked what was going on. “The President was shot and killed in Dallas,” answered one of the boys.

“Well, he finally got what he deserved,” Anderson declared happily. “He should have stayed home.”

“Get out of here, Anderson, you b-----!” yelled Eric angrily.

Anderson, a big, beefy Texan who was also an ROTC Marine, outweighed Eric by about 100 pounds. He took a step toward Eric, probably to respond to the insult. Then, looking around and realizing he was hopelessly outnumbered, he backed away. Muttering something about stupid liberals, he went to his room.

None of us felt like having lunch, so we dispersed quietly. At dinner, Anderson apologized to the group for his insensitive remark. I did not forgive him and avoided talking to him for the rest of the school year.

Our soccer team won the Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Soccer League championship. We also played exhibition games against other Big Eight schools, finishing the season undefeated with only one tie. Although I preferred to play forward, the coach had me play center halfback³. He reasoned that I had the speed and the stamina to guard the other teams’ center forwards, who generally represented the most significant scoring threat. Although soccer games required two 45-minute periods with continuous play, I always felt that running a single 400-meter hurdle race was far more tiring.

³ In those years, soccer was played in a more offensive style, compared to the midfield-oriented strategy of today. A team had five forwards, three halfbacks, two fullbacks, and a goalie.



Picture of our League Champions soccer team, taken at the award banquet. I stand to the left and slightly behind the coach holding our trophy. Our top scorer was a 5'5" player from South America (third from the left).

My roommate's beer-making effort was not successful. Some nights, I heard popping as his vertically stored bottles blew their lids and foamed all over. Our room developed the foul smell of a cheap pub. We had to keep our windows open for several days to remove the odor, and the carpet required professional cleaning.

When the brewing process was complete, he generously opened some bottles to share at dinner. The brown liquid tasted awful! At first, I thought that it was only me because I had been spoiled by good beer, but the expressions on the faces of the others confirmed my judgment. Eric's "beer" was not fit for human consumption. He quickly lowered his price from 25 cents to 10 cents, eventually five cents per bottle. Still, he could not sell a single bottle. His pride prevented him from dumping everything, so he slowly drank his entire stock during the rest of the school year. I felt sorry for his business failure but was glad the last bottle was out of our room.

Several Boulder residents volunteered to become "host families" to foreign students. The Sheets family selected me and regularly invited me to their house for home-cooked meals. They had two teenage children who loved to hear about my experiences during the Hungarian Revolution. Their son, Payson, who planned to become an archeologist, had heard about Attila the Hun in history class. He hoped to visit Hungary one day and look for the unknown gravesite of the king.

One day, Mrs. Sheets asked me what my favorite Hungarian meal was. "Chicken paprikás," I told her.

"Would you prepare it for us one day?" was her next question.

“I would, but I don’t know how.”

“Could you ask your mother for a recipe?” she persisted.

The next day, I wrote to Mother and asked for instructions. By return mail, she sent me a hand-written recipe. My host family’s mother became excited and invited several neighbors to come for a Hungarian feast during Christmas vacation.

The two main parts of the chicken paprikás are the chicken, cooked in a broth, and the dumplings, called *nokedli*. Mrs. Sheets purchased all the ingredients. The recipe outlined instructions for the chicken, and I proceeded to cook it in a large pot. The *nokedli* required a lot more work. I remembered watching my mother make it many times. First, she would make the dough and then flatten it on a breadboard. Holding the board over the stove, she would chop small pieces directly into a pot of boiling water. Immediately, the pieces of dough sank to the bottom. When they came up to the surface, they were ready to eat.

Somehow, I misread the recipe and put too many eggs into the dough. The dough was thick and sticky instead of the expected nice, smooth texture. When I began to chop it into the water, instead of small half-inch segments, large chunks of dough came off. They did sink to the bottom of the boiling water, so I was satisfied and waited. The problem was that they never rose to the top. I did not know what to do. After a long wait, I decided to fish them out of the boiling water and serve them as they were.

While concentrating on the dough, I forgot about the chicken. When I rescued it from the pot, it was completely overcooked. The meat came off the bones and looked very unappetizing. Not having any other choice, I proceeded to serve the meal.

The guests were extremely polite, but I could tell that the dinner was a disaster. The meat was watery, and the oversized dumplings had the consistency of racquetballs. I watched our guests struggling as they tried to cut the large lumps of dumplings without much success. Fortunately, Mrs. Sheets had baked a beautiful apple pie, so at least our guests did not have to go home completely hungry. My host family never asked me to cook again.

The academic year passed quickly. I stayed at the Co-Op during school vacations, reading the law books and trying to understand Set Theory. Despite my best efforts, I barely received a C in math. I received a B in Business Law and A’s in all other courses in the first semester. In the second semester, I received all A’s except for a C in math again. My cumulative Boulder grade average for the year was 3.58.

I enjoyed working for Professor Wicks in the electronics lab. He encouraged me to apply for an academic scholarship. Nearly all of them were available only to U.S. citizens or immigrants with Green Cards. Still, he found a company without such a restriction called Square D. I applied immediately, and Mr. Wicks wrote an excellent recommendation to accompany my request. Within two weeks, I received the news—that Square D had granted me a scholarship of \$500 each semester until I completed my B.S. (Electrical Engineering & Business Administration) degree. After thanking the company, I considered moving out of the Co-Op in the fall.

Instead of looking for full-time employment, I took courses during the summer to earn more units. Some of the credits I had transferred from Dubuque had not been allowed. My double major required additional courses, so staying in school all year round made sense. I also

continued working in the electronics lab, developing new experiments for the following school year. My days were as full and challenging as they had been during the regular term.

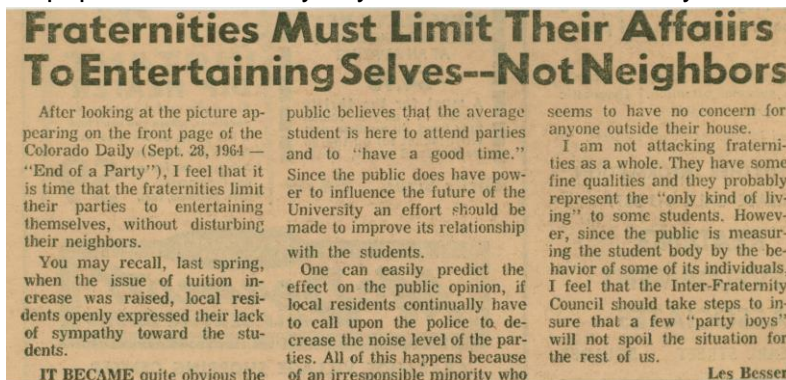
The only bright part of the summer was a visit from my Toronto girlfriend. She could stay in our room because Eric had gone home for the summer. Her German nature, however, could not stand the condition of the room. As soon as she arrived, she began a major cleaning. When Eric returned at the end of the summer, he did not recognize the place. Suspecting that he would not help keep the room clean, I told the Co-Op I would not stay there for the next school year.

Our soccer team's goalie, Dick Rumpf, was planning to move out of the dorm and was looking for a roommate to share an apartment. Dick, a German-American aerospace engineering student, and I had similar personalities and interests. The two of us began to look for a furnished apartment to rent. We soon saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a basement apartment only a block away from the Co-op. Dick and I immediately responded. The one-bedroom apartment with its small kitchen and spacious bathroom looked perfect. The rental price was unusually low.

Mrs. Williams, the elderly widow who owned the house, interviewed us at length. At first, she was reluctant to rent to us because she preferred a married couple. Using the salesmanship I had learned in the gym, I convinced her that having two engineers in the house would be a real asset. She would never have to worry about mechanical and electrical problems. We also promised to keep the place clean and not to sneak in girls. Finally, she agreed, and we moved in the following day. As for our promises, we did keep the apartment clean...

We learned why the rent was so low when we went to bed the first night. Our bedroom window faced the house of the "animal house fraternity" of the campus. Loud music and party noises kept us awake. At midnight, we called the police and complained. After a while, the noise calmed down, and we slept for a few hours.

During the following week, the fraternity hosted two more loud parties. After each call to the police, the frat boys pulled back inside their building and turned the volume down for a while. Next, we complained to the Inter-Fraternity Council, and I wrote a letter to the student newspaper. Two fraternity boys came to see us the day after the letter was published.



My letter, as it appeared in the *Colorado Daily*. It brought an immediate response from the fraternity.

"We're sorry to hear that our parties keep you awake," one of them stated. "Instead of complaining to the police, why don't you join us? We have more girls than we can handle."

"You'll have lots of fun," added the other.

Although their offer sounded tempting—"If you can't beat them, join them"—we declined by telling them, "We're engineers and have to study." After some negotiation, we reached a mutually beneficial agreement. They would inform us about their parties in advance so we could study in the library on those evenings and not complain. In return, we could take home their leftover party food. In addition, if they had too many girls at a party, they would invite us over to discover "what you're missing by not joining our fraternity." The arrangement worked well for us. We saved money on our grocery bills and had opportunities to meet sorority girls who would never have come near the engineering school.

Although we lived on the edge of the campus, I was itching to have a car. When I mentioned it to one of the sponsors of our soccer team, who owned a dealership in Boulder, he showed me a used 1947 Chrysler. "This beauty was owned by one of our lady teachers," he began. "She kept it in her garage and rarely used it. The car has only 26,000 miles and is in excellent condition." He sold it to me for \$150.

Compared to the current models, the nearly 20-year-old Chrysler looked like an old battleship. However, it was in spotless condition and had velvet-covered seats. I had wheels for my stay at CU.

Our soccer team again had a banner year, although we lost a game against the Air Force Academy. Playing against the Academy was always challenging. Although most of their players lacked soccer skills, they were extremely tough physically. The rules allowed unlimited substitutions. Three or four times during the game, their coach would send in a new squad. "Kill" was their strategy. I suffered a broken cheekbone in the game against them and had to sit out the last two matches of the season. The bone under my left eye had to be repaired with a stainless-steel wire.

Near the end of the semester, I was invited to a meeting of the engineering honorary society, Sigma Tau. Professor Wicks told me that being a member of an honorary always looked good on a résumé, so I went to the gathering. About 40 other students showed up; some of them were already members. While we waited for the meeting, I started a conversation with two girls seated behind me. When one of them heard I was studying electrical engineering, she asked me what to do about her transistor radio's volume control, which was making unpleasant scratchy sounds. I offered to look at the radio the next day.

The four society officers sat at the front as the president opened the meeting. He explained the charter of the society and talked about their activities. At that point, the vice president took over. "You've been selected for possible memberships based on your academic performance and extracurricular activities. Tell us something about you."

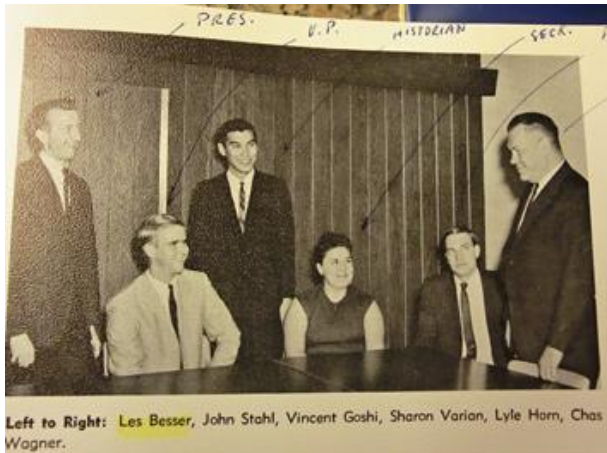
One by one, we introduced ourselves. Most pledges only said a few words, but two were lengthy. When it came to my turn, I told the group about my long-time interest in electronics and that I had given up a well-paying job to become an engineer.

At that point, all new pledges were asked to leave the room and wait outside. After a while, the president invited us back. "Congratulations," he said. "You've all been accepted. Now, we'll elect the officers for the next year." Then he asked for nominations for president.

To my surprise, Sharon Varian, the girl with the radio problem, stood up to nominate me. She told the group I had offered my help without knowing her. She added that my experience managing the gym would enable me to lead the group. I was stunned to hear the unexpected

endorsement by someone I had just met. Three others also received nominations, but I won the most votes. To return the favor, I nominated Sharon for secretary. She was also elected.

After the meeting, the former president handed me a booklet, Robert's Rules of Order. "Study this to handle future meetings," he told me. I learned many new concepts, such as orders, motions, resolutions, etc. The first meeting I presided over was difficult, but we all learned our roles after a while. I enjoyed our meetings and decided to become involved in the student government. By the spring of 1965, the student body elected me to be an Associated Engineering Student Council member. I also held offices in two other engineering honoraries: Tau Beta Pi and Eta Kappa Nu.



Student government photos from 1965. Left: Sigma Tau. Right: Associated Engineering Students (I am standing in the center of the back row).

Divorce Quebec Style

Visiting my sister in Montreal during the summer of 1963, she shared her marital concerns with me. "Tibor is a wonderful man. He loves me and takes good care of me," she began. "The problem is that I want children, and he will not consider having a family."

"What do you plan to do?"

"If he doesn't change his mind soon, I'll divorce him."

I did not believe she was serious, but a few months later, she let me know that he had chosen to get divorced rather than have children. However, divorce in the Catholic province of Quebec was challenging to arrange. The courts would agree to break up a marriage for only a limited number of reasons, such as extreme physical or mental cruelty or adultery.

A commonly used process to circumvent these restrictions was to fake adultery. The couple that had mutually agreed to a divorce hired a team of a "professional" woman, a private detective, and a photographer. The husband would check into a motel with the and. The detective and the photographer would show up at the hotel and take pictures of the two in a compromising situation. The wife could then sue for adultery using the photos for proof. Éva and Tibor went through these steps and obtained their divorce in early 1964. She continued working at the import-export company to support herself.

I felt sorry for Tibor because he was a good man. The two of us never had any disagreement, and I did not know why he did not want children. I wrote him a friendly letter and wished him all the best.

At the end of the summer, Éva sent me a long letter to tell me about a new man in her life. Péter, another 1956 Hungarian refugee, was a divorcee about Éva's age with "all the good qualities of a loving husband." She added that I had already met him when I lived in Montreal. "He was the one who played the piano in the evenings at the ski resort where we all stayed for a long weekend."

Hearing that she had met someone compatible was good news. I had been worried about her being alone, but now she sounded happy. The ending of her letter, however, raised some concerns. I recalled that the talented entertainer had also liked to drink excessively. I wrote to Éva immediately and asked about Péter's bad habit. I also wondered if a piano player could make enough money to support a family.

In her reply, she assured me that his drinking was all in the past. "He did it to forget the problems of a failed marriage, but he gave it up completely. Don't worry!" In the rest of the letter, she told more about Péter. Piano playing was only his hobby. Trained as a mechanical engineer, he had switched to sales and, for the past two years, had operated a distributor partnership. After their marriage, they would settle in his house and "make babies." Her plans sounded good, and I hoped her future husband's drinking would not lead to any problems.

Before Christmas that year, I received an invitation to attend their wedding in Montreal. Included was a generous Christmas present from the groom—a round-trip plane ticket. I took a few days off from school and flew to Montreal for the wedding in mid-February 1965. They exchanged their vows in a simple ceremony, and both looked very happy. Péter went out of his way to make me feel at home. I was glad that my sister had found a good partner.



Left: Éva and Péter at their wedding in February 1965. Right: My photo begins to show some hair loss.

When I returned to Boulder, the difference between the winters of the two cities became clear to me. Both had cold weather and lots of snow, but we had many sunny days in Boulder—a rare event in Montreal! The gloomy gray skies and high humidity made the Canadian winters unpleasant. I was glad to be in Colorado again.

I liked all the courses during my second year at Colorado, except Electromagnetic (EM) Field Theory. The subject itself was interesting: how electric currents create magnetic fields and what the effects of these fields are. The part I did not like was memorizing long formulas. No lab was associated with the course, so we only learned the theory.

The professor who taught the course left for a one-week conference in the second semester. A practicing engineer from a Boulder company took over instruction during our teacher's absence. He showed up Monday and wanted to know what we had learned. He asked about real-life applications of EM fields. When we could not answer his questions, he shook his head in disbelief. "Let me explain how these fields are created, measured, and applied," he said. During the rest of the week, he changed the seemingly dull subject to an interesting one. Instead of learning new formulas, we began to understand the fundamentals of the topic. We loved that engineer!

At the end of the week, our class presented a petition to the Dean. We asked if that engineer could continue teaching the course for the rest of the semester. Our request was promptly denied. We had to endure memorizing yet more equations without understanding their purposes. After completing two semesters of the course and earning B's, I learned little about how microwaves can be used.

Interestingly, after graduation, the Microwave Division of Hewlett Packard hired me and allowed me to learn state-of-the-art applications of microwave technology. With that knowledge, I later founded two companies in that field.

First Experience with the Hewlett Packard Company

Professor Wicks, my mentor, had been a college classmate of a man named David Packard, and they had worked together for a while at General Electric. The professor recalled when Hewlett and Packard (HP) started their business and invited him to join their new venture. "I was not a risk taker," the professor told me. "I wanted a steady job and secure monthly paychecks. Imagine what I've missed," he added.

His story made me think about what I could have achieved by staying with the Vic Tanny organization in Canada. By that time, my former boss had expanded his operation throughout Canada. On the other hand, the gym business was not a model of ethical operation, so I shrugged off those thoughts.

In the spring of 1965, Professor Wicks told me HP was known to support the continuing education of their employees, and he recommended that I apply for a summer job at HP oscilloscope division in Colorado Springs. "CU had a branch in Colorado Springs, and I'm certain HP would even allow you to take a course there during working hours," he told me. I followed his advice and applied for a summer job. One of the HP engineers who regularly visited our school interviewed me and offered me a summer job. I happily accepted and looked forward to working for that famous company.

When the second semester ended, I moved to Colorado Springs. My roommate's parents lived in the city. They helped me find an inexpensive trailer home rental for the summer near

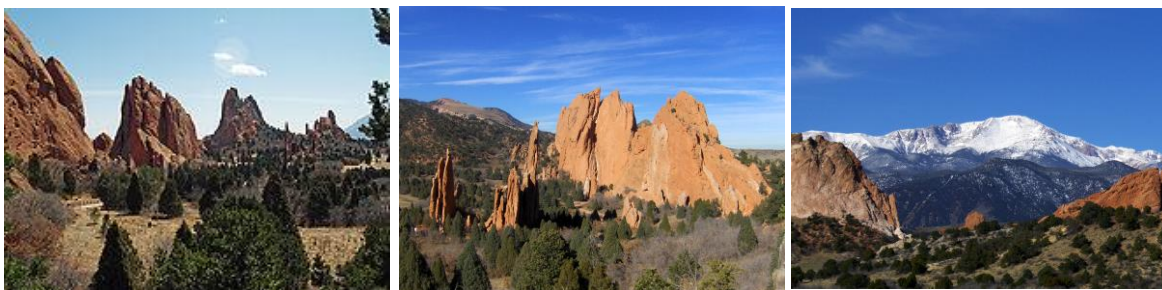
the Garden of the Gods⁴, located only a few miles from the HP plant. A small creek flowed peacefully through the large trailer home complex. My bedroom window offered a magnificent view of Pikes Peak. This trailer park looked like a pleasant place to spend my summer.

The first evening, however, I heard some commotion nearby. After going to investigate, I saw a police officer struggling with a burly man next to one of the trailers. The officer was trying to handcuff the intoxicated man, who was not cooperating. Confident about my Vic Tanny muscles, I stepped in to help. The two of us managed to subdue the troublemaker. The officer handcuffed him and shoved him into the patrol car. Before leaving, the police officer thanked me for my assistance.

I later learned the drunk had wanted to enter the trailer owned by his former girlfriend. He tried to force his way when she refused to let him in. She had called the police, but the intruder still refused to leave. When the officer attempted to arrest him, he resisted. That was when I came upon the scene. The trailer park's manager came to see me, and to show his appreciation for my help protecting his tenant, he installed a TV in my unit free of charge.

The oscilloscope division of HP was one of three large electronics companies on the north side of Colorado Springs. I drove the unpaved, pothole-riddled Garden of the Gods Road to reach the newly built plant. A sign stood at the beginning of the road: "Rough Road for the next 3.1 miles." The road must have been in poor condition for some time because a driver with a sense of humor crossed out the word "miles" and wrote "years." I drove my old Chrysler very carefully to work.

Professor Wicks had told me that HP would be an excellent workplace, but I was unprepared for how impressive it was. Compared to the factory where I had worked in Budapest, HP looked like a palace, with clean, shining floors, spacious cubicles, sparkling odorless bathrooms, and an attractive cafeteria. Everyone was friendly and helpful. My supervisor let me take time off from work three times a week to take a course at the CU Extension. I decided that HP was the company I wanted to work for after graduation.



Three pictures showing parts of the Garden of the Gods. The snow-capped mountain in the background of the right-hand photo is Pikes Peak, rising to an elevation of 14,110 feet (4,300 meters).

One day, as I hurriedly drove to the school's downtown location, I passed a police car at one of the intersections. The officer immediately turned on his flashing red lights and stopped me for speeding. I was surprised because I was moving at the speed limit of 35 mph. He

⁴ A unique group of sandstone rock formations near the high mountains.

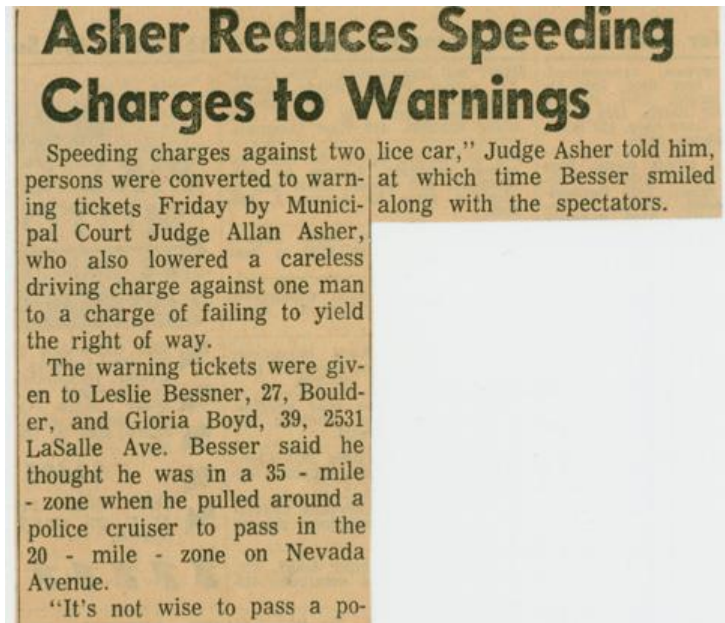
pointed out that the speed limit had changed to 20 mph only a few blocks back and gave me a ticket. I tried to explain that I had been unaware of the change, but he did not relent.

When my colleagues at work heard what had happened, they suggested to appeal to the traffic court judge. "Explain that you're only here for a summer job. He may waive the fine," suggested one. I followed his advice and went to court a few days later.

Once it was my turn, I pleaded "guilty with explanation." When I delivered my excuse of not being aware of the speed limit change, the judge did not look sympathetic. I heard a voice behind me as he was about to fine me. "Your honor, may I speak on behalf of this man?"

I turned around and recognized the police officer I had helped a few weeks earlier at the trailer park. The judge agreed, and the officer told him about the trailer park incident.

"Well, we don't want Mr. Besser to have bad memories of our city," said the judge as he changed my violation to a warning. "Next time, think carefully before you pass a police car," he added. I thanked the police officer and left happily without a blemish on my driving record.



An article taken from a Colorado Springs newspaper.

The summer of 1965 brought an unusual amount of rain to Colorado. Flash floods gushed down the canyons, and rivers overflowed their beds. Part of the four-lane highway between Denver and Colorado Springs was washed away. The small creek that passed through our trailer park rose to an alarming level, coming close to flooding the area. For the first time in my life, I witnessed the destructive power of water. It left a lasting impression on me, and I decided never to live in a potential flood zone again. Fortunately, my trailer was not affected.

My last year at CU, 1965-66, looked promising. I had leadership positions in the student government and three honorary societies. My cumulative 3.58 GPA virtually assured graduation with honors. Our soccer team had elected me to be their captain. The U.S. economy was booming, and company interviewers swarmed our campus. I felt confident that I would find a good engineering job after graduation.

Although I was grateful to Canada for allowing me to immigrate there in 1956, I planned to settle in the United States after graduation. My student visa would expire once my studies ended, but I could remain working in the United States for 18 months under the "Practical

Training Program⁵.” Hewlett Packard, headquartered in California, was my desired destination after graduation. Once employed at HP, the company could request a permanent visa and a Green Card for me from the INS — I hoped.

Seeing the large number of companies offering campus interviews, I decided to talk with as many firms as possible, beginning in the fall. That way, I would have lots of practice before the HP interview I planned for the following spring.

After preparing a résumé, I signed up for interviews with 20 companies in the fall and another 20 the following spring. In addition to HP, I selected different industries, ranging from long-established giants such as General Electric, U.S. Steel, IBM, and Continental Oil to new high-tech companies like Texas Instruments, Varian, AT&T, and Motorola. In addition, for variety, I added firms like Hallmark Cards, Lever Brothers, and Boeing.

Good news reached me from Hungary. The Communist government granted a general amnesty to all those who left the country illegally in 1956. I immediately applied for a Canadian passport and planned to visit Budapest the following summer after graduation. When my passport arrived, the package included a warning. It stated, “Canada will protect its naturalized citizens while they visit foreign countries, *except when they are within the borders of their country of origin.*” Reading the italicized clause concerned me. *Would the Hungarian officials still remember my mischief with the personnel records at our factory in 1956? Could I end up in jail?* The note with the passport made it clear that I would be on my own if I were in trouble in Hungary.

One of the Hungarian-American newspapers carried a timely article on this subject. A reporter traveled to Hungary and asked the authorities, “Does the amnesty guarantee safety to every visiting former Hungarian, regardless of what offense they may have committed during the revolution?”

The government official would not give a straight answer. “Not everyone will receive visas to enter Hungary. Those who receive one don’t have to worry,” he said. “They’ll be welcomed on their return—unless they do something illegal during their stay.” He had no other comment.

That diplomatic answer sounded like the government might refuse entry visas to some of the revolutionaries rather than arrest them for what they had done. The reporter also added that Hungary needed Western currency. If only half of the 200,000 who had escaped to the West in 1956 returned to visit their country, they would generate significant tourist revenues.

After reading the article, I applied for a Hungarian visa. It took several months, but I finally received it. The Party had either forgiven my “sins” or lost the records. I began planning for a two-week stay. My mother was equally excited to hear about my plan. It had been almost ten years since we had seen each other.

More good news came from my sister. She was expecting their first child the following summer. I promised her I would stop in Montreal for a short visit on my return from Hungary.

My campus job interviews progressed exceptionally well. The combined Engineering-Business curriculum with its extra coursework paid off. Nearly all the companies that talked with me at CU followed up with all expenses paid invitations to visit their facilities.

⁵ This program is still in existence under the name of Optional Practical Training (OPT).

In most cases, trips to visit a company would require taking two days off from school, but I did not think that would cause any problem. On the first day of a typical interview trip, I would fly to the nearest airport and check into a hotel. The following day, someone from the company would meet me for breakfast and take me to the plant for the interviews. At the conclusion, they usually provided a little tour of the neighborhood before taking me back to the airport.

Among others, perhaps the most interesting experience of these trips occurred during my visit to Texas Instruments (TI) in Dallas. I was somewhat leery of going to the city where President Kennedy had been killed. Still, after hearing that TI was one of the world leaders in high-tech transistor manufacturing, I agreed to visit the company.

At the plant, the personnel representative introduced me to my host for the day—a man whose head was not much above the level of my waist. “Mr. Kitchen is one of our engineering managers,” the administrator told me. “He’ll spend the day with you, determining what part of our operation would best fit you.”

Mr. Kitchen walked me back to his work area. His desk and chair were just the right size for him, but he offered me a regular chair. We sat in the middle of a large office section, separated from others by only low partitions. He explained that very few employees at Texas Instruments had private offices. “The open environment helps to find someone when needed.” He smiled and added, “Unless they are as little as I am.”

At the beginning of our conversation, I was highly uncomfortable. *Is this a setup to see how I behave under unusual circumstances? Is he a real manager or just an actor who is testing me?*

As he talked about the company, its products, and the structure of its R&D department, I began to relax. He sounded like a very knowledgeable engineer. He asked many questions regarding my previous experience. I liked him and, by lunchtime, had begun to consider TI a possible workplace.

During the afternoon, I spent time with several of his colleagues who worked in different departments. They showed me the various steps of semiconductor manufacturing and testing. Mr. Kitchen reappeared at the end of the day. “Our director of marketing would also like to talk with you. Would you be able to stay in Dallas overnight?”

I agreed. He told me we would have dinner at a Texas-style steak house, but first, we would stop by his house to pick up his wife. Once in his car, I saw that his feet could not reach the foot pedals and that all the controls were mounted on the steering wheel. Inside his house, I felt like Gulliver in Lilliput. With a few exceptions, everything was about one-half of the standard size. His charming wife was a couple of inches shorter.

During our ride to the restaurant, they explained the culture of the “Little People,” as they called themselves. Well over 100,000 of them lived in the United States at that time. They belonged to various organizations and led active social lives. Their children sometimes inherit their short stature but can also be of standard size.

After parking the car, we walked into the narrow hallway of the steak house and stopped at a set of Dutch doors. Shortly after, the maitre d’ appeared on the other side. “Dinner for one?” he asked, looking at me.

“No, there’re three of us,” I replied.

“Are they still parking the car?”

“No. They’re here.”

“Where?”

“Right here,” I said, pointing downward.

The man looked confused for a moment but stepped forward and peeked down over the top of the Dutch doors. Then he saw my two companions.

I will never forget the expression on his face. He stood there for a moment in shock. After he regained his composure, he led us to our table. Mr. Kitchen ordered a massive steak for me. That was only the second time I had tried one, and it was delicious—nothing like the first one I’d had in Montreal.

The following day, my interview continued with TI’s marketing group. Their job descriptions also sounded very interesting. I concluded that I would work in engineering for a few years and then transfer to marketing. I added TI to my list of potential employers.

Back in school, halfway through the semester, our landlady suddenly passed away. By that time, Dick and I had become very fond of her and felt genuinely saddened by her death. Her son, who inherited the house, decided to sell it. We moved into another apartment about two miles away from the campus, ending the convenience of having short walks to our classes.

Proximity to campus mattered less to me during this time, anyway. Since I had begun pursuing interviews nationwide, I missed classes regularly. I enjoyed traveling and seeing how the various companies operated so much that I was willing to let my grades slip. In most courses, the difference between receiving an A or a B depended on handing in all the homework. Therefore, I focused on studying enough for B’s and skipped the homework.

My travels also prevented me from the daily soccer practices, but I did my best to be there for all games. Our soccer team’s long-standing undefeated record ended when we lost a non-league match to Denver University. Knowing that we had two games scheduled for the weekend, our coach had spared most of the first-team players for the league game on Friday. I was not there to witness our defeat by the DU team, heavily reinforced by Norwegian skiers. Two days later, fired up by our loss, we traveled to Fort Collins to play against Colorado State University.

We played well and had a commanding 4-0 lead by the middle of the first half. Then, CSU substituted and brought in several football players. They began to play rough, injuring two of our forwards. The referee lost control over the game and did not throw out the fouling CSU players. During a close battle to control the ball during the middle of the second half, the CSU center kicked my leg hard behind the shin guard. I fell, and my leg did not feel right when I stood up, so I signaled for a substitute. Limping to the side, I sat and massaged my aching leg. After winning the game 6-3 and returning to Boulder, an X-ray showed bad news: I had fractured the fibula of my left leg.

The next day, the doctors placed a walking cast on my left leg. I used crutches for a few days and then could walk without support. The cast stayed on my leg for six weeks. My only consolation was finding out that the CSU player who had kicked me so viciously had received a suspension for the rest of the soccer season.

Although the walking cast slowed me, I continued the interview trips. By the end of the first semester, I had garnered 15 job offers, but I was still unwilling to make a final decision until I visited HP in the spring. Because I traveled so much, I mainly earned Bs in the first semester,

and my grade average dropped somewhat. However, it still looked like I could graduate with honors.



The memorable CSU game that sidelined me for the rest of the soccer season. That was the last time I played on CU's team.

In 1966, under the presidency of Lyndon Johnson, the Vietnam War escalated. The war did not affect me personally because I was a Canadian citizen on a student visa. Many of my classmates, however, faced the draft after receiving their degrees. The demand for engineers in the United States increased even more. During the second semester, I continued signing up for additional interviews. The professors allowed me to make up the classes I had missed during the trips—except in one course.

The exception was the Semiconductor Material Science course taught by Professor K. When the term started, he announced an unusual way of deciding when to give us an unannounced pop quiz. "Statistical probability is very important in our subject," he began. "At the beginning of each class, I'll throw a pair of dice on the floor. If the sum of the two comes to seven⁶, I will give you a quiz. Those tests will determine a significant part of your grade."

I tried to be funny. "It's not fair. Those are your dice, and you make the throw. Let us do that," I suggested.

"Fine. That will be your task," he agreed promptly.

For the next three weeks, my throws never came up to seven. The professor was surprised and began to eye me suspiciously. Then, I was away for an interview, and the classmate who took over my role threw the unlucky number. The class had a quiz. After I came back, my luck resumed. The professor had me toss the dice backward against the wall. Still, I never rolled a seven. Finally, he lost his patience and said, "I don't know how you do it, but you must be cheating." He took over the task for the rest of the course. After that, the occurrences of pop quizzes followed the expectations of probability. Because I traveled so much, I missed several

⁶ Seven has the highest probability of being rolled (a one in six chance), while two and twelve have the lowest (each has only a one in 36 chance).

of his tests, and Professor K. did not let me take them later. I was not too concerned. Even if I received a C in that course, it could not hurt me—it was my attitude. I continued traveling.

On one of the trips, I visited two companies, Motorola and U.S. Steel. I observed an interesting contrast between their management teams. The gray-haired U.S. Steel managers, immaculately dressed in dark business suits, told me about their two-year rotational new employee training program. Only after the initial 24-month period would they decide where I would work. At Motorola, most managers were in their late 20s or early 30s. They dressed informally. The company grew rapidly, and the expansion created advancement opportunities for young people within a few years. Motorola took me to lunch in their bustling, noisy cafeteria, where the managers mingled with other employees. In contrast, with the U.S. Steel managers, we ate at a quiet, prestigious club in downtown Chicago. During that meal, I had wondered how long it would take me to reach management ranks. I preferred Motorola's style of operation.

My last two job interviews took me to Palo Alto, California, to see Varian and Hewlett Packard's Microwave Division. After receiving a good review from the Colorado Springs group of HP, I assumed that their California interview would be just a formality. It did not turn out that way.

The first man, from HP Personnel, was amiable. He asked about my trip and college life and complimented me on my school achievements. I expected to receive a job offer from him right there. Instead, he turned me over to a second man, T.D., who sat at a small conference table in the middle of an open work area.

T.D. was a short man with a booming voice. After our introduction, he looked at my résumé and asked questions. "What do you know about S-parameters?"

"I don't know what they are," I replied quietly.

"Oh, you don't know," he bellowed. "Do you know how to solve flow-diagrams?"

I lowered myself on the chair and admitted, "No, I don't."

He frowned and, in his loud voice, asked two or three more questions about microwave technology. I had no idea about those, either. My chance of working for HP seemed to be vanishing.

"I see you had two semesters of electromagnetic field theory. Haven't you learned anything about microwaves?" he asked impatiently. People around us began to stare at me.

"I know how FM radios work," was my hopeful answer.

"OK, tell me about that."

I grabbed that last chance and explained the difference between AM and FM broadcasts. Drawing on my technical high school experience, I drew a block diagram of an FM radio. After I began to talk about the radio's circuitry, he was satisfied. "Although we need to teach you about microwaves, I feel that you'll be able to pick it up quickly," he told me. After shaking my hand, he turned me over to the third person of his team.

During the next half hour, his colleague took me for a plant tour. Then he had me talk with three more people: one in the research and development group, one in the production area, and finally, one in marketing. The last person took me back to Personnel, where I learned a job offer would be mailed to me the next day. My new dream would come true—I would live in California and work for HP!

Back in Boulder, I received HP's letter a few days later. I would be a project engineer at a monthly salary of \$850. The company promised to pay all my relocation expenses and local hotel accommodation until I found a suitable living arrangement. As we agreed, I would report to work in late June after returning from my trip to Hungary.

In today's economy, it sounds incredible, but counting HP's, I received over 30 offers from companies nationwide. I wrote and politely replied to everyone, explaining that I could not turn down the combination of HP's work environment and California living.

I was in heaven. Only a few weeks remained until graduation. After my long-anticipated trip to Hungary, an exciting job awaited me. I was not even going to attend the graduation ceremonies. In my haste to see my mother again, I planned to leave for Hungary the day after my last final.

Near the end of the school year, I received several honors. In the Outstanding Engineer of the Year competition, the engineering students voted me to become one of the three finalists. Shortly after, the Colorado Engineering Council selected me as the winner. I was also named one of the 20 Pacesetters of the University's 17,000 students, based on "Leadership, character, service to the University, and academic excellence." That came with the distinction of being included in *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges*. At a fancy ceremony, the mayor of Boulder handed each of the Pacesetters the award and a key to the city. My Pacesetter citation read:

Les Besser, a native of Hungary with a 3.5 grade average in Electrical Engineering and Business Administration, has held memberships in Sigma Tau, Eta Kappa Nu, Delta Sigma Pi, Tau Beta Pi, and the IEEE. The former Hungarian Junior and Canadian Interprovincial 440-yard hurdles champion Besser also captained the CU soccer team.

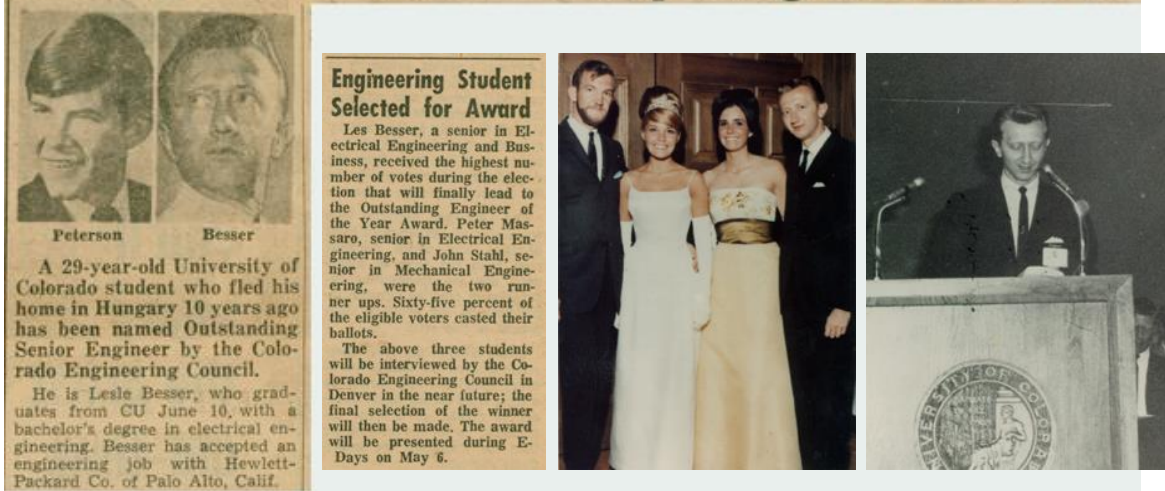
Being active in student government provided several benefits. Interviewing the Queen of the Engineers Ball candidates was one of them. In addition to the interview, the five committee members could take the top five contestants to the ball. My date, the daughter of a Denver socialite, was the first runner-up. I proudly danced with her at the ball held at a country club. When the ball ended, I drove her back to the sorority house where she lived. She wanted me to stop the car about three blocks from the house. "Let's walk from here," she said. I was surprised because it was raining outside. After we parted, the reality hit me—she did not want her sorority sisters to see her stepping out of my 20-year-old car!

Something unexpected happened, as I thought I was on top of the world. Two weeks before the final exams, the secretary of the EE Department office called me. "Professor K. has already turned in the expected grades for the semester⁷, and he plans to flunk you," she told me.

Her news struck me like a lightning bolt. I had already accepted a job with HP and paid for my flight to Hungary. If I failed that required course, I would not graduate. *What can I do?*

⁷ The department head wanted advance notice of the students who were to graduate that semester.

Hungarian Named Top Engineer at CU



Left: Two articles from the Boulder newspapers. Center: A picture taken at the Engineers Ball. Right: Accepting the Outstanding Engineer Award.

My pride did not allow me to go begging to the professor. It would probably not have helped anyway because he could quickly point out all my missed tests. Instead, I dropped everything else and began studying hard for that course's final exam. My guardian angel probably came to my rescue again because I received one of the top scores on the final. Professor K changed my grade to a D. It was nothing to brag about, but I passed his course! However, I missed graduating with honors by one-tenth of a point.

Shortly before I left for Hungary, a *Denver Post* reporter interviewed me and wrote an excellent article about my background. The photo that appeared in the article showed me with my mentor professor, Dr. Wicks, in the lab.

Computer dating on campus began about a month before I graduated. The student newspaper published a lengthy personality questionnaire and, for two dollars, offered to match a person with three highly compatible dates. With my background in engineering, I trusted computers and sent in the completed form with the money. During the busy weeks of May, I completely forgot about the service. Only when my forwarded mail reached me in California a few weeks later did I learn what I had missed. The dating program had sent me the names of three "like-minded" girls. After looking at their photos in the college yearbook and learning that one of them was our Homecoming Queen, I wished I had waited another week before taking my trip.

During the early years of my childhood, while Pista's family was raising me, my mother could only visit me sporadically. She always took me to play in Budapest's *Városliget* (City Park), where she would buy a large pretzel to share. On one of those occasions, I promised her, "When I grow up and become rich, we'll come here in our car, and *each of us* will have a whole pretzel!" Remembering that promise, I wanted a car during my visit, but renting one in Eastern Europe would not be easy. I decided to fly to Vienna, pick up a rental car at the airport, and drive to Hungary. Arriving in a Western car would also impress everyone who knew me.



PROFESSOR HELPS — Prof. Platt Wicks, left, of the University of Colorado electrical engineering department and Leslie Besser, this year's "Outstanding Senior Engineer" at CU, examine circuits of an oscilloscope amplifier. Besser, who will graduate

June 10, will be concerned with similar circuitry in his new job with the Hewlett-Packard Co., Palo Alto, Calif. Besser, a Hungarian refugee, attributes Wicks' interest in him as being instrumental in his ability to complete his studies at CU.

Professor Wicks, my CU mentor, had been like a father to me. I stayed in touch with him after graduation until he passed away in 1977.

Visiting my homeland

Although the Denver-Vienna flight included two stops during the overnight trip, I did not feel tired. After picking up a Ford Taurus from AVIS, I sped toward the Hungarian border 65 kilometers (40 miles) away.

The guard let me pass when I reached the Austrian border without stopping. On the Hungarian side, several cars ahead of me waited for clearance. I saw border guards armed with submachine guns walking around those cars.

Suddenly, I lost my courage and considered turning around. I remembered the recurring dreams I had experienced after escaping from Hungary. The basic theme was always the same: I would illegally sneak back to Hungary, only to find myself amid another revolution. In my dreams, I always asked myself how I could have been so foolish as to return.

I tried to calm my nerves. *There will not be another revolution. The Hungarians learned the hard way that they could not defeat the Red Army. This time is different. I am going back with a legal visa.* I continued to inch forward until the Hungarian guard halted me.

"*Paß bitte,*" (Passport please) he said sternly in German, seeing my car's Austrian license plate. I handed my passport and visa to him while speaking Hungarian. He became friendlier

and looked through my documents. “I see you are one of the fifty-sixers⁸,” was his following comment. “What brings you back this time?”

“I haven’t seen my mother for ten years. I also want to eat some real Hungarian food.”

He laughed and asked if I was bringing any gifts with me. Hearing that I had only small items, he took the documents into the guardhouse. A few minutes later, he reappeared and handed back my papers. “Drive carefully and remember to register at the district police station within 48 hours,” were his parting comments.⁹ He lifted the border gate and waved me through. I sighed with relief and quickly drove away.

A four-lane highway on the Hungarian side was partially completed. Although famished and some roadside restaurants emitted tempting aromas, I was not about to stop. In a few hours, I reached the outskirts of Budapest. Excitedly, I missed a detour sign and drove into a section of the road under construction. A police officer stopped me.

I made the mistake of talking to him in Hungarian. He likely would have let me go if he had thought that I was a foreigner. Instead, he told me I had to pay a fine of 100 *forint*. I had no Hungarian money and asked if I could pay with U.S. dollars. “It’s illegal for Hungarians to handle Western currency,” he informed me sternly. “You must first exchange your money and pay the fine in *forints*.” He gave me the address of a Budapest district police station and instructed me to hand the money to “Sergeant Balko.” I promised to comply the following day.

A little shaken by the incident, I drove carefully to my mother’s apartment building. Traffic was relatively light, mostly busses and streetcars. The few passenger cars on the streets were small and noisy. The mufflers of the Soviet-made Ladas and East German Trabants spewed stinky, smoky fumes. Compared to American store windows, the ones in Budapest looked bare. However, the sidewalks were clean, and I saw no beggars.

Finally, I reached the place where I had lived for 14 years. A camouflage-painted van with a communication antenna mounted on its top was parked in front of the apartment building. Seeing the military vehicle in the civilian neighborhood alarmed me. *Is someone waiting here to spy on me?*

I stopped behind the vehicle and observed it for some time. Then, a soldier came out of the building, waved to someone looking through an open window, climbed into the van, and drove away. Relieved, I took my suitcases and walked up to our apartment. Mother heard my knocking and opened the door with tears running down her cheeks. We hugged each other for a long while. Then she pulled me to the kitchen table, where I could smell one of my favorite meals—stuffed cabbage. The table was already set for two.

I was shocked to see how much her appearance had changed. She had not mailed me any pictures, so I still carried a mental image of her from 1956. She appeared to have aged 20 years during my ten-year absence.

Other than her looks, everything else seemed the same in the apartment, except that now she had a small television in the living room. Before I could open my bags, she had me sit at

⁸ One of the questions in the Hungarian visa stated, “If you have ever been a citizen of Hungary, when did you leave the country?” My answer, “November 1956,” made it obvious that I was one of the illegal escapees.

⁹ Residence registration was a legal requirement for all Hungarians and foreign visitors.

the table and served me a large portion of the meal. She also opened a beer bottle and poured it for us both. "Eat, my son," she encouraged me. There was no need to tell me twice.

Her appearance might have changed, but her cooking tasted just as good as before. I stuffed myself and listened to her quick summary of the past years. Life had not been easy for her. Hearing the hard times she had faced, I was overwhelmed by guilt for having left her behind. She probably read my mind because she changed the subject and told me how proud she was to have a college graduate son. That had been beyond her wildest dreams. Hearing that from her made me feel somewhat better.

We chatted the rest of the evening while she gave me slices of my favorite dessert, *dobos-torta* (a multilayer cake with hard caramel topping.) Eventually, I could not keep my eyes open. We said good night to each other and prepared to retire. The two students renting the living room spaces were away for summer vacations, so I could sleep on my old familiar sofa.

The following day, I exchanged money and registered my stay at the local police station. When the officer in charge heard that I had been directed to pay the fine to a specific policeman at another station on the Buda side, he became curious and made a phone call to inquire. I was in the room during the lengthy call and watched him shake his head in disbelief. When he finished, he turned to me. "There was a misunderstanding," he said while tearing up my citation. "You don't need to pay anything." I suspected some illegal activity and concluded that Montreal was not the only city with crooked police.

Mother reminded me that Cousin Pista was eager to see me. Since their marriage five years earlier, the young couple had shared a three-bedroom apartment with the wife's parents and her married brother's family. Pista and his wife, Kuki, had two children, ages two and three. Altogether, three couples and four children squeezed into an apartment with one bathroom and a small kitchen. The grandparents had been living in the apartment since the late 1930s. When their two children married, like many others in war-torn Budapest, they moved in with the parents and raised their babies there.

In the evening, carrying the large Colorado University yearbook and some small presents, I went to see them. After an emotional reunion, Pista introduced his "American cousin" to the family. Then he said, "Tell us about America."

"Wait!" interrupted his wife. She jumped up, closed the windows facing the street, and pulled down the shades. "There is a military installation across the street," she explained. "They may have listening devices." Suddenly, I realized I was behind the Iron Curtain, where overhearing a conversation contrary to the Party's philosophy could lead to trouble. Although the thick walls assured privacy, we kept our voices low.

We talked late into the night, long after the children went to sleep, even though all the adults had to work the following day. Pista and Kuki also had to drop off the kids at the free daycare centers.

As I was leaving, Pista walked me to my car. He revealed that he also wanted to go when I planned to escape from Hungary in 1956. His girlfriend, now his wife, would not leave without her parents, and they did not want to risk being caught. We renewed our promises to stay in touch despite the physical distance separating us. We agreed to meet on Sunday for a day trip to Lake Balaton.



Left: A photo of my mother taken during the winter before my visit. Center: Pista and Kuki in their apartment. Right: Their two children, aged three and two.

A few days later, I drove Mother to the City Park. Fulfilling my promise to her in my early years, I bought two pretzels and handed her one. When I asked if she remembered my promise, she did not. After I repeated it to her, she began to cry. It was a precious moment for both of us.

From the park, we drove to the top of Mount Gellért and stepped out of the car at a viewpoint. I was chatting with Mother while taking an 8-mm movie of Budapest's panorama, with the Danube separating the city's two sides. It was a clear, sunny day, perfect for capturing the views.

A Trabant pulled up next to our car, and two Hungarians emerged to admire my rented Ford. "Look at this nice Western-made car," exclaimed one. "We couldn't own anything like that in this darn Communist system. Am I right?" he asked, turning toward me.

I immediately suspected he might be setting me up to say something incriminating. "I'm sorry, but we're just leaving," I replied, rushing my mother to our car. The man looked perplexed and said something to his friend. They stared at me as I pulled out of the parking place. They might have meant no harm, but I did not want to take any chance of getting in trouble.

Although I spent most of my time in Hungary with Mother, I met with some former track teammates and coaches who had not left the country after the revolution. We enjoyed recalling the experiences we had had during our running days. Most of the ones I met wished they had also escaped in 1956.

My mother told me that a few weeks earlier, she had received a letter from an elderly aunt who lived in a small village. "When I had you out of wedlock, most of my family shunned me. Now, Aunt Manci wants me to visit her," she said. "Could we go there in your car?"

I had not met her aunt, and visiting a small village was not particularly appealing. However, to make Mother happy, I agreed. Because only a relatively small number of people had telephones, we had no easy way to announce our visit. We just took off for the journey the following Sunday, hoping the aunt would be at home to see us.



Left: Picture of Budapest, taken from Mount Gellért. Five bridges over the Danube link the two sides, Buda and Pest. Right: I was taking the movie from the top of the rail when the two men approached us. My mother was standing behind.

Aunt Manci welcomed us with open arms. She was skinny and wore a country woman's customary black Sunday outfit. Her face was wrinkled, and her happy smile revealed many missing teeth. After seating us at an outdoor table, she served meats and bread and urged us to eat. I was not bashful and helped myself to the delicious sausages, bacon, and home-baked bread.

The appearance of a foreign car in the village was highly unusual. News of an American visitor spread rapidly. Within a short time, curious neighbors surrounded the Ford. Their children were bolder and came into the backyard. They sat politely and watched every move we made. I felt like I was on a stage.

The aunt told us she had always loved my mother, but her husband had forbidden contact with the "outcast of the family." After the husband passed away, she located Mother and wanted to make up for the missing time. "I have TB and probably don't have too long to live," she confided to us, coughing frequently. "I had to see my favorite niece before I go."

She was sweet, and I felt very affectionate toward her when we left. It was like meeting a grandmother I had never seen. She wanted us to stay overnight, but I only had two more days left in my visit. We wished her all the best and drove back to Budapest.

The last day of my stay came too quickly. To extend our time together as long as possible, Mother suggested we drive together in my car to the last permitted city near the border.¹⁰ From there, she would return to Budapest by train while I continued to Vienna.

We were quiet at the beginning of the ride, knowing we would soon be separated again. When we finally started talking, I promised to visit again. I told her I would look into the possibility of her coming to California. I asked if she would consider living there permanently. "If I were your age, yes," she replied. "But starting life again in a foreign country would be too difficult at my age. As long as I can see you and Éva at times, I'll be happy."

¹⁰ Only the local residents and visitors with special permits were allowed to be within the 10-km-wide Western border zone.

In the city of Győr, I walked her to the train station. We said tearful goodbyes and parted. With a heavy heart, I waited until the train pulled out and returned to the car. Within a half hour, I arrived at the heavily fortified border area.

Leaving Hungary was not as easy as entering. Heavy guardrails protected the road. Border patrol officers toting submachine guns swarmed the area. When I reached the first checkpoint, a guard asked for my passport and visa and took the documents to the guard station. A few minutes later, he returned with two other guards. “Where is your mother?” he asked.

“She is on the train back to Budapest.” I wondered if they had been tracking me.

“Leave your keys in the car and step into the station,” the guard commanded in an official tone.

I hesitated for a moment. *Were my recurring dreams more than nightmares—possibly premonitions? How can I escape now?*

I realized I had no choice but to comply. Crashing through the two sets of gates seemed improbable. Even if I could pass the first one, the guards on the other side could easily cut me down. I remembered that shooting someone during an escape attempt led to promotions for the shooters. They would not hesitate to open fire. I resigned myself to my fate and stepped out of the car. The guard led me into a small room in the station and told me to wait.

I watched the guards inspect my car from the room's small window. One used a pole with a mirror to check the car's undercarriage. Another took my suitcase out of the trunk, but instead of opening it, he climbed inside the trunk. Next, he scrutinized the inside of the car, trying to remove the seats. Then it dawned on me—they were looking for my mother. Someone in her Budapest apartment building possibly had seen us leaving together and thought I might try to smuggle her out of the country.

After the fruitless search ended, they let me go. I felt safe again after passing through the second border gate. The Austrian guard looked at my passport briefly, and I was soon on my way to the Vienna airport. Within a few hours, I boarded a Lufthansa flight and headed to Frankfurt.



Chapter 6: California—Here I Come

With a scheduled stop in Montreal, the Lufthansa 707 jet to San Francisco took off three hours late. The delayed departure worried me because I had planned to spend time with my sister at the Montreal airport. Booking my return flight with a layover in Montreal would have cost several hundred dollars more. The cost-free alternative was to see each other during the scheduled four-hour stopover.

When I expressed my concern about the delay to the flight attendant, she assured me the departure from Montreal would also be pushed forward. Hearing this good news calmed me, and I slept during most of the seven-hour-long transatlantic flight.

Upon our arrival, I inquired again how long the plane would stay on the ground. “We’ll be there for three hours,” the flight attendant told me. “But watch the departure information board for changes if we can leave earlier to compensate for part of the delays.”

In 1966, airports did not have jetways. As I began walking down the stairs from the plane, I was surprised to see my nine-month-old sister and my brother-in-law, Péter, standing near the base of the stairs next to a Jeep. After greeting me, Péter explained that he knew one of the immigration officers at the airport. When he learned about the flight delay, Péter contacted the officer, who allowed us to meet on the tarmac. “This will eliminate the time wasted by the arrival and re-boarding processes,” my brother-in-law told me.

The officer drove us to a deserted runway. “You have nearly three hours to chat,” he told us. “I’ll be hunting for rabbits.” He strolled away.

We had much to tell each other. I recounted my experiences and observations from Hungary. Their conversation focused on the arrival of their first child, expected to happen within a few days. “You’ll be an uncle soon,” said Éva. “If it’s a boy, we’ll name him after you.” I was flattered.

Time passed quickly, and the immigration officer reappeared carrying two long-eared creatures. “We’ll have rabbit stew tonight,” he said proudly. “I’ll check on your flight now.”

He turned on the two-way radio in the vehicle and began to speak in French. After a short time, he looked at us in alarm. “Your plane is ready to depart,” he said to me. He started the Jeep and raced back toward the terminal. When we arrived at the 707, the ramp stairs had already been pulled away, and the engines were running. Apart from my passport and ticket, all my belongings were on the plane.

“What happens now?” I asked in a panic.

The officer picked up the phone again. After a short argument with someone at the other end, he turned to me. “You’re in luck. The pilot agreed to let you on.”

In a few minutes, two men hurriedly rolled the stairs to the plane. The front door opened, and an attendant rushed me in. The door slammed behind me as I ran to my seat amidst the angry glares of the other passengers. As I buckled my seatbelt, the plane taxied to the runway and took off.

It was an uncomfortably close call. I learned later that the excitement had affected my sister as well. She had gone into labor on the way home from the airport! My niece Sandy was born that evening.

One of the CU engineering students who had a summer job with a firm in San Carlos had driven my car to California. Shortly after my arrival, he met me at the Palo Alto hotel where I stayed. The old Chrysler had handled the long trip well, and I was glad to have it back. The next day, I reported to work at Hewlett Packard's Microwave Division.

The attractive receptionist in Building 5 greeted me with a friendly smile. "So, you're the new engineer I've read about," she said. Seeing my astonishment, she handed me a copy of the HP monthly publication *Measure* and pointed out the article "Hungarian Freedom Fighter Joins HP." The write-up included the photo that had appeared in the *Denver Post* a month earlier. "Looks like you'll need no introduction," she added while calling Personnel. I thought of explaining to her that I had not played an insignificant role in the revolution but decided to do that later when she was not on duty. It would be a good excuse to ask her out.

While waiting, I recalled the article in the Dubuque newspaper that introduced me to the students after my disastrous "record-setting" SAT. The HP publication described me in a far more favorable light. I kept the magazine so I could send the article to my mother.

A member of the Personnel Department asked me to complete various personnel records. He also informed me that the San Jose newspaper wanted to interview me later that week. I took the news with mixed emotions and hoped the reporter would not be aware of how poorly I did in my job interview at HP.

My new supervisor, Harley Halverson, took me around the lab and introduced me to everyone working in the spectrum analyzer section. They had already read the article and welcomed me as a member of the "HP Family." Harley gave me a large amount of reading material on microwave test instruments. He also assigned an application engineer to teach me how to use an essential graphical design tool—The Smith Chart. As it turned out, my tutor, Julius Botka, was another Hungarian—a graduate of the same technical high school I had attended. We became good friends, and he introduced me to some practical aspects of microwave engineering. During the next two weeks, I realized how little I knew about the subject and was grateful to HP for allowing me to learn state-of-the-art technology. I thanked God for the privilege of working for such a great company.

Following Personnel's recommendations, I visited several nearby apartment complexes after work. I found a furnished one-bedroom unit, only ten minutes from HP, for a monthly rent of \$150. The two-building complex had a large, beautifully landscaped courtyard with two swimming pools surrounded by bikini-clad, sunbathing tenants. It was the nicest place I had ever lived.

I learned that one of the high-level HP managers was dating the receptionist, so I gave up asking her out. Encouraged by the leads I had received from the computer dating service at CU, I decided to try a dating service again. I filled out a questionnaire attached to the *Palo Alto Times* and mailed it to their office. This time, the price was higher—\$5.

For exercise, I joined the soccer team of a local ethnic German group called the Harmony Club. Most of the players were German-Americans. We played weekly games against other teams up and down the San Francisco Peninsula. In addition, fierce volleyball games took place in the HP atriums at lunchtime. At the end of each game, the winning team stayed on to face a new challenger. Along with the other players, I quickly gulped lunch in the cafeteria and rushed to the volleyball court. If my team lost, I spent the rest of my lunch hour playing

Ping-Pong at one of the many tables surrounding the courts. Because my former health club experience had taught me that membership prices were negotiable, I also managed to join a gym at a discounted price.

After my second week at HP, Harley assigned me my first design project. Instead of working on the internal circuitry of the next-generation Spectrum Analyzer under development, my task was to design an external stand-alone component called a “low-noise impedance converter preamplifier.” My project would enable microwave professionals to probe the performance of circuits and systems without interfering with their operation.

Some of the reading material Harley had given me covered the principles of low-noise concepts, but I still did not know how to start the circuit design. My colleagues told me that an expert on that subject worked in Building 1. “He is Dutch and a very friendly person,” one of the engineers told me. “Go and ask him for advice.”

HP had open labs instead of private offices, so I quickly found the Dutchman's cubicle. His desk was covered with books and papers, and his workbench was messy. He was in the midst of some computations, using a slide rule¹. I walked away without wanting to disrupt his work, but he had already noticed my presence.

“May I help you?” he asked. He spoke with an interesting accent.

“I heard that you’re a world expert on low-noise design. I am new and don’t know how to start my project.”

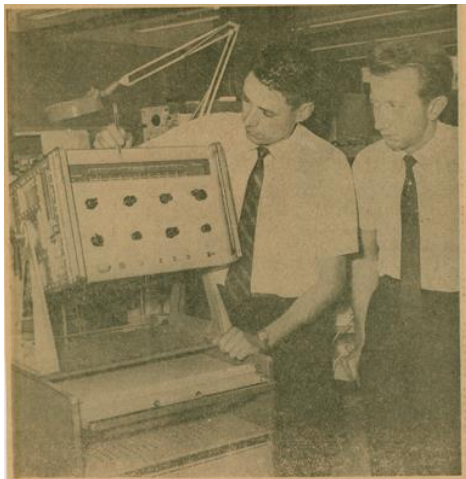
“Pull up a chair, and let’s talk about it.” He shoved the books aside to make space on his desk. “Tell me what you have to design.”

He listened patiently and then began to tutor me. We met every morning for several days until he felt I was ready to start working on my project. I appreciated his assistance and promised myself that when I became more experienced, I would reach out to anyone who needed help. Later, I learned that such comradeship was one of the many keys to HP's success.

My former CU schoolmate bought the old Chrysler and returned it to Colorado after his summer job. Many young single guys drove Mustangs, but I wanted to be different and bought a red Plymouth Barracuda. Next on my list was finding a girlfriend. The dating bureau sent me five new contacts every month, keeping me busy socially.

Near the end of the summer, HP had its annual picnic — where the company executives, including Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard, grilled steaks for the employees. We played various games, including a challenge soccer match. To express our gratitude to the referee—our lab manager, Paul Ely—after the game, the players wrestled him to the ground and sprayed him with whipped cream. I enjoyed all the activities. Being part of the festive environment reinforced my conviction that HP was the best company in the world.

¹ Before electronic calculators became available, engineers commonly used logarithm-based slide rules to simplify scientific computations.



FREEDOM FIGHTER — Leslie Besser (right), a Hungarian freedom fighter 10 years ago, now works with supervisor Harley Halverson, 381 Gaadalupe Dr., Los Altos, designing Hewlett-Packard calibrating equipment to maintain operation of the free world's sophisticated electronic gear. * * *



ON THE WAY to the second victory at Microwave picnic, the aggressive offense of the "World All Stars" launches another attack. The weary British defense, although fighting bravely, was unable to match the speed and skill of the attackers. From left to right: LES BESSER (W), BRUNO RICCOBONI (W), JACK MAGRI (B), DAN DERBY (B), KARL GYLLENBERG (W), DIETER (W), and HOWARD HARRINGTON (B). Source: photos by John Blodgett



Upper left: The article in the *San Jose Mercury* showed me with my supervisor. (Note how design engineers dressed for work in the 1960s.) My first design project was an external component for the \$9,500 Spectrum Analyzer shown in the picture. **Upper right:** Dribbling the ball while playing on the World All Stars team at the company picnic. **Lower left:** Spraying the helpless referee. **Lower right:** The result for his skills and impartiality during the game. He was a good sport and did not fire any of us.

By the end of the year, things were going exceptionally well for me. I switched to a nicer apartment and completely furnished it. My job was challenging, and I loved the friendly, pleasant work environment. Taking advantage of the constant flow of computer-dating contacts, I kept meeting as many women as possible. Life could not have been better!

In the early part of 1967, I developed a cough. When it did not go away after several weeks, I saw a doctor in Palo Alto. "Nothing to worry about," he told me and prescribed a cough suppressant.

I took the medication for two weeks, but the cough persisted. It was particularly bothersome during soccer games, so I returned to the doctor. This time, he was away, so I saw his partner, Dr. Hecker, a pulmonary specialist. After his examination, he sent me to have a chest X-ray. Looking at the films, he said, "You may have pneumonia or something worse. Let's perform a sputum test!"

I could not imagine what could be worse than pneumonia. The doctor had me sit in his office when the test results returned. "I'm afraid you have tuberculosis," he said somberly. "It requires immediate clinical treatment."

"There must be a mistake," I protested. "I am in top physical shape. How could I possibly have TB?"

“This is not something you picked up recently. I feel that you probably picked up TB germs several months ago,” the doctor explained. “Because you had been exposed to TB in your childhood, your body was more susceptible to the disease,” he added.

I suddenly remembered visiting Aunt Mancini in Hungary the previous summer. She had had severe coughing spells while we visited with her. Mother wrote me later that Aunt Mancini had been hospitalized with TB in the autumn and passed away a few weeks later. Possibly, my resistance had been weakened by the hectic lifestyle during my last year in school, and I had contracted the sickness from her.

When Doctor Hecker heard that I lived by myself, he said that I would need around-the-clock care and would have to be admitted to a TB clinic and begin taking heavy dosages of antibiotics immediately. The nearest available facility was the Santa Clara Valley Medical Center in San Jose. California law required me to stay there for at least three months. He explained that before I could be released, two consecutive monthly sputum tests would have to show negative results. Every sample is cultured² for a month before going through a microscopic test for TB bacteria. Additionally, TB tests were recommended for all those I had been in close contact with during the past six months.

The news hit me hard. *How will this affect my job? How can I pay for my apartment, the furniture, the car, and the hospital expenses if I don't work?* I sat there, not knowing what to do next.

While collecting my thoughts, the doctor called Valley Med and found space for me. Next, he asked me to go home and make all my arrangements by telephone to minimize personal contact. Still overwhelmed by the news, I drove back to my apartment.

My supervisor at HP was extremely understanding and promised to investigate my insurance coverage. As for my project, he would review its priority with management. My apartment building manager was also very cooperative. He agreed to store my furniture, so I would not have to pay rent during my hospitalization. I contacted the girls I had been dating and urged them to take TB skin tests. They were all shocked and promised to proceed with the testing. After all the phone calls, I packed a suitcase with the items recommended by the doctor and drove to the hospital. I parked my car in the lot and left it, not knowing when I would be driving again. With a tight feeling in my stomach, I entered the place that would be my home for an undetermined length of time.

The Admissions Office clerk informed me that the paperwork had already been completed and awaited my signature. “Your HP health insurance entitles you to a semi-private room,” he told me. “However, all those rooms in the TB ward are occupied. Until space becomes available, you’ll share a large room with several others.” He turned me over to an orderly who led me to the isolation ward on the top floor of the building.

One of the nurses took me to a room with about a dozen beds. She pointed to the one next to the door. “Here is where you’ll stay. Please change to your pajamas, and I’ll return to collect your street clothes.” With that, she left the room. At this point, my morale probably reached the lowest level in my life.

² The samples are kept in a moist, heated environment to encourage bacterial growth.

I looked around and saw a group of men wearing identical striped pajamas in the far corner. They were sitting on the last two beds, and their conversation had stopped when the nurse led me in. As I began to undress, one of them approached me. "Are you from San Quentin?" he asked.

The unusual question surprised me. "No," I replied, shaking my head.

"From Folsom?"

"No."

"Which prison did you come from?"

"I didn't come from a prison."

Now, it was his turn to be surprised. "Then, why are you here?" he asked suspiciously.

"I've been coughing, and the doctor told me I have TB."

He went back to the group to pass on the information. The men stayed together and did not attempt to make any more contact with me. When the nurse returned to take my clothes away, I walked with her outside and told her the strange questions the man had asked me. She laughed. "They all came from California prisons and probably think you are here to spy on them," she explained. "You need to convince them that you're a real patient."

I took her advice and joined the group. After a lengthy questioning session, they finally believed I was there to be treated. I also learned from them that convicts received a thorough medical exam before being admitted to prison in California. If TB was found, the convict was sent to an isolation clinic like the one where we were staying.

The facility was not guarded. "Can't you escape from here?" I asked.

"Why should we?" replied one. "The food is good, and we don't have to pay rent."

His answer made sense.

Later that day, I met the doctor in charge. He looked at my chart and the X-ray and prescribed antibiotics, both orally and by injection, three times a day. They would take another sputum test at the end of each 30 days. "If the antibiotics work, you could be out of here in three months," he said encouragingly.

"After my discharge, how soon can I begin to play soccer?"

"I'm afraid that part of your life has ended," he said firmly. "You'll never be able to do that kind of physical activity in the future."

I was devastated! It was bad enough to share a room with a group of convicts. Now, I had been told that I would never play soccer again. That was too much to bear. I skipped dinner and stayed in bed, trying to figure out what I had done to deserve such a fate.

After the first few days, I adjusted to the slow lifestyle of the TB ward. There was not much to do, so I began teaching some patients basic math with the doctor's permission. Surprisingly, most convicts were eager to learn what they had missed in school. Perhaps they wanted to know how to increase the odds of their gambling or the success of their next robbery, but I did not question their motives. The classes kept me occupied.

My HP supervisor called with good news—management agreed to place a hold on my project until I returned to work. Even though I had worked for the company only seven months, they extended my paid sick leave beyond the regular period. Their generous action further increased my loyalty to them.

Visitors were allowed in the ward, but the patients had to wear protective masks in their presence. The girl I had been dating came to see me almost every day, to the envy of my roommates. At the end of the first month, a patient in a double room expired, and I was first in line to take his place. Although it was eerie to sleep in the bed where someone had recently died, the added privacy justified the move. I had strange dreams the first night there but slept without problems afterward. I continued giving the math classes to the others during the day, but my new roommate was another non-felon. It was nice not having to listen to prison stories every night.



Left: A photo taken in the semiprivate room that had a nice view of San Jose.

Right: Wearing the required mask during a visit from my girlfriend.

At the end of the second month of my stay, the result of the first sputum test I had taken in the hospital came back negative. The same day, I provided the second sample. Thirty days later, it was returned, also negative. As a result, 91 days after my admission, the doctors discharged me. I still had to take antibiotics and have regular chest X-rays for the next 18 months, but I could return to everyday life!

Someone had already rented my former apartment, but the building manager arranged for me to move into a brand-new building across the street. I was glad to be surrounded by my furniture again. Although I did not tell the doctors, I began to play soccer again two months later without any noticeable effect.

My colleagues at HP arranged a welcome-back party on my return. The company nurse administered my daily antibiotic shots, and I eagerly resumed work on my project. The only part of microwave circuit design I did not enjoy was the tedious, time-consuming manual computations. Two of the engineers in our lab had written a small computer program that eliminated most of the manual calculations. I grabbed the opportunity to apply the program to my project through a commercial timeshare computing system. Our lab manager supported the effort and allowed us unlimited computer time. Within a few weeks, my prototype showed promising results. The product, however, never reached the production phase in its original printed circuit board form.

Hewlett Packard's space-age and military defense products required smaller, lighter electronic components. Hybrid integrated circuit technology replaced the bulky conventional printed circuit boards (PCBs). This new approach required careful handling of each circuit under a high-power microscope using tweezers and hypodermic needles. I was fortunate to be one of the pioneers working in that area. Our division constructed a new hybrid integrated

circuit facility³, and management decided to have my project be one of the pilot projects built in that form.

Of course, the new technology introduced new problems. The conventional PCB construction allowed convenient tweaking and tuning to obtain the desired performance if needed. A costly and time-consuming redesign was required if the hybrid circuit did not work as expected. Quick and accurate initial design of the hybrid circuits became critically important.

HP's newly developed test equipment also became an invaluable tool for microwave circuit designers. The Network Analyzer allowed engineers to characterize the circuit components accurately. Using that instrument, we developed a new approach: the "S-Parameter⁴ Design."

Our Research and Development lab manager, Paul Ely, faced a significant decision. Should HP keep this revolutionary new approach secret or make it available to others? He recognized that circuit designers would have to purchase HP test instruments to use the new technique, so he shared it with the public. History proved his choice was the right one. The Microwave Division led HP's strong growth of highly profitable products for nearly two decades. The factory could hardly keep filling orders for the Network Analyzer product line.

I became a lifetime advocate of the new form of computer-aided high-frequency circuit design and submitted a paper about it to the WESCON Technical Conference. It was accepted, and I gave my first technical presentation to a large audience in San Francisco. At the conference, the editor of a technical magazine asked me to write an article for his publication. After my article was published in June 1968, recruiters hounded me. By then, however, I had become a dedicated HP employee and refused to consider leaving the company. I turned down every offer for job interviews elsewhere.

The new design technique developed at HP sparked an interest among engineers who were eager to hear more about it. The Washington D.C. chapter of IEEE⁵ invited me to give a presentation to their members. My previous talk at WESCON focused on the computer-aided approach. This time, I wanted to show the details of the graphical manipulations required before using the computer. With the assistance of our graphic artists, I created colored transparencies for an overhead projector and prepared for the presentation. After giving a dry run of my talk to our group at work, I confidently headed to our nation's capital. As an HP employee flying farther than the Mississippi River, I enjoyed the privileges of the first-class cabin, including a pair of nice slippers.

The local IEEE chairman and the other officers met me on my arrival at the airport. They took me to dinner at the fanciest Chinese restaurant I had ever seen. The walls were decorated with beautiful Oriental paintings, and the seats had velvet covers. The chopsticks, decorated with gold Chinese characters, felt like ivory. The food was delicious, and I washed it down with sweet plum wine. Next, my eyes focused on the chopsticks, and I could not resist

³ Some of the circuit elements were integrated on top of a thin ceramic or sapphire substrate while others were added in miniature "chip" form. This approach was different from monolithic integrated circuits, where all the components were constructed on a semiconductor chip.

⁴ A new form of electrical measurement, based on travelling waves instead of conventional voltage and current relations.

⁵ Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the largest professional organization in the world.

the temptation; I slipped them into my pocket before we left the restaurant. Nobody noticed, and we headed to The Johns Hopkins University for my talk. Over 100 people were gathered in the large auditorium to hear me. I quickly reviewed my lecture material one more time. Everything was in order. The chairman introduced me to the audience. I placed my first transparency on the overhead projector and turned its switch on.

Swoosh! A sudden flash preceded the projector light's failure. The bulb had burned out. I moved the bulb selector to the alternative position, only to learn that the spare bulb was either missing or defective. One of the local engineers rushed to help, but he could not find additional bulbs. The maintenance men had already gone for the evening. The search for another projector proved fruitless. The only alternative display they could find was a flipchart and colored marking pens.

I did my best to illustrate my points by drawing on the flipchart, but most people could not see the essential details. My carefully prepared and rehearsed presentation turned into a disaster! The IEEE officers apologized profusely, but it did not make me feel better. That simple little two-dollar light bulb had ruined everything.

Back at HP the next day, I was telling my Chinese-American cubicle mate about the awful experience in Washington. While unpacking my briefcase, I came across the chopsticks and asked him to translate the writing. "If you take this from the restaurant, something bad will happen to you," he read.

With my superstitious nature, I immediately suspected that the projector problem could have been prevented by not taking those chopsticks. To avoid more bad luck, I shipped them back to the restaurant with an apologetic explanation.

A few weeks later, I received a package from the restaurant. Inside, there were two sets of chopsticks and a letter. "Your friend tricked you with the translation," it stated. "The script was a quotation from Confucius. Please use the enclosed chopsticks with our compliments!"

When I showed the note to my colleague, he laughed at my gullibility. He had already shared his prank with other engineers in the lab. I was the target of their good-natured teasing during coffee breaks for some time.

My Tennis Career

Julius, my young Hungarian colleague at HP, said he had signed up to learn tennis. "Why don't you come with me?" he asked. "We could then play regularly."

I had always considered tennis and golf to be the games of the upper class. I remember seeing tennis courts in some of the sports complexes of Budapest, but I never knew anyone who played the game. In California, on the other hand, we had convenient free public tennis courts. If I learned to play, it would be fun and good exercise. I thought I was a good Ping-Pong player in Hungary, so picking up tennis should be easy.

I was utterly wrong. Controlling the ball with the larger racket was not so simple. It took Julius and me a month until we could regularly hit the ball back and forth over the net more than two or three times. However, we did not give up. In about six months, we reached a level where the game became enjoyable. We also teamed up and played doubles against some of the other beginners. To our surprise, we beat most of them.

One day, an announcement was posted at the public course where we played: “Champagne Doubles Tournament at the Los Altos Country Club.” Participants did not have to be members of the club. Entries were available at three levels: A, B, and C. The first three teams in each group would receive prizes.

Julius and I signed up immediately. We figured that doing well at the “A” level would be hopeless. The only question was whether to have a good showing in the “B” category or to win at the “C” level. We decided on the latter and practiced hard for two weeks.

On the tournament day, our opponents showed up dressed in immaculate white tennis attire while we wore T-shirts and running shorts. They carried multiple rackets in fancy sports bags and carefully measured the net’s height. We sensed trouble, and our intuition was correct. We finished dead last in the lowest category—ending our aspirations of playing at Wimbledon.

Being Part of the HP Family

Our lab manager needed a new secretary. One interviewee, a charming young blonde woman, quickly caught the attention of several of us single engineers. We all hoped she would be selected. To express our desire, one of the guys slipped a note to our manager. “Hire her! We’ll teach her to type.”

To our delight, she ended up with the job. However, she could already type faster and more accurately than us. Unfortunately for us, she had a steady boyfriend. Still, her pleasant mannerisms and charming Southern dialect captivated us, and we enjoyed her becoming part of our lab.

In 1968, Hewlett Packard requested a permanent U.S. immigration visa for me. After the INS interview, I was sent for a thorough physical exam. When the doctor in charge found out that I had been hospitalized with TB, red flags went up. He wanted to quarantine me to find out if it was safe to allow me to stay in the country. HP hired a well-known immigration lawyer who lobbied on my behalf. After a few months of nerve-wracking legal maneuvering, my Green Card finally came through. At that point, I became a legal U.S. resident and had to register for the Selective Service. Fortunately, my advanced age of 32 saved me from being drafted into the unpopular Vietnam War.

As time passed, I learned what separated HP from most corporations. Although the company had been formed to produce innovative engineering products, it was also concerned about its employees and the local community. Hewlett and Packard aimed to hire the right people and immediately give them all the responsibility they could handle. Layoffs were unknown at HP. We all shared in the company’s profits. During an economic slowdown, we would take a day off without pay every second week. Most of us went to work on those days anyway.

Engineers could use company facilities, equipment, and even electronic components to pursue their hobbies. If they did the work on their own time, the company felt that designing

something different helped them to widen their horizons⁶. Several of us built our stereo equipment with the help of HP's largess. We exchanged design ideas and compared our products. Our lab truly had a family feeling, and I loved being part of the group.

Another interesting aspect of the organization was HP's trust in its employees. The company's site was not fenced in. The side doors of our lab stayed unlocked 24 hours a day, leaving the expensive parts and testing equipment unguarded. No one checked what people brought in or took out. The honor system worked perfectly.

HP applied for a security clearance for me because our microwave test equipment had been installed in most of the U.S. Navy's ships. After I completed a lengthy, detailed questionnaire, two officers from Naval Intelligence came to interview me at work.

For about an hour, they asked questions about my past, including my childhood in Hungary. They wanted to know what relatives I had behind the Iron Curtain and how frequently I communicated with them. The fact that I was still single at 32 also raised a touchy question. "Do you date women?" asked one of them diplomatically.

I assured them that I was not homosexual, but they wanted to have the names of girlfriends I had had in the past. To convince them, I turned over the list of women I had received from the computer dating service. They were satisfied and promised to come back for a second interview.

Two weeks later, they returned. "You didn't tell us that your mother came to visit you in the United States," said one of them as soon as we sat in the conference room.

"She has never come to the U.S.," I replied.

The men looked in their notebooks. "Think again because we have different information," said the second officer. Both stared at me, waiting for my answer.

The men sounded so convincing that I wondered if my mother had managed to come over without telling me. I had heard once about a Hungarian American man whose wife had passed away, and he had invited women from Hungary to come and look after him. *Would my mother do that without telling my sister and me?* But I had been receiving her weekly mail with Hungarian postmarks, so I rejected that possibility.

I did my best to convince the officers that my mother had not been in the U.S. I also answered their other questions. After our discussion, they told me that I would learn the outcome of the investigation sometime later. However, I was unlikely to receive a Secret Clearance because I was not a U.S. citizen and still had relatives in the Eastern Bloc.

They were right. A few weeks later, the U.S. State Department rejected my application without explanation. I was unhappy because the job of visiting naval vessels to assist with installing our equipment sounded interesting to me. However, HP did not want to pursue the idea any longer. I was puzzled by where and how the Intelligence Officers had received the incorrect information that my mother had visited the United States. I never did find a plausible explanation.

⁶ Stephen Wozniak worked at HP a few years later and used the company's parts to build his first personal computer. He showed his design to Hewlett who did not show any interest in it. After Wozniak left HP, he teamed up with Steve Jobs to launch their own company.

The End of My Dating Game

After nearly two years of frequent dating and changing girlfriends, I became tired of the dating game. Most of my colleagues were happily married. The idea of settling down and having children gradually appealed to me. I particularly missed celebrating holiday festivities with a family and decided to focus on meeting women who had the potential to become a lifetime partner. Interestingly, I did not have to wait long once my outlook changed.

Joyce Bogart, a 23-year-old woman on the latest computer dating list I had received, sounded lively and bubbly over the telephone. She was a native Californian, and her parents lived nearby. For the past few years, she has worked as a secretary for one of the electronics companies in Sunnyvale. I felt an immediate attraction to her during our first meeting. After dating her for about three months, I liked her even more. Then, as we parted one evening, she dropped a bombshell. "I interviewed last summer with World Airways, and they just offered me a job as a flight attendant," she told me. "The only problem is, I need to move to Los Angeles."

I did not know how to respond without sounding unhappy. *How could she consider moving away when I formulate my plans with her?* Thinking about my next step kept me awake for a long time that night.

I went to work the following day, still wondering what to do. Steve Adam, a fellow Hungarian and microwave engineer in my division, noticed my long face. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"My girlfriend has a job offer to take her to Los Angeles. I was hoping to marry her one day."

"Do you love her? Is she right for you?"

"Yes."

"I have a simple solution for you. Come with me."

We walked to his car, and he drove us to downtown Los Altos. He led me into the Paragon Jewelers store. "This is a friend of mine," he said, introducing me to the owner. "He wants to propose to his girlfriend and needs a ring."

Hearing what Steve said stunned me, but the jeweler did not hesitate. He pulled out a large tray of rings from one of the glass cases. "What kind do you think she would like?"

There was no easy way to back out now. After a while, with the help of my friend, I selected a nice diamond ring. Once that was accomplished, I felt relieved, thanked Steve, and began considering how I should ask Joyce to marry me. I wanted to follow the Hungarian custom and ask her parents' permission first. I decided to do so that evening.

The parents lived about 20 minutes away from my apartment. I had met them only once before, but when I phoned from work, her mother told me I would be welcome to stop by to see them. With the ring in my pocket, I drove over after supper.

I could tell that they were curious about the purpose of my visit. After a few minutes of courteous chitchat, I asked her father for the honor of marrying his daughter. A short silence followed my request.

"You've only known her for a few months," replied Joyce's father. "Don't you think waiting a little longer would be a good idea?"

I explained why I did not want to wait. Their daughter's bubbling enthusiasm and my down-to-earth stability were complementary. We had similar interests. I felt we had what it would take to be happily married. If she were to move to Los Angeles, it would be hard for us to maintain our relationship. If we were engaged, I assumed she would turn down the World Airways job. We could be married the following year if we still felt the same way about each other. I was 32 years old, and she was nine years younger, but the age difference did not bother us.

They were surprised I had not discussed my plan with their daughter first. "Are you sure she wants to marry you?" asked the mother. "If she loves you, why would she consider a move to Los Angeles?"

Her questions were logical, and I did not have a good answer. I told them that, in many ways, I was old-fashioned and felt it was proper to ask for the parents' approval first. Once they agreed, then I would propose to her.

I could tell they liked what I said. We talked about our fundamental beliefs, financial outlook, and family issues for quite some time. The three of us shared similar views in most areas. The only topic they showed concern about was religion. They were members of the Methodist Church and attended services faithfully. I went to Catholic mass, but only on major holidays. I assured them that I would give my wife complete freedom to decide the religious upbringing of their future grandchildren. After hearing that, they blessed me and wished me good luck in my next step.

The day before Thanksgiving, 1968, I handed Joyce a small present: a Hungarian bowl I had bought during my trip to Budapest. The ring was Scotch-taped to its bottom. She admired the hand-painted colors and turned over the bowl to see the trademark stamp. There, she saw the ring.

"Will you be my wife?" I asked.

She was so astonished that she almost dropped the bowl. "Of course I will," she replied after overcoming her surprise. She removed the ring, put it on her finger, and kissed me.

The following February, a Methodist minister married us in a ceremony held in her parents' home in Atherton. We stayed in the Mountain View apartment I had rented earlier, although Joyce was eager to have us buy a house.

My father-in-law, a Standard Oil (now Chevron) executive, gave us a two-week all-expenses-paid Hawaiian vacation for a wedding present. He arranged an ideal tourist guide for us: Sarge Kahanamoku, a younger brother of the two-time Olympic champion swimmer Duke Kahanamoku.

Sarge was a well-known personality in the islands. Most Hawaiians knew him. He introduced us to all the beautiful sights, taught us to scuba dive, and took us for a ride in an outrigger canoe. We watched the sun dipping into the Pacific Ocean during dinners. Hearing the gentle native music while smelling the fragrance of Hawaiian flowers created an unforgettable experience. Even now, when I look back, those two weeks represent my most memorable vacation. I was grateful to my in-laws for such a wonderful honeymoon gift.

When I returned to work from Hawaii, I found a package containing a nice silver bowl. The attached card had a short note: "Congratulations and Best Wishes, Bill." I did not know which

Bill it came from, so I went to the closest one, Bill Nelson, to ask if the present had come from him.

“No, it wasn’t I,” he laughed. I went to ask the next Bill. Same response. Finally, the third one was kind enough to tell me, “It came from THE Bill—Bill Hewlett.” He explained that every employee received one after their marriage. Other gifts, such as baby blankets, were given to those with their first child. Those were only two ways HP showed how much it valued its employees.



Left: Tasting the cake. Right: Receiving the marriage certificate from the 94-year-old Dr. Luftborrow. Our marriage was the last one he performed because he passed away soon after.

Beginning to Teach Courses

One of the engineering section managers, Doug Gray, and I developed a one-day seminar on the new s-parameter-based high-frequency circuit design and began delivering it at various HP field offices nationwide. The course became extremely popular, and our sales force wanted to expand the coverage to Europe the following summer. After giving the overseas seminars, I planned to take time off and visit Hungary with my wife.

Many of my colleagues were working on advanced degrees at Stanford University. HP paid all the school expenses and allowed employees to take time off work for the classes. The campus was close to our Palo Alto facility, which was convenient for taking courses during the day. Stanford offered a program combining an engineering MS degree with an MBA. Because I had already taken the core business courses at CU, that program looked very attractive, and I applied to Stanford. Within a few days, the school turned me down.

I figured there must have been a mistake and made an appointment with the head of admissions. When I met the man, he pointed out that my grade average had dropped in my last year at CU, and I had received a “D” in an engineering course. “I am afraid that indicates you are not qualified for our graduate program,” he told me.

Telling him about my hectic traveling schedule during my senior year and the various awards I had received at CU did not change his mind. I went back to work and complained to our Personnel Manager. The next day, the Stanford administrator called me. “Against my better judgment, I will give you a chance to prove yourself. Come see me.”

With excitement, I rushed over to his office. “I’ll let you take a graduate-level course this summer,” he informed me. “You’re an experienced designer. Taking an electrical engineering course would be unfair, so I want you to take a math class.” He placed me in an 800-level math course on matrix theory. I was disappointed with his selection, but this was my only choice if I wanted to attend Stanford. The course began a few weeks later.

During the first class session, I felt like I was in a foreign country. All my classmates were Ph.D. candidates in math. They spoke a language that only occasionally had a few commonly used English words. After spending all my free time studying and reading references, I received a “B” in the course. As soon as the grades were available, I proudly marched to the Admissions Office to show my success.

The man looked at the grade slip. “In a graduate course, a ‘B’ means failure,” he announced with disdain. “Try another university where the requirements are lower.” With that, he dismissed me. I was extremely disappointed by his treatment, and it took me nearly 30 years to get my revenge⁷.

The University of Santa Clara had an “Early Bird” graduate program, but it was too late to apply for the fall semester. Classes were offered in the mornings, 7–9 a.m. They were less convenient than the Stanford program, but I had no alternative. I enrolled in the Santa Clara program to begin the following January.

When my project’s prototype phase was completed, I requested a transfer to our marketing department. The company sent me to Max Sacks International for a three-day course on sales techniques to be taught by the company founder. In contrast to my brief training at Vic Tanny’s gym, he showed us how to sell with integrity.

At the beginning of the course, Max handed each of us a small card. “Read through the sentence on the card,” he told us. “Then, go back a second time and count how many times you find the letter ‘F.’ Write down your results.”

I read the sentence,

FINISHED FILES ARE THE RESULT OF YEARS OF SCIENTIFIC STUDY COMBINED WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY YEARS.

Next, he asked how many Fs we found. We all agreed that there were three of them.

“You’re wrong. There are six Fs in that sentence,” he said. “Look again!”

He was right. Everyone in the class had missed the Fs in the three repetitions of the word “of.” It was embarrassing to make such a simple mistake.

“The first lesson of salesmanship is to find the hidden Fs in your customer,” he told us. “Before you begin to sell someone your product, find out as much as possible about that person. You need to know what their interests and needs are. Then you’ll have a much higher chance of closing the sale.”

⁷ In 1994, after I had already received my Ph.D. degree in electrical engineering and owned a successful international continuing education company, Stanford asked if I would teach short courses on their campus. I politely declined their request!

The course was fascinating. By the end, I realized what a vital part selling plays in our lives. Even if our work does not require us to sell a product or a service, we often need to “sell” ourselves to others. I considered technical sales a possible career path for myself sometime in the future. It would have been beneficial to have that course before working for Vic Tanny,

After returning to HP, I was assigned to work on introducing a newly developed test instrument. Preparing the marketing plan for the product was interesting and challenging.

However, a few weeks later, our division’s lab manager called me into a conference. “We have probably the world’s finest hybrid integrated microwave circuit facility. So far, all our products have gone into our test equipment,” he began. “We have encountered a potential large-volume component market where our technology could present a breakthrough. It is cable television!” Next, he came to the point. “A small hybrid microcircuit could replace a bulky component in the cable boxes. Please come back into engineering and develop that product. If we can do it at an acceptable price, Anaconda Cable TV Company will place a large order with us.”

Although I was enjoying my new marketing assignment, his request flattered me. Of all the capable people in our division, he had picked me for that important project. I agreed to his request and moved back into the lab. Within a few months, we had produced prototypes and received an order for 10,000 units. HP sent regular shipments to the cable television equipment manufacturer by the fall. To recognize my contribution, Anaconda presented me with a souvenir inscribed, “CENTURY CABLE TV AMPLIFIER, MADE ESPECIALLY FOR LES BESSER, COMMEMORATING THE INTRODUCTION OF MICROELECTRONICS IN THE CABLE TV INDUSTRY.” HP filed a patent for my circuit, and I received \$100 when the application was approved.

After working with computer-aided design (CAD) for some time, I realized that much of the expensive computer time was spent on mathematical matrix conversions⁸. I discussed the issue with Stanford professor Dr. Robert Newcomb at one of the IEEE meetings. He was a well-known circuit theory expert and thought there might be a more efficient way to handle the math. The two of us began to explore the subject. To my wife’s chagrin, we worked late nights for weeks in his office. The math course I had taken at Stanford proved very helpful in solving the complex matrix equations, although Professor Newcomb did most of the analytical work. When we finally reached a promising approach, I wrote a computer program in BASIC language to test the theory and compare the results against the HP program that was also written in BASIC but used the conventional simulation technique.

Our expectations were correct; the new method did help to speed up the analysis of high-frequency circuits. The professor did not want me to reveal the idea to anyone until our paper had been accepted for presentation at the IEEE International Conference on Communications (ICC), scheduled for San Francisco the following year.

⁸ The first-generation CAD programs required frequent conversions of mathematical forms to handle various types of circuit interconnections.



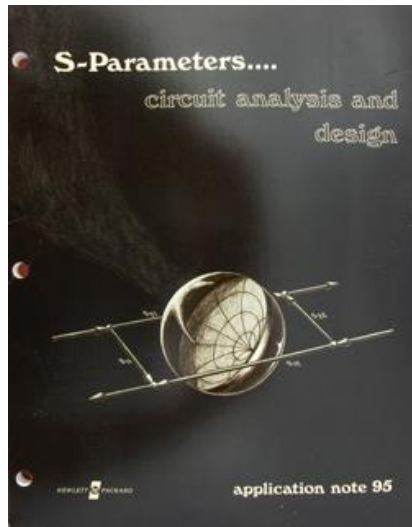
Left: I was comparing the measured results of the circuit with the computer-predicted simulation. The picture shows HP's first computer-controlled network analyzer. Right: The hybrid microcircuit, which I had designed, is shown here in a custom-designed gold-plated circular package, mounted on top of a printed circuit board. The integrated circuit was constructed on a 25-mil thick, 0.5" x 0.6" highly polished sapphire substrate.

My next step was to rewrite the program in FORTRAN. Because HP allowed us to use their facilities for personal projects, I did not hesitate to do that project at work during the evenings. In our lab, I could remotely access Stanford's computer for the work. With the results obtained by that program, and with the help of Professor Newcomb, I wrote a paper and submitted it to the ICC.

When the IEEE Circuit Theory Group's Bay Area chapter had its annual election of officers in 1969, Professor Newcomb nominated me. At the University of Colorado, I joined the IEEE as a student member but had not attended their meetings in California. To my surprise, most likely because I worked for such a high-caliber company, the members elected me. I began participating in the activities of the largest professional organization in the world and remained active in IEEE for about 40 years!

During the summer, the founder of the HP Lab division and a Director of HP, Barney Oliver⁹, decided to write a comprehensive handbook of electronic measurements and instrumentation. He asked me to contribute a section on high-frequency amplifier design. I felt honored that he had selected me for the task and dedicated several weekends to writing. HP also published articles on the new high-frequency circuit design in their Application Note series, including my magazine article, "Combine s parameters with time sharing." The AppNote became highly popular, and HP distributed thousands of copies worldwide. The publicity helped me to become more visible in our industry.

⁹ An interesting episode between Barney Oliver and Bill Hewlett took place in the HP Lab division. After HP introduced its first scientific desktop calculator, Hewlett commented to Oliver that he would really like to carry such a tool in his shirt pocket. Oliver measured Hewlett's pocket, and within a year the HP team developed a pocket calculator, the HP-35, to replace slide rules. The product turned out to be a huge success and an invaluable tool to design engineers.



Left: The flyer of our one-day high-frequency design seminar. When I provided my biography to our art department, I assumed that Stanford would accept me for their graduate studies. Center: Front cover of the popular HP Application Note. Right: The first page of my article's reprint in the AppNote.

Employment recruiters again began to hound me. Although I was not seriously considering leaving HP, I did agree to talk with Tektronix of Beaverton, Oregon. After an initial interview in the SF Bay area, the company flew my wife and me to their plant for secondary discussions. After the interviews, their VP of Engineering offered me a job and took us on a tour through a newly constructed housing development, where one of the beautiful model homes was priced at \$13,000! On our way home, my wife and I agreed that if the same opportunities had been available in Silicon Valley, I would have accepted the job offer and bought that house.

In the latter part of 1969, the manager of HP's Solid-State Division, John Attala, left the company. A few days later, he became the vice president and general manager of the newly formed Microwave and Optoelectronics Division of Fairchild Semiconductor. Several of his former HP colleagues followed him to Fairchild. I was unaware of their desertion. One weekend, Dr. John Moll, Fairchild Microwave's Director of Engineering and a former high-level staff member at HP, called me at home. "We're looking for an engineer to head our hybrid circuit development," he began. "Dr. Attala and I would like to show you a challenging opportunity at Fairchild."

I thanked him but explained that I was happy at HP and would not consider leaving. "I respect your loyalty, but we could offer you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," he countered. "Let's have lunch next week."

Although I had not met John Moll at HP, he was an icon in the semiconductor industry for co-inventing the first nonlinear transistor model. I figured talking with him would be no harm and agreed to meet in the executive cafeteria of Fairchild's headquarters in Mountain View.

Dr. Moll came in with another manager. They outlined the ambitious charter of their new division. In addition to developing new state-of-the-art microwave semiconductor devices and circuits, their plan included collision-avoidance radar for automobiles, a locator for downed aircraft, and two-way cable television communication systems. "You would be the key person to lead the cable TV product development," they explained while showing me the plans of an

80,000-square-foot facility under construction in the hills of Palo Alto. It all sounded very impressive.

“Let us introduce you to Dr. Attala,” said John Moll, seeing that I was wavering. “He’s been in a planning meeting with Dr. Hogan, but they should finish now.”

Lester Hogan came to Fairchild from Motorola earlier that year to revitalize the semiconductor operation. He brought a group of high-level executives, referred to in Silicon Valley as “Hogan’s Heroes.” The thought of meeting such famous people was too tempting to refuse. I agreed to go along.

At HP, only Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard had private offices. Dr. Attala’s huge office, monitored by an attractive secretary, was very imposing. We waited only a few minutes until he appeared.

John Attala was an Egyptian-born American with striking good looks, personal magnetism, and contagious enthusiasm. “I’ve heard about you and want you to join my team,” he greeted me. “I also loved working for HP, but our new group at Fairchild Microwave can do so much more for the world. That’s why so many of us from HP have come here.”

Dr. Attala briefly outlined his plans for the division. Then, he abruptly changed the subject. “What is your salary at HP?” he asked.

“One thousand two hundred dollars per month.”

He looked at a notepad on his desk. “We’ll pay you twice as much and also give you an option for one thousand shares of Fairchild stock,” he offered. “Your title will be Engineering Section Manager. How soon can you start?”

My head was buzzing. *Double my salary. Manage a group. Have a stock option.* I had heard about people at HP receiving options, but all those people were well-established managers.

Attala probably read my mind. “Fairchild’s stock price is currently in the low twenties. When our division’s new products are introduced, your stock will be worth two or three times more.”

All eyes focused on me. “Let me think about this, please,” I said.

“Of course,” said Dr. Attala. “Call John Moll when you’ve decided, but don’t wait too long!” We said goodbye, and I left Fairchild.

When my wife heard the gist of the interview, she became excited. “We could buy a house much sooner than we had planned,” was her first reaction. “At HP, it would take you years to receive that high a salary.”

She was right. At the same time, I was so attached to HP that it was hard to imagine working anywhere else. *How could I leave my project and the European seminar series planned for the following summer? What would all my colleagues think about my selling out to a higher bidder?*

I did not sleep well for several days, trying to make the right decision. The friends with whom I confidentially shared my dilemma unanimously suggested I seize the opportunity. Even my father-in-law, who had worked for Standard Oil Company for 25 years, recommended the change. He warned me, however, to handle my resignation tactfully. “HP is a great company, and you may decide to return there one day,” he advised me.

Finally, I made the big decision to leave the company. In a carefully worded letter, I explained the advancement opportunities the new job offered me. Although Fairchild had

pressed me to start there as soon as possible, in my letter, I promised to stay at HP for a month to ensure a smooth transfer of my project responsibilities. In addition, I offered to take a vacation from Fairchild during the upcoming summer to participate in HP's European seminars. My wife typed the letter, and I handed it to my supervisor the Monday after Thanksgiving Day.

He stared at me in disbelief momentarily and suggested we talk it over. "You have a good future at HP," he told me. "Why would you want to leave?"

Without stating Fairchild's salary offer, I replied that my mind was firmly made up. He shook his head and asked me not to discuss the matter with anyone. Then he went to talk to our division manager. I proceeded with my regular duties.

Before lunchtime, my supervisor returned and asked me to see the lab manager. Two section managers were also waiting for me in the conference area. The lab manager informed me I would soon be due for a salary increase. After completing my project, I could transfer back to marketing, where I could advance rapidly. "Our division is growing fast, and you could be given more responsibility soon," he explained. "Also, Fairchild has a different company culture. You wouldn't be as happy there as you are here."

He also added that it was not ethical to join a competitor, pointing out that Fairchild might want to go after HP's large CATV component business. We talked for a while, but I stuck with my decision. Then, he brought up something unexpected. "I told our marketing manager about your resignation. He mentioned seeing you one evening making copies of a computer printout. Do you have a copy of our CAD program's listing?"

Without going into details, I informed him that I had copied the PERT Chart of my microcircuit project. He did not look convinced but did not press the issue further. "It looks like I can't talk you out of what I feel is a big mistake," was his following statement. "In that case, you should leave HP immediately. Your supervisor will help you to gather your personal effects and escort you to Personnel. You'll be paid for the month you offered to work here."

His words dumbfounded me, and I asked if I had heard him right. When he repeated his instructions, I asked about my participation in the European seminars. "I appreciate your offer, but we'll find someone at HP to replace you." With that, he said goodbye to me without shaking my hand.

My coworkers stared at me as I boxed my books and belongings while my supervisor stood beside me. They were unaware of what was going on. Our Personnel Manager was already waiting for us in his work area. He asked me to sign some forms, handed me an entire month's salary check, and walked me out of the plant. After four years of working there, I was no longer part of the HP family. I suddenly felt like an orphan!

As I learned later, on that very same day, two high-level managers from our division, one from production and the other from marketing, had also resigned to join Fairchild. Several other people had already moved there from other HP divisions. It appeared to HP's management that Fairchild was systematically pirating key personnel from engineering, manufacturing, and marketing in an attempt to take away HP's new high-frequency microcircuit component market; later, rumors flowed that Bill Hewlett met Fairchild's CEO in a restaurant and protested the luring away of HP staff. Whether it was Fairchild's deliberate effort or not, as far as I recall, I was the last HP employee to join Fairchild Microwave.

Before the Fairchild hiring incidents, few people had quit HP. During my four years with the company, the Microwave Division frequently added new employees, but I could not recall anyone leaving. Naively, without knowing what a standard practice was when an employee left to work for a competitor, I had not expected an immediate termination after my resignation. I intended to stay for December and pass all relevant information about the important CATV project to someone else.

With hindsight, by revealing the software development I had worked on with Professor Newcomb, I could have prevented any suspicion that I had taken proprietary information from HP. In retrospect, I feel that not telling HP about our work has been one of the biggest mistakes of my life. Even though Fairchild's attorney assured me later that HP could not have had any claim to the ownership of the unique s-parameter algorithm, my action damaged my close relationships with some of my former colleagues. The only HP employees who liked me more were their sales engineers because as soon as I established my new group at Fairchild, I placed a large order of high-priced microwave test equipment.

In early 1970, when the IEEE ICC accepted my paper¹⁰, I sent a letter to my former lab manager at HP. I asked him to send someone to attend the presentation, where I discussed the details of our new simulation technique, but he disregarded my suggestion. If he had sent an HP employee to my presentation, it would have been clear to the company that our approach at Fairchild was revolutionarily different from the already published method used in HP's CAD program.



Dave Packard and Bill Hewlett, as I remember them from the 1960s. The image behind them is the “Smith Chart”, a frequently used microwave engineering tool.

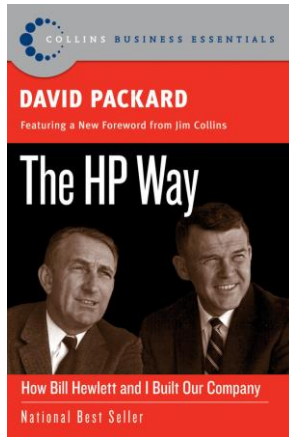
Overview of my employment with the Hewlett Packard Company

Without a doubt, one of the best decisions of my life was to seek and accept work with HP's microwave division. As I learned later, the division's primary goal was to hire “inventors” rather than “4.0 geniuses.” Although the company also hired theoretical-leaning geniuses for their advanced HP Labs, the microwave division wanted engineers “who knew which end of the soldering iron to pick up.” I always considered myself to be part of that group.

Initially, HP was a test instrument company. Its goal was “*To design and develop electronic measuring instruments and techniques.*” Its unique corporate philosophy, the “*HP*

¹⁰ Besser, L., “A Fast Computer Routine to Design High Frequency Circuits,” IEEE ICC Conference Digest, San Francisco, CA June 1970.

Way,” helped the company become one of the world's fastest-growing and most admired large companies.



Dave Packard’s best-seller book, described HP’s philosophy.

Although I knew very little about microwaves when I was hired, the company allowed me to learn on the job. Working in the microwave division introduced me to practical technical concepts and allowed me to become involved with computer-aided circuit design. For those advancements, I will always be immensely grateful to the founders and the management of the company.



In 1968, I was verifying the computer-simulated performance of a microwave amplifier using the HP Network Analyzer – a revolutionary new test equipment without competition for decades.

Chapter 7: No Longer Walking the HP Way

My new boss at Fairchild was pleased to hear HP's decision to terminate me immediately. "You can start working here tomorrow instead of waiting a month," he told me. "You can help me interview other engineers for your group."

Although I was eager to begin, my wife and I decided to take a week off. We drove to Lake Tahoe and spent a few days planning our next year. After coming home, we began to look for a house to buy. Fairchild's new plant was already under construction in Palo Alto, so we searched there and in Los Altos. Having lived in apartments my entire life, owning a house was a new concept for me. I had heard from my colleagues that homes frequently required repairs—something the apartment managers had always handled. However, being an engineer, I was confident I could do repairs myself.

The year 1970 was the busiest of my life. The Early-Bird graduate program at Santa Clara University ran courses from 7 to 9 a.m. I attended morning classes twice a week and went directly to work from there. Most of my classmates also held full-time engineering jobs in the Valley. We showed up in the classrooms sleepy-eyed and then rushed to work at the end of classes. It was not an easy schedule, but one advantage of the early start time was the ease of parking on the normally busy campus.

Our new Fairchild division employees were scattered among three temporary locations in Mountain View for several months. The building where I began work was quite spartan compared to HP's facilities—no cafeteria or library. We all looked forward to the completion of our new plant.

My first assignment in this no-frills environment was to design an inexpensive alternative to HP's thin-film hybrid cable TV amplifier. I was concerned about the low selling price targeted by the Fairchild marketing group. Generally, the price had not been an essential consideration in my former job. The strength of HP's Microwave Division lay in its production of unique, low-volume test equipment that had limited or no competition. The components' cost and manufacturing were secondary considerations because their products commanded high selling prices. Even though my HP cable TV amplifier was a high-volume product, it had no competition. So, the price could be set relatively high.

In contrast, Fairchild's expertise was high-volume, low-cost products. After seeing the mass-production semiconductor capabilities of the company, I felt confident about meeting the \$25 price goal for my project. To keep the cost low, I wanted to find an inexpensive package¹ for the circuit. The mass-produced TO-3 power transistor package looked suitable for my needs, but it had only two pins available for electrical connections—two less than the four I needed.

Asking around at Fairchild, I learned that Dr. L. of the Semiconductor Division was the company's packaging expert. I decided to ask his advice and drove to his plant. I located his office but found the area deserted. After a short wait, I saw a man walking toward the office. I stepped into his path and asked, "Are you Dr. L.?"

¹ The word "package" refers to the protective, sealed housing of the transistor chip circuitry.

“Yes, what do you want?”

“I’m new at Fairchild and...” was all I could say before he interrupted me.

“Do you have an appointment to see me?”

“No, but all I need is...”

“I don’t talk to anyone without an appointment,” he said, cutting me off again. “See my secretary!” He stepped into his office and slammed the door behind him.

Suddenly, I remembered my HP lab manager’s warning. *“Fairchild has a different company culture. You won’t be as happy there as you are here.”* He was right! Because most of the key employees of our new **Fairchild Microwave Division** had come from HP, they still behaved the “HP Way.” We all went out of our way to help each other. However, the first time I stepped out of our division’s boundaries, I discovered that cooperation did not exist at **Fairchild Semiconductor**. Eventually, on my own, I found a vendor who agreed to modify the standard package at a reasonable price.



Pictures show the top and bottom of an inexpensive standard TO-3 power transistor package. For my amplifier, I wanted two additional leads coming through the metal case, so the package had to be altered. Even though the package required a modification, its final cost was only a fraction of the custom-made package used by HP.

The next step was to write a CAD program to design high-frequency circuits. I added a user interface to our previously developed routine stored in Stanford’s computer and entered it into the General Electric (GE) Timeshare System. One unique feature I added was an extensive database to store the measured parameters of Fairchild’s microwave transistors. Marketing agreed to have the program available to designers to promote Fairchild’s transistors. I decided to name it SPEEDY to emphasize how fast the program operated.

In a short time, SPEEDY became popular worldwide. Circuit designers no longer had to rely on datasheets or characterize their microwave transistors as long as they used Fairchild’s devices. The company recognized the competitive advantage created by the program, and I received an additional stock option.

Finding experienced microwave circuit designers was extremely difficult. We could no longer recruit engineers from HP. Our management decided to look for bright young engineers and teach them computer-aided techniques. Two of the new hires came with interesting backgrounds.

One of them, a recent young emigrant from Romania, had no U.S. experience, but he sounded promising during the interview. We offered him a job and expected him to grab the opportunity immediately. To my surprise, he waited several weeks before accepting the offer. It took months before I finally learned why he had hesitated.

During a company dinner to celebrate the completion of our new building, he approached me carrying two glasses of wine. “Les, there is something I must confess to

you,” he began after toasting me. “When you offered me a job, I knew you were a Hungarian. You knew I was from Romania. I thought you wanted to hire me only so you could give me lots of trouble.”

His revelation at first surprised me. Then I realized how much ethnic hatred existed among the various Eastern European countries whose borders had changed frequently during and after the two World Wars. Fortunately, I had lived far away from those troublesome border zones. Other than disliking the Russians for imposing their political system on us, I did not have any reason to dislike other nationalities. I reassured Peter that I held no such ill feelings. He and I remain good friends to this day.

Professor Chan, Chairman of Santa Clara University’s EE department, recommended the other new employee. “One of my Ph.D. candidates is a giant,” he told me. “He is head and shoulders above all of my other students. Although he has no practical design experience, I’m sure he’ll learn fast. His name is Chi Hsieh. Talk with him.”

I called the student and arranged an interview for the next day. At the agreed time, our receptionist paged me. “Mr. Hsieh is here to see you.”

Eager to see the “giant,” I rushed to the entrance. The lobby was empty except for a young, small-framed boy sitting on one of the chairs. I assumed he was the son of an employee. “Where is Mr. Hsieh?” I asked the receptionist.

“Right there,” she replied, pointing to the young man.

Based on the boyish appearance of the applicant, I seriously questioned Professor Chan’s judgment. During the interview, however, my doubts quickly faded. Although he lacked knowledge about the latest microwave technology, the student had logical reasoning skills and a firm grasp of the basics. We hired him, and it did not take long to realize why his professor thought so highly of him. Chi picked up what had taken me months to learn at HP in mere weeks at Fairchild. He quickly became one of our most valuable design engineers.

Our new division faced unpleasant news after happily moving into our new Palo Alto facility. About a third of the new building extended into Los Altos Hills. That city, primarily a bedroom community, had strict building codes that Fairchild had violated.

Los Altos Hills did not allow manufacturing activities, and our semiconductor production facility happened to be on their side of the city line. Petitioning the city and offering to pay a fine to allow the operation to remain there did not help. A costly and time-consuming reshuffle of the work areas moved manufacturing to the Palo Alto side.

The next inspection also found that the building exceeded the Los Altos Hills’ height limitation by 18 inches. This was a more complex problem to overcome because we did not want to shave off the roof. Finally, following an outside consultant’s recommendation, the company ordered a large amount of soil to raise the ground level around the building on the Los Altos Hills side. Fortunately, our main entrance faced Palo Alto, so the front door remained unblocked.

About the same time this monumental “landscaping” project was going on, one of my colleagues asked me to coach kids’ soccer. The team was part of a California-based

organization called AYSO². I agreed, remembering how much I had enjoyed playing soccer. I thought it would be fun to coach and also welcomed the opportunity to get more exercise. Soccer was pretty new to the American sports scene, and his team of six- to seven-year-old boys and girls, the Panthers, had no idea how to play. In our first game, they all crowded around the ball, trying to kick it regardless of what direction the ball should go. Within a few months, they learned the basics, and the games became more enjoyable. I stayed on and coached for several years.

As if the weekends weren't busy enough with soccer games, I was part of a group of other local IEEE chapter officers who decided to organize Saturday design seminars for Bay Area engineers. We managed to secure the Stanford Linear Accelerator (SLAC) auditorium for one-day courses at no cost, except for the lunch provided by their cafeteria. We charged \$10 to IEEE members and \$20 to non-members and planned to set up scholarships from the revenues. The first course, entitled Computer-Aided Circuit Design, was an overwhelming success. Over 300 people attended the inexpensive continuing education program. We immediately made plans for follow-up courses.

**COMPUTER AIDED
CIRCUIT DESIGN:
THEORY AND APPLICATIONS**
November 14, 1970
Main Auditorium
Stanford Linear Accelerator
2575 Sand Hill Road
Palo Alto, California



COURSE SCHEDULE

Morning:

1. Topological techniques: K-tree approach and flow graphs. Comparative analysis. Chan
2. High frequency linear circuit analysis in the frequency domain using scattering parameters. Two-port techniques, stability. Besser
3. Time domain analysis. Non-linear circuits. Utilization of mini-computers. Fazarinc

Lunch: (at SLAC's cafeteria) Cost included in registration fee.

Afternoon:

4. S-plane analysis. Pole-zero patterns. Computer graphics. LISA (Linear Systems Analysis) and GSPAN (Graphics S-Plane Analysis) programs. Johnson

Afternoon (contingued)

5. Search strategies (optimization). Pattern, gradient, random, stochastic gradient, search techniques. User interaction. Hall

Break:

6. CAD workshop. On-line computer analysis and synthesis of circuits supplied by seminar participants. Hall

LECTURERS

Shu-Park Chan, Chairman, Department of Electrical Engineering, University of Santa Clara,
Les Besser, Project Manager, Fairchild Microwave and Optoelectronics Division,
Zwanko Fazarinc, Development Engineer, Hewlett Packard Laboratories,
Edward T. Johnson, CAD Project Leader, IBM Systems Development Division Laboratory,
Robert Hall, President, Dean Hall Associates

FEE

The fee for the course is \$10.00 for IEEE regular members, \$5.00 for student members and \$20.00 for non-members. The fee also includes the lunch at SLAC and the lecture notes to be handed out.

REGISTRATION

The enrollment for this course is limited. Therefore, persons interested in taking this course are urged to enroll early by completing and mailing the registration form below. Companies may enroll for any given number of individuals, supplying names later. *To ensure enrollment, individual names must be received before Nov. 1, 1970.* For additional applications, use separate sheet giving information requested on enrollment form.

INFORMATION

For additional information concerning the program, write or call:
Les Besser
Fairchild Microwave and Optoelectronics
423 National Avenue
Mountain View, Calif. 94040
Phone: (415) 962-2872

REGISTRATION FORM

(Should be received before November 1, 1970)

Mail to: Dale Nielsen
c/o IEEE San Francisco Section Office
Suite 2210
701 Welch Road
Palo Alto, California 94304

Enclosed is check (payable to San Francisco Circuit Theory Group) in the amount of \$_____ to cover the enrollment fee.

Name: _____
(please print full name)

Home Address: _____
(Street)

(City and State) (Zip)

Business Address: _____
(Street)

(City and State) (Zip)

Position or Title: _____

Business Phone: _____

IEEE Affiliation (Check One) Member
 Student Member
 Non-Member

IEEE Membership No.: _____

I have a circuit problem that I would like to have optimized at the seminar

NEXT SCHEDULED COURSE:

February 1971

Active Filters

Announcement of the 1970 highly successful one-day seminar on Computer Aided Circuit Design. The fee for IEEE members was \$10, including lunch!

² American Youth Soccer Organization, a group that advocated sportsmanship above all, specified that every child must play at least one half of each game, regardless of his or her skill level. Established in Los Angeles in 1964 with nine teams, today the organization has over 50,000 teams throughout the United States.

Serving lunch to such a large number of people took far more time than we had scheduled. The cafeteria manager could not find any way to speed up the process. Later, when I expressed my frustration about the slow service to my mother-in-law, Doris Bogart, she offered a surprising idea.

“Let my service league ladies (CAC) serve lunch to your group,” she suggested. “We’ll buy sandwiches and hand them out quickly. Your engineers can sit at the outside tables and eat in a nice, peaceful environment. Pay us the same as you paid SLAC.”

I liked the idea and agreed to try it at the next seminar, knowing that any profit they made would go toward a good cause. Her service league of volunteers had been formed several years ago to help jailed inmates’ families. The other IEEE officers also liked the idea.

My mother-in-law showed up with a group of ladies on the next course day. They handed out the lunch and the refreshments smoothly. The sandwiches were so large that most people took only half. Everyone was satisfied, and there were even leftovers. Mrs. Bogart’s group became the food provider for years to come. When other IEEE chapters heard about the success of our courses and formed their own, they also invited her group to serve their lunches. Thousands of engineers attended our chapter’s course series during the following years. We set up college scholarships from the revenues.

A New House

The real estate agent we had contacted earlier called us one evening. “Looks like I’ve found the perfect house for you,” she said. “Let me show it to you.”

A few days later, she drove us to the three-bedroom home on a third-acre parcel in a Los Altos cul-de-sac. The house was in good condition, with an appealing front yard. The property was listed at \$33,000. After my wife saw the blossoming fruit trees and flowers in the garden, she grabbed my hand. “I love this place. Let’s buy it.”

The idea of becoming a homeowner was still somewhat scary. “Let’s wait another year,” I replied. “I’m busy at Fairchild and settling into a big house will take even more work.”

“A year is a long time. We should bring our child home to a house instead of an apartment.”

It took me a few seconds to absorb her last statement. “Are you pregnant?”

“Yes! We’ll have our baby in August.”

I hugged her with excitement. “Of course, we’ll buy this house!” We offered \$30,000 to the seller and settled at \$31,000³.

Moving into the house required buying additional furniture, appliances, and maintenance equipment for the garden. A lawn mower was one machine I had never used before. I had seen other people using those noisy beasts and was eager to try one myself. Following the instructions from the Sears salesman during the first weekend of our occupancy, I began to mow our lawn.

³ In 2024, that house would sell for over three million dollars!

After finishing the front yard, I went to the back of the house. About halfway through that lawn, the engine began to sound muffled. When I removed the bag, I noticed the chute clogged up. I reached down with my left hand to clear the opening.

Something hit the tip of my middle finger. Pulling it back, I noticed it was bleeding. Fortunately, the sharp rotating blade had only cut a small gash that healed in a few days. Later, I read the instructions: "Never place anything into the chute while the motor is running!"

Once we had a house, the next step was to find a pet. A neighbor's dog had a litter, and we adopted one of their adorable male shepherd-husky puppies. For some reason, I named him Tarzan, and he soon became the center of our affection.



Left: Our first house in Los Altos. Right: Joyce holding eight-week-old Tarzan.

Becoming a Father

Five years passed since I had last seen my mother. Rather than going back to Budapest, Joyce and I decided to see if the Hungarian government would allow Mother to visit us for the arrival of our first child. Legal travel to a Western country from Hungary was not routine in those days. The Communist government carefully guarded against the possibility that someone might not return to the "workers' paradise." My only hope was that because my 60-year-old mother was a pensioner and had an apartment, the officials might be relieved if she did not return.

We filed the necessary paperwork from both ends to request an exit permit and a U.S. visa. A few months later, her trip was approved. Our baby was due in late August, so we planned my mother's visit to coincide.

The *Los Altos Town Crier* had a contest for a "Good Guy" award, and I nominated my wife for it. To justify her case, I stated that instead of purchasing new furniture for our house, she had agreed to spend the money to bring my mother from Hungary to see her grandchild. The editors liked my reason and selected Joyce as the winner. We received a certificate for three people to dine in one of the Los Altos restaurants.

After her long journey, Joyce and I picked up Mother at the San Francisco airport. Although she looked tired, she was happy to see us and congratulated me on having such

a pretty wife. In the airport garage, I proudly seated her in our car, and we drove to our house.

After arriving home, I parked the car in front of our house. "This is where we live," I announced to my mother, expecting a favorable response.

Until then, she had been impressed with everything: my wife, our car, and my maneuverability in busy traffic. After looking around at our street, however, she became subdued. "But there are no sidewalks on this street," she said quietly.

At first, her comment surprised me. Then I remembered how the city people in Hungary looked down on those who lived in the country. They felt that civilization ended where the sidewalks ended. It took quite some time for my mother to accept that her college-graduate son lived in a country-like environment.

Mother unpacked her luggage inside the house and proudly gave us the presents she had brought. First, she placed several Hungarian Herend porcelain figurines on the carpeted floor of the living room. Then she reached into her carry-on bag and pulled out a large bowl. When she removed the lid of the bowl, Joyce and I saw a large, cooked goose liver sitting in the middle of hardened goose fat. She had smuggled the liver through customs! When the aroma reached me, I excitedly jumped over the figurines for a closer look. Unfortunately, I did not raise my feet high enough and kicked off the head of my favorite figurine, *Ludas Matyi* (Goose-Tender Matty). Mother was horrified and began to cry. Throughout her long trip, she had carefully hand-carried and guarded the precious gift, and I had carelessly broken it.

My clumsy action dampened her cheerful mood. She stopped crying when I assured her I knew about a unique store that handled China restoration. They could reattach the head. She fully recovered when I asked to eat some of the goose liver. With a beaming face, she served the liver and spread the goose fat on bread. I know how unhealthy that meal was, but in 1971, I was not concerned about a proper diet.

Joyce's due date approached and passed, but our baby did not show any desire to appear. We packed a suitcase, and I was on standby to rush her to the hospital at a moment's notice. Nearly a month later, she called me at work one afternoon, "The time is here!"



The Goose-Tender *Matyi* statue, made by the famous Herend porcelain factory. Only a very close observation reveals the repair on the neck.

I arrived home within ten minutes. After passing the news to Mother, I led Joyce to the car, tossed the suitcase into the back seat, and rushed to Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Gatos. A nurse led us into a small room and notified Joyce's obstetrician, Dr. Trueblood.

He soon showed up in a grumpy mood because he had had to leave his daughter's birthday party.

"You still have a way to go," he announced after his examination. He instructed the nurse to notify him immediately of any change and returned to his daughter's party. Joyce and I were left in the room to practice the Lamaze⁴ technique. Our baby, however, was not in a hurry to join us.

Dr. Trueblood appeared again. This time, he was eager to speed up the process. "I'll give you a shot that will help," he told my wife.

I went out to call my in-laws and my mother with the latest news. When I returned to the room, it was empty. I ran out into the hall.

"The shot sped up the process," a nurse told me. "She is delivering right now." I raced to the delivery room.

Our son George was born early on September 24, 1971. The staff allowed me to hold him close to my heart in my hands. He had blue eyes, long dark hair, and a loud cry. The noise he made sounded better than any music I'd ever heard. I was the happiest man in the world. I had become a father!

When I returned home from the hospital, my mother was eagerly waiting for me at the door. "Hello, Grandma," I greeted her.

"Is it a boy?" she asked nervously.

"Yes."

Her face suddenly relaxed. She ran over and hugged me. "I'm so happy." Only then did she ask me how my wife and son were doing.

Like most traditional Hungarians, it was important to her that the first child was a boy to carry on the family name and responsibilities. Later, she told me she would love a granddaughter just as much. However, she was happier about having a grandson.

After Joyce came home from the hospital, I learned quickly that babies do not have the same sleeping habits as adults. Waking up in the middle of the night to help George became part of my life. What amazed me was that I did it without any resentment. I enjoyed becoming a parent and carried out my duties faithfully. Even changing messy diapers did not bother me. I will always feel sorry for people who go through life missing the experience of holding and comforting their helpless little child.

While Joyce was recovering, my mother took over the household duties. I appreciated her help, but covering up her disapproval of my young wife's housekeeping was difficult. I found myself in the middle. Fortunately, I was the translator.

Mother noticed that a picture frame on the living room wall was dusty. "*Miért nem tartja tisztán a feleséged a képeket?*" she asked me. (Why doesn't your wife keep the pictures clean?)

Joyce was sitting in the same room feeding George. "What did your mother say?" she asked me.

"She likes the nice pictures we have," I replied.

Then, I turned to Mother. "*Jövő héten megfogja csinálni,*" (She'll do it next week.)

⁴ A breathing technique to make childbirth easier.



Left: The photo in the Los Altos newspaper article, dated August 18, 1971, shows my nine-month pregnant wife with my mother. Right top: Assembling a crib for our baby. Right bottom: My wife was coming home from the hospital with two-day-old George in her arms.

The two women smiled at each other. I had managed to keep the peace.

Mother was also very unhappy when she found out that George was circumcised after birth. In Hungary, that was only done to Jewish boys. I explained that it was a routine procedure in the United States, but she disapproved of her grandson having to endure such pain.

Because George was born so late, the original three-week visit we planned for my mother was extended to two months. Toward the end of Mother's visit, we discussed her future. I knew she and my wife could never live peacefully under the same roof. Having an apartment nearby for my mother would isolate her. She also realized that at her age and without English language skills, it would be difficult for her to fit into American suburbia. I promised to visit her frequently and make her life in Budapest as comfortable as possible. We parted sadly, and she returned to her familiar Hungarian lifestyle.

Raising our son was far more joyful than I had anticipated. Seeing the various phases of his development—turning over in the crib, learning to crawl and walk, and eventually starting to speak—was an amazing experience for me. The first time he had a cold and was congested, I felt helpless for not being able to make him more comfortable. When I took him to receive his first set of immunizations and the doctor poked his tiny arm, he cried bitterly, and I wished I could take the pain instead.



Left: "Nagymama" (Grandmother) adores her grandson. Center: Holding the three-day-old George. Right: I'm taking an afternoon nap with my son.

After his first birthday, George said "Daddy" for the first time. I was more proud hearing that than I had been after any of my past athletic or technical achievements. As the old saying goes, "Any man can be a father, but it takes someone special to be a daddy." I became part of that special group.

A few months later, some of the ladies who worked in the company's clean-room⁵ saw George's pictures all over my desk and wanted to see him. I drove them to our house one day during lunch hour. To my surprise, as soon as George saw them, he began to cry. When they came closer to him, his cries intensified, and he ran to my protection. It took me a while to realize the reason. The ladies wore white lab coats, and George thought they were doctors, ready to administer more shots. Only when they removed their coats was I able to calm him. His fear of doctors remained with him for some time. Ironically, when he grew up, he decided to become a physician.

Second Visit to Hungary

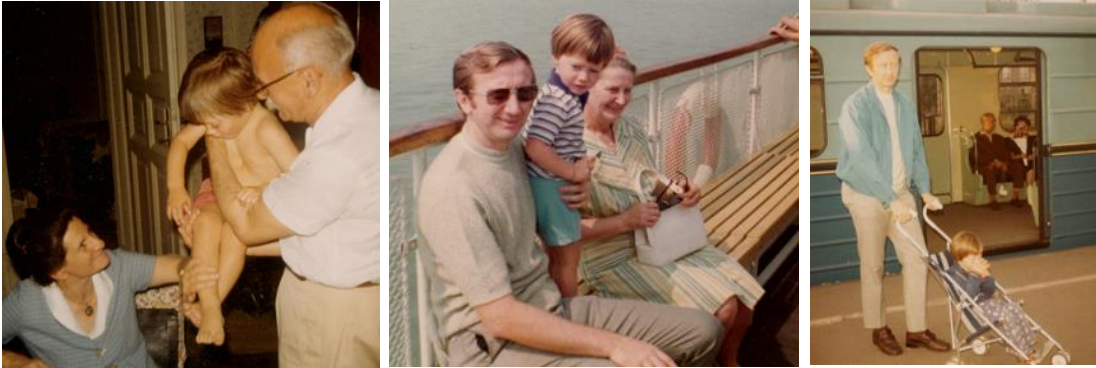
My mother still lived in the same apartment we had had before I escaped from Hungary. It lacked central heating, hot water, and any place to take a bath or shower. The building had no elevator, and climbing the stairs to the third floor became more challenging for her as the years passed. Her efforts to upgrade to a better apartment had been fruitless. I decided to visit her in the summer of 1973 to see if I could help her find a more comfortable place for her later years. Joyce had never been to Europe, so she was eager to come along. George was nearly two years old, so we took him with us. The airlines provided bassinets next to the bulkheads of the planes, making the long flight quite comfortable for small children.

Most of the tenants in the apartment building still remembered me. They all wanted to meet my American wife and child. The fact that neither Joyce nor George understood

⁵ Semiconductor and microcircuit production required ultra-clean facilities. In those areas, the operators had to cover their clothing and shoes to minimize dust carried from the outside.

Hungarian made the meetings somewhat awkward, but I did my best to translate their conversations. Mother, of course, was always present to show off her son's family.

We met Pista's family, who still shared an apartment with his wife's parents. Joyce was amazed that four adults and three children shared one bathroom. I explained to her that it was not unusual. Although World War II had ended nearly 30 years before, obtaining an apartment in Budapest was still difficult. The socialist government had placed a higher priority on developing heavy industry. Rebuilding the war-torn city without foreign investment was going slowly.



Left: George is taking a bath at Józsi bácsi's apartment, using the same tub I had my first bath when I was three years old. Center: Cruising with Mother on the Danube. Right: Leaving the Budapest metro. George is sucking his thumb—his favorite way to relax.

Pista helped me find a couple interested in trading their small, nearly new one-bedroom apartment located on the outskirts of Budapest for Mother's larger place that was centrally located. The other apartment was on the sixth floor of a panel house⁶, but the building had central heating and an elevator. The apartment had a small bathroom equipped with a gas water heater. A bus stop located only a block away offered convenient transportation to the inner parts of the city.

The couple agreed to the trade—if we would provide an additional one-time payment “under the table.” We used up most of our traveler's checks to satisfy their demand. The government owned every apartment building in Budapest, so the trade still had to be approved by the housing bureau. Paying a small bribe to the official helped to speed up the process. The moves were scheduled to take place about a month later. Pista and his friends promised to help Mother when the time came.

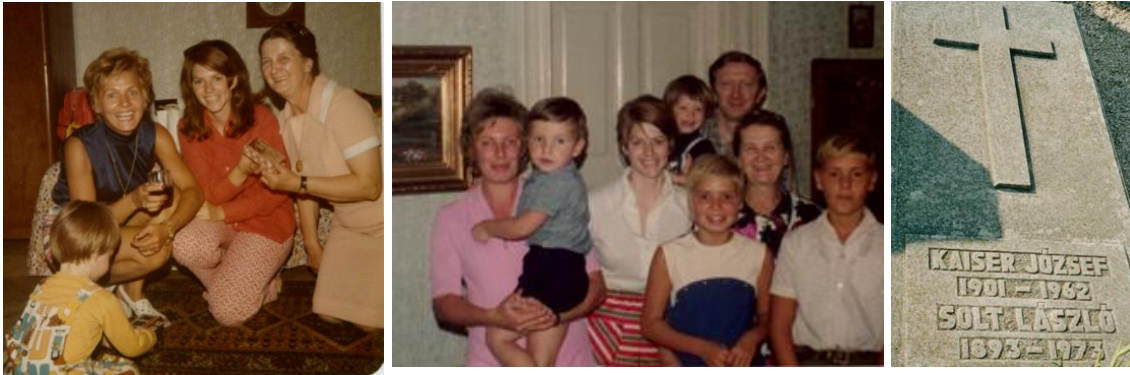
Although Mother was eager to cook for us every day, we all went to a restaurant on the first Sunday. Before leaving California, we heard Hungarian restaurants did not have highchairs, so we took a special harness to keep George on a chair.

When we tried using the harness for the first time in a restaurant, George did not like it and made his displeasure known. All the other customers stared at us. They also made unflattering comments about “tying a poor defenseless child to his chair.” Finally, the

⁶ Many of the newly constructed government-owned buildings were built with large prefabricated steel-reinforced cement panels.

waiter came and asked us to untie our son or leave. Not wanting to be thrown out, I placed George on my lap and ate dinner together. After that day, we always ate at home.

Mother told me that my father had passed away earlier that year. She wanted to show me his gravesite in a cemetery on the Buda side. I was not interested in going. Even though he was my biological father, he was never a dad to me. However, to please her, I agreed to go. At his gravesite, I said a prayer for his soul and forgave him for not being a caring father to me.



Left: My sister, Eva, visited Budapest at the same time. Mother and Joyce are holding a new toy for George. Center: Pista's wife, Kuki, was holding their younger son. Their other two children are standing at the front. Right: My father's gravestone, covering the grave he shared with his father-in-law.

Our two-week stay went by quickly, and we returned to the United States. After settling back into our comfortable house, I thanked God for leading me to California. I had enjoyed visiting Budapest, but I had become used to living in this country. This was now my home.

During George's routine health checkup at age three, his pediatrician pulled me aside. "I detected a strange noise in his heartbeat. He may have a hole in his heart. It would be best if you took him to see a specialist," she told me.

Alarmed by this news, we took him to Stanford Hospital's Pediatric Cardiology Department. After a series of exhaustive tests, the doctors assured us that there was nothing serious. "His heart has a murmur that's not uncommon in children," said the department head. "Most likely, he'll outgrow it, but we'll monitor his condition regularly."

Joyce and I were still concerned. I had already noticed that after any strenuous activity, George's face became flushed, while his playmates did not show the same effect. We watched him closely and had him take frequent rests after playing. Thankfully, as he grew older, these symptoms went away.

Another job change

During the spring of 1972, the semiconductor industry experienced one of its cyclical slowdowns. Although our division's sales increased, we received an order from Fairchild corporate to lay off 10 percent of our staff. Our division manager refused to comply. He called a staff meeting in his office to discuss how we would pass through the difficult times. During the meeting, his secretary stuck her head into the room. "Excuse me, Dr. Attala, but Dr. Hogan would like to see you," she said apologetically.

“Continue our discussion. I’ll be back shortly,” John told us as he left the office.

Suspecting nothing, we kept on with our planning. An hour passed, but our leader had not returned. Finally, his secretary showed up. “Please go back to your workplaces. Dr. Attala was fired,” she announced in a tearful voice. “Dr. Van Poppelen will be our new division head.”

The news shocked all of us. The Microwave Division had already developed a unique product line. Our **Gallium Arsenide Field Effect Transistors (GaAs FET)** and low-noise microwave transistors had no competition worldwide, and the defense industry had already booked our entire production capability. We could not understand why Fairchild’s management did not see the bright future of our division. They had made a drastic cost-cutting decision for the entire corporation, ignoring how much our division contributed to the company.

At that point, I had had enough of Fairchild and began to look for another company that cared more about its employees. A friend recommended a medium-sized firm located in San Carlos. “Farinon is like a mini-HP,” he told me. “I know several people who work there, and they’re all very happy.”

The physical appearance of Farinon’s plant was not very impressive; it looked like a large warehouse. Both HP and the sparkling new Fairchild facility in Palo Alto spoiled me. However, the Farinon employees I met during my first interview impressed me so much that I quickly decided to work there. Their open and friendly attitudes, combined with their enthusiasm for the company, convinced me that I would be happy.

A few days later, I returned for a second interview to see Ed Nolan, Farinon’s VP of Engineering. Like the engineers I talked with earlier, he was open-minded and personable. He wanted to know more about my computer-aided design experience. I told him about the design program I wrote for my Master’s thesis on the small IBM computer at the University of Santa Clara. It was more advanced than SPEEDY because it also included circuit optimization⁷. “Our engineers are still doing manual calculations instead of using computers. You could help them become more efficient designers,” he said, offering me an attractive job.

After being with Fairchild for two years, I decided to give up my stock option and resigned. They did not walk me out the door like HP had. Two weeks later, after passing my responsibilities on to another engineer, I began to work at Farinon. Three others from Fairchild also decided to follow me. One of them was Chi Hsieh, the “Giant,” who had become an expert in computer-aided circuit design by then. The other engineer, Bob Griffith, played a vital role in setting up Farinon’s microcircuit facility. The third person helped to train newly hired production assemblers in the microcircuit lab.

My first assignment at Farinon was to rewrite my thesis program to operate on a commercial timeshare system called NCSS that used an IBM 370 computer. My company paid for the computer time required for the conversion. Based on an agreement with Ed Nolan, I retained ownership of the software, and all Farinon employees could use the program without paying royalties.

⁷ An iterative technique to find the best values of circuit components for optimum performance.

I transferred the program from the university into NCSS's computer via punched cards⁸. It required quite an effort from me to convert from standard FORTRAN to the proprietary language of NCSS. When the program finally ran on the timeshare system, I asked the engineers to propose a suitable name or acronym to describe its function. One came up with **C**omputerized **O**ptimization of **M**icrowave **P**assive and **A**ctive **C**omponen**T**s (COMPACT). I rewarded him with a dinner in a Hungarian restaurant and began to train my colleagues on the computerized approach. Most of them were eager to learn, although a few still preferred to use the hand-held calculators.

A few weeks later, a salesman from a competing timeshare company, United Computing Services (UCS), stopped by to demonstrate their microwave circuit design program. After hearing that we had been using my program that could even optimize circuits, he asked if he could come back with their technical experts to see how it worked. I agreed, and he returned the next day with two other men. They were impressed to see how quickly COMPACT found the best component values for optimum circuit performance. My program was user-friendly, with intuitive abbreviated names for the components, such as RES for a resistor and CAP for a capacitor. Their software used numerical codes that required memorization by the users. I also wrote a user manual for COMPACT that included typical examples of various microwave designs.

"Why don't you put this program on our system and collect royalties for its usage?" asked the salesman when he heard I owned it. "We'll do the conversion to our system at our expense and reprint the manual for our users," he offered.

That idea had never occurred to me, but I liked it. "Let me ask my boss," I replied. "Come back tomorrow."

I knew that the founder of our company, Bill Farinon, had always advocated entrepreneurship. Whenever anyone approached him with an idea of leaving Farinon to start a new business, he was even willing to help finance it—as long as the other person put up a significant part of his own money. However, I did not plan to leave my job, so I knew my case would differ.

My manager did not object to the idea but wanted to discuss it with Ed Nolan. Later that day, they called me in for a conference. "COMPACT is your property, and you can do whatever you want with it on your own time," said Ed. "I don't like the idea that our competitors might also use it, but at least they have to pay for it, and we don't. Go ahead and try it!"

Encouraged by the enthusiasm of the UCS salesman and blessed with the green light from my bosses, in late 1972, I formed the company Compact Engineering. In a few weeks, COMPACT was running on UCS. After testing it during the weekend, I gave them the go-ahead signal. I received a royalty check for over \$1,000 a month later, nearly equal to my monthly salary at HP. The long hours spent writing and converting COMPACT were beginning to pay off significantly.

⁸ Stiff paper cards that contained digital information by the presence or absence of punched holes in predefined positions. Nowadays, the same information is stored in digital format.

Visiting Japan

During the spring of 1975, my father-in-law called with good news. “You and Joyce are going with us to Japan!” He told me Mitsubishi had been building huge oil tankers for Standard Oil. Whenever a new ship was ready, an entire family of a Standard Oil executive was invited to the launching ceremonies. My father-in-law was selected for that honor that year. His wife was to cut the rope that symbolically tied the ship to the pier. The extended Bogart family included 20 people: parents, children, siblings, and cousins. Mitsubishi paid for all the expenses of the two-week trip.

Because our son would have been the only youngster in the group, we left him with his best friend’s parents. Both of the boys were four years old, and they spent a lot of time together. The father, a friendly but hot-tempered Turkish-American man, was the proud owner of a new Datsun 240 Z sports car. He washed and waxed the car frequently to keep it spotless. When not used, the vehicle was always parked in their garage for protection. We heard their large, unruly dog once stood against the car door and scratched the paint. The man wanted to put the dog down. Only his wife’s desperate plea managed to save the pooch—his sentence was commuted to being put up for adoption.

The couple loved George almost as much as their son. I felt comfortable leaving our son with them, but Joyce felt two weeks would be too long. We decided to stay in Japan for only one week.

The trip was marvelous, and we received royal treatment all the way. After a first-class flight from San Francisco to Tokyo, our group was whisked through Japanese customs and immigration. Mr. Yoshida, the head of our host committee from Mitsubishi, welcomed us at the airport. He handed everyone in the group a detailed schedule for our visit. A small caravan of limousines took us to a five-star hotel in Tokyo, where we spent the first three days.

Our hotel was located next to the American Embassy. From the window of our room on the 25th floor, we could look down and see groups of people demonstrating against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Police carrying large shields protected the building and hauled away some of the protesters. I felt like I was watching a silent movie because we could not open the window to hear the noise.

Each day had been meticulously planned for us from morning through late evening. In addition to visiting museums and historical sites, attending sporting events, and shopping, Mrs. Bogart had an additional task on her schedule. She had to practice the cutting of the rope. An ancient superstition stated that the ship would only be protected from evil spirits if the rope were cut in a single chop. Every day, Mr. Yoshida and a white-gloved assistant called on her. They carried a chopping block, several pieces of a two-inch diameter rope, and the razor-sharp hatchet.

I witnessed her first practice session, where it took her five or six strikes to cut through the rope. Although, like most Japanese men, Mr. Yoshida did his best to hide his emotions, we could see that he was pretty concerned. By the third day, however, she had almost succeeded once with the first blow.

We found real bargains while shopping. The exchange rate of the U.S. dollar was 400 Yen. I bought a Nikon camera with an F1.2 lens for about half the price compared to California. Inexpensive silk kimonos and genuine pearl and coral jewelry were extremely popular with the ladies in our group.

Another memorable experience was the integrity of the shopkeepers. When I bought the camera, I gave the salesman on the other side of the counter a 100,000 Yen bill. He courteously bowed while accepting the money from me. Then, he took several smaller bills from the cash register and handed me the change on a small tray. After counting the amount, I placed the money in my pocket.

When we left the store, someone in our group who had previously spent time in Japan told me I should not have checked the amount the salesman gave me. "To him, it indicated that you didn't trust him," he explained. "Japanese people are sincere. You never have to count the money they return."

I followed his recommendation, although I checked the amount initially outside the store. It was always correct, so eventually, I stopped checking.

On the evening of the third day, we flew to Nagasaki, the city where the second atomic bomb had been dropped during World War II. Besides a large memorial, there was little to remind us of the once-devastated area. The busy modern city had been completely rebuilt. The next day, we visited the hill overlooking the harbor where the story of *Madame Butterfly* was set. We saw the new supertanker being prepared for its launching ceremony.

Instead of the Western-style hotel where we had stayed in Tokyo, our Nagasaki residence was traditional Japanese. We enjoyed the new quarters that included Japanese baths with steaming hot water. My only negative experience took place during the first night. After drinking lots of beer and sake at dinner, I had to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. I forgot that the door openings were about five feet eight inches high. As I walked in the darkness, I banged my head on the upper part of the door frame and developed a large bump.

The rope-cutting practice sessions continued. By the fourth day, Mrs. Bogart managed to cut through with a single hit most of the time—but not always. There was only one more day left to practice until the launch.

Finally, the highlight of our trip arrived. On the morning of the sixth day, our hosts took us to tour the giant oil tanker. The top deck exceeded the length of two football fields. The sophisticated control system ensured a balanced configuration of the cargo. Two monstrous diesel engines provided the power to carry 40 million gallons of oil at 10 knots.

Although she complained about a sore wrist, my mother-in-law agreed to Mr. Yoshida's request for a final rehearsal. The results were not promising; she failed twice to sever the rope with the first strike. Everyone was tense during lunch and avoided talking about the rope cutting.

In the early afternoon, the sharply dressed crew stood at the side of the top deck. Our group and the Japanese dignitaries were seated under a large canopy on the shore. A band played first, followed by speeches from Mitsubishi's executives and the ship's captain. Language interpreters were seated behind us to translate the Japanese speeches. Then, the band played again, and Mr. Yoshida led my mother-in-law to the

designated place where the rope was stretched. He handed her the hatchet and stepped aside. I was close enough to see that her hand was shaking. The music stopped, followed by silence as Mrs. Bogart raised the hatchet. She lowered the sharp instrument until it touched the rope, establishing her aim. Then, with one self-assured swift strike, she sliced through the rope.



Left: Watching the entertainment in a Japanese geisha house. Center: Part of the Bogart family. Next to me, from left to right: Joyce, Joyce's brother, Mrs. and Mr. Bogart, Mrs. Bogart's sister and brother-in-law. Right: Mrs. Bogart's last practice of the rope cutting under the watchful eyes of "Yoshida-san."

The crowd erupted with joy; everyone clapped and yelled. She looked relieved as the giant ship slowly slid into the water. At the banquet that followed, the president of Mitsubishi expressed his thanks by presenting her with a beautiful pearl necklace.

The rest of our traveling group was to continue the tour, but Joyce and I were flying back home at the end of the first week. On the way to Nagasaki airport, we had a great idea: downgrade our first-class tickets to tourist class and use the refund for a trip to Hawaii sometime later. The airline complied with our request and placed us back into the coach section of the plane. It was a different experience than our first-class trip, but we told ourselves that tolerating the cramped quarters would be worth the extra vacation later. However, our scheme backfired on us! Instead of sending us a check for the difference, the airline refunded Standard Oil because a corporate credit card paid for the tickets! Big mistake!!!

Upon our return, we phoned our babysitting friends to find out when we could pick George up. The wife told us what a fantastic week they had had. Her husband had taken time off work to spend several days with the family and George in their condo at Bear Lake. When we asked her about the trip, she said everything had gone smoothly, except that George had upchucked when her husband drove the Datsun too fast on the curvy mountain road.

Joyce and I stared at each other for a moment. Visualizing the mess our son must have made in the new car and knowing what had almost happened to his dog for a lesser offense, we were afraid to ask what her husband had done to George. Our friend at the other end of the line sensed our apprehension and assured us that her husband did not hold any grudge against George. After cleaning up the car, however, he drove more slowly for the rest of the trip.

Expanding My Programming Side Business

Shortly after COMPACT became available at UCS, other timeshare companies wanted the program on their computers. Fortunately, my agreement with UCS was not exclusive. By early 1975, COMPACT was running on five international timeshare services worldwide, without any competition. Although the University of California at Berkeley had also developed a large circuit simulator called SPICE, it did not have the input and output capabilities needed for microwave circuit design. Some larger companies, like HP and Texas Instruments, had their in-house programs. However, most firms focused on hardware product development and used COMPACT. By a stroke of luck, I had a global monopoly of the commercial computerized microwave circuit design.

The intensity of the Cold War was increasing, and the demand for new telecommunication, spyware, and Electronic Warfare (EW) products was high. The defense industry was busy providing for the needs of the Defense Department. Money was no object. The government was willing to pay the price for performance.

My royalties were increasing, but so was the demand for product training and support. My wife already helped to answer telephone calls, but most users wanted immediate help. Farinon's management was extraordinarily understanding and allowed me to take a limited number of COMPACT-related phone calls at work—as long as I continued to fulfill my job requirements. As a result, I spent long days at the plant. At home, I worked on program enhancements and looked for solutions to the customers' problems. I was not sleeping much.

Early one morning, while I was still at home, an East Coast user named Bob phoned and asked for help with his circuit. During our conversation, he had to step away for some reason, but he promised to call back soon. Ten minutes later, the phone rang. When I picked up the receiver, I could tell by the hissing noise that it was a long-distance call⁹.

"Hi Bob," I said, assuming it was my customer again.

"How...how did you know who I am?"

"I have ESP," I answered, trying to be funny.

"That's incredible..." the man mumbled. "I must meet you one day in person."

As it turned out, the second caller's name was also Bob, but he was not the same man who had phoned earlier. I told him the truth only when we met at an IEEE conference years later. Until then, he believed that I had a special gift.

A caller from a Canadian defense organization named Communications Research Centre (CRC) told me that their engineers wanted to use COMPACT. Their security requirements, however, would not allow them to pass circuit information through outside telephone lines. "Would you sell the program so we could install it on our secure in-house computer?" he asked me.

That question had never arisen before, but I did not want to turn business away. "Yes," I replied.

"How much does it cost?"

⁹ This was decades before Caller ID became available.

I had no idea what the program would sell for. "Fifteen hundred U.S. dollars," I said meekly, ready to negotiate.

"I'll send you a purchase order later today," was his instant reply. I wish I had asked for a higher price.

One of the ladies in Farinon's sales department tutored me on how to handle an international transaction. She said I should ask for an Irrevocable Letter of Credit for the purchase price. After CRC sent me the documents, I dumped the program from the NCSS computer on punched cards and shipped the box to CRC. Joyce and I used the money for a down payment for a Volvo station wagon.

A week later, an angry programmer phoned from CRC. "We're having trouble installing this program on our IBM computer," he began. "There are no comments¹⁰ in the program, no flowcharts, and no code documentation. Who wrote this mess?" he asked, not knowing he was dealing with a one-person operation.

My ego was hurt, but we had already spent the \$1,500, so I had to accommodate him. "I'm sorry, he is not available. Perhaps I could help you," I offered.

"We cannot solve this through the phone. We'll need someone up here," he barked at me.

After I calmed him down, CRC agreed to pay the expenses to fly me to Ottawa for the weekend. Without revealing that I wrote the program, I was able to help iron out the problems in one day. Only years later, after I hired professional programmers, did I learn the proper ways of documenting the source code of a large computer program.

Once the engineers at Farinon became proficient with computer-aided design, I took on new project responsibilities. I developed several components for a new microwave repeater¹¹. When they were completed, I wanted to learn about the entire system. I had always worked on communication system components but knew little about the operation.

My manager agreed that I could take a one-week short course on microwave radio system design at the continuing education division of UCLA. I flew to Los Angeles for the class.

Shortly after the course began, I realized that most other students already knew what I wanted to learn in the course. They were military defense experts from Hughes, TRW, and Aerospace. Their interest was in communicating between rapidly moving objects, such as two fighter planes. I only wanted to know how to send and receive signals between two stationary antennas on Earth.

Fortunately, the teachers reviewed the basics at the beginning. The next day was spent on microwave filters, which interested me. After the second day, however, I was lost. Most of the material went over my head for the next three days. By the end of the week, I had developed the utmost respect for those who designed our nation's military electronics defense systems.

¹⁰ Non-executable statements placed in the program's code to explain the functions of key sections.

¹¹ Microwave signals propagate in straight lines and do not follow the curvature of the Earth. Receiver-transmitter combinations are required at 25-30 mile intervals of a long-haul communication system to pick up and retransmit the signals at slightly different angles.

During the course, I met the chairman of the Electrical Engineering Department, Gábor Temes, another 1956 Hungarian refugee. I told him about my involvement in computer-aided design. “Why don’t you create a short course on that subject and teach it at UCLA?” he asked me.

“I don’t have a Ph.D.,” I replied.

“That’s not a problem. The man who taught the filter section in your course doesn’t have one either,” he said. “But both of you have much practical experience in the subjects. You could teach the course together.”

I thanked him for the advice and talked with the filter expert, Bob Wenzel. We had dinner that night and agreed to develop a course. He would cover two days on microwave filter synthesis¹², and I would follow with three days on microwave amplifier design. Both of us would emphasize the computer-aided approach.

I also realized that such a course could serve as a hidden advertisement for COMPACT, so I was eager to pursue it. My manager shook his head in disbelief when I told him about my idea. “Perhaps you should cut back to work only half-time at Farinon instead of killing yourself,” he suggested. “You already work more than anyone I know. Why would you want to take on more?”

Later that day, Bill Farinon called me into his office. “I am concerned about your well-being,” he began. “Why don’t you take a three-month leave of absence? See if your program business has a future. If it does, go at it full-time. If it doesn’t, return to work here and forget the rest.”

He was right. My heavily packed schedule couldn’t bear the addition of even one more project. I needed to make a decision—one way or the other.

My father-in-law was unhappy to hear that I was considering leaving a steady job with a good company. Because Joyce was expecting our second child, he was concerned about my medical insurance. “This may not be a good time to be on your own,” he told me. “Don’t be so impatient. Frankly, I don’t see how anyone can make a living by selling a computer program!”

This time, I did not take his advice. At the beginning of 1976, after adding another room to our house, I incorporated Compact Engineering and began to work full-time at home. I was the president and treasurer of the company, and Joyce was the secretary. Perhaps my father-in-law agreed to become a board member to ensure I would not go broke.

I applied for medical insurance at one of the major companies. Their questionnaire asked about my family’s medical history, and I entered the information about the tests George had undergone at Stanford two years earlier. A few weeks later, the company accepted Joyce and me but rejected our son.

The news hit us hard. *Perhaps the Stanford physicians had not told us everything. What if George has a severe heart disease?* I immediately went to Stanford to inquire. “Please tell me the truth,” I pleaded with the doctor.

¹² A closed-form mathematical procedure to find the exact component values of circuits that pass and reject specified frequencies.

After reviewing the initial test results and the follow-up examination records, the doctor again assured me that George had no heart defect. "Would you write a letter to the insurance company and tell them that?" I asked him.

The doctor's letter did not change the insurance company's decision. I applied to a different company; this time, I did not mention George's tests. All three of us were accepted, but we feared the company might recheck our initial information if we made a significant claim. Fortunately, none of us had any serious health problems.

On the home front, I tried to spend as much time with the family as possible. We frequently took weekend trips to the Bear Lake region with the family that cared for George while Joyce and I visited Japan. The two boys had been after me for some time to take them fishing. Finally, before one of our trips, I purchased fishing poles and promised to show them how to catch big fish. I remembered how Cousin Pista's father hooked fish from the Danube, so I was confident about our success.

The locals at Bear Lake told me that the best time to catch large fish was early morning. I headed to the lake at 6 a.m. with the two nine-year-olds in tow. The sky was still cloudy. Rainfall the night before had brought the worms to the surface, making it easy for us to collect them for bait. I carried the fishing gear, and the boys brought buckets to carry all the fish home.

None of the locals had warned me about the mosquitoes. Those little pests also woke up early, and they converged on us as soon as we reached the shore. We wore only T-shirts and shorts that left lots of skin exposed. In a short time, all three of us were covered with bites. That, however, was the lesser problem.

The fish showed no interest in our bait. We moved around to different spots without success. After an hour of enduring the mosquito attacks, we gave up and walked dejectedly back to the cabin. Two small boys crossed our path, carrying primitive fishing poles and a pail with two large fish. "What did you catch, Mister?" one asked me.

Holding our fancy fishing rods, I was too embarrassed to find the right words. "Nothing," George quietly replied, admiring the other kids' fish. My son and his friend never asked me to go fishing again. I left the poles behind in the cabin, hoping someone else would have better luck with them.

Becoming a UCLA Instructor

In 1976, the IEEE's Microwave Society (MTT) held its annual symposium in Palo Alto. For the first time, the event included exhibits, and I rented a booth there to publicize COMPACT. My booth did not have large fancy signs and displays. Instead, I offered a drawing for a Polaroid camera as a prize to attract potential customers.

My booth was located in the middle of one of the aisles. I stood in the booth next to a small sign and planned to hand out the lottery sign-up sheets to everyone passing by. The idea was good, but I had overlooked the importance of sex appeal.

Facing the direction of traffic flow, at the end of the aisle in the wide booth of "Company X," three provocatively dressed young ladies were handing out shopping bags with the company's logo. The men I had planned to attract to my booth never noticed me. They

passed by, rushing to have a closer look at those ladies. My great promotional plan ended with only a handful of new contacts.

After my disappointment at the symposium, I decided to advertise in the trade magazines, but it was expensive. Finally, it became apparent that teaching short courses would be the better form of promotion. Instead of paying for advertising, I would be paid as an instructor, and all the students would be exposed to COMPACT. If they learned how to design microwave circuits with my program, most likely, they would want to use it again after returning to work. I asked Bob Wenzel to put full-time effort into developing the material for his portion of the UCLA course. I began to do the same.

Bob and I agreed on having the "Microwave Circuit Design" title for the five-day course. Preparing the overhead transparencies for my three-day course portion took considerable time. In the pre-Microsoft Office era, all text and illustrations of the artwork first had to be created manually. I also inserted the results of COMPACT's runs on some pages. Using a copy machine, I made the overhead transparencies I would use in the presentation. After rehearsing my talk, I settled on showing about 80 pages each day.

UCLA promoted the course heavily by direct mail to companies and individuals. The response was overwhelming. It was fully booked six weeks before the start date, and the school scheduled additional sessions. Their East Coast educational partner, the University of Maryland, also asked to present the seminars at their locations. Companies began to ask for in-house presentations. Creating the short course was a highly profitable investment of my time.

Bob and I recognized that maintaining students' interest in a five-day microwave design course would be difficult. Microwave theory is abstract and mathematical, so we agreed to focus on the practical applications as much as possible. In addition, we planned to make the course lively by occasionally telling anecdotes about our careers. One described my first experience submitting an article to *IEEE Transactions*.

A year earlier, Professor Newcomb and I had written an article for the trade magazine *Microwave Journal* to describe COMPACT's structure and capabilities. The subscribers to that popular periodical had a wide range of technical backgrounds. We included several sidebars with detailed explanations to the novice to clarify new concepts without boring the more experienced readers. We also used plain language throughout the article.

Just as we prepared to submit it to the magazine, we learned that a prestigious IEEE publication planned to release a special issue on computer-aided design techniques. Being published in that professional engineering society would be a status symbol. Though I had never written anything for them, we changed our plan and sent the article to its editor. In a short time, a rejection letter arrived. "No significant technical contribution" was the reason given.

I was crushed. My co-author, who had significant IEEE publishing experience, tried to console me. "The article is too straightforward," he said. "We'll have to make it more complex. Let's rewrite it!"

We did just that. First, we removed all the sidebars. Next, we replaced some short words with longer, more impressive-sounding ones. Finally, we changed the variables "a"

and “b” in the equations to the Greek symbols α and β . When it was resubmitted in all its convoluted glory, the article was accepted and published!



Left: The top part of my home-made magazine advertisement of COMPACT. Right: Low-budget signs in my booth at the IEEE MTT Symposium’s Exhibits. In addition to COMPACT, I also sold design programs written by others.

I frequently used that example to amuse my students. Then, I showed them a couple of slides to illustrate my story. The primary material came from an unknown source. I added the parts about the IEEE.

Do you want to be an IEEE author? Suppose you want to publish something as simple as:

$$1 + 1 = 2 \qquad \text{Eq. (1)}$$

This form is not very impressive. IEEE reviewers like complex formats and will probably reject your work.

You can complicate the left-hand side of the expression by replacing each number “1” with commonly used mathematical equalities:

$$1 = \ln(e), \text{ and} \\ 1 = \sin^2 x + \cos^2 x$$

You can complicate the right-hand side. Replace the number “2” with this expression:

$$2 = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n}$$

Now, $1 + 1 = 2$ can be rewritten “more scientifically” as:

$$\ln(e) + (\sin^2 x + \cos^2 x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{1}{2^n} \qquad \text{Eq. (2)}$$

This is already more impressive. But don't stop here. You can further complicate Eq. (2)! Substitute for "1" and "e" two other complex formulas:

$$1 = \cosh(y)\sqrt{1 - \tanh^2(y)} \quad \text{and} \quad e = \lim_{z \rightarrow 0} \left(1 + \frac{1}{z}\right)^z$$

Now, Eq. (2) may be rewritten as:

$$\ln \left[\lim_{z \rightarrow 0} \left(1 + \frac{1}{z}\right)^z \right] + (\sin^2 x + \cos^2 x) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} \frac{\cosh(y)\sqrt{1 - \tanh^2(y)}}{2^n} \quad \text{Eq. (3)}$$

Mathematically, Eq. (3) still states that $1 + 1 = 2$, but in a far more impressive form!

I was right. The students were highly amused.

The first Microwave Circuit Design course we presented at UCLA was also a learning experience for me. Bob taught the first two days, and I followed him for three more days. The students looked exhausted by Thursday afternoon, and I sensed a problem. We struggled through the last day.

After the course ended, Bob and I looked through the written evaluations from the students. They liked the material but felt we had packed too much into five days. "This course should be two weeks long," said one. "I wish we had practice sessions to apply what we've learned," stated another. "You advocate computer-aided design, but we did not have the opportunity to use a computer," he added.

Based on the feedback, we reduced the amount of material covered. UCLA agreed to let us use their computer classroom for one afternoon of each course. They installed COMPACT on their system for the next course. The students learned how to use it and had the opportunity to design circuits with it. At the end of that course, Bob and I received outstanding reviews.

UCLA was happy with the success of the course. Bob and I received 25% of their tuition revenues, amounting to more than \$2,000 for each day of instruction! In addition, they also paid for our travel, hotel, and incidental expenses. On top of that, several students began to use COMPACT through timesharing, which increased the royalties. Lastly, the thousands of brochures UCLA mailed out served as an indirect promotion for the program. Even if the school had not paid me a dime, I would have benefited from the teaching.

My mother was impressed that her son taught at such prestigious American universities. Teachers were highly respected in Hungary. On my next visit to Budapest, she introduced me to her friends as a professor rather than an engineer. I did not want to take her joy away and just smiled.

Our Second Child

On June 4, 1976, my wife gave birth to a beautiful, healthy daughter, Nanci Ann. That time, I was in the delivery room and had the opportunity to hold the tiny baby immediately. The photo one of the nurses took of the two of us shows my happiness on the occasion.

Joyce and I had been warned before Nanci's arrival about the possibility that George might resent losing his status as the only child at home. "He has been the undivided center of attention for five years. He may be jealous of the newborn child," said one of the neighbors. "Be careful how you treat them."

As it turned out, George was delighted to have a little sister. He spent hours caressing and talking to her. It was no accident that Nanci's first word was "Geoooooorge," instead of Mommy or Daddy.

Joyce had her hands full, taking care of the two children. To replace her function in the business, I hired a neighbor's daughter to become Compact Engineering's first employee. I also found a microwave engineer who was interested in programming. I hired him, and he helped me write code for new features added to COMPACT.

The two extra people working in our house made it crowded. However, finding an outside office did not appeal to me. I enjoyed working at home, next to my family. In the spring of 1977, we looked around and found a solution — a 4,000-square-foot, three-level house being constructed on a slope in Los Altos Hills. The rear side of the house overlooked a peaceful valley. Its 1,200-square-foot basement would be an ideal office. I could maintain a short commute to work—20 steps downstairs.

The beautiful house was nearly finished, and the contractor told us we could select the interior finishes and appliances. George was ecstatic when he spotted the large closet under one of the stairways. "Let's move here," he pleaded. "This could be my fort!"

We sold our first house with a 200 percent capital gain and purchased the home in the hills for \$200,000 (worth over four million in 2021). I had to make more money to pay for our fancy new place.

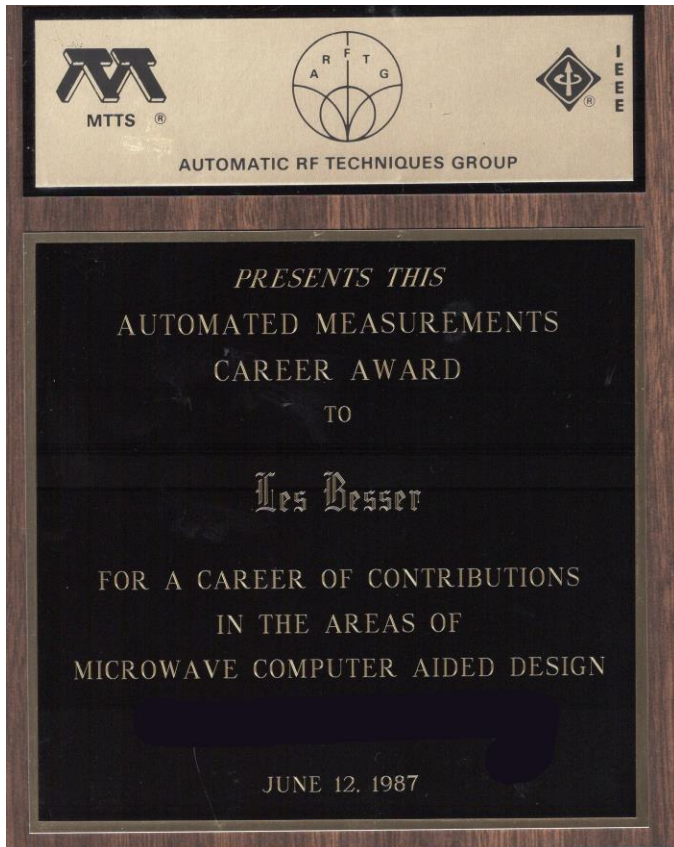
In a few months, our spacious new house was constructed. We moved in just before Nanci's first birthday. George immediately discovered some new favorite playthings—the large appliance boxes. I cut door and window openings in them. The kids had more fun with the make-believe buildings than their sophisticated toys.

Designed to take full advantage of the hill's slope, all three stories of the back of the house faced a small valley. Our living quarters sprawled across the top two floors, and we set up a nearly self-contained office on the lower level. The employees could use the ground-level door when they came to work. If they wanted to relax, they could go upstairs to the living room or step outside and lie down on a lounge chair on the large deck.

Maintaining COMPACT on five timeshare systems, all using different types of mainframe computers (IBM, CDC, Xerox, etc.), required significant time. Fortunately, one of the timeshare companies wanted to relocate their local technical support employee to the East Coast, and the man did not want to move. After hearing his problem, I offered him to work for us, and he agreed. Having a computer expert on our staff to coordinate the program updates and bug fixes proved to be a wise investment.



Left top: A proud father with his newborn daughter. Left bottom: Big brother George expresses his happiness for having Nanci. Right: Our new mega-home in Los Altos Hills before the landscaping was completed. The lowest level became Compact's "headquarters."



An award is given to me by a Chapter of IEEE's Microwave Society in recognition of COMPACT.

Chapter 8: The Ups and Downs of Entrepreneurship

Demand for COMPACT was increasing. By the following year, we had six employees. George began first grade, and Nanci frequently came downstairs to entertain us. She loved to sing to her captive audience and could not understand why I had to take her upstairs instead of asking for encores. Even though the children sometimes interrupted my daily routine, I was glad to be so close to the family during work. I felt that my presence made up for the times I had to travel.

I was fortunate to find key employees to share my workload and enhance our professional image. An outstanding programmer, Mike Ball, restructured COMPACT and added the much-needed comment lines. Chuck Holmes, one of the most capable engineers I have ever met, helped to lighten my travel schedule. He took over the program's in-house installation and training, leaving me with marketing and teaching the university short courses.

Instead of running ads in the trade journals, I submitted application articles to the publications. That did not cost money, and the articles served as concealed advertisements. I also encouraged our customers to publish their success stories. By the third year of our full-time operation, COMPACT was recognized as the industry standard.

The Defense Department had strict guidelines for exporting goods that might be used for military purposes against NATO. Most of the military communication and weapons guidance systems operated at microwave frequencies. COMPACT was often used to design the circuitry of those systems. Accordingly, the Eastern Bloc countries and other potentially hostile nations were on the blacklist. Although I was extra careful in screening the customers, there was one time the program ended up in the wrong hands.

A British trading company bought COMPACT and stated it would be used by one of their divisions. They transferred the funds to us, and we shipped the program to their address. They also asked for installation assistance, and I sent Chuck to London for the job.

Nearly a week passed without any news from Chuck. I became concerned and called London to inquire. "Your program was forwarded to one of our associates in *Yugoslavia*," the company's buyer informed me. "It was already running on their computer, but they needed help to tune it for maximum efficiency. Dr. Holmes has been working with them all week and should soon be finished."

Yugoslavia was not technically part of the Eastern Bloc, but the West did not trust Marshall Tito's¹ regime. He supported the policy of nonalignment between the two hostile blocs in the Cold War but conducted business with both sides. Even though the customer signed an agreement that the program would be installed only at one location, there was no guarantee that it would not be passed on to the Soviet Union. I faced a potentially serious dilemma.

Who knew the consequences if I told the Defense Department what had happened? They could fine me or quite possibly even shut down my company. I decided to do nothing and anxiously waited to hear from Chuck.

¹ Long-time President and Supreme Commander of the former Yugoslavia. Although Tito initially sided with Moscow, in the late 1940s, he switched to an independent form of Communism called "Titoism."

A few days later, the head of the British company telephoned. He apologized for the extra time our employee had been required to stay and told me that Chuck was already on his way home. Their customer would, of course, pay us for the extended days required. He explained that he had been away when the decision to purchase COMPACT was made. In his absence, one of his subordinates had handled the arrangement. Supposedly, he was unaware that the end user was in Yugoslavia. I was furious hearing his flimsy excuse, but knowing that our engineer was safe and would be back soon was reassuring.

I picked Chuck up on his arrival at the San Francisco airport. On our way home, he described his adventures.

The morning he arrived in London, a customer representative met him at the airport. The man informed him that the work would be done near Belgrade at a non-profit research company. He had already reserved a first-class flight to Belgrade for Chuck later that morning. Naturally, Chuck was surprised about the change of plans, but the representative assured him it had all been cleared with me. Not wanting to call and disturb me in the middle of the night in California, Chuck boarded the plane and enjoyed the first-class treatment.

A Yugoslav army officer waited for him in Belgrade. After a long ride in a military vehicle, they arrived at an army base. The commander, a colonel who spoke English well, welcomed him, and they had dinner together.

During the meal, the Colonel explained the problem. Their base had been designing military electronics, and they wanted to use COMPACT in their work. Their programmers, however, could not install the program on their Soviet-made Ural-2 mainframe computer. That is why they had asked for someone from our company to come and help. "I expect you to stay as long as it takes," the Colonel emphasized. "We have very comfortable living quarters for you."

When Chuck asked if he could call me, the Colonel shook his head. "I'm sorry, but for security reasons, that's not possible. I'll ask our buyer in London to send a message to California." (I never received a message.)

After dinner, a soldier led Chuck to a nicely furnished apartment and locked the door from the outside. Peeking out through the window, he could see an armed guard standing nearby. Accepting his fate, Chuck went to sleep. The guard unlocked the door at the start of each day and locked it again every night.

Chuck was a runner and expressed his desire to jog every morning. The Colonel agreed. A soldier in a Jeep drove alongside, escorting him on the inner roads of the base as he ran.

The Soviet computer had an unfamiliar operating system. Many of COMPACT's functions required complete recoding. Chuck worked long hours with the help of several capable programmers. He told me that at the time, he was unsure if they would ever let him go. The Colonel and his staff honored him at a special celebration when the work was completed. The next day, he headed home.

Hearing how the British company had deliberately misled us made me extremely angry, but it was too late to do anything. For a long time, I lived in fear, dreading the consequences that might arise from that questionable sale. Fortunately, none did.

I promised myself to be more careful about future direct sales. After that incident, I modified our purchase agreement form to precisely show the location and detailed information about the computer on which the program was being installed.

These days, the end user never receives the source code of a program. Instead, the software companies create executable modules from their computers. The user must register these modules through the Internet to prevent usage on multiple computers.

In my business, however, we did not own a computer and could not generate executable codes. In the 1970s, COMPACT was installed on the timeshare systems' mainframe computers made by IBM, Control Data (CDC), Honeywell, CRAY, XEROX, and Univac. For our in-house sales, depending on the type of computer the customer owned, I created a copy of the program's source code on punched cards or magnetic tapes.

The source code at the customer's site always required modifications because each timeshare company had its own customized operating system and programming functions.

I had no real copy protection other than trusting the buyer's integrity. Fortunately, software piracy in those times was not what it is today. Of the several hundred direct COMPACT sales, there were only two cases where I suspected unauthorized usage.

Part-time soccer coaching

The American Youth Soccer Organization (**AYSO**) was formed in California during the mid-1960s to offer the sport to 6-19-year-old children. They looked for volunteers to coach, referee, and administratively assist newly formed teams. Hearing that I had played soccer before, a neighbor asked if I could coach a team he was forming.

In the 1970s, only a few AYSO coaches had played soccer. I felt that with my experience, I could teach new players the basics. In those days, children began playing on teams at five or six — now they start at age two. Son George had just begun first grade that year, and I thought it would be good for him to learn the game.

My wife and I were concerned about his face turning red after hard running. On a soccer team, the goalie rarely runs, so that was the position I selected for George. My only concern was that even if a goalie makes several spectacular saves, everyone remembers when he once missed the ball. Fortunately, George became a good netkeeper and enjoyed his teammates telling others about his performance. I was happy he could participate in a team sport without stressing his heart. Later, we learned that the murmur was gone, and we no longer had to be concerned about his health.

Dr. Max, the healer

Somewhere, I had heard that when children suffer minor injuries, the fastest cure is to take their attention away from the pain. I found a successful way to apply that theory that always worked with our daughter. It also involved the neighbor's dog.

Beyond a chain-link fence at the bottom of our sloping backyard, a large German shepherd watched over our neighbor's property. His name was Max. One day, while Nanci was running too close to our rose bushes, a thorn pricked her finger. She began to cry so loudly that I could hear it inside my office.

After rushing out to investigate, she showed me the tiny drop of blood on her finger. My efforts to calm her did not work. She cried even harder. Max stood on the other side of the fence, watching the drama.

In desperation, I picked up Nanci and carried her down the slope. "Let's tell Max what's happened," I suggested. She immediately stopped crying. When we reached our side of the fence, I talked to Max. "Look at Nanci's finger," I said. "Could you make her feel better?"

Max wagged his tail, and I kept talking to him. Nanci also told him what that awful bush did to her finger. She completely forgot about crying. We said goodbye to Max and walked back to the bush. I spanked the bush for its crime. The matter was closed.

From that day on, I used the distraction technique successfully many times. It even worked when we were away from our house. Whenever she was hurt, I promised to tell Max when we arrived home. Of course, I always had to follow up on my pledge. Max was a sympathetic listener. As payment for his healing services, I sneaked to him daily treats.

My First Sales Representative

A man speaking with an Asian accent called the office one day. "My name is Nobu Kitakoji," he said. "I'm the president of Tokyo System Lab and would like to represent you in Japan. May I come to your office to talk about it?"

I did not know how to respond. *He thinks I have a large company. I should not meet him in our house.* "Let me suggest a restaurant where we could talk over lunch," I said.

"Thank you very much, but if possible, I would also like to see your operation," he replied.

I could not think of any reasonable excuse not to have him visit us. I explained that my office was in my home. He sounded surprised but assured me it would not be a problem. Within an hour, he showed up at our front door.

Our visitor was slightly built, about five feet six inches tall, with a humble and polite demeanor. After bowing deeply from the waist, he offered to shake hands, contrary to Japanese custom. I introduced him to my wife, and we talked in our spacious living room. He apologized for interrupting my schedule. Next, he complimented us on our house and admired the magnificent view of the valley. Then, he revealed a gift for me—a beautifully framed picture of Mount Fuji. His courtesy was almost overwhelming.

After a few minutes of general conversation, he turned to business. He had heard that some of the companies in Japan were using COMPACT through timesharing and asked if we had sold any for in-house installation in that country. I answered, "No."

"Japanese companies will not buy foreign-made computer programs without having local representation," he told me. "With our established contacts in the industry, however, I'm certain we could sell quite a few programs for you." He showed me his company's customer list, which included familiar names like Sony, Fujitsu, NEC, NTT, and Toshiba.

In a short time, we verbally agreed for his company to represent us in Japan. A few weeks later, he returned with his vice president to finalize the contract. After we signed the papers, Compact Engineering had its first sales representative. The arrangement worked out exceptionally well for us.

When the Space Communication Group of Hughes Aircraft Company purchased COMPACT, they asked me to conduct weekly four-hour tutorial seminars during eight weeks. The company wanted their engineers to participate on their own time, so they scheduled the seminars from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Wednesdays. I flew from San Jose to Burbank in the early

afternoon on those days and returned in the late evening. Hughes provided a driver to shuttle me between the Burbank airport and the plant.



Meeting two officers of Tokyo System Lab in our house. From left to right: Chuck Holmes, Kitakojisan, me, and Kono-san.

In 1978, the San Jose airport had only one terminal with about a dozen boarding gates. The short-term parking lot was just across the terminal. Security was almost nonexistent. With a ticket in my hand, I could arrive in my car at the short-term parking area 15 to 20 minutes before departure, walk to the gate, and board the plane. That specific Burbank flight always took off from the same gate. After the first few weeks, I was thoroughly familiar with the routine.

One Wednesday, as I sat in the plane taxiing toward the runway for takeoff from San Jose, a male voice came over the PA system. "This is your captain speaking. Let me welcome you on our flight to LAX..."

"Someone better tell the captain that we are going to Burbank," I said with a smile to the passenger sitting beside me.

"No," he replied. "We're going to Los Angeles."

PSA had switched gates that day. I was on the wrong plane!

Fortunately, we were headed in the same general direction. When we landed at LAX, I called Hughes from a pay phone and explained what had happened. I took a taxi and arrived at the plant just in time to begin the course. The students enjoyed hearing what an absent-minded professor they had, but it was not a mistake I wanted to repeat.

I always checked gate assignments after that day.

A New Business Opportunity

In January 1979, a man called me. "My name is Wayne Brown," he said. "I am heading up a new project for Communications Satellite Company (Comsat) and want to know if we could make a special arrangement with you. Let's have dinner together to discuss it." We set up a meeting at Maddeline's in Palo Alto a few days later.

Although Comsat Laboratories in the Washington D.C. area was on our COMPACT user list, I did not know much about the company. However, the financial brochure our stockbroker gave me the next day provided more information. Comsat was the first international commercial satellite company, formed by the U.S. Congress Communications Satellite Act of 1962 and incorporated as a publicly traded company in 1963. It operated Intelsat and Inmarsat and was involved with the launch of Early Bird. Satellite communications were performed at

microwave frequencies, so we shared something. I was eager to learn what they wanted from me.

Mr. Brown and I arrived at the restaurant at the same time. The owner, whose son played on my AYSO soccer team, recognized me as we walked in. He led us into a small private dining room. At first, I thought that we were receiving special treatment because of my coaching, but later, I learned that our reservation had been made for that room.

The Comsat man did not waste time. As soon as we were seated, he told me that a few years previously, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) had reclassified the company as a utility and began regulating the rates it charged its customers. As a result, Comsat's revenues and profits started to decline. To make things worse, the company's worldwide monopoly on satellite telecommunication was to end the following year with the new Open Skies Policy of the FCC. The new ruling encouraged competition. Comsat's management had decided to diversify and look for new business ventures. One of their ideas was to automate high-tech companies' engineering design and manufacturing processes.

"This is why I wanted to see you," he said. "The engineers of the large companies either use outside timesharing or their central mainframe computers. The first alternative is expensive and not fully secure. In the second case, they generally use a computer purchased for business instead of scientific applications."

I did not see where he was heading. "True, but are no alternatives," I said.

"Not yet," he replied. "Within a year, however, my group will develop a new design system running on minicomputers. We'll automate the engineering departments. Digital Equipment (DEC) and Prime Computer Company have recently introduced powerful minicomputers capable of simultaneously handling the needs of 30 to 40 engineers!"

I focused on mainframe computers in my business and was unaware of the minis he mentioned. All of a sudden, I became interested in his project. "Tell me more."

He would not go further unless I signed the nondisclosure agreement he had brought with him. I signed on the spot. Then, he outlined his ambitious business plan.

His group of 20 professionals had been converting various business applications, such as database management, word processing, and something new—an "electronic spreadsheet" called VisiCalc (the predecessor of Excel) to minicomputers. Next, he wanted to add COMPACT to the package. "We'll sell the entire turnkey system to military defense and telecommunications companies. You'll make more money because we'll market your program," he said.

He predicted that customers using their system could drastically reduce engineering administrative staff. "Right now, when you need a letter, you dictate it to a secretary who types it. If every engineer has a computer terminal and learns how to use it, there'll be no need for secretaries."

The man sounded like a visionary. The more I heard, the more excited I became. Under his proposal, Comsat would pay us generously for the conversion and sign a non-exclusive license to market COMPACT on the minicomputers. They had leased a large building in Palo Alto, and we could share the facilities with his local group and have access to their minicomputers.

The idea sounded attractive. Compact Engineering had ten employees then, and it was time to leave our home office. Using their building for six months would be ideal until the project's estimated completion. By then, I would have found a new office.

I gave Wayne a tentative positive answer. Back at home, I discussed the offer with Chuck, Mike, and my wife. All three thought it was an excellent opportunity to expand the scope of our business. Joyce was also happy to regain the exclusive use of our kitchen. Within a few weeks, I signed a contract with Comsat and moved into their building.

Our children did not like the change. Nanci had just begun preschool and would cry in class. "My daddy started to work, and he's not home anymore during the day," she told the teacher. When the teacher asked her how long I had been out of work, she said, "He's never worked."

A few days later, I met the teacher. "I'm so glad to hear you've found a job," she told me. "But apparently, Nanci does not like the change."

I was confused. "I've been working full-time since I turned eighteen. Where did you hear that I did not have a job?"

"Nanci said that you're no longer at home during the day," she replied.

I finally understood and explained to her that I began my home business the year Nanci was born. To Nanci, a dad at home during the day couldn't possibly be "at work" simultaneously!

Establishing a Closer Working Relationship with Comsat

Many of the Comsat employees in the local group came from Hughes Aircraft. Most of them had programming backgrounds, although there were also a couple of engineers. They were highly competent, and we quickly developed an excellent working relationship with all of them.

Maintaining a program with over 20,000 lines of code had become difficult. We had the listings of the programs from about 60 on-site installations. When a customer reported a bug, we first had to determine if it was unique to that installation or existed in all programs. As the number of in-house installations increased, the required product support became unmanageable.

At that point, our direct sale revenues far exceeded our timeshare royalties. It was evident that once the program became available for minicomputers, even small companies could afford it. I decided to focus on that market. To differentiate the new program from the previous product, I assigned it the name Super-COMPACT. Our programmers placed clever software switches² into the code to eliminate the need to store the listings of all future customers.

Although we had gradually increased the program's price from \$1,500 to \$10,000, Wayne laughed when he heard the latter figure. "You've been giving away that program," he told me. Comsat's market analysts recommended selling Super-COMPACT on the minicomputers for \$60,000! I was horrified to hear that price, but time proved them right. I *had* been giving away the program!

² Statements to separate program segments unique to specific customers.

Two months later, I proposed to Wayne that we expand the scope of their design system by letting my company add two other circuit design programs: SPICE from UC Berkeley and FILSYN, a major filter synthesis program. The SPICE program had been developed with public funds, so its source code was free. The filter program was owned by an individual I knew well, and he was open to joining us. Both programs were running only on mainframe computers. Therefore, they would require extensive conversions to run on the minicomputers.

Wayne liked the idea, but such a significant modification to our original agreement required the approval of a Comsat vice president. Our plan was accepted, and I added five more people to the Compact staff to work on the two programs. With 15 employees on our payroll, I had to pay more attention to personnel issues. I split our technical people into two groups to minimize my administrative workload. Chuck headed our engineers, and Mike was responsible for the programmers.

As our project completion approached, I read a lengthy article in *Business Week*. According to their prediction, office automation will become a five-billion-dollar business within five years. *IBM, General Electric, HP, and other giants will enter that business and squash Compact Engineering! What should I do?*

I called a conference with both our accountant and our corporate attorney. "Would Comsat be interested in buying your company?" asked the accountant after hearing my concern.

I had not thought about that, but the management style of Comsat did not appeal to me. The fact that the U.S. government had created the company had left its mark on it. Lower-level managers had limited decision-making power. Critics often referred to the company as a "government corporation."

Comsat was also quite formal, placing importance on titles and academic degrees. I had never liked it at Fairchild, where those with PhDs were always addressed as "Dr." by their subordinates. I preferred the style at HP and Farinon, where virtually all employees were called by their first names.

On the other hand, Comsat was a large company that could provide protection. Its worldwide sales and marketing organization could do a far better job selling our products than I could. The company wanted to diversify due to losing its satellite communication monopoly. I concluded that the good outweighed the bad and that exploring the possibility of selling Compact to them would make sense.

Our accountant recommended a two-day seminar titled "Selling Your Own Business." I attended the course in San Francisco the following week. It was an eye-opener and helped me to formulate a strategy for selling the company. That opportunity came faster than I expected.

Halfway through the Super-COMPACT installation on the DEC PDP-10 (VAX) minicomputer, Wayne and I flew to Washington, D.C., to present to a small group of Comsat officers. We met in the president's luxurious private office on the eighth floor of their headquarters at L'Enfant Plaza. The expansive windows of the office offered a spectacular view of the city's landmarks.

During the luncheon that followed the meeting, their vice president of marketing sat next to me. "At what price should I be selling Super-COMPACT to companies with a VAX?" I asked him.

He stared at me. "I thought we had an exclusive arrangement with you to market the product," he said.

"Your exclusivity only applies to bundled sales," I replied. "I have the right to sell the program without a computer."

The news must have spoiled his appetite. It appeared that he had the wrong information. "That's going to be a problem," he said after some thought. "Let me talk this over with Mickey Alpert." He stood up, walked over to the other side of the table, and began a conversation with another man. "Let's talk about this after lunch," he suggested when he returned.

Mickey turned out to be the vice president of mergers and acquisitions. He set up a meeting for later in the afternoon. "Would you consider a merger between Comsat and Compact Engineering?" he asked after I had answered several questions about my company.

I remembered the final advice given to the participants at a recent business seminar: *Let the buyer pursue you!* "I haven't thought about it," I replied, hiding my excitement. "Our employees like the small company environment."

"You could certainly maintain that environment. I know you operate differently in California. Don't let our ways here scare you," he assured me. "Think about it after you go home. Comsat's resources would help your company grow much faster." I promised to reply in a few days.

Wayne told me that he was asked to stay there for another day. After my return, I contacted Owen Fiore in Los Angeles to find out if he would represent me in a possible merger. He was one of the attorneys who had lectured in the San Francisco seminar, and I had been impressed by his presentation. "I'll be up in your area over the weekend," he told me. "We could talk about it then."

Wayne called my home the following evening. "Let me come over and tell you what Comsat plans to do." Knowing that it must be something important, I agreed. He was at our house in a few minutes.

"With my group's recommendation, Mickey has already been negotiating to purchase a small Texas company with an outstanding digital design program," he began. "When that acquisition happens, it'll fill the only missing link of our design system."

He was right. Our programs only handled the analog portion of a system. Adding a capable digital design program would make the Comsat package highly marketable. However, Wayne was not finished.

"If that deal goes through and you agree to sell, Comsat will set up a new West Coast subsidiary headed by me. It would have multiple divisions: the Compact group led by you and the digital group with its current president," he added.

It sounded like Comsat was serious. I told Wayne I was interested and planned to meet with an advisor over the weekend.

Owen Fiore spent Sunday morning with me. He agreed to represent me after looking at our financial records, tax returns, and customer list. In addition to expenses, his charges would be based on the time spent on the case.

As for the sales price, he felt it should equal our revenues from the past twelve months. Instead of cash, he recommended that we ask for a tax-free stock exchange. "When the news

that Comsat is entering into the office automation market reaches Wall Street, the stock price should go up," he said.

I phoned Mickey the next day to follow up on our conversation. He flew to California and stayed in our office for an entire day. Before he left, I signed a letter of intent to merge that he took with him to present to Comsat's board the following week. The ball was rolling.

During the following weeks, I visited Comsat headquarters twice. The first trip was mostly spent on technical discussions and planning. Owen also came with me the second time to discuss the financial terms. I was glad to have Owen there because he asked for many benefits that would not have occurred to me. By the end of our second visit, we reached a tentative agreement with Comsat that only needed their board's approval and a satisfactory audit of Compact's financial records. One of their business managers and a CPA were to come home with us to conduct the audit.

The terms of the agreement far exceeded my expectations. I would be a senior vice president of Comsat and president of the Compact Division, with an annual compensation of over \$100,000. In addition to a four-week paid vacation, I would be paid for an additional four weeks, during which I could teach university courses and keep the revenues received. The executive benefit package included fully paid medical and dental insurance for me and my family, life and disability insurance, and a company car. For retirement consideration, Comsat would give me retroactive credit for my employment with Compact. Along with our two key employees, Chuck and Mike, I would receive a five-year employment contract. Compact and Comsat were to each pay their legal expenses for the merger.

On the flight home, I reviewed my finances. The 35,000 shares of Comsat I would receive in exchange for my company's assets would pay annual dividends of \$2 per share. When I added everything up, my income and net worth would be higher than my father-in-law's! My yearly salary at Farinon had been \$30,000 a few years earlier, and we had lived well on that. Now, we would have so much more. Never in my life had I expected to achieve such wealth.

A few days after going through Compact's financial records, the Comsat business manager asked for a private conversation. "You must keep what I have to say between us," he began. "Comsat would fire me for disloyalty if they found it out," I promised complete confidentiality.

"Your company has high potential, but Comsat is not flexible enough to exploit it. Don't sell out now. Please hire me to be your business manager. We'll find venture capitalist financing and grow the company for a few years. Then we'll go public."

I was astonished to hear what he said. "How could I do that after already signing a tentative agreement?"

"The merger hasn't been finalized. You can always back out before the formal agreement is signed."

His proposal sounded unethical. After negotiating a deal with Comsat in good faith, how could I turn them away now? On the other hand, going public in a few years sounded lucrative. I called my father-in-law and Owen for advice. Neither of them wanted me to hold out.

I thought Owen was more concerned about the possibility of losing the additional revenues than the ethical part. On the other hand, my father-in-law agreed that I should not trust someone ready to "bite the hand that fed him." I valued his opinion and decided to go with Comsat as planned.

It took about a month to finish the transaction. Just before Christmas 1979, we signed the final agreement. Comsat established a new subsidiary called Comsat General Integrated Systems (CGIS) and changed the name of my division to Compact Software. They purchased land near the intersection of San Antonio Road and Hwy 101 and built a new facility for the subsidiary. Our plant included a central computing center with a Digital Equipment VAX, a Prime 450 minicomputer, and an interactive terminal on every employee's desk. The recently purchased Texas group also became a part of CGIS. We began an aggressive hiring campaign to build a company that would automate engineering departments worldwide.



Our new building was in Palo Alto. Comsat built it to our specifications, although it took some time for them to agree to have a bicycle storage room!

When we released Super-COMPACT in 1980, the demand for the program was overwhelming. Our advertising campaign emphasized that it would be offered only on the VAX. The key selling point was decentralizing engineering departments by providing a smaller computer center dedicated to scientific applications. Our motto was to have a computer terminal on every engineer's desk. In 1980, that was a revolutionary new idea!

A week after the program's release, I received a call from an angry executive. He was the head of a division of Hughes Aircraft. "We are one of the most important defense contractors in the United States," he shouted. "Who are you to tell me that I need to buy a minicomputer to use Super-COMPACT when we have a multimillion-dollar IBM mainframe in our central computing center?" He demanded that we make the program available for his computer.

I had learned at HP that "the customer is always right"³ and gave in to his demand. We converted the program for his IBM system. Soon after, General Dynamics wanted it on their CDC mainframe, and the Naval Research Lab wanted it on a Cray. We gave these companies what they wanted as well. Within six months, the program ran on five different computer operating systems. Although that made our support and maintenance more complex, the customers were satisfied. Our business was booming.

Japanese companies that previously had not trusted a home-based operation also wanted the program from a Comsat division. I frequently traveled to Japan to speak at conferences

³ That was true in those times.

and promote Super-COMPACT at trade shows. On my first visit, Kitakoji-san introduced me to eating sashimi—something I still enjoy.



Left: Compact Software booth at a Japanese conference center. Right: Participating in karaoke in a Tokyo bar.

Back in California, the head of UCLA’s Continuing Education Center resigned and formed his own business. His company, Continuing Education Institute (CEI), offered short courses in the US and planned to expand to Europe. He asked if I would teach for his company at major industrial centers that would not compete with UCLA. I agreed to do it at two locations: in the Boston area and Palo Alto. I especially liked the second one because it did not require travel.

A Stanford-educated Swedish entrepreneur, Birgit Jacobson, partnered with him to form an overseas group, CEI Europe. Her philosophy was offering courses at popular tourist locations where engineers would take their families for vacations, like Nice, Barcelona, and Davos. She asked me to teach in Europe, too. I consented because those trips would allow me to visit my mother in Hungary.

Engineers who had taken our introductory design course asked for advanced-level courses. Since I didn’t have time to conduct more courses, I found other lecturers and designed a class to follow the one Bob and I taught. The two five-day courses formed a strong foundation for high-frequency circuit designers. Decades later, updated versions of those classes are still being offered.

In 1980, American Airlines began a passenger loyalty program called AAdvantage. United soon followed with its Mileage Plus program. I flew frequently on both airlines and soon became a member of their elite classes, which enabled me to be in first class on most trips. That year, I traveled about 30 percent of the time, so accumulating mileage in the programs was easy.

Trying to Balance Family Life and Business

At home, I often performed “magic” tricks for our children. My favorite was to “change traffic lights.” When we arrived at a red light, I stopped the car and looked at the traffic light for the cross street. As soon as I saw it change from green to amber, I would say, “*Abracadabra Kalamazoo, red light change to green!*” The children, who watched only the lights facing our direction, observed the red change to green. They were always impressed by my “magic power.”

Our three-year-old Nanci was invited to a weekend sleepover at a friend's house. "Daddy, can you really change the red light to green?" she asked me after returning home.

"Yes, of course," I replied. "Why do you ask?"

She told me her friend's father had taken the girls out for breakfast. On the way to the restaurant, they reached an intersection with a red traffic light. Nanci asked the dad to change the light.

"I can't do that," said the father.

"My daddy can do it," Nanci told him. "Perhaps he could teach you, too."

I had no choice but to admit the truth. It took quite a while to regain her trust.

After buying a truck and a camper, my in-laws invited us to camp out for a weekend at a lake near Nevada City. The vast pine trees blanketing the area and the clear blue sky reflecting in the water presented spectacular scenery. Joyce and I fell in love with the area and purchased a large lot only a block from Scotts Flat Reservoir.

My father-in-law thought of a joint project for our lot. He would buy a log cabin kit if I assisted him in building it. Joyce and I thought it was a great idea and agreed. After the lumber was delivered, we all took a week off to start the construction. My brother-in-law, David, also came with us. A local contractor provided guidance and directed our work.

I had never used a hammer for longer than a few seconds at a time. Hammering the large nails into the logs for a week led to a painful elbow. I had trouble controlling the ball while playing tennis the following week. When the pain persisted, I went to see a sports doctor. He diagnosed a severe case of tennis elbow—which developed during my week as a carpenter. It was several months before I could return to playing tennis.

My brother-in-law and one of his college friends spent their entire summer vacation working on the cabin. After it was completed, my father-in-law purchased a powerboat and water skis. We all learned to water ski and spent many weekends in that area.

Joyce had grown up with her family having horses. She wanted to get back to riding, and she also wanted to teach our kids how to ride. One day, she hoped to take them to compete at horse shows. Los Altos Hills allowed its residents to keep farm animals, so she proposed that we buy two horses.

The only time I had been near these hooved creatures was in Budapest. A brewery that made deliveries by horse-drawn carriages parked their wagons and stabled the horses in the courtyard of the building next to ours. My contact with the animals had been limited to passing by the front gate of their structure; my only memory of horses was smelling the odor of manure. As a result, I had never been attracted to them. However, seeing how much Joyce wanted to have the animals, I agreed.

In addition to owning horses, Joyce also thought that having a swimming pool would allow our children to learn to swim and be safe in the water. However, our hillside location was unsuitable for a pool or horses. As wonderful as it had been, our house no longer worked for us. Giving up our beautiful three-level home was difficult, but I compromised to keep the family happy. We began the search for another home with enough flat land and found a suitable place near Magdalena Road on the southwest side of Highway 280. We moved there in January 1981. The one-acre lot already had a nice pool and a stable for horses. In a short time, we also purchased two horses. We had taken the first steps toward a semi-rural lifestyle.

Shortly after we moved in, friends asked if they could leave their pony with us for a week while they were on vacation. We agreed, and they brought the pony to our stable. Late the next afternoon, while Joyce was away from the house, an excited George called me at work. "Daddy, the pony escaped into the street."

Fearing that a car might hit the animal, I rushed home. Driving around in our immediate neighborhood, I could not find it. I returned home and called the police, explaining what had happened. The dispatcher told me that someone on Summerhill Road had reported a loose pony just a few minutes earlier. The place was about a mile from where we lived.

I jumped into my car and quickly drove to the reported address. A woman stood in the driveway, holding the pony by its reins. Her family also kept horses, and she had found the pony standing next to their fence. I thanked her profusely and proceeded to take charge of the runaway. The little beast sprinted to the road as we exchanged holds on the pony.

Frustrated with my failure, I gave chase with the hope of a quick capture. Being a former runner—an award-winning one, at that—I was confident I could catch him. To my dismay, however, the distance between us was rapidly increasing. After running about 100 yards, I had to accept defeat. My two long legs were no match for his four short ones. Huffing and puffing, I went back to the car to follow him.

Fortunately, the pony stopped half a mile away, next to two children. I yelled to the kids and asked them to hold on to him. This time, I succeeded in transferring the pony to my grip and walked him back to our house. My children were relieved, and we ensured that the gate was securely shut from then on. We never told the pony's owners about the incident.

Our first dog, Tarzan, had developed a fatal disease and did not live long. I was eager to have another dog, and the large backyard of the new home was ideal for one. We bought a cute German shepherd puppy, and Nanci gave her the name Princess.

During puppy training, we quickly realized that Princess was not as bright as we had hoped. I was determined to train her properly and looked for professional help. Someone recommended a two-week live-in obedience program at a Sunnyside dog kennel. After introducing our dog to the owner, he guaranteed success. We left Princess with him.

A week later, the man called us. "Please take your dog home," he said sheepishly. "I am afraid she is not trainable."

When we picked up Princess, the trainer apologized, explaining that it was the first time in his career that he had failed to teach a dog the basics. For consolation, he gave us two large bags of dog food. We had to accept that our beautiful dog was not a mental giant. We loved her regardless.

Nanci was a light sleeper and often became scared after waking up at night in the new house. When that happened, she would come into our master bedroom and crawl into bed with us. I walked her back into her room and held her hand until she fell asleep. An hour or two later, she was again in our bed, and the cycle repeated several times. Keeping a low-level light on and playing soft music in her room did not help. I did not get much sleep on those nights.



Upper row, left to right: In our new home with wisteria blossoms; Nanci and Princess; Halloween outfits; The pony I tried to catch. Lower row: Riding prizes won by our kids.

Finally, I had a brilliant idea. When I put her into bed in the evening, I tied one end of a long string around her wrist and the other around mine. I told her to pull the string when she woke up at night. I would respond by pulling it at my end. That way, she would know that I was near.

The low-tech communication system worked. Whenever the jerk on my wrist awakened me, I pulled the string until she felt it. Being assured that I was there, she went back to sleep.

George's room was located farther from our master bedroom. He had no problem sleeping there as long as I ensured his closet door was closed—so the monsters could not come out at night.

I had an established bedtime story with the kids from the time they were very young. I made up individuals who invented various things to please a king. The inventions had consistently been named after their inventors. For example, Mr. Softdrink invented soft drinks, Mr. Utensil the utensils, and so on. The children loved them, and I often had to be highly creative to develop believable ideas.

Increased International Travel

I enjoyed playing with my children at home, but my work required me to travel frequently. In mid-February, Kitakoji-san asked me to participate in the TokyoCom conference scheduled for the newly constructed convention center near Tokyo's harbor. "I arranged a TV interview for you," he informed me. "It'll generate a lot of publicity for your company."

I knew he had arranged a booth for us in the exhibit area but had not planned to attend that conference because Joyce was unhappy about my frequent travel. However, the idea of being interviewed on Japanese television appealed to me. Even with the short notice, I agreed to go.

I arrived in Tokyo amid one of its most severe winters. To make things worse, the heating system in the new convention center exhibit area was not operating. Standing in our booth wearing only our business suits was uncomfortable, but warm coats would have been culturally inappropriate in appearance-conscious Japan. I hadn't thought to bring layers of long underwear. Our representative brought small chemical heater pouches that we could place into our pockets, but keeping our hands in our pockets was not polite. The only option was for us to stand shivering in our booth with forced smiles.

Although I had participated in other conferences in Japan, the TokyoCom was the largest and most interesting I had ever seen. The employees of the various large companies wore identical bright-colored business outfits. Most of the exhibits had high-power PA systems blasting their messages. Pretty young women stood before each booth, politely handing out company literature and gifts. Thousands of visitors strolled through the crowded aisles.

The five-minute-long TV interview in the exhibit area was fascinating. The reporter asked questions in English, repeated them in Japanese, and also translated my answers for the viewers. In my hotel room that evening, I watched his report on TV during the evening news. Due to the chilly environment, I did not look comfortable during the interview. However, it was great publicity for our company.



Left: Sampling Japanese snacks during the TokyoCom opening ceremony. Center: Setting up for the TV interview. Right: Demonstrating Super-COMPACT a month earlier at the European Microwave Conference in London.



Left: A cover page article of *Microwave System News* about the CGIS design system. Center and right: Two Super-COMPACT advertisements. The one on the right shows me in the photo.

I spent much of the flight from Tokyo planning my family's future. I felt I had already surpassed all my professional goals and did not want to stay in the "rat race" much longer. After fulfilling the five years of my employment agreement with Comsat, I intended to retire at 49 and leave the high-tech world. With the dividend income from our stock and the retirement benefits from Comsat, I calculated that we could live comfortably for the rest of our lives without any financial concerns.

The kids especially missed me during business trips, although they liked it when I visited Japan because of the unique gifts I always brought home. George turned nine already, and Nanci was nearly five. During the previous year, not only had I moved out of the home office, but I had also traveled all over the world without them. To make up for the time I had missed with the family during my business trips, I was eager to devote myself to them fully. After retirement, I planned to coach both track and soccer. Perhaps I could also teach courses occasionally.

An Unexpected Change

To my dismay, my optimistic plans were not to be carried out as I had envisioned. Within a few days of arriving home from Japan, I learned my wife was in love with our 25-year-old handyman. The possibility of a divorce loomed, and I desperately searched for a way to prevent it. Our close friends and relatives were puzzled by the news as I was. Joyce and I seemed to be one of the model couples in the community.

I naively thought perhaps one of the issues between us was the nine-year age difference, so I tried to look younger. I noticed my hair loss, so I had permanent waves added. Cosmetic surgery was the last step. None of those physical changes brought any positive results in my marriage. It seemed that there were deeper problems of which I had been unaware. Marriage counseling did not provide any solution as to what I could do. Joyce was determined to end our 13-year marriage.

I could not help but think of my marriage breakdown in terms of a hurdle race. My track specialty was the 400-meter hurdles, an event with ten hurdles to pass over. During my racing career, I felt relieved every time I reached the last hurdle because there were no more obstacles on the way to the finish. Now, in my life's race, I felt as though I had passed over the last hurdle, only to find that someone had unexpectedly snuck another one in my way. I felt devastated.

As if my marital problems were not enough, difficulties with a colleague began to interfere with our progress at work. For several months, our vice president of engineering, Chuck, had disagreed with the company's business plan; he wanted to add new features to Super-COMPACT before its release. The sales department wanted to sell what we had and market a new version later. Chuck's stubborn stance created tension between engineering and the rest of the company. I had private discussions with him, but his attitude did not change. The president of CGIS recommended terminating Chuck's employment.

I was torn between my loyalty to Chuck and concern about the company's continued operation. He was the second engineer I had hired, significantly contributing to our success.

He had always been a dedicated worker. To complicate the case, he still had almost four years left of his five-year employment agreement with Comsat.

When I presented the problem to our legal department, one of the attorneys made an interesting revelation. “We had serious personnel problems with an employee last year,” he told me. “Instead of firing him, we sent him through a program called *Lifespring*. In five days, he became a different person. He is still with the company.”

“What’s Lifespring?” I asked.

“It’s a humane version of EST⁴.”

I had heard that EST was some mind-control process. Participants were locked into rooms for hours without even being allowed to go to the bathroom. If Lifespring was similar, I did not think Chuck would like it. I asked the attorney to find a legal solution to our problem.

That evening, I met with our daughter’s kindergarten teacher. Through the parents’ grapevine, she had heard about my marital problems. She asked if she might offer a possible solution. I was eager to listen to what she had to say.

“The parents of another of my students were recently considering divorce,” she began. “A mediator recommended an awareness course. After completing the program, they worked out their differences and stayed married.”

“What kind of course was that?”

“Lifespring. They took it together in San Jose.”

Two different people had recommended the same thing to me in one day. *It cannot be an accident! Perhaps it could help me find the solutions to my problems.* “Thanks, I’ll look into it,” I told her.

The following day, I called Chuck into my office. He seemed nervous and was probably expecting to be fired. I began as gently as I could. “We both know about the serious disagreement you have about the release of Super-COMPACT, and I also face possible divorce. I’ve heard about a course that might help both of us. Would you go through it with me?”

He wanted to know more about the course. I told him the little I knew. He asked me to give him some time to think it over. An hour later, he came to see me. “Let’s do it,” he said.

The Basic Lifespring Program⁵ was five days long. From Wednesday through Friday, they held evening sessions only, but Saturday and Sunday were full days. Chuck and I drove to the Holiday Inn in San Jose for the first session. Approximately 300 people were eagerly waiting outside the closed doors of the ballroom. When the doors opened, the Lifespring staff ushered us inside.

Promptly at 5 p.m., the trainer introduced himself after everyone had been seated. Then, he asked if we knew the lowest form of awareness. “Not knowing anything,” offered one of the participants.

“You’re close but not right,” the trainer replied. “Realizing that you don’t know, you’re already at a higher level. The worst case is when you don’t know that you don’t know.”

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erhard_Seminars_Training

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifespring>

My interest perked up. I had never heard that reasoning, but I agreed with him. *This might be an exciting program. I'm glad we came.*

The trainer went through the ground rules, and some of them generated heated discussions. "The course will only start after you all agree to the rules," he declared. "You must be seated every day at the agreed time. No one will be admitted late," was the first rule.

"What if I'm held up in heavy traffic?" "What if I can't find parking?" participants asked.

"Figure out how to deal with those possibilities. Just be here on time!"

Some of the other rules were:

- Have an open mind.
- Unless it is an emergency, stay in the room until the break.
- No eating or drinking during the sessions.
- No smoking and no use of any non-prescription drugs.
- No side talking.

The leader encouraged participation. "Raise your hand when you have a question or want to share," he said. "Wait until I call on you to speak."

It took over two hours for everyone to accept the rules. Those who disagreed were asked to leave. Finally, the process began. Small-group discussions and exercises followed each one- to two-hour lecture. Each session was designed to handle a specific personal issue.

At the beginning of the first small-group session, the leader asked everyone to describe briefly what brought us to Lifespring. Like me, most people came after some traumatic experience in their lives—losing a loved one, having domestic problems, being fired at work, being sentenced for a crime, or just not fitting into society. One man came to overcome his fear of water. Our socio-economic backgrounds were varied; participants ranged from the unemployed to corporate executives.

I had never participated in a course dealing with interpersonal issues, and the events of the next five days profoundly affected me. Neither the trainer nor the staff had an academic background in psychology, but they possessed special skills to zoom in on the real causes of our problems quickly. One man shared that he had held several jobs but had been fired from each one after only a few months. In a short time, it became apparent to all of us—except him—that his excessive drinking interfered with his job performance. Only two days later, after one of the group exercises, did he recognize the actual cause. I heard later that he joined Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and eventually became one of the leaders of that organization.

The trainer instructed us to make direct eye contact while talking with someone. He also emphasized using the pronoun "I" instead of "you" to acknowledge accountability. I was amazed to hear how often the participants switched to "you" to avoid responsibility. For example, a man who often beat his wife explained his reasoning, "...when you lose your temper..." instead of "...when I lose my temper..."

Lifespring also frowned upon using the phrase, "I'll try." Instead, they recommended giving a firm commitment by saying "I will" or being honest and say, "I will not."

The question, "Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?" came up frequently. One of the participants stubbornly argued for performing a task just because he wanted to be correct. "Sometimes, it is more important to be happy, even if it means sacrificing something," emphasized the trainer. "You don't always have to be right!"

During the lectures, we sat in wide rows. One of the presentations focused on being empathetic with others. Before the break, the trainer asked us to remove our shoes and pass them to the second person of the same sex on our left. "To experience how it feels to be in someone else's shoes, for the rest of the evening, you must wear what was handed to you," he instructed.

My feet are size nine. The loafers passed to me must have been three or four sizes larger, and I had to be careful not to lose them while walking around. The exercise helped me realize that I could never truly understand someone's difficulties until I had personally experienced what it was like to be in their circumstances. At the conclusion, the trainer reinforced the idea by saying, "Don't judge someone until you've walked a mile in their shoes."

Around 10 p.m. on the second evening of the course, we were paired up and instructed to stand and face our partners. Our assignment was to tell our partner about an incident from our lives when we had been the helpless victim of someone else's wrongful action. When the partner was satisfied that the other person could have done nothing to avoid being victimized, we had to switch roles. The couple could only sit on the floor when both sides were finished.

Both my partner and I told convincing stories. I was pleased to see him agreeing about my being the victim in my upcoming divorce. We figured that was the end of the session, and we could go home. We were wrong!

"Now I want you to tell the same story to your partner, except this time, blame yourself," the trainer said. "Bring up everything you could have done to prevent the outcome."

The participants burst into moans. "That's not possible," someone said after raising his hand.

"I'm convinced it can be done," the trainer replied. "We're not leaving until everyone is done."

To my surprise, after lengthy, sincere soul-searching, I came up with possible solutions that could have prevented the failure of my marriage. Joyce and I had already had a lovely home and comfortable life in Los Altos. Nobody had forced me to start a business that required long working hours and frequent travel. *If I had been satisfied with being just a design engineer, I might not be facing a divorce now.*

My partner was also successful in finding a solution to prevent his problem. We learned a powerful lesson that evening: when we feel that bad things are done to us by someone else, it is not always entirely the other person's fault.

At the graduation ceremony, Chuck approached me. "Les, I realize that my stubbornness has been getting in the way of my working well with the other employees," he said. "You don't have to worry about me anymore. I'll fully cooperate with the group."

Chuck kept his promise. He spent the next day at work making peace with everyone. From that day on, he became a model employee and continued to be my close friend. A month later, we both went through Lifespring's Advanced Training session. The lessons I learned from the courses stayed with me throughout my life and helped me make better decisions. Unfortunately, as helpful as the Lifespring courses were to me throughout the rest of my life, they did not save my marriage; Joyce was determined to start a new life with another man.

Having grown up without a father or a male role model, I assumed that the most crucial task of the husband and father in the family was to provide a safe and secure environment for

his family. My academic courses have taught me how to troubleshoot technical problems and how to solve them, but I was unaware of the domestic issues I faced at home. Without any obvious warning sign that my wife was unhappy, I was unprepared to face the inevitable. No matter how much money we had or how clever I thought I was, the frustrating truth remained that our marriage had ended.

Although I could not prevent the divorce, the Lifespring experience eased the impact. My wife and I agreed to handle it through mediation without hiring two adversarial attorneys. We set a goal of completing the required legal procedures by the summer of 1981.

I did not want to be a typical divorced father who sees his children infrequently or never, so I asked for joint 50-50 custody. Joyce disagreed, saying such an arrangement would not be feasible with my busy corporate role. Not having any other choice, I decided to resign from the company. Coincidentally, while I was contemplating how to break the news to Comsat, our president, Wayne Brown, announced that, due to health reasons, he planned to leave by the end of the year. Being second in command at CGIS, I was supposed to take over his role.

The meeting with the Comsat brass in Washington did not go well. "Several of our employees have gone through divorces, but they still function fully in their jobs," one of the Comsat VPs told me when I gave the reason for my resignation. I explained my desire to have joint custody of my children, but he was not sympathetic. When I did not change my mind, I was threatened with a lawsuit for breaking my five-year employment agreement.

Fortunately, in California, such contracts exist mainly to protect the employee. By giving up all my perks, I reached an amiable compromise by agreeing to stay part-time for a year until our sales manager could be prepared to take over running the Palo Alto facility. After Wayne's departure, the head of the Texas division became the new CGIS president.

My last primary official task was helping to host the Comsat directors in California at their board meeting, who came from all around the country. I made elaborate plans about what to show them. Among other things, we demonstrated our concept of an automated engineering department. For fun, before the demo, I asked them to guess four critical component values of a microwave amplifier, which we were to design with our system.

One of the board members, a well-dressed lady, turned in the winning estimates. Even though she told me she was not an engineer, her numbers were extremely close to the actual values. I asked if she would consider working for us.

"How much would the job pay?" she asked.

"About \$50,000 a year," I replied.

She politely declined my offer. Later, I learned she was an heiress with over \$100 million net worth.



Photo of the Comsat officers, board members, and the CGIS officers. Joseph Charrick, Comsat's president, stands in the front row, behind the letter "m," wearing a light-colored jacket. I am in the back row, second to his right. The only female board member stands next to the sign on the left. She was our design contest winner.



Photo of the Comsat Research Laboratories located in Bethesda, MD.

Chapter 9: Single Parenting

Our children, particularly Nanci, did not take the news of the divorce well, but Joyce and I did our best to reassure them that they would not lose either of their parents. After explaining the 50-50 joint custody, we discussed splitting the time between us. Following the kids' recommendation, we settled on changing their residences weekly. Joyce remained in the Los Altos Hills home and kept the horses. I found a house on Russell Avenue near the children's elementary school; it was also within walking distance of a junior high and a high school. I did not like moving for the fourth time in ten years and promised to stay in that home for a long time.

Although the house's location was ideal, it needed a lot of work. The previous owner liked dark colors; the carpets, the window coverings, and the wallpaper were all brown. I decided to redecorate the home using vivid, cheerful colors completely. Adding large sliding glass doors, bay windows, and skylights made the house much brighter. Resurfacing the old brick-covered fireplace with shale tiles made the family room far more inviting. A landscape architect helped to reshape the front and back yards. We also added a gazebo and hot tub.

Against the decorator's advice, we moved in as soon as the carpets were laid. I let the kids select their furniture and decide their color schemes. Nanci's idol was Miss Piggy¹, and pink was her favorite. Her room reflected those choices. George's taste was more subtle, although he wanted wallpaper with Star Wars characters.

The remodel took two months, and I realized it would have been wiser to rent an apartment until the work was completed. Living with the noise and dust was no fun. On the other hand, I watched the job progress and learned some new skills from the workers.

My mother offered to come and help with the transition. After her arrival, she cooked for us and taught me to prepare some simple Hungarian meals. I went to work a couple of days every other week but always stayed home when the kids were in my house. The books *Mom's House, Dad's House*, and *Co-Parenting Survival Guide* gave me advice on minimizing stress on the children when they switch between the two homes. Both of them adjusted surprisingly well. I, however, need to learn more about mothers' tasks!

One evening, when the children were in my house, the mother of one of Nanci's friends called. She wanted to know if her daughter could spend the afternoon with us after kindergarten. I agreed and promised to pick up the girl with Nanci and bring them home together.

The next evening, she called again. "You left my daughter standing in front of the school!" she scolded. "Thank God another mother drove by before long and saw her being all alone."

I totally forgot my promise to take the little girl home. The next day, I mounted a dedicated bulletin board on the refrigerator and started keeping all child-related memos on it. I took the mom and daughter with us on the weekend to Farrell's Ice Cream Parlor for a treat. However,

¹ Miss Piggy was a major character in *The Muppet Show*.

I doubt she ever forgave me for my absent-minded action because she never asked me to pick up her daughter again. Neither did any of the other mothers!

After my mother returned to Hungary, the kids and I established our weekly menu. I prepared dinners at home for five days: 1) wiener schnitzel (*Bécsiszelet*) with roasted potatoes; 2) a pan-cooked dish with layers of boiled potatoes, hard-boiled eggs, and pepperoni (*Rakott krumpli*); 3) noodles topped with sour cream and cottage cheese mix (*Turóstészta*, although Nanci renamed it “white stuff”); 4) BBQ steak with creamed vegetables; and 5) Swanson’s frozen Chicken Pot Pie. On one of the remaining days, we brought Kentucky Fried Chicken home; on the other, we ate out at a nearby Chinese restaurant.

The winter of 1983 brought an unusually high rainfall to our region. One morning, after dropping the children off at school, I took my car to the Volvo dealer for a major service. They gave me a ride to the CGIS office, where I planned to stay until the work on the car was completed. The service, however, took longer than expected. It was a shortened day at school, and my children had to be picked up. Mike Ball offered to loan me his car. I collected the kids from school, and we drove home. They were going to do their homework. KFC dinner was scheduled for the evening.

Not planning to stay long, I left the car in our driveway with the engine running, and the three of us walked into the house. Shortly, I heard Nanci screaming from her room. “Daddy, Daddy, come, quick.”

I rushed to her room and saw a smashed part of her large bay window. Strong winds had blown off an aluminum sheet from the neighbor’s roof, breaking through our window. The carpet near the window was completely soaked with rain.

After comforting her, I phoned our home insurance agent. “One of our windows was broken by a flying object,” I told him.

“Not covered,” was his reply. “Your deductible for windows is \$500. I don’t think the repair would exceed that amount.”

Frustrated, I was ready to hang up when I heard an enormous thud outside, followed by George’s voice. “Daddy, come and see this.”

I asked the insurance man to hold for a minute and ran to my son’s room facing the street. To my horror, when I looked through his window, I saw that the large tree in our front yard had crashed to the ground, flattening the top of Mike’s car.

George and I went outside in the pouring rain to investigate. The engine was still running, but George could crawl inside to turn off the ignition.

I returned to the phone. “I have bad news for you,” I told the man. “One of our trees just fell on top of a car.”

“Is it your car?”

“No, it belongs to a colleague.”

“Not covered,” said the man calmly. “He has to claim it under his insurance.”

Thoroughly irritated, I hung up on him. Reluctantly, I made the next call. “Hi Mike. How attached are you to your car?”

“It’s a great car. I love it.”

“I’m sorry that a huge tree crushed it in our driveway.”

Mike took the news graciously. I called AAA and had the car towed to a garage. I reimbursed Mike for his expenses and switched to another home insurance company.

Our local newspaper sent a reporter to photograph the front yard after the incident. The next issue showed readers what had happened.



Photo from the *Los Altos Town Crier* article shows Mike's car with the huge tree on its top.

Les Besser was on the phone in his newly purchased Los Altos home telling his insurance company that the storm had blown in a new bay window when he heard a crash. Looking out a window, he discovered that a tree had fallen across his driveway, landing on a car he had borrowed from a colleague at work because his own car was in the shop.

George and Nanci were introduced to computer games when I worked at CGIS, using the company's video terminals. I wanted them to become "computer-literate" early, and shortly after moving into our home on Russell Avenue, I bought IBM's newest personal computer, the XT, equipped with an internal 10-MB hard drive². The kids quickly learned how to use it. After that, they were surprised that many adults were unfamiliar with computers. "Dad, my teacher does not have a computer at home," the surprised 12-year-old George told me one day. "How can he be a teacher?"

I explained to him that home computers were still new to most people. He was proud that he knew more about something than his teacher.



Seven-year-old Nanci and twelve-year-old George are learning to use our IBM PC XT in 1983.

Lifespring encouraged its graduates to teach the principles we learned in the training to our children early in their lives; it also offered special events with kids in mind. I took George

² A minute fraction of the capability of today's hard drives.

with me to a locally held “Family Weekend. During the course, George shared with the group an experience he had at school, where he had not gone along with the majority decision of his class.

“Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?” asked the trainer, trying to emphasize the value of compromise.

“I want to be right,” answered George, “because when I’m right, I’m happy!”

The group broke out in laughter. Even the trainer had trouble keeping a straight face. During the break, many people congratulated George for his clever answer. He enjoyed his few minutes of fame.

Introduction to the Unexplainable

Although I had been in good health, low back pain began to bother me. Chiropractic manipulations did not help. My former mother-in-law, who had been involved with a medical group that researched the writings of the psychic seer Edgar Cayce³, suggested a visit to a homeopathic clinic in Phoenix. The clinic, headed by two physicians, offered a body-soul evaluation. Although I did not believe in psychic healing, I took her advice and made an appointment with them.

On the first day, they asked me to have a psychic reading. A beautiful woman greeted me at the session and asked why I was there. I explained my back problem, and she began to “read me.”

At first, she gave me a general description of my background and personality. I suspected she had received prior information from my mother-in-law, so I was not impressed. Then, she went into a trance and began to talk about highly personal parts of my life. She brought up events from my childhood that I had never discussed with anyone. My doubt gradually dissipated. *This woman can see things. I’d better pay close attention.*

She talked to me for nearly an hour while I listened, flabbergasted. Among other subjects, she discussed my children and predicted that “they will both be healers.” (In their adult lives, Nanci was involved with rehabilitative Pilates, and George is a physician!) To my utter amazement, she also discussed my “past lives” and told me that a long time ago, I had lived in England in a female body. “You cheated on your husband,” she said. “It created much karma for your present life.” Of course, that was too much, and I dismissed that part.

As for my back problem, she envisioned that the pain would subside when I accepted what I could not change in my life. At the end of the hour, she handed me a session recording. Dazed, I left her. I was beginning to realize that there are things in life for which engineers do not have scientific explanations. Psychic ability is one of them.

After coming home, I followed her suggestion, gradually accepted that I was 45, and gave up trying to behave 20 years younger. In a few months, my lower back returned to its normal,

³ Although he was a photographer, Cayce discovered his psychic abilities and produced hundreds of readings in a trance. Many of those readings specified prescriptions to treat various physical ailments. A biographical book by Jess Stern, *Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet*, describes his life.

pain-free condition and remained for 30 years. However, the part about my past life sounded so far-fetched that I dismissed it—until it came up again at a technical conference a year later.

A female Dutch engineer approached me during the coffee break at a microwave symposium in San Francisco. “I think we’ve met before,” she said.

She did not look familiar. “Are you using the COMPACT program I wrote?” I asked.

“No. We met hundreds of years ago in England.”

That did not make sense at first. Then, I suddenly remembered what the psychic told me in Phoenix and pulled her aside. “Tell me more please,” I asked.

After ensuring nobody could hear us, the lady confided in me about her unique ability to sense other people’s auras. Additionally, she had frequent regressions to recall her own past lives. Then, she told me an amazing tale. “Hundreds of years ago, you and I lived in England as upper-class women. We were close friends. Both of us cheated on our husbands, but you were caught and brought shame to your family.”

Her revelation astonished me. *What is the probability that two people from different parts of the world come up with the same information? Perhaps this past-life concept has some truth in it.* I met her several times before she returned to Amsterdam, and we became romantically involved. Our friendship in this life, however, was cut short by her death in a car accident. If humans have multiple lives, perhaps we’ll meet again.

Reentering the dating game, I quickly learned it had changed significantly during my 14-year absence. Women had become much more assertive, and the health risks involved with physical relationships had also increased. I joined a singles group, Trellis, and attended some of their functions. I also enrolled in a video dating program called Great Expectations. I liked the second option more because their system allowed the members to preview the personal folders of prospective dates. Reading their completed questionnaires and looking at their photos and video interviews allowed me to meet women with compatible backgrounds and interests. The fact that I had no trouble attracting women, including some younger ones, helped rebuild my bruised ego.



Three pictures from my single-parent days. Left: Ready for tennis. Center: Coming home from Mexico. Right: Listening to the Gypsy playing my mother’s favorite Hungarian song.

For the first three years, I did not take dating seriously; I just wanted to have fun. Then, I began to look for a permanent life partner who would also be a suitable stepmother to my

children. That task, however, was not easy. Single women without children generally wanted to have children of their own. Because I was almost 50 and had had a vasectomy, additional kids were not in my future. Meeting women with children was more difficult because I had to make sure that the family members of both sides were compatible.



Pictures taken from my first three years of single parenthood.

I also learned that making money was easier than keeping it. California laws and my divorce agreement had evenly split our family's financial assets. I looked for investments to recover the money I lost through the divorce. I did not have significant investment experience, so I asked my stockbroker and our accountant for advice. "Put your money into limited partnerships⁴," was their response. "You receive tax shelter for several years. You can reinvest the proceeds in new ventures when the partnership is sold at a profit. It is safe and defers the taxes."

The recommendation sounded good. I checked with another source and received the same advice. I invested a large part of my assets in six different partnerships that owned large office complexes. For several years, I paid minimal income taxes.

In the mid-1980s, the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Tax Reform Act so rich people and big corporations would have to pay their fair share. The new law ended the use of limited partnerships as tax shelters. The resale market for those partnerships suddenly disappeared. What had been a lucrative investment for decades became almost worthless overnight. Instead of regaining my pre-divorce assets, I lost a significant part of my investment, and the prospect of my early retirement vanished. It seemed that yet another hurdle had been shoved in my path.

⁴ A unique business partnership, where the "general partners" manage the business and assume legal debts and obligations. The "limited partners" are liable only to the extent of their investments, but they receive the tax benefit of "passed through" losses during the development of the partnership.

I was still teaching the short courses, and they paid exceptionally well for a few work days. Most of them, however, required travel that interfered with my domestic schedule. Ideally, until I remarried, I preferred to be Mr. Mom one week and a carefree single guy the next. Being away teaching meant that I had to give up the latter. Finding a girlfriend who was available to travel freely was difficult.

Another Business Opportunity

My sister, who lived in a Cleveland suburb, motivated me to have my own business again. After tolerating the alcoholism of her husband for 20 years, she filed for divorce. She needed to support herself and two college-age daughters but lacked special skills. *I thought she could move to California and work with me if I had a small business*, so I considered starting another home-based business.

Fate presented an opportunity for me. Ron Rose, one of the salesmen at CGIS, called me unexpectedly, "I have a business proposal for you," he said. "Let me come over to discuss it."

When he arrived, he told me that Comsat had not been satisfied with the division's progress and had decided to close CGIS. However, they wanted to be sure that the technical support of their software would continue. "There are over \$1 million worth of support contracts for Super-COMPACT," he said. "Comsat would probably give the contracts away if they were assured that capable people would maintain the support."

Next, he outlined his plan. He and I would start the new company and hire two CGIS support engineers and an administrator. One of those engineers lived on the East Coast; the other was in California. The two of them could provide effective coverage for most of the world. Ron proposed to be the "Administrator," and I could be the President. Annual payroll expenses for the three employees would be about \$150,000. Office expenses, equipment, and overheads would not exceed \$100,000. This new business could be highly profitable with a guaranteed \$1 million yearly revenue.

I liked his idea but explained to him that my time was limited. "Don't worry," he said. "You can be a figurehead, and I will do most of the work."

After thinking it over for a few days, I agreed to explore the idea with Comsat. The company was glad to hear that we would continue to support Super-COMPACT. Ron and I filed the paperwork to set up a new corporation. He felt I had name recognition in the microwave industry and recommended we call the company Besser Associates. Initially, I was hesitant, but after discussing it with others, I agreed to use that name.

We extended good job offers to the two laid-off CGIS engineers before another company could snap them up. They were glad to join us. Éva sold her house in Ohio and moved to California to work for us. Ron and I leased an office in Palo Alto. I was ready to visit Comsat in Washington to finalize our agreement. They asked for a week to create a formal contract.

The week passed, but we did not receive a contract. Comsat asked for another extension. Finally, they announced that they had found a buyer for all the assets of the Compact division, including the support contracts. Our idea of having a highly profitable new company ended before it had a chance to begin.

I faced a serious dilemma—another unexpected hurdle in my life. Our three employees, as well as Ron, are expected to be paid. We had nothing to sell or support. After less than one month of operation, I had to let the two engineers go and bought Ron's forty percent share of the business for \$40,000. I felt responsible for Éva and kept her on the payroll as the Office Manager to handle my course teaching. However, that was not enough to keep her busy.

I recalled some of the feedback I had received from a Motorola manager who came to evaluate our short course at UCLA. "I wish this course focused on the RF frequency applications instead of microwaves⁵," he had written on his course evaluation form. "My engineers need continuing education, but they develop mobile phones instead of defense electronics. Your course has limited value to them."

I thought there might be an opportunity for me to develop courses for personal communication equipment instead of defense communication, and I contacted him. "If we revise our microwave courses to cover RF frequencies, would Motorola give us enough teaching business to justify our work?" I asked him.

"We have thousands of engineers worldwide," he replied. "Talk to Motorola University to find out if you could become part of their continuing education program."

At that time, Motorola was a progressive electronics company. All their technical employees had to take at least 40 hours of continuing education annually. The potential for teaching in-house courses was huge.

I visited Motorola University in Schaumburg, Illinois, to find out how we could establish a long-term working relationship with them. I met three managers, one from the corporate training group and the others from their mobile phone and pager⁶ divisions. They were open to the idea. However, the engineering manager did not want Bob's two-day filter design section. He wanted me to expand my material to five days, including computer lab sessions with Super-COMPACT⁷. "How much would you charge for revising the Microwave Circuit Design course to fit our needs?" the manager asked.

I had not even planned to ask for money but grabbed the opportunity to discuss payment. We agreed and tentatively set up a pilot program at their Fort Lauderdale division. "If the courses help our engineers to become better designers, your company could become the worldwide teaching group for RF courses."

I altered my course material during the following months to satisfy their needs. The three other instructors who taught the next-level courses followed suit. Once the lecture material was ready, I presented my five-day "RF Circuit Design 1" course in Florida. Shortly after, the next level RF class was taught.

The courses were successful, and we repeatedly returned to the division to teach. Within one year, Motorola became a steady customer and requested 20 to 25 classes annually. Our contract specified \$15,000 for a five-day domestic course, plus expenses. Paying the

⁵ Mobile communication initially began at the Very High Frequency (VHF, 30-300 MHz) and gradually moved into the Ultra High Frequency (UHF, 450-950 MHz) range. Both VHF and UHF frequencies are within the RF (Radio Frequency) range. Most of the military communications were at the Microwave or GHz frequencies.

⁶ A small, inexpensive, highly popular wireless receiver commonly used before mobile phones became widely available.

⁷ Motorola had purchased Super-COMPACT for several divisions. The Fort Lauderdale group was one of them.

instructors generously for their contributions assured me of finding top experts in various specialties.

My next target was AT&T. Using the format already established with Motorola, we began to teach at the various AT&T locations. I signed up more instructors who added new courses to our curriculum. Within a few years, Besser Associates became a recognized continuing education provider for the RF and microwave industries. We began looking for an assistant for Éva to handle the increased administrative work.

Branching Into Different Kinds of Lectures

In 1985, Cardiff Publications launched a new communication symposium, RF EXPO. The publisher of their *RF Design* magazine, Keith Aldridge, asked me if I would present a mini-version of the RF Circuit Design course at the conference. Squeezing the five-day course into a single day was difficult, and my first presentation was unsuccessful. Some of the participants slept through part of the day. Others stared with blank faces. When I asked questions, only a few volunteered to answer. One participant summarized how many of them probably felt, “By the first break, I was lost,” he wrote on the course evaluation. I had misjudged the background of the attendees.

Gary Breed, the magazine editor, suggested drastically simplifying the course content. “Your five-day course is aimed at design engineers. The ones who come to a one-day seminar are technicians, salesmen, and managers,” he told me. “Their main interest is in the fundamental concepts.”

I followed his advice and redesigned the course to cover only the basics. We also changed the name of the course to RF Circuit Fundamentals. The promotion emphasized that the course would provide “an introduction to the mysteries of RF technology.”

The symposium the following year was held at the Disney Hotel in Anaheim. Cardiff prepared 100 sets of the course notes. Their registration staff, however, was utterly overwhelmed by the large number of people who showed up at the door. When I was ready to begin the presentation, 150 participants crowded into a conference room with only 100 seats. The hotel staff opened the rear doors and placed chairs in the hallway, creating an L-shaped space. Although loudspeakers were installed for those sitting in the hall, they could not see me or the projection screen. The staff frantically reproduced the notes on the hotel’s copy machine and handed them out by sections to those who had not received them at registration. During the first coffee break, the Audio-Visual (AV) group placed a video camera in the meeting room and connected it to a couple of TV monitors in the hallway. After that, everyone could see the screen. It was a nerve-wracking day, but most of the participants were happy in the end.

On my return from the conference, I sat next to a young woman on the plane. “What did you do in Anaheim?” I asked.

“I went to the RF Expo Symposium.”

“I was there too. Did you see the exhibits or hear some of the technical sessions?”

“I attended a full-day seminar.”

“What was it about?”

“My boss sent me to learn about high frequencies because I sell RF system components.”

“Was it a good course?”

“Oh, yes. I’m sure I’ll feel more confident now when I talk to engineers.”

I did not ask where she had been sitting during the course. I did not want to embarrass her if she did not recognize me as the instructor. The important part was that it might help her to be more effective at work.

The following year, the RF Circuit Fundamental course drew over 300 participants. Encouraged by the interest, I added a second day that also became popular. Cardiff asked for additional short courses and expanded the number of locations for the RF Expo to cover both the East and West Coast. In addition to Anaheim, I taught courses in San Jose, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, and Orlando.



One of my early RF Expo one-day seminars. I used an overhead projector for the illustrations.

Recognizing that only a limited number of people could attend these conferences, I decided to videotape my courses. KCSM Public Television Studio in San Mateo was the most convenient and economical place for the recording. The studio allowed me to record six two-hour segments in VHS format for a fixed price. Two cameras would record simultaneously during my presentation; one would focus on me, and the other would be on the projection screen. An editor regularly switched between the two outputs to make the presentation more understandable. They agreed to provide a single high-definition master tape of the combined sessions.

Compared to current video recording technology, the 1986 methods seem primitive. The recorded image of the overhead projection was far from the high-resolution quality we see in PowerPoint presentations today. However, with limited expertise and an equally limited budget, that was the best I could do.

Meeting the studio’s personnel proved an interesting experience. The day we recorded a short practice session, I learned they had a strict pecking order of duties. During setup, one of the inactive television cameras was in the way, so I asked one of the employees if he would move it. “Only the camera chief is allowed to do that,” he replied, but that person was unavailable. The crew waited 30 minutes until the chief showed up and shoved the equipment aside.

I did not enjoy standing in front of two monstrous cameras. Instead of interacting with a live audience, I had reflectors shining into my face. Reviewing my recorded practice session

was not at all encouraging. I was stiff and made some obvious mistakes. “With this capacitor, we can tune the frequencies,” I said once while pointing to an inductor. Another time, I dropped the transparency marker and banged my head on the overhead projector while picking the marker up.

After several days of practicing alone in our office, talking to a blank wall, I felt confident to begin the recording sessions, and within the space of two weeks, we received the final tape. The first 100 sets of VHS tapes were delivered to our office two weeks later. In addition to our live courses, Besser Associates now had another product to market. In the following decade, we sold nearly 300 RF Circuit Fundamentals 1 and 2 sets. At that point, a publishing company bought the rights to market the videos. The contents were converted to DVD format and are available online⁸ for \$595 per course.



The RF Circuit Fundamentals courses, offered on videotapes and DVDs.

Finding a New Sibling

In 1987, after a week of teaching in Europe, I spent the weekend in Budapest visiting my mother. The first day, as she reminisced about the past, she made a slip of the tongue. “The daughter of that good-for-nothing woman who married your father must be about 40 years old now,” she told me.

“You’d never told me they had a child,” I interjected.

She quickly changed the subject. Although I tried to bring it up again several times, she would not discuss it. On the other hand, I was determined to find out if I had a sister in Hungary.

I knew my biological father had passed away in 1977 and also remembered the street where he lived and went there late that afternoon. Not recalling the house number, I started at one end of the street and knocked on the door of each building’s housemaster. When he was unavailable, I asked tenants if Solt’s wife and daughter still lived there.

The short street had about forty 4-5-floor high buildings, but as I progressed along the street, I did not find any residents who knew of my father’s family. I was beginning to fear my search would be in vain. Finally, in the last building, I saw an elderly man walking out. “Excuse me, does the Solt family live here?” I asked him.

⁸ <http://www.amazon.com/RF-Circuit-Fundamentals-Pt-1/dp/1884932401>

“Not anymore,” he replied. “After the father passed away, the wife and daughter moved out.”

My heart began to pound faster. “Do you know where they live now?”

“I have no idea, but the daughter works for MALEV. Her name is Kati.”

I thanked him for the information. MALEV was the Hungarian national airline. *I should be able to track her down there. But I'm flying home tomorrow morning. I'll inquire at the airport before leaving and contact her on my next trip.*

Mother escorted me to the Budapest airport the following day, and I asked again about my father's daughter. “There was no child,” she told me and looked away. I did not press the issue further with her.

At the airport passenger terminal, I had my mother sit down and tell her I needed to exchange money. This would probably be my only chance to make a stab at tracking down my half-sister. After waiting in line at the foreign exchange kiosk, I stepped to the window. “Do you know someone working for MALEV named Kati Solt?” I asked the blond lady sitting inside.

“Why do you want to know?” she replied.

“It's personal. Do you know her?”

“Kati Solt is my maiden name. What do you want from me?”

I could hardly believe my good luck. Of all the 4,000 airline employees, I found the right person on my first try! “It's a long story, and I don't want everyone to hear it. Could you come outside for a few minutes?”

She did not reply but stepped back and consulted with one of her colleagues. The two of them looked at me suspiciously. Next, she talked with another employee. Finally, she waved at me and came outside.

“Was your father's name László Solt?” I asked when she stood next to me.

“Yes,” she replied in a surprised voice.

“Did you live on Rippl Rónai Street for a long time?”

“Yes. Who are you?”

“I must board my flight soon, so we have only a few minutes. I believe that we have the same father. I am your half-brother.”

That was too much for her to absorb. She stepped back. “That's not possible,” she whispered. “I would know about it.”

I saw that my mother was nervously looking at me. *She must not find out who I am talking to because her reaction might not be pleasant. Kati's mother lured my father away when my mother was pregnant, and I cannot think of any reason why my mother would be nice to Kati. The two of them must not meet.*

I guided Kati back behind the kiosk, where my mother was out of sight. Turning to Kati, I quickly told her what I knew about our father. She still looked numb. “I'll have to think all this over and ask my mother to verify it,” she said.

I told her I would return to Budapest in a few months and look her up again. She said goodbye and quietly walked away. Our first meeting did not end as positively as I had expected.

Before completing my check-in, I said farewell to Mother. Parting from each other had always been difficult, particularly for her, because she was left behind. Before our last hug, she sprayed holy water on me from a small bottle she always carried.

After going through customs and immigration, I waited in the departure area before boarding my flight. Suddenly, Kati appeared. Her MALEV badge allowed her to bypass the inspections. "I'm taking a short break so we can talk more. It's still hard for me to believe you might be the brother I've always wanted," she told me.

We chatted for about 20 minutes, exchanging information about our families. I showed her pictures of Nanci and George. She told me she was married to a four-star general of the Hungarian Army and that he was a devoted Communist. The two of them did not have children. "Keeping in touch with someone in America would present a political problem for us," she said with concern. "You better not write to me. Perhaps we can meet again the next time you're in Budapest."

We concluded our brief acquaintance because my plane was ready to leave. She offered me a handshake first but then changed her mind. Instead, she hugged me and planted a kiss on my cheek. "I'm glad that we finally met," she said, with tears in her eyes.

When the elderly man in the apartment building told me that Kati worked for MALEV, I assumed she would be a flight attendant. I only went to the kiosk to ask for information to avoid raising my mother's suspicion. MALEV had about 4,000 employees, so the probability of walking up to the right person the first time was minuscule. The result was even more incredible because nobody at the airport would have known her by her maiden name. She told me that if I had asked anyone else about Kati Solt, I would never have found her.



With my half-sister, Kati Tóth, at the Budapest airport. We asked one of her colleagues to take a picture before I proceeded with my check-in.

On my long trip to San Francisco, I contemplated what it would have been like to grow up under normal circumstances, with the loving care of both a mother and father. Neither Éva nor I had such luxury. I was determined to maintain contact with Kati and learn more about the father I knew so little about. I was also curious about her Communist husband. Meeting him would allow me to discover how those people felt about the West. The Kremlin's attitude had softened over 30 years after Stalin's death. *Would his feelings have also changed, or is he one of the hardliners? Would he allow Kati to maintain contact with me?*

I fell asleep in my seat, and a new version of one of my recurring dreams returned. After I snuck back into Hungary, fighting broke out again. As I desperately tried to escape through a muddy field, Kati appeared wearing a flight attendant's outfit. "Hurry," she said. "Your plane is leaving." I tried to follow her, but my feet were stuck in heavy mud. She moved farther and farther away from me and gradually vanished. After waking up, I wondered if I would ever see her again.

Traveling with My Children

My children and I vacationed many times in Hawaii, but our most memorable trip there occurred on Thanksgiving of 1982. As we checked into the Hilton Ilikai in Honolulu for a one-week vacation, we heard a powerful hurricane approaching the island. After the first couple of days, the forecast was confirmed. Hurricane Iwa would hit the island by the next day. Most of the hotel guests wanted to move to the lower levels. Our room was on the 24th floor, but nothing was available below the 12th floor when we tried to change. The best alternative was a room on the sixth floor at the Outrigger Hotel, so we moved there.

At registration, the desk clerk handed me several candles and matches. "The hurricane might knock the electric power out," he said. "If that happens, use these."

The clerk's comments did not sound encouraging. "How long would that be?" I asked.

"It might take days to restore power throughout the island," he replied.

Neither the kids nor I had witnessed a hurricane, so naturally, we were curious about what it would be like. We did not have to wait long. The following day, the sun did not seem to rise. We stared into dark skies through the window. The howling winds, accompanied by heavy rain, increased in intensity. We stayed inside our room, and I wondered if it had been a mistake to remain in Hawaii.

The storm's strength steadily increased, and the children became increasingly worried. Six-year-old Nanci was scared out of her wits. Being eleven, George tried to put on a brave face, but I could see he was also frightened. It was not easy for me to appear calm, either.

The eye of the storm passed midway between Oahu and Kauai. Being in the path of the "eyewall," the Waikiki Beach district received gale-force winds. Occasionally, the walls of our large building shook. By noon, the sky was pitch dark, and the rain was pounding fiercely against the window. The kids were petrified and huddled next to me on the sofa. I closed the curtain and tried to divert their attention by telling them a story, but it did not work. I was no competition for Iwa's power.

Suddenly, the electricity went out, and our room became dark. Nanci screamed and began to cry. I lit some of the candles so that we could see. The only thing I could do was to hold them and reassure them that the building would not be blown away. Deep inside, I was just as scared as they were.

In a few hours, the force of the storm diminished. Holding our candles, we descended the stairs to the lobby, packed with guests and residents taking refuge from the storm. Someone from the hotel staff announced that the worst part was over. However, he asked everyone to stay inside until they heard from the police that it was safe outside. The kids and I climbed the six flights of stairs back to our dark room.

I had bought fruit and snacks the night before, and we ate those for dinner. Although the rain was still falling, the kids were over their fright and eagerly planning to tell everyone at home about our scary experience. All three of us slept in the same bed that night.

Cloudy skies greeted us on Thanksgiving morning. Power had not been restored. Like all other hotel guests, we carried candles using dark stairways and hallways. The street outside our hotel was covered with two to three inches of water, and cars traveled slowly. I was anxious to drive around the island and see how much damage the hurricane had caused.

The door to the basement garage was locked. "We apologize to all for the inconvenience," stated a posted sign. "The cars will not be available until the water is pumped out of the garage." An employee told us that parts of the garage were three feet deep in water. Some cars were floating. Fortunately, our car was parked in a slightly higher part of the garage, where the water was only about one foot deep. The next day, we drove around the island. The destruction was incredible.



Left: On the day of our arrival, blue skies and 80 degree temperature greeted us. Right: Dinner at our hotel's restaurant.



The day after the hurricane, rainwater still flooded the streets.

Hurricane Iwa's 120+ mph wind gusts and 30-foot ocean waves had heavily impacted Oahu. The rainfall within 24 hours had exceeded 20 inches. Nearly 2,000 homes were damaged, leaving scores of people homeless. The swells had wiped out most of the roads near the coastline. A large part of our hotel's sandy beach was completely washed away.

Finding food was not easy. Most of the stores and restaurants were closed. The few that served customers had long lines of people. We were lucky to have pizza on paper plates for Thanksgiving dinner—with lukewarm soft drinks out of the bottles.

By the end of the week, life began to normalize. Electricity was restored in the Waikiki area, shops opened, and new tourists arrived. We flew home Sunday morning and, for weeks, shared our stories with friends. None of us will ever forget that vacation!

Closer to home, the IEEE Microwave Group's annual conference was held in various cities in the U.S. Along with hundreds of other companies, Besser Associates always had a booth in the exhibitors' area. Most of the companies gave away small gifts to attract potential customers. Nanci discovered the opportunities to collect goodies and often asked me to take her to those events. We also took one of her girlfriends to the St. Louis and New York conferences, where one booth's personnel teased me about the girls. "Your daughter and her friend cleaned us out," said a salesman when I stopped by his booth. The girls had returned several times to increase their haul of New York souvenirs. I had to buy an additional bag to carry their stuff home.

International Travel

George traveled overseas with me twice. When he was only twelve years old, we visited Taiwan and Japan. He was amazed to see how cramped Asian living quarters were compared to American standards. My former colleague, Chi Hsieh, also gave us a tour of Taipei. While visiting his neighborhood, someone offered George a Chinese treat: a pack of dried seaweed. The local children enjoy chewing them, similar to Americans chewing gum. George did not like the taste, but wanting to be courteous, he kept chewing a piece while holding the rest of the pack in his hand. The faces of the neighbor boys standing nearby indicated that they would live to have some of the treats. When he offered to share the seaweed, the boys gladly accepted it and grabbed the package out of his hand. They stuffed it into their mouths, chewing with relish. I could see that George was relieved to have none left.

In Japan, we enjoyed riding on the bullet train and the subway system and playing Pachinko⁹ in special parlors. George's biggest thrill, however, came when we went to a large department store's toy floor. He found various electronic toys fascinating, and I had trouble returning him to our hotel.

A company manager who represented Compact in Japan, Suyama-san, and his family drove us to a mountain resort for an overnight stay. The place was beautiful, but George had trouble with the Japanese food, which was different from the American and Hungarian cuisines he was used to. He managed to find something he tolerated at dinner, but the following day, he refused to eat anything from the breakfast menu. Mrs. Suyama felt so bad that she took George to the resort kitchen and talked the cook into making scrambled eggs. To this day, George avoids Japanese food.

When George turned 16, I took him and one of his closest friends, Richard, to Europe. Our trip began in London, continued to Zurich, and ended in Budapest. Among the many adventures, their favorite was pretending to be American spies in Hungary. Whenever we saw a "No photography allowed" sign near the airport, railroad station, or government buildings,

⁹ A highly popular Japanese game, similar to American pinball.

they acted like they were taking pictures. If Russian soldiers passed by, the two boys talked gibberish to each other and mimed placing imaginary tracking devices on the “enemy.”

One warm day, while I was driving with the boys in our rental car with the windows down, a Soviet military truck stopped next to us at a traffic light. The boys immediately pretended to demobilize the vehicle by throwing hand grenades into its exhaust pipe, which pointed sideways toward us. Their little game, however, led to something they did not expect. When the traffic light changed to green, the Soviet driver stepped on the accelerator, spewing heavy black smoke into our car!

We coughed and gasped for clean air for some time, but the boys felt that their task of destroying the vehicle had been successful. After that experience, however, I kept the car windows closed.

It was interesting to me to compare the behavior of the boys in the presence of the Soviet troops with the way I had felt when I lived in Budapest three decades earlier. To them, it was a game. To Hungarian children in the 1950s, our occupiers caused fear. I was glad George and Richard had not been subjected to that experience.

Richard, a Chinese-American boy, had no problem with any ethnic food; he ate whatever was put in front of him. George liked European food, except when it was hot, and native Hungarian dishes sometimes included a fair amount of paprika. The first day my mother served us goulash soup, George alternated between one tablespoon of soup and one drink of water. Richard just gobbled it up and asked for more. They both liked Hungarian cookies and pastries. Mother had a hard time keeping up with baking for them.



Left: Flying from Taiwan to Japan. Center: George is playing Pachinko in Tokyo. We liked the game so much that we purchased one after coming home. Right: Dining with George and Richard in Budapest

At the age of 13, I took Nanci to Europe. We flew from San Francisco to Munich, rented a fancy Mercedes, and drove to Budapest. On our way, we passed through Bavaria and visited several castles, including the famous Neuschwanstein. One night, we stayed in an Austrian *Gasthof* so she could see where I lived after escaping from Hungary.

I frequently told my children about the variety of meals Hungarians eat, although I did not cook exactly that way during my single parenthood. “We had a different meal almost every day when I was a child,” I used to tell them. “Meat was rare, but we had a wide variety of casseroles, noodles, and potato dishes.”

When Nanci and I visited my relatives in Hungary, they always offered us my favorite meal: cold cherry soup and Wiener schnitzel. After the third time, we sat down to eat the same dinner, Nanci asked if people in Budapest ate anything else. I explained the reason and, from then on, asked everyone for more variety. By the end of our trip, Nanci had been introduced

to many Hungarian foods. She liked *paprikás csirke* (chicken paprikash), but just like her brother, she did not care for spicy meals.



Pictures taken while traveling with Nanci. Top: At the Munich Airport; driving through the Austrian Alps; and with my sister Kati and her beloved Bigu. Bottom: Standing in front of the statue of St. Anthony—my protective saint—in a Hungarian church; taking Nanci and her friend to New York during an IEEE conference; an old-fashioned photo at Disneyworld.

On the weekend, Cousin Pista drove us to his cabin on the Danube River's shore, about 30 miles from Budapest. One of our tasks was to catch frogs, although he did not tell us why. Only when we returned to his apartment did we learn the reason. His children had a large aquarium with three turtles, each six to seven inches long. The live frogs were served one by one as dinner to the turtles. Nanci and I watched the first helpless frog being torn apart alive in the water by those seemingly peaceful turtles. We excused ourselves from the rest of the meal and never wanted to see those savage creatures again.

Just as I had done with George a year earlier, I took Nanci to the apartment buildings where I had spent my early years. She was horrified to see the musty coal cellar section we stayed in for weeks during the Second World War. "I'm so glad the rats didn't eat your toes," she told me after hearing how scared I was of them.

In addition to giving my children opportunities to broaden their horizons, our travel allowed me to develop an even closer relationship with them. This was particularly true for Nanci, who told me she appreciated that she could count on me no matter where we were. I was glad we had the financial means to take them to nice places.

Back at home, George became interested in track. The Los Altos School District had a popular annual sports event for elementary students called the Junior Olympics. All the schools in the city participate and train their future athletes to compete in track and field events. I volunteered at Loyola Elementary School to help the hurdlers and was the starter for the running events at the final competition. George showed promising ability in the 60-yard hurdles and won the final as a sixth-grader at Loyola School. At Blach Intermediate School, he continued hurdling and set a school record that still stands today.

Encouraged by his success, we practiced during the summer following his junior high graduation to prepare for high school competitions. The 30-inch middle school hurdle heights increased to 39 inches in high school—a significant change—but he could run over them by the end of the summer. He enrolled in St. Francis High School in September 1985, and the track coach was happy to have an experienced hurdler.

In his freshman year, George was undefeated in the 65-meter hurdles Frosh/Soph category. In that event at the prestigious K-Bell race, he set a record that stood for more than a decade. He had to run against the older boys in the Varsity group for team scoring considerations in several of the dual meets. In those races, he learned to accept defeat gracefully.

My offer to coach as a volunteer for the St. Francis team was swiftly turned down. The rejection puzzled me, mainly after they saw how well George performed due to my coaching. “We don’t want the parents of our athletes to be involved in coaching,” the head coach explained. “It could lead to conflicts between the interests of the parent and the team.”

Although I recalled trouble with some parents when I coached AYSO soccer, the St. Francis rule still bothered me. I could not understand why they would not be happy to accept my free service. Only now, after spending more than a decade as a volunteer coach for the Mountain View High School hurdlers and sprinters, could I fully appreciate their reasoning. Of all the problems our coaching staff has experienced, the vast majority can be traced to parental interference. Just as it is best to keep the church and the state separate in politics, it is best to keep parents and coaches apart in high school athletics.

By his junior year, George had become the top 110-meter hurdler in his league. I faithfully attended all his races until the middle of the season when a teaching job took me to the East Coast. When I phoned George in the evening, his usually upbeat morale was low. “Dad, please always be here for my track meets,” he begged me. “I hit two hurdles today and finished last!”

For the rest of his high school track program, I went to see every one of his competitions. He won all the 110-meter hurdle races of the dual meets and placed fourth at the CCS Championship. Participating in track earned him recognition and increased his self-esteem. He graduated with honors in June 1989 and decided to attend college at UC Davis. I did not doubt that he would do well in adult life.



From left to right: George won hurdle races in elementary, middle, and high school. Right: George's 16th birthday cake.

A typical teenager, George wanted to own a car. When he was still a freshman at St. Francis, I promised him my car if he could run the 110-meter hurdles faster than I did in my youth. During his senior year, his best time was 15.1 seconds, which surpassed my record¹⁰ by half a second. Although we ran over 42-inch high hurdles in Hungary, compared to the 39-inch ones used by American high school runners, I gave him full credit and the keys to my four-year-old Nissan Maxima. George was delighted and proudly drove the car for a few weeks. Then, he realized that the family sedan did not fit his image.

"Dad, would it be OK if I traded the Maxima for a Mustang?" he asked sheepishly. I agreed, and soon, he was driving a Mustang. A girlfriend was next on his list. He was on the way to becoming a man.

I had learned to ski in the Canadian Laurentian Mountains during my stay in Montreal. Although I never became an expert in the sport, I found downhill skiing exciting and challenging. The milder climate of California made skiing even more enjoyable. One of my goals was to introduce the children to that winter activity.

In the early 1980s, I took George and Nanci to Heavenly Valley for a ski weekend. I put George into the ski school for a day. Nanci was far more cautious and fearful than her brother, so I taught her. We carried our skis to the most manageable bunny slope and walked uphill about 50 feet. I buckled the skis on her boots and asked her to slide with me. The gentle slope was barely noticeable.

"Do you want me to be killed?" she cried out with terror in her voice.

I reassured her that nothing wrong would happen, but she was petrified. It took quite an effort to have her begin to slide. "She might never learn," I thought.



In this photo, taken at Lake Tahoe ski area, Nanci was 12 and George 17. By that time, they were both very good skiers.

¹⁰ My main event was the 400-meter hurdles but occasionally I also ran the shorter race.

I was wrong. By the end of the weekend, she could snow plow. Encouraged by the results, we went back the next several weekends. Gradually, she began to like it. In about a year, she surpassed my level. After that, she and George took the more daring routes while I stayed on the intermediate slopes.

Nanci loved Miss Piggy of the Muppets and frequently imitated the little pink pig's "Hi-Ya" sound and karate chop when she did not like someone. That almost caused a problem for us once.

When she was approximately seven, I took her to the Cow Palace in South San Francisco to hear Kenny Rogers, one of her favorite singers. Shortly after we left the concert, Nanci had to go to the bathroom. The nearest convenient place was a tavern with a large number of huge motorcycles parked in the front. The inside of the smoke-filled beer hall was packed with riders dressed in black leather like Hells Angels. Trying to be inconspicuous, I guided Nanci to the ladies room.

"These men stink," said Nanci. "They need to take a bath."

"Be quiet," I whispered. "We could be in deep trouble."

"Don't worry, Dad. I can 'Hi-Ya' them."

I picked her up and held her close to me. "Don't say a word," I said while walking through the drunk bikers. When she was finished in the bathroom, I quickly carried her outside. She was puzzled and could not understand my concern. After all, she would have protected me!

Nanci had a cat at her mother's house, and she had been begging me to have a dog or a cat in my house. I had always been a dog-lover, but with my travel schedule, owning one was impractical. Her persistence, however, eventually wore me down. After some research, we located a cute little kitten, brought her home, and named her Bubbles. In addition to the two canaries I bought for the kids earlier, we now had a four-legged pet at home. Nanci was pleased.



Left: Bubbles as a kitten. Right: A year later, Nanci holding the adult Bubbles after I gave her a bath and haircut. Neither Nanci nor Éva approved my pet grooming work.

Even in her early years, Nanci wanted to be an actress. She loved to watch Shirley Temple movies and reenacted the performances whenever she could find an audience. Her teachers recognized her ability and selected her for several of the school's theater productions. Beginning with Christmas plays in kindergarten, she played the starring roles in *Jack and Jill*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella*, *Princess and the Pea*, and others.

Another of Nanci's ambitions was to become a cheerleader. Beginning in junior high, she tried out for the school's team every year—without success. She worked hard on her routine and did well in singing, dancing, and chanting. Her weak area was acrobatics; she was not as good in gymnastics as the other girls. I did my best to help her, only to watch her being rejected year after year. She was brokenhearted for weeks every time, but she did not give up. I wished she would quit the tryouts, but I admired her perseverance.

St. Francis High School was within a five-minute walk of our house, and the same year George graduated, Nanci enrolled there. Her brother's family name created instant recognition. She was invited to join athletic teams and groups. Unfortunately, skiing was the only sport in which she excelled. Worse, she did not make the cheerleader team there either. Although she was an "A" student, the fact that so many expected her to shine in athletics wore her down.

"Dad, I'm tired of not living up to George's sports star image," she told me. "Let me transfer to another school."

I felt her pain and agreed. She began her second year at Los Altos High School. Once again, she failed to make the cheerleading team. I did my best to boost her self-esteem by pointing out the other areas where she did well, but she was determined to be a cheerleader.

Finally, in her junior year of high school, she succeeded. I proudly witnessed her becoming one of the chosen nine on the cheerleading team. Her dream was fulfilled, and she participated in the team's activities throughout the school year. The following year, however, she decided not to try out. "Once was enough," she told me. "I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it." Mission accomplished!



Left: Nanci with George and I after she played the role of Mrs. Potiphar in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Center: As a princess who could sense a pea placed under 20 layers of feather mattresses. Right: Nanci's long-sought dream finally came true in her junior year, She is second from the left in the back row.

A Telephone for My Mother

During the summer of 1988, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Károly Grósz, visited the United States. After meeting with President Reagan in Washington, where he expressed a desire to establish closer contact with the West, Grósz made several stops in the U.S., including San Francisco. The Hungarian-Americans of Northern California honored him at a dinner, and I was among the invited guests. He was sitting at the head table with the Hungarian Consul and some American dignitaries. After building up my courage, I decided to grab the opportunity and ask for assistance for my mother.

Under socialism, the Hungarian telecommunication system remained in a primitive state. Only a few residences had telephones—in many cases, party lines—and installing new service in an apartment was virtually impossible. My mother had petitioned for phone service for nearly two decades, but her request was always denied. Grósz's visit offered an opportunity to appeal at the highest level.

I walked up to the head table and stood before the guest of honor. "Forgive me, Mr. Prime Minister, but I have an unusual request," I told him in Hungarian when he looked at me.

"What is it?" he asked.

After introducing myself, I explained that my elderly mother lived alone in Budapest, and I wanted to allow her to call for help by phone in an emergency. I also briefly told him about my continuing education company and offered to teach courses to Hungarian engineers during a forthcoming visit to Hungary.



President Reagan greeting the Hungarian Prime Minister at the White House.

"We would not expect anything from you," he said with a smile. "Come to see me when you're in Budapest, and I'll do my best to help." He gave me his business card and wished me all the best. Joyfully, I returned to my seat and finished the wonderful Hungarian dinner.

A month later, I arranged a trip to Budapest and wrote a letter to Grósz to remind him of our discussion. After arriving in the city, I called his office in the Parliament. "The Prime Minister is in Moscow for a conference," his secretary informed me. My heart sank, but she continued. "He received your letter and wanted you to see one of his cabinet ministers. I'll transfer your call to that office."

Another secretary came on the line and told me Mr. S.T. would see me the following day. "His driver will pick you up at your mother's address," was her unexpected offer.

The following day, a shiny, black, Russian-made ZIL limousine was waiting for me in front of my mother's apartment building. The driver greeted me warmly. During the ride, he wanted to hear about life in California. At the Parliament, he turned me over to a guard who escorted me inside the building.

It was my first time inside the Parliament. I followed the guard up the impressive red-carpeted stairs to the second-floor reception area. Within a few minutes, I was in the office of the Minister of Industry.

The man was amiable. After shaking hands, he asked if we could address each other by first name. Of course, I agreed. He asked the secretary to bring us coffee. Then, he wanted to know why I was there. I described my mother's need for a telephone and the fact that she had been denied many times.

The minister was quite familiar with the national shortage of telephones. "What we need is a brand-new digital telephone exchange, but the American embargo prevents us from

buying one,” he told me. “We can produce more phones, but the central office doesn’t have the capability to satisfy the demand. Installing telephone lines in brick and cement buildings is another problem. However, I’ll figure out something to find a line for your mother.”

“Thank you. I would be very grateful.”

We chatted for some time before his secretary reminded him of another appointment. As we parted, he wished me a pleasant stay in Budapest. His driver took me back to my mother’s place. Some neighbors noticed when I stepped out of the official government automobile and looked at me curiously. I did not care. My mother might have a telephone after all.

Within a few weeks after my return to California, our telephone at home rang in the early morning. “*Lacikám, megvan a telefonom,*” (Les, I have a phone) I heard my mother say through the noisy line. Even though the connection quality was poor, it was the best telephone call I had received in a long time. My mother was elated to have such a luxury.

A month later, during my next visit to Budapest, I called the office of the helpful minister and asked to see him. That time, he invited me to lunch in a restaurant rather than meeting in the Parliament. I placed five American \$100 bills in an envelope before going. In the restaurant, I thanked him for his assistance with the phone installation and asked him to accept a token of my appreciation. He looked inside the envelope and said, “I’m glad it worked out.” With that, he pocketed the money. I had learned how to do business in socialist Hungary.

Delivering a Presentation in Budapest

The Hungarian government-sponsored telecommunication research institute, *TÁKI*, accepted my earlier offer to the Prime Minister. The group invited me to give a seminar on computer-aided design of microwave circuits at their facility. *TÁKI* employed top-notch microwave engineers in Hungary. Until 1956, one of their tasks was to assist with developing the Soviet military communication system. After the revolution, the Kremlin did not trust the Hungarians, and *TÁKI*’s research was reduced to domestic applications. The guarded research center was built on the Buda side of Budapest, on top of a hill, surrounded by the most prestigious residences of the city.

I had mixed feelings about their request. On the one hand, lecturing as an engineer in my native country, which I had left as a technician three decades earlier, appealed to my ego. On the other hand, Hungary was still part of the Eastern Bloc. I would have to be careful not to give away any unpublished information that might be used to hurt the West. I agreed to teach a half-day summary of my UCLA short course.

A problem I faced while preparing for the presentation was not knowing the Hungarian version of the technical terms I had learned in English. I had given courses in Japan and France where I spoke in English, and a local translator continuously summarized my talk, but the task would be different this time. I needed someone to help me with my native language.

TÁKI offered to provide one of their bilingual researchers to assist me with the Hungarian terminology. Dr. Tibor Bercei, one of their top microwave engineers and a full professor at the Technical University of Budapest, was selected for the assignment. I sent Tibor a printed copy of my transparencies before my talk so he could prepare the handout material.

The two of us held a quick rehearsal at their facility on the morning of my talk. During the rehearsal, I added a few handwritten pages and asked Tibor to make transparencies for me and print copies of the extra pages for the group. He seemed troubled by my request.

"I need permission to use the copy machine," he told me. "We may not receive the permission in time for your presentation."

I assumed his concern was not finding help to copy the material. "The two of us could do it quickly," I suggested.

"I'm not allowed to use the machine. It requires written permission from the Director!"

I still did not understand the problem and assumed perhaps it was a union restriction. I recalled when I visited Ford Aerospace as a consultant and discovered that an engineer was not allowed to replace a component in a circuit board. Only the technicians were allowed to use the soldering iron.

"Perhaps I could run the copies if you are not allowed," I offered.

"No one is authorized to use the copy machine here without special permission," he said quietly. "It's a security restriction."

Finally, I understood the meaning. The political system would not want people to be able to reproduce printed material. Freedom of the press did not exist there.

I proceeded with the presentation without the additional pages. The participants asked many questions and told me at the end how much they appreciated the information. Tibor helped me out whenever I stumbled on unfamiliar Hungarian terms. The two of us have maintained contact and are still close friends. *In 2016, Tibor received the IEEE Microwave Career Award, the highest international recognition in that field.*

FBI's Visit

One evening, I was at home, copying a videotape cassette someone had loaned me. Shortly after I sat down to watch the program, the telephone rang.

"This is Agent M... from the FBI," the voice at the other end of the line told me. "We're seeking information about one of your former employees at CGIS. Would you allow me to come by to talk with you?"

I was puzzled. *What would the FBI want from me?* "Who are you looking for?" I asked him.

"Let me explain it in person," the agent persisted. "May I come over to see you now?"

"Yes, you may," I replied. "I'm not doing anything special."

"Would it be OK if I bring another agent with me?"

"Yes, go ahead."

About 20 minutes later, the doorbell rang. Not wanting to interrupt the progress of my video copying, I turned off the television display. When I opened the door, I saw two well-dressed people outside, one handsome man and a beautiful woman. They flashed official-looking badges and handed me their business cards. Everything looked authentic, so I led them inside the house and offered them seats. I sat adjacent to them on the sofa, eager to hear what they had to say.

The man looked at my entertainment center, where the audio equalizer was flashing its colorful LED lights. "Are you recording our conversation?" he asked.

“Oh, no. I'm just copying a...” I stopped suddenly, remembering those FBI warning screens appearing at the beginning of all commercially recorded programs.

The agent graciously did not press the issue and began to explain the reason for their visit. Several years earlier, some vitally critical proprietary documents had disappeared at the Ford Aerospace Company's Palo Alto division. Their investigation had focused on a Chinese-American employee of my former company, who had regular access to the Ford facility. They wanted to know if I knew of that person's present whereabouts.

I told them that after CGIS had shut down its operation, I lost touch with most of the employees and had no idea where that person might be. The agents took careful notes of everything I said. After asking questions about some of the other former employees, they apologized for taking my time and prepared to leave. Before parting, however, they asked me to contact them if I heard about the person of their interest at any time. I promised to do so, and they left.

Twenty years later, I met a woman who used to work at Ford Aerospace. When I learned she was a security officer, I asked if she knew of those missing documents. To my surprise, not only did she know of the incident, but she had personally investigated the suspected Chinese industrial espionage. The case had created quite a commotion within the company, but as far as she knew, it had never been solved.

And I was never prosecuted for copying the video...

An Unexpected Side Career

During the latter part of 1988, the president of Cardiff, Bob Searle, initiated a major shakeup of the *Microwave Systems News (MSN)* magazine. He fired many staff, including the publisher, and asked me if I would become the new Editorial Director. His request surprised me. “I'm not a writer,” I told him.

“I've seen the articles you've written for our publications,” Searle replied. “They're good enough. Besides, as Editorial Director, you must write only a short monthly column each month. We want you to hire new staff and supervise the operation.

Explaining that I already had a good business did not change his determination. “Your magazine involvement could be part-time,” he countered. “We want your name on the masthead of *MSN*.”

He outlined what Cardiff could offer me. Their large Palo Alto building had many empty office spaces, and my small company could easily fit into one section. We could use all their business equipment. In addition to a generous salary, they would give Besser Associates a full-page advertisement every second month in two of their publications, *RF Design* and *MSN*.

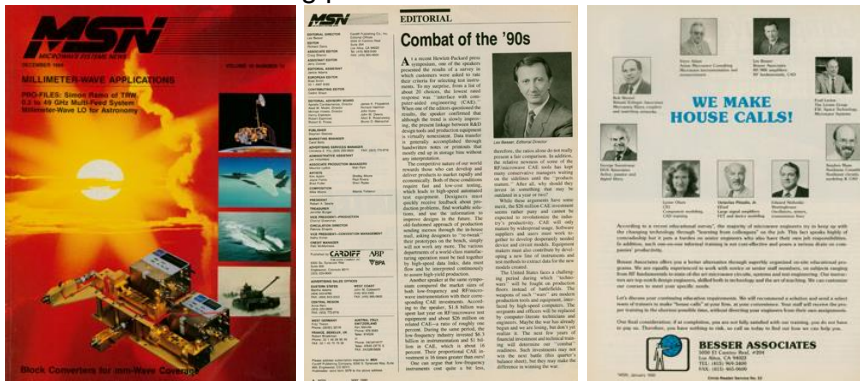
At that point, I could no longer resist, and we reached an agreement. I would spend one-third of my time on *MSN*'s editorial duties. My first task was to reassure the remaining demoralized employees about the ongoing future of the publication. Next, I hired new editors and administrative staff and began to work with them. A month later, Besser Associates relocated into *MSN*'s building. After being cramped in a small office, we suddenly had all the space we wanted.

One of the first lessons I learned in the publication business was timeliness. Printing and mailing the monthly magazine had rigid deadlines that could not be missed. The problem was that we did not have complete control over all material. People submitting articles did not always send in their work as promised. Advertisements sometimes arrive late. To make planning even harder, the total pages in the magazine varied month to month, depending on the advertisement space sold. We could not exceed a specific ratio of editorial to advertising pages.

Unlike my predecessor, I did not restrict my editorial column to technical issues. One month, I discussed American educational problems under the heading, “Johnny Must Learn to Read.” A month later, I asked why our universities do not teach engineers oral and written communication skills. In an editorial entitled “Engineers Need Not Apply,” I described my recent experience seeing a classified ad in a single newspaper. It read:

“Wanted: Expressive, outgoing, friendly, communicative, articulate male. Engineers need not apply!”

In the editorial, I posed some questions. If the last sentence had not been included, how many engineers would meet the listed characteristics? Did we choose to be engineers because we were born poor communicators? Or were we the inevitable result of the educational and training process we endured?



Left: The front cover of one of MSN's monthly issues. Center: The masthead and my editorial column. Right: One of the full-page Besser Associates advertisements in MSN, promoting in-house courses as “House Calls.”

Another editorial column raised the question, “Guns or More Butter?” suggesting that the Cold War should be eased. I wrote that negotiating with a rational and reasonable man like Gorbachev seemed logical.

Surprisingly, our readers appreciated my raising these issues. The magazine received numerous “Letters to the Editor,” complimenting the new direction. Our advertising revenues began to increase.

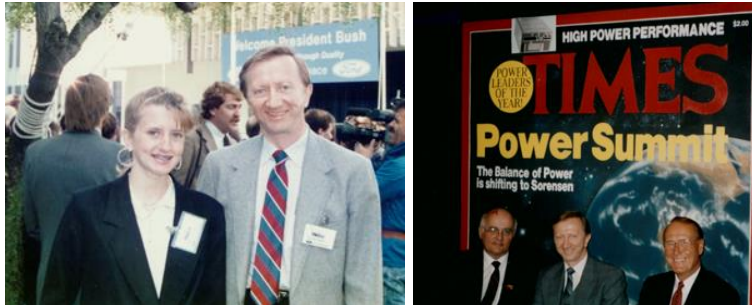
One of the local TV stations planned to air a hawkish program about the role of microwaves in military hardware. They set up an interview with the editorial director of another Cardiff publication, *Defense Electronics*, but the editor was held up in traffic when the TV crew arrived. “The show must go on,” said the crew chief, and he asked me to step in for the missing man.

“I don’t know much about military defense communications,” I replied.

“Don’t worry. We’ll edit the parts where you don’t have the answer.”

They did a great job of making me look like a defense expert. Watching the program on TV later made me wonder how much other “experts” know about their topics when they appear on air.

When President George H.W. Bush visited the West Coast in 1988, Nanci asked me if I would take her to a talk scheduled to be presented to the Ford Aerospace Company in Palo Alto. She was a reporter for her middle school’s newspaper and wanted to write an article about the President’s speech. One of the fringe benefits of my position with the publication was a press pass so I could take her. We sat in the first row, only a few feet from the President. Nanci’s presence at the speech elevated her status at school.



Left: School Reporter Nanci at President Bush’s speech. With her hair up and wearing business attire she looked more like an adult than a thirteen-year-old. Right: A mock Time magazine, showing me with look-alikes of Premier Gorbachev and President Bush.

In 1989, we began to publish interviews on MSN. Each month, someone from our editorial staff or I asked the opinions of business and technical leaders of our industry. Encouraged by the readers’ positive response, I contacted the Soviet embassy in Washington and requested an interview with Premier Gorbachev. Without committing to a specific date, they indicated that it would be a possibility later that year. Cardiff gave the green light to the trip. Excited, I began to prepare for my first trip to the Soviet Union.

Finding the Woman of My Dreams

After seven years of dating, I finally met a woman through Great Expectations who seemed to have all the qualities I wanted. My first date with special education teacher Susan occurred at the Magic Pan restaurant in San Jose. It was lunchtime, and I ordered my favorite dish from that restaurant, cheese blintzes. Because a single order only provided three blintzes, not enough to fill me up, I always asked for a double order—served on the same plate. Susan ordered a chicken salad.

Another waitress brought our orders, and the blintzes came on two separate plates. She placed the salad in front of Susan and one of the blintz orders in front of me. “Whose is the second order?” she asked.

“It’s also mine,” I replied quietly, not wanting to attract attention in the crowded restaurant.

“You must have a big appetite,” said the waitress with a loud laugh.

People around us also laughed. Susan noticed that I blushed. That reaction and the fact that I greeted her with a bouquet of roses made an excellent first impression.

All my friends who met Susan, including my former in-laws, told me she would be my perfect wife. She was educated, attractive, and had two well-balanced children. At that point, her son Kent was 17 years old, the same age as George. Susan’s daughter, Daphne, was 18,

six years older than Nanci. When my mother visited us, she gave me her approval, too. Our four children liked each other, eliminating my fear of possible family feuds.

After nearly two years of dating, Susan and I decided to marry. We had a simple church wedding, followed by a reception. Over 100 of our close friends celebrated with us.



Even my old-fashioned mother was highly impressed with Susan and gave me her seal of approval.

Our honeymoon in Kauai allowed us to wind down and plan our lives together. Ensuring our children's lives would continue smoothly was one of our highest priorities. Daphne was in her second year of college but still lived at home. Kent was beginning his first year at UC Santa Cruz but would be home for holidays and summers. George was in his last year of high school. Nanci was still in junior high school; she and George were at our house every other week. Our children were all doing well academically, had close friends, and stayed free from tobacco and drugs.

We added another bedroom to my house to accommodate the enlarged family. Susan left her teaching job to help us in our business. In addition to giving up my kitchen duties, I welcomed her much-needed administrative skills in our office. My kids appreciated Susan's well-balanced home-cooked meals.

Of her many good traits, I especially admired her motherly devotion to her children. Undoubtedly, she would be a good stepmother to my kids, and I did my best to always be there for Daphne and Kent.

I soon learned that Susan was extremely well-organized. She always knew where everything was in the house. Recognizing that unique ability, Kent affectionately named her "411." When one of us could not find something, we yelled, "Calling 411." Susan would appear and find the missing item in no time.

People often say that once the initial sparks of married life die away, partners drift apart. In my second marriage, just the opposite has happened. The longer I have lived with Susan, the more I love her. We have proved that two nitpicking Virgos can enjoy a harmonious marriage. We balance each other's weaknesses and combine our strengths. I will be forever grateful to God for bringing the two of us together.



Pictures with Susan. The one on the right was taken at our wedding on August 5, 1989.



**Left: With our children (Nanci, Daphne, George and Kent) before heading to the wedding.
Right: At the reception with my former in-laws, Nelson and Doris Bogart.**

A Sensitivity Lesson

Two months after our marriage, I was in the office late afternoon finishing a long article. Everyone had gone home so I could focus on my work. A sharp jolt shook the building as I submitted the file to print and walked to pick up the printout. Some acoustic ceiling tile brackets snapped open, and the floor moved. Another jolt followed. *It's an earthquake. I must take cover.* I ran to a doorway and stood there until the movement stopped. It was the biggest earthquake I had ever experienced.

The lights were still shining. The power service had not been interrupted. At that point, I realized I had not saved the MS Word file I was working on and rushed back to my computer. As I sat down, the electricity went off. I lost several hours of work on my long file!

Annoyed and still shaken from the earthquake, I tried to call Susan at home, but the line was busy. After several attempts, I finally reached her. Not knowing the quake's magnitude, I exclaimed, "We lost power here just as I tried to save my work. My long Microsoft Word file is lost!"

"Are you worried about your stupid file instead of asking how we are doing in the house?" she asked incredulously. "Don't you want to know if the house is still standing?"

I realized how insensitive I had appeared and tried to assure her that she and the family were my main concern. Complaining about losing a computer file was not the best way to begin that conversation. I attempted to rush home to be with the family, but the drive took three times the usual ten minutes. None of the traffic lights worked, and there were long waits at every major intersection.

Fortunately, our home sustained no structural damage. A couple of bookcases spilled their contents, and some dishes broke in the kitchen. A 27-inch Zenith television fell off its stand,

face down in the family room. Surprisingly, it worked fine when I righted it and switched the set on. I wrote Zenith a testimonial about the durability of their product.

Later in the evening, we heard that the Loma Prieta quake was 6.9 on the Richter scale, the strongest one in our area since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Son Kent was attending the University of California at Santa Cruz—near the quake's epicenter. When the first tremor hit, he was among hundreds of students in a large lecture hall. Despite all the earthquake training California students had received, the panicked students ran outside the building for safety. That night, they slept on the lawn, away from the dormitories.

Many buildings in the Santa Cruz area were heavily damaged. Throughout Northern California, the quake killed 63 people and injured nearly 4,000. Approximately 10,000 people became homeless after their homes suffered severe structural damage. The loss of my file became trivial in comparison.

Approaching Political Changes

During most of my European trips, I would also spend a few days in Budapest. In addition to visiting my mother and Pista's family, I found opportunities to meet Kati and her husband, Lajos, who had retired from the army. The bits and pieces Kati told me about my father allowed me to become familiar with the man I had met only a few times. According to Kati, my father and I shared physical resemblance and analytical minds. She also gave me photos from his earlier life, including his military service.

Lajos was a devoted Communist Party member. He believed everyone should work as hard as possible to build a better society and take only from the common good according to their needs. Being a former general, he often lectured me about the evils of the capitalist system. "You tell President Bush that..." was the beginning of his frequent complaints, followed by some perceived injustice committed by the United States.



Left: Pista in my mother's apartment, celebrating his 53rd birthday. Right: in a photo taken when Susan visited Budapest with me for the first time, Kati and her husband, Lajos.

“Lajos, I don’t have a direct phone line to the White House,” I would reply.

“I understand, but you must agree that I am right,” he continued. Being outranked, I quietly went along with his arguments.

Significant changes were coming to the entire world. At the beginning of 1989, the Hungarian government removed the barbed wire fences and landmines along the border between Hungary and Austria. When Susan and I were in Budapest in the late summer of that year, we went to see Kati and Lajos. They lived in a four-unit apartment building next to the West German¹¹ Consulate, guarded by armed Hungarian soldiers. While we chatted in my sister’s living room, I noticed something strange through the window—people wearing civilian clothing were climbing over the wall into the backyard of the consulate. The Hungarian guards, seemingly unconcerned, looked in another direction.

“What’s going on?” I asked Kati.

“East Germans are escaping,” she replied. “Once inside the consulate, they’ll be granted passage to West Germany.”

The news astonished me. I had heard that Gorbachev had relaxed the Soviet political grip over the Eastern European countries. However, for the Hungarian government to allow their socialist comrades to escape to the West openly was far beyond my imagination.

Something unexpected was brewing on the political scene!



Breaking down borders... Hungarians toils for their freedom yesterday, pulling down the electrified fence on the road in Vienna.

Hungary turns the Iron Curtain into scrap



Eyewitness
Ian Traynor
in Hegyeshalom,
Hungary

even halting for a minute. Their boss, Colonel Balazs Kovacs, had one explanation for the group: “It makes Hungarian feel better that we have an old-fashioned border with the West.”

The soldiers worked on the suburban garbages with their axes, crowbars and protective gloves.

As they progressed along these miles of the Austro-Hungarian frontier, they left

discarded segments of rusted barbed wire as a memento of the way the world used to be.

This part of the world used to be a no-man’s-land. The Hungarians got rid of it in 1972, but until Monday the 16th miles of fencing along the border with Austria had its voids of electricity running through it. “Not enough to kill, but enough to shock,” said Colonel Vidoss of the border guards.

some 420,000 a mile to erect. It is now costing around 120,000 to pull down the whole lot over the next 18 months. History will repeat, the top brass clearly think.

“This is the beginning of a new process which we hope will help our international image a lot,” said Col Kovacs, head of the border guards.

However symbols of political change in Hungary and attitudes towards the West, it is hardly surprising that

now much better than with many of the Warsaw Pact allies. With friends like Russia and Czechoslovakia, what needs enemies?

But how had the Hungarians managed?

They were not asked for their views. “As far as I know, the building of this system was not mentioned in those orders,” said Col the talkative way of justification.

And was there not now a risk that some would seek to

Hungarians do not have to try to cross in such a way,” advised Col Vidoss.

But these Hungarians are hardly the problem. What about disgruntled Czechs, Slovaks, and East Germans with easy access to Hungary?

“You will have to ask those other countries if they will stop tourists from staying in Hungary,” said the colonel.

“We do not want to deal with this.”

Hungarian border guards are dismantling the barbed wires, allowing visiting East Germans to flee to Austria.

¹¹ After the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into two parts. East Germany had a socialist government and belonged to the Warsaw Pact. West Germany had a Western-style democratic system.

Chapter 10: The End of European Communism

Two months after East Germans began to escape to the West through Hungary, the Cold War¹ showed signs of winding down. On the evening of November 9, 1989, the East German government unexpectedly opened the checkpoints of the Berlin Wall and allowed its citizens the freedom to leave. As the news spread, thousands streamed through the gates to the West.

The monstrous 12-foot-high concrete wall that for nearly 30 years had separated Communism from capitalism had finally been breached. Frustrated citizens on both sides attacked the hated Wall with hammers, chisels, and pickaxes. Instant celebration broke out in the Western section. Strangers hugged and kissed each other to celebrate the event. Within a year, the two Germanys would unite into a single democratic country. Due to the sudden political changes, however, the interview I hoped for with Premier Gorbachev did not materialize. The Soviet Consulate informed me that he was too busy to talk to reporters.

The collapse of the Wall also initiated the collapse of Communism in Europe. Under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, the Soviet Union soon dissolved. Eastern Bloc countries denounced their Communist leadership and elected new governments. The Cold War officially ended in 1991 without a battle.

I welcomed the change and wanted to grab the opportunity to establish some form of business in Hungary. Combining Western capital and Hungarian labor seemed like a promising opportunity. Two U.S. corporations, Litton Industries and Digital Microwave Corporation, showed interest in setting up a joint-venture operation in Budapest. I arranged exploratory visits for them with *TÁKI* and two other companies.

The task turned out to be far more complex than I had envisioned. Under the socialist system, cost accounting differed from American companies. A Litton Industries vice president and I saw an example when we visited Orion, Hungary's largest television manufacturer. During our tour of the company, the Orion chief engineer proudly showed us the wave-soldering machine where the tuners of the televisions were assembled.

"What is the cost of producing one of those tuners?" asked J.R., the Litton. I translated his question into Hungarian.

The Orion managers who escorted us looked puzzled. "We don't keep track of the cost," said one of them.

"Could you produce a quick estimate?" I asked him, without translating his answer. J.R. looked at me curiously.

"Accounting will provide the answer shortly," I said to him.

Similar questions came up during our tour, but none were answered. We also noticed several workers standing idle, smoking, and chatting. "What are those men doing?" asked J.R.

"Waiting for parts to arrive." "Waiting for maintenance to repair their equipment." "Taking a cigarette break" were the kinds of answers we received. J.R. shook his head disapprovingly.

Before leaving Orion, we spent time with the company's financial group. The accountants did not have much of the information we wanted but promised to send it to us within a few days. The

¹ A form of political and military hostility between NATO and the Eastern Bloc countries.

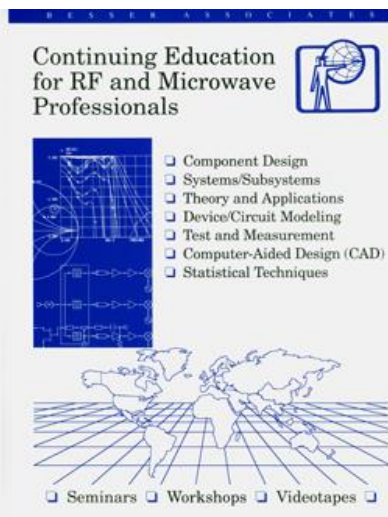
data never arrived. Shortly after, J.R. told me his company was not interested in a joint venture with the Hungarian companies we visited. I had a similar experience when I took a representative of Digital Microwave to Budapest.

In all fairness, our visits took place shortly after the sudden political regime change. The country was in complete turmoil because the system under which they had operated for more than 40 years had changed entirely. They had no capital to operate or expand, and their Eastern European market had disappeared. Eventually, the Hungarian companies became more aligned with Western practices, and many of them either partnered with or were sold to foreign companies. I did not participate in any of those transactions.

The end of the Cold War also significantly impacted the American electronics industry. Government military spending was drastically cut, and defense companies laid off large numbers of engineers. At the same time, demand for personal communication products was on the rise. Companies producing pocket pagers and mobile telephones had problems finding experienced technical people. Cellular phone companies generally did not seek engineers displaced by defense companies. "Those engineers are too expensive and have been designing products for the government too long," a mobile phone company personnel manager told me. "They don't fit into our operation."

He was right. Engineers working for the defense contractors had developed high-priced, low-volume electronic systems. Performance and reliability were of the utmost importance. In contrast, the personal communication industry wanted low-cost, high-volume products. If a customer had to choose between two pagers, one with superior performance but selling for \$500 and another with lower performance but selling for \$50, he would choose the less expensive product. If a \$50 pager failed, it would be replaced rather than repaired.

The universities still taught electrical engineering students the same courses they had offered for decades. Academia did not adapt fast enough to the changing world. Their slow response created opportunities for my training organization. We quickly developed courses to fill the needs of the new industry. In a short time, our instructors became extremely busy.



Left: Susan and I in our booth at a microwave conference in Boston. Center: Our course brochure cover page. Right: The company's monthly publication.

With the shrinkage of the microwave business, Cardiff made an abrupt decision to merge *MSN* with *Defense Electronics*. They offered jobs to employees willing to relocate to their headquarters in Denver and terminated the rest. After three years of involvement with *MSN* magazine, I was pretty happy to give up my role with the publication and focus on Besser Associates exclusively. My company moved to another office in Los Altos, maintaining my short commute. Three of our four college-age children no longer lived at home, and Nanci was with us only every second week. I began to travel more and more to teach courses. Susan often came with me to these workshops—I worked while she shopped. 😊 In some years, we slept more often in hotels than at home.

Becoming Dr. Besser

The students generally addressed me in the U.S. and Australia by my first name. In Japan, it was always “Besser-san.” Europeans were more formal and used “Dr. Besser.” When I informed them that I did not have a Ph.D., they gave me a surprised look and usually switched to “Professor.”

During one of my visits to Budapest, Dr. Berceli gave me a tour of the Technical University of Budapest and introduced me to some faculty members. Over and over, I had to explain that I was not Dr. Besser. Observing my discomfort, Dr. Berceli, a full professor at the school, took me to the Dean’s office and had me wait in the lobby. “I might have good news for you,” he said, “but let me check it out first.” With that, he entered the inner office of the Dean.

He returned later with a big smile on his face. “I was right. Your technical accomplishments have earned you the right to receive a doctorate—not just an honorary one, but a regular degree,” he said. Seeing my surprise, he explained a long-established procedure of that university. Selected individuals who had proven their ability but, for various reasons, had not completed a formal program could qualify for this shortcut doctorate. To become eligible, a candidate had to:

1. Show a significant international technical accomplishment.
2. Have both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Electrical Engineering.
3. Have at least ten years of teaching experience at a major university.
4. Prove outstanding knowledge in one of the significant technical fields.
5. Submit a thesis and pass an oral exam by the dean and selected senior faculty members.

“You’ve already met the first four requirements,” he told me. “You authored COMPACT, have two engineering degrees, taught for more than ten years at UCLA, and are referred to as the ‘father of computer-aided microwave circuit design.’ Writing a thesis and defending it should not be hard for you. Then, you can truly be called Dr. Besser.”

It sounded like a great opportunity to me. I filed the required paperwork and forwarded the class notes from my microwave circuit design course. To meet the deadline set for the thesis, I focused on computer-aided design, expanding selected bits and pieces from my previous publications. It was far from the most elegant dissertation, but I did not want to take much time away from my family and work. I hoped to overcome any shortcomings of the written material during the oral presentation.

The university gave me several dates to defend the thesis. I selected one that corresponded with a scheduled European trip and went to the school to meet the examining committee. After teaching courses for nearly 20 years, I was again the student and nervously waited for the proceedings.

The committee was sympathetic and focused on practical engineering rather than pure theory. They allowed me to demonstrate an actual circuit design with my portable computer. In the end, I was able to answer all their questions. They sent me outside the room and, after a short conference, asked me to return. The Dean congratulated me and informed me that I had successfully passed the examination. In 1992, at 56, my formal education was complete. I had earned a Ph.D. in Hungary — without bribing anyone!

Delighted with the outcome, I went back to my mother's apartment with the good news. "I wish my poor parents could see how fortunate I am," she cried happily. "They had even less schooling than I had, and now my son has a doctorate! Her joy grew as she contemplated the rosy future of her grandchildren. "Debbie will also have a Ph.D. soon. And George may go to medical school. I am so proud of all of you!"

I reminded her that Abraham Lincoln once said, "The important thing is not what your grandparents were, but what your grandchildren will be!"

My Mother's Decline

In 1991, my mother asked me to celebrate her 80th birthday with us in California. When she arrived, I noticed she had become frail and feared that this might be her last trip to the US. Her memory and hearing were failing. She had suffered a detached retina the previous year that had not been repaired in time. After his examination, our local ophthalmologist concluded that the vision in her right eye could not be restored. Her hearing improved with the help of state-of-the-art hearing aids that I bought for her, but there was not much we could do about the memory loss.



Left: My mother with Nanci, George and me. Right: Mom's four grandchildren: Eva's two daughters are Debbie (next to Nanci) and Sandy (next to George).

I escorted her back to Budapest and investigated getting her a better apartment. After a couple thousand dollars changing hands, she relocated into a nicer apartment on the Buda

side—only a few streetcar stops from where Pista lived. Her new building had several stores on the street, including a grocery store. I also hired someone to look after her part-time as necessary.

One of her regular morning routines was to boil water for tea. I watched as she lit the gas stove burner with a match and noticed that her waist-long hair was dangerously close to the flames. That day, I went to a department store and purchased the simplest microwave oven. The small appliance had only one dial, and I taught her how to operate it to boil her tea water. She promised me that she would use it instead of the gas burner. Relieved, I returned to California. I phoned her several times to find out if the microwave oven was functioning correctly. She assured me that it was working well.

On my next trip a few months later, the first thing I noticed in her apartment was that the microwave oven was not plugged into the electrical outlet. “Mother, you promised me you’d use this oven,” I growled.

“I’ve been using it, and it works fine,” she replied.

“How can you say that? It’s not even plugged in.”

“It makes an excellent bread box.” She opened the oven door and pulled out a loaf of bread. “Look how nice and fresh it is.”

I gave up but convinced her to cut her hair shorter.

Her hearing aids stopped working twice. After the second repair, the technician told me that, in both cases, the tiny electronic boards inside had been damaged. When I questioned her, she admitted using her hairpin to clean the ear wax. From then on, her caretaker took over the cleaning task.

By the end of 1992, her condition had worsened. The doctors could not find anything wrong other than dementia. Her memory continued to fade. In mid-December, the doctor called me. “You’d better come over to see her. She may not have much time left.”

George offered to go with me to see Mother during the Christmas break of his senior year at UC Davis, where he was majoring in physiology. We arrived in snow-covered Budapest two days after Christmas. The scenery was quite different from what we had left in California. The sun hid behind heavy clouds, and the temperature dipped below zero degrees Celsius (-20 degrees Fahrenheit). Fortunately, we had taken warm clothing with us.

Mother perked up for a while after we first arrived at her apartment but soon fell back into a deep sleep. She alternated between short awakenings and long sleep for the next several days. “I’m tired of living,” she told me once when she was alert. The doctor recommended hospitalization. Finding an available bed was difficult, but she was taken to Szent János Hospital through Pista’s connections. The best they could give her was a room with five other patients—all elderly ladies. George and I visited her there regularly.

By New Year’s Day, her condition had improved, and I hoped to take her home soon. Then, she had a sudden relapse and developed a cough. Sadly, George had only a few days left before he had to return to college. When he said farewell to Mother, she did not want to let him go. “I’ll never see you again,” she whispered. Then she grabbed my hand. “Swear that you won’t cremate my body when I die,” she demanded. Although I assured her that she would be out of the hospital within a few days, I agreed.

On our way back to my mother's apartment, I explained to George why she did not want to be cremated. She believed that the world's end would come in the year 2000. At that time, all dead people would be resurrected. She wanted to face the Creator in her own body.

I drove George to the airport the following day. When we parted, I suddenly realized how difficult it was to be left behind when a loved one went away. I understood why Mother always cried when I left Budapest after visiting her.

The next few days did not bring any improvement in Mother's condition. Although she was not religious, she asked for a priest to give her the last rites. When I went to see her early in the morning on January 6, she refused to eat or drink. I returned in the afternoon, but she was not awake, and her hands were cold. Her breathing was loud and erratic. I sensed that she was slipping away. Rather than attempting any heroic effort to revive her, I sat on her bed, held her hands, and talked to her softly. "I'm staying with you as long as you want me," I told her. A few hours later, she completely stopped breathing. The room was already dark, and the other patients were all asleep.

A nurse came in to check on Mother. "She is gone," I told her. The nurse checked her pulse. Then, using a flashlight, she placed a small mirror before Mother's mouth. Not detecting any breath, she rushed out and returned with a doctor. He agreed that my mother had passed away.

An orderly covered Mother's head with the sheet and packed her belongings in a paper bag. I left the hospital feeling numb. Back at her apartment, I kept thinking of my childhood—all her hard work and sacrifices so I would be fed, clothed, and safe. Now, she was gone forever.

The following day, Pista took me to obtain a death certificate. The official told me burial spots were only available at cemeteries outside Budapest. I did not like that news, but the man offered no alternative. He gave me instructions on how to proceed.

"One of my former water polo teammates is the director of the *Farkasréti* cemetery," said Pista after we left the office. "Let's visit him and see if he can help."

Farkasréti was the cemetery where my father was buried. Mother had taken me there to show me his grave.

The director was tied up when we went to his office at the cemetery. His secretary told us it would be about 20 minutes before he could see us. I left Pista in the office and went outside to see if I could find my father's grave.

I remembered that his grave was close to the office building. I found it quickly and said a quick prayer for his soul. Before leaving, I noticed a deep, wide hole next to his grave. There was no indication that anyone was buried there.

Pista was already in the director's office by the time I returned. The two were drinking beer and recalling the days they played on the same team. "Is there a way my American cousin's mother could be buried in this cemetery?" Pista asked after emptying his glass.

"It would be *very* difficult," replied the director, emphasizing "very."

"I'd be *very* grateful to you," I told him, emphasizing the same word.

The director pulled out a giant book and flipped through the pages. "We might find something near the perimeter, although most sites have already been committed to others."

"I was just outside and saw an empty hole next to my father's grave," I told him, pointing to the map on his wall. "Would that be available? It would be great if she could rest next to him," I replied as my spirits began to lift.

“Oh, no. Those plots near the front are reserved for government officials or celebrities. I couldn’t give you that one.”

“I’d be extremely grateful if you could make that happen,” I said, raising the ante by emphasizing the new adverb.

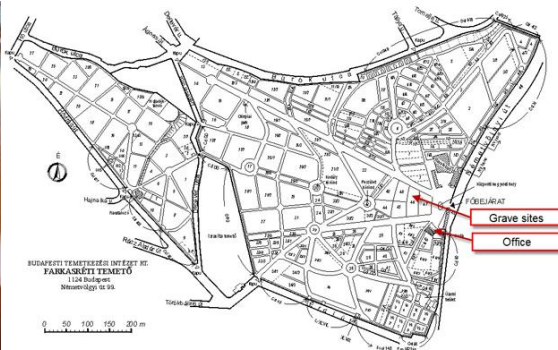
I could tell he was wavering, and I began negotiating with him. In the end, he let my mother have the site. In exchange for the favor, I left \$500 with him—the same price I had paid the Hungarian government minister for arranging a telephone for Mother.

Only later did I learn that the plots were rented for 25-year periods. If the agreement were not renewed, the remains of the dead person would be removed to a remote location. That had just happened with the plot next to my father’s.

I stayed in Budapest for another week to attend to the difficult task of closing Mother’s apartment. Going through all her worldly possessions was hard because so many had memories tied to our lives.

Among her books, I discovered a diary she maintained after Éva and I escaped from Hungary. For the first time, I learned how much she had suffered financially during the late 1950s. With the sudden loss of the money she had received from my sister and me, she had all the meager earnings from her housecleaning and laundry services. Suddenly, I was filled with remorse for not helping more substantially. Even though she had never asked for money, I should have sent her more instead of buying a car in Canada. I knelt to pray and asked her forgiveness for being so selfish.

Another surprise was a life insurance policy with instructions attached: “Please give this money to my grandchildren so they remember me.” The cash value of the policy was equivalent to nearly a thousand dollars. After receiving her death certificate, I could collect the money.



Left: George standing in my mother’s apartment. Center: Map of the cemetery where over 300,000 people have been buried. Arrows point to the director’s office and the location of the empty gravesite I found for my mother—next to my father’s. Right: Holding the temporary cross over Mother’s grave the day after the funeral. My father’s grave is on my right side.

Except for the few items I decided to take to California, I gave away everything she owned. What the families of Pista and my cousin Ferenc did not want went to the Catholic Church, where

I was baptized in 1936. I authorized Pista to sell the apartment² and use the funds to buy one for his daughter, who had recently married but still lived at home.

The funeral was simple and sad. In a short memorial service at the cemetery, I asked them to play “Farewell to Mother” from the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, my mother’s favorite. The aria, recorded by Luciano Pavarotti, brought tears to my eyes then—and every time I have heard it since.

After returning to the U.S., I doubled the amount received from Mother’s life insurance company and purchased for each of her four grandchildren 20 shares of Apple stock, paying \$25 per share. (Unwisely, I did not buy any for myself.) By December 2024, Apple stock split by a factor of 224! The former 20 shares would now be worth \$896,000! I am sure our “youngsters” would appreciate their grandmother’s thoughtfulness even more if they kept their stock.



Photos taken seven years later, in 2000. Left: Susan and Kati at Mother’s grave with the final headstone. The inscription reads, “With loving memories, Éva, Laci and grandchildren.” Right: Standing next to the gravesite of Pista’s wife, Kuki, who passed away a few months after my mother did. Pista was still grieving over his loss.

Travel Adventures

Our worldwide travel brought many exciting experiences. My teaching took me to 31 countries on four continents, presenting courses personally to over 10,000 participants. Observing the different cultures, customs, and behaviors of the students in the various countries was an education for me. The quiet and formal Europeans, the respectful and polite Japanese, and the aggressive and demanding Israelis presented a sharp contrast to the laid-back, easy-going style of the American participants. After a while, I learned how to adjust my teaching style to be effective but still popular with students of diverse cultural backgrounds.

If I asked questions during a course in the U.S., some better students would immediately reply—often without raising their hands. The first time I posed a question during a course in Japan,

² After the end of the Cold War, the new Hungarian government sold apartments to the residents who lived in them. Taking advantage of the low prices, I purchased my mother’s apartment for her. Later, those dwellings could be sold again by the owners.

nobody responded. I soon learned the reasons for their silence. If the answer were wrong, the person might lose face. On the other hand, if the answer were correct, he could be viewed by the others as a show-off. So, it was better for them to be quiet.

Without any two-way communication, I had no feedback about the class members' level of understanding. I couldn't tell if the pace was too fast or if they already knew the material and were bored. Waiting through the language translation in the class made the task even more difficult. My first teaching day in Tokyo was highly frustrating.

During dinner, I expressed my problem to an American-born sales manager who had lived in Japan for quite some time. I asked what I could do.

"Japanese people are eager to help others," he responded. "Tell them that you'd be honored if they would assist you in setting the right pace for the course."

I followed that advice the next day, and the class became more responsive. Encouraging them to ask questions, however, required a more unique approach.

Knowing that hard liquor was expensive in Japan, on my next trip, I brought a bottle of American whiskey with me. On the first day of the class, I placed the bottle on my desk after asking them to help by answering my questions. "If at least five people ask technical questions during the morning session, I'll give this bottle to one of you," I told them. The group broke out in laughter, then took the bait. They asked questions, and we had a great course. I was successful in using that approach many times.

One course I taught at HP-Japan, however, was different. Nothing I did broke the ice. The students watched me with blank expressions. They would not answer my questions or raise any despite the bottle of whiskey in front of them. I walked out of the class at the first coffee break, unhappy and irritated.

"This is the worst bunch of students I've ever had," I complained to a group of HP managers standing some distance from the meeting hall. "They just stare at me, looking like dummies instead of real people."

"Besser-san, Besser-san," cried out one of the HP application engineers, running toward us from the meeting room. "Please turn off the wireless microphone!"

It was a terrible mistake, but the damage was done. My only hope was that the students were so busy talking with each other that they missed the statements I had broadcasted through the PA system. Many of the students understood enough English to understand the meaning of my words. If they did, however, there was no change in their blank expressions. I was relieved when the course was finished, and I could leave. I had learned a vital lesson that time—the first thing to do when I stopped lecturing was to turn off the microphone immediately!

Cambridge, the British Ivy-League School

I was heading to Cambridge University in the U.K. for a CEI-organized course. During the one-hour bus ride from Heathrow to the college, I sat beside a well-dressed Englishman reading a newspaper's sports section. We began to chat. After hearing my accent, he wanted to know my national origin. Once he heard that I was born in Hungary, our discussion shifted to sports. He knew what a great national soccer team my country had in the 1950s.

“Some Western sports, like baseball, have never captured my interest,” I confessed. “And I don’t see what’s exciting about cricket,” I said while pointing to a photo in his newspaper.

“Yes, it is a strange game,” he admitted, “although I enjoy watching it.

Our discussion drifted to other subjects. “Come and see me if you have some free time,” he said when we reached Cambridge. “I would like to introduce you to my work.”

I promised to do that, assuming he was a professor or a researcher. When we exchanged business cards, I was shocked to read his title: **Head Coach of the Cambridge cricket team!**

One afternoon after my session ended, I walked to the cricket field. The coach introduced me to the team as “someone who knows nothing about their game.” Out of courtesy, I watched their practice. I still don’t think I would ever become a fan if I watched a hundred games.



My picture was taken with the Cambridge cricket team. Although their coach attempted to give me a thorough introduction to the game, I still understood very little about it.

Usually, the instructors headed home on Friday after the short courses ended. On this trip, however, Irving Kalet and I stayed for another night. We both had Saturday flights to the U.S. and planned to take the bus to Heathrow early the following day. Two attractive young CEI course facilitators, Karen and Anneli, also stayed over to finish their administrative functions with Churchill College. They took us out for dinner to one of the famous Cambridge pubs in the evening. Our contractual arrangement specified that CEI paid all our expenses.

Irving and I were in our 60s, nearly two generations older than the predominantly male college crowd drinking and eating there. As we entered the pub with the two tall Swedish women, eyebrows immediately raised. “Dinner with Grandpa?” one of the young bucks asked sarcastically as the hostess led us to a table.

“They aren’t our grandfathers,” snapped Anneli. “Mind your own business!”

Her statement generated immediate discussions. During dinner, I could feel many stares; people were likely wondering what two old geezers were doing with the young ladies. Then something—probably unprecedented—took place.

At the end of our meal, the waiter handed the check to Irving, who looked a few years older than me. “I’ll take that,” said Karen, quickly grabbing the bill.

Her action stunned the crowd for a few seconds. Up to that point, perhaps they had assumed that two well-to-do old gentlemen were taking their mistresses out to dinner, but seeing the girls paying for it was too much. Many of the students shook our hands as we were leaving,

congratulating us. Irving and I just smiled and accepted their admiration. There seemed no reason to tell the students about our true connection with the girls.

Driving for the First Time in England

I usually relied on public transportation when I taught courses in large cities or universities. In rural areas, rental cars were more convenient if the course location and hotel were far apart. When Susan traveled with me, she usually dropped me off in the morning to teach and picked me up in the late afternoon. She always found ways to fill her days—visiting museums and churches and shopping, one of her favorite activities.

When Motorola asked me to teach a five-day course at Basingstoke in the U.K., I combined it with a two-day course at a London-based conference center. That time, I traveled without my better half.

At Heathrow Airport, I picked up a rental car and took one of the motorways toward Basingstoke. Driving for the first time on the left side of the road, I quickly realized my mistake in not picking a car with automatic transmission. Shifting gears with my left hand while watching the traffic was nerve-racking. The car had no air conditioning. The effects of the heat and stress had me soaked with sweat when I arrived at the hotel.

The Motorola training center was only a few blocks from where I stayed, so I had no problem navigating there in the morning. When I returned to the hotel after my first day of teaching, I learned that they did not have an exercise room. Instead of going out to run in the hot and humid weather, I inquired about local health club facilities. The front desk was accommodating and gave me directions to a gym “about a 15-minute drive” from the hotel.

I changed quickly, jumped into my car, and headed for the gym. Unfortunately, the route included five roundabouts—most of them with more than four exits. GPS was not available in those days. Instead of 15 minutes, it took me nearly an hour and a half to reach my destination. The same thing happened on my way back. I found myself lost several times. I told myself that the next day it would be easier.

My 30 years of driving experience did not help me at all. No matter how hard I concentrated during my daily visits to that gym, I could not return to the hotel without taking at least one wrong exit out of one of the roundabouts. I had several close calls when I slowed down momentarily to think. At the end of the week, I thanked St. Anthony for protecting me, returned the car to the airport, and promised myself never to drive again in the U.K.—or any other country where they drive on “the wrong side of the road.” I took the bus to London for the next course.

After the first day of teaching in London, I noticed a small crowd gathered outside the entrance of one of the Underground stations on my way back to the hotel. Curiously, I joined the group and saw a man playing a shell game. As I joined them, I saw the player place a small ball under one of three cups. He shuffled the cups around rapidly, using both hands. Then he asked onlookers to guess which cup covered the ball. If the guess were correct, the gambler would double whatever bet was placed.

A man standing at the front of the group pointed to one of the cups and put a ten-pound note on the table. The gambler pocketed the money first, then reached out for the cup indicated by the customer. However, lifting the cup, he rapidly shifted the ball under another cup. Although his

movement was swift, I could see that he was cheating and voiced my observation. The man who placed the bet agreed with me and demanded his money. Several others in the crowd made threatening noises. The gambler caved in and paid.

"Let's try it again," said the winner.

The gambler placed the ball under one of the cups and shuffled again. I did my best to follow the movements of his hands with my eyes. When he stopped, the previous bettor pointed to the same cup I would have guessed.

"Please help me to ensure he doesn't cheat again," said the bettor. "Put your hand on the cup."

I did as he asked, and after the man placed a ten-pound bet, the gambler lifted the cup, and the ball was underneath. The crowd cheered, and the gambler grudgingly paid again.

"We're making a good team," said the happy winner. "I'm going to break this guy today."

In the next round, the man asked me again to place my hand on the cup we both agreed upon. "Why don't you place a bet yourself?" he asked me as he put his money on the table.

Although gambling is not in my blood, I could not see any risk and quickly added ten pounds to the bet on the table. All that time, I kept my eyes focused on the selected cup.

The gambler lifted the cup. To my surprise, the ball was not there. He lifted a second cup to prove that we had made a mistake. I was stunned. The gambler took our money away.

"That's OK," said my new friend. "Let's double our bets to win our money back." The cheering crowd endorsed his suggestion. Then, it suddenly hit me: *I was being taken by the group!*

"No more bets for me," I announced, preparing to leave. The others tried to convince me to stay, but I walked away. About two blocks later, I saw a policeman and approached him. I briefly outlined my experience and asked if he would return with me to investigate.

"I'm certain they're gone by now," he told me. "They always operate near the subway stations and quickly move after they take money from the suckers." He smiled at this "sucker" and lowered his head a bit. "You know, by placing bets yourself, you are equally guilty because gambling is illegal in England. If I arrested them, I would have to do the same with you. I suggest you forget the incident and don't fall for such a scam in the future."

I walked back to my hotel. Thinking during dinner about the teamwork of the crooks, I could not help but admire how well the operation had been set up. Their role-playing was perfect whether they were all professional actors or experienced crooks. They deserved my ten pounds.

At the French Riviera

Another European course, organized by CEI Europe, took Susan and me to the city of Nice, France, during the week of their annual Mardi Gras Carnival. Our hotel, the Grand Aston, was located on the parkway where the nightly festival parade ended. The front desk clerk led us to the best corner room on the top floor. He took us to the spacious balcony to show us where we could watch the festival directly below us that evening. We had heard much about that spectacular parade and looked forward to seeing it.

As the evening approached, the crowd on the street began to swell. Bleachers on both sides of the wide boulevards were packed with spectators. After dinner, we bought two of the crazy hats everyone wore, mingled with the crowd, and watched the magnificent floats slowly crawl by. The

noise level was so high that we had to shout to each other, but being there was a fantastic experience.

After a while, jet lag hit us, and we went to our room. For a while, we watched the procession from the balcony. Knowing I would have to start teaching the following morning, we retired. Around 10 p.m., we closed the balcony doors and went to bed.

Falling asleep, however, was not easy. The master of ceremonies was stationed directly below us. Amplified by a powerful PA system, his voice blasted through our windows. We tried using earplugs, but they could not silence the racket.

I called the front desk. "Could we switch to another room in the rear of the hotel?" I asked.

"Sorry, but the hotel is fully booked. Is something wrong with your room?"

"The room is lovely, but we can't sleep because of the street noise."

"Monsieur, this is no time to sleep! You should be watching the parade."

I gave up. We took sleeping pills, but even with the drugs, it took some time to sleep. Thankfully, the march ended around 1:30 a.m., so I had some rest.

The next day, we tried again to change rooms, but nothing was available. In desperation, I asked the person at the front desk if someone on the rear side would be willing to upgrade to our room. The idea worked. We gave up our fancy accommodation for a smaller room that looked at the outside walls of another building. We had no view but slept undisturbed for the rest of the week.

Because I had the same course scheduled at Motorola in Schaumburg, IL, the following week, we flew back to Chicago on Saturday. Susan cleaned my overhead transparencies on Sunday so I could use them again to teach. After dropping me off at Motorola University, Susan hit the mall. She has a black belt in shopping.

The first morning of the class ran smoothly. I had lunch in the cafeteria and returned to the classroom to begin the afternoon session. However, I sometimes had trouble finding the right words for some reason. Next, one of the transparencies slipped out of my hand. I landed on my rear end when I squatted to pick it up. *What was going on?*

Three times a day, I took various health food supplements. On Sundays, I filled my plastic container with the pills for that week and transferred each day's portion to a small box every morning. That week in Schaumburg was no different from any other—with one exception. I realized I had somehow added a sleeping pill to the noon portion of my vitamins.

I had trouble keeping my eyes open and explained to the class what had happened. The students were highly sympathetic to the absent-minded professor and agreed to cancel the afternoon session. One drove me to our hotel, where I darkened the room and slept.

Susan returned to the hotel mid-afternoon. When she entered the dark room, she was alarmed to find me sound asleep. Her first thought was that I was sick. She was glad to learn the truth later. She teased me for a long time about my mistake.

Promise of a New Symposium

Seeing the success of the RF Expo conferences, another trade magazine asked me to participate in a symposium they planned to offer the following year. The proposed location was a newly constructed conference center in Chantilly, VA, about 20 miles from Washington, DC. The

organizers hoped to attract government research center employees in the DC area. The publication had a good reputation, and the location they suggested did not pose any competition to RF Expo, so I agreed. The one-week program I put together for the symposium involved seven of our most experienced and popular instructors. The magazine heavily promoted the event.

As the conference date approached, I suggested to the publisher that I visit the location to check out the facilities. He assured me everything was in order and I did not need to go there. Fully trusting him, I arranged for all our instructors to arrive there on a Sunday and begin the courses the following day. Exhibitors were to set up their booths on Monday, and the symposium would open officially for general traffic on Tuesday.

As scheduled, Susan, I, and our Director of Engineering drove to Chantilly from the Washington Dulles airport on Sunday afternoon. Approaching the vicinity, however, we could not spot the expected large building. The service station attendant where we stopped for help informed us that he had never heard about any conference center nearby. Following our original directions meticulously, we arrived at the street address to find only a large single-story warehouse in a deserted shopping center. Besides a few pick-up trucks, there were no signs of life outside.

Entering the unlocked front door, I saw workers standing around. The foreman told us that his crew had been hired to set up partitioned sections, but the movable walls had not arrived. The publisher appeared shortly and explained the reason: the truck bringing the building material had been involved in a major accident several hours away. Delivery would not take place.

I pinched myself, hoping this was all just a bad dream—no such luck. The building looked like an empty Costco instead of the expected fancy conference center.

Although I was furious, this was no time to argue with the publisher—we needed a solution! Over 200 people would show up the following day to take our courses. We could not turn them away without suffering devastating consequences to my company's reputation.

With few options and little time, the best we could do was purchase metal water pipes and set up classroom frames. Long curtains were hung along the pipes to provide walls. Fortunately, the publisher had already ordered video projectors and screens. Using them, we could set up the five classrooms we needed for the courses.

The following day was one of the worst of my entire life. First, I had to face the shocked instructors when they saw the primitive conditions of their "classrooms." Standing on the bare concrete floor, they stared at the 30-foot-high ceiling. The curtains provided no sound insulation, so the students would hear simultaneous instructions from all the lecturers. To make it worse, the workers set up the exhibitors' booths very early into the first session. The sounds of forklifts loading and unloading material, workers hammering, and people yelling instructions added to the already chaotic atmosphere. Several students had had enough by the time the first coffee break rolled around. They asked for refunds and left. Luckily, the majority toughed it out. It was a miracle that we survived that week.

The publishing group lost significant money on their flubbed effort to establish a new symposium. Adding insult to injury, they refused to pay us the agreed-upon amount for our courses, even though they had collected the course fees during registration and the classes had been presented. Our attorney recommended a lawsuit, but after the arbitration fiasco I had gone through with the divorce, I promised never to be involved with another legal battle. Rather than

fighting in court, I decided to write off the miserable event as a learning experience and be more careful in the future. Even today, as Susan and I face something unpleasant, we say, "Things could be worse. Remember Chantilly!"

Trouble with U.S. Customs

In 1988, I visited Taiwan by myself to teach a course at the company of my former colleague, Chi Hsieh, "The Giant." During my first tour of his company, I noticed how sparkling clean their restrooms were. Generally, except for large Western hotels, public restrooms in Taiwan were unpleasant. When I mentioned how impressed I was to see the spotless men's room, he shared the unique way he had established to keep them clean.

"After we moved into our new building," he told me, "it took only a day until the restrooms became quite messy. No matter how often the janitor cleaned them, the facilities were soon in bad shape again. I called for a company meeting to discuss the problem."

"I gave my employees two choices," Chi told me. "Either they could manage to keep the restrooms clean themselves, or I'd do it myself." Chi shrugged his shoulders. "But I told them if I were the one to do it, I'd be in the restroom instead of selling our products, and they'd be out of work." He smiled at me. I left it up to them to decide."

The facilities have remained clean ever since.

Approximately 30 of the company's engineers attended my course in their large conference room. They were far more outgoing than the Japanese students and would have likely asked questions even if I had not offered them the bottle of whiskey at the opening. Lunch was catered in neat wooden boxes in the classroom. They ate quickly, folded their arms on the tables, laid their heads down, and slept. I was the only one awake!

I photographed the napping group for my company's monthly newsletter. We published the photo later with the caption, "Enthusiastic students after a Besser course." It generated lots of follow-up comments from the readers.

One evening, Chi told me to prepare myself for something unusual. He took me to a section of Taipei called Snake Alley, which had hundreds of small shacks. In front of each establishment, vendors pointed to large cages covered with fine wire mesh and tried to lure the passersby to purchase something. Inside each cage, I saw a large number of snakes wriggling around. "Those are deadly reptiles," said Chi. "Their venom would kill a human within minutes."

I could not imagine why anyone would want to buy one of them, but in a few minutes, I witnessed an elderly man nodding his head to the seller. Money exchanged hands. A handler, wearing a long, thick protective glove on one arm, exited the shack and opened the top of the cage. The customer pointed to a particular snake, and the handler pulled it out by its tail. People crowded around to watch the action.

The handler picked up a razor-sharp knife with his other hand and swiftly slit open the underbelly of the helpless reptile. The vendor was already holding a glass container underneath to collect the blood. In a few seconds, the snake was still, and the bright red blood flow stopped.

Next, the vendor handed the glass to the customer, who swiftly drank it. The crowd cheered, and the man bowed to them with a big grin.

“Poisonous snake’s blood is an expensive aphrodisiac,” Chi told me. He estimated the price of the drink was at least US\$100. “That old man bought some expensive fun for tonight.” I hoped Chi was right.

The snake’s blood was not the only item marketed. The handler also removed the gall bladder and the still-beating heart of the snake, tossed them into shot glasses filled with alcoholic drinks, and sold them to the highest bidders, who drank them without hesitation. According to Chi, those body parts had medicinal powers. I was both horrified and puzzled by what I had witnessed that evening.

After our experience in Snake Alley, Chi took me to buy presents. Among the stores we visited was a high-class jeweler that sold fake versions of expensive designer watches. One could buy cheap imitations of Rolexes, Guccis, Rados, and other name brands on the streets, but this store offered products that looked particularly authentic. I purchased a dozen makes for my family members and visualized how they would impress their friends with their “high-end” timepieces.

When the course was finished, I had already arranged to spend a week in Hawaii with George and Nanci during their winter school break. Our flights were scheduled so that the three of us would arrive in Honolulu at about the same time from different directions. Susan had planned to take Daphne and Kent to Club Med in Mexico that week.

Because I had spent almost all my travel money buying presents, I called home and asked Susan to send some cash with the children. At the Taipei airport, I purchased a few last-minute souvenirs and boarded my flight penniless.

Going through U.S. Customs in Honolulu, I declared around \$700 and was prepared to use my AMEX credit card to pay the duty over the allowed limit. “What are you bringing with you?” asked the customs officer after perusing my declaration form.

“Toys, jewelry, and fake watches,” I replied.

“Go to line number two for inspection,” he ordered me.

The second inspector immediately wanted to see the watches. Not trusting the baggage handlers, I carried them in my coat packets. When I handed one of them to the inspector, he scrutinized them for some time. “This watch is not fake,” he said. “It is made with real gold.” He had a similar reaction after seeing another watch.

My God. The store made a mistake. Now I am in real trouble. “I thought they were only gold-plated,” I mumbled.

The inspector waved to another officer to come. The two of them began to search in my suitcases. Soon, a third one joined in and opened the folder with the paperwork for the course I taught.

“I see this invoice for \$15,000. What was that for?” the third man asked me.

“I presented a short course in Taiwan.”

“How much cash do you have with you?”

“I don’t have any.”

“Where is the \$15,000?”

“The company will wire it to our bank.”

“Are you sure you don’t have it in your pocket?”

“Of course, I’m sure.”

The officers escorted me into a small room to search me. I did not realize that my children, who had arrived shortly before me, were waiting just outside the Customs area. Through the sliding doors, they watched me being led away by the customs officers. “Daddy is being arrested!” cried out Nanci. “What are we going to do?”

George tried his best to calm her down. They decided to wait for a while. If I did not come out soon, they would call their mother for advice.

After the customs officials were satisfied that I was not hiding any cash in my pockets or shoes, they returned me to the open inspection area. Their metal specialist told them that the watches were only gold-plated after all. Although I had been unaware of the restriction on bringing those counterfeit products into the U.S., they confiscated all the watches. Even worse, I had forgotten to declare a gift Chi sent to Susan. To the customs officers, I was not only a “smuggler” but had grossly understated the value of what I was bringing into the U.S. Two strikes against me!

To the children’s and my relief, after I paid a \$400 fine with my credit card, the inspectors let me go. We were heading toward Waikiki before I noticed the fake Rado watch I still wore on my wrist—they had missed one!

Teaching and Skiing

A few weeks later, right after the famous World Economic Forum, I flew to Switzerland to teach in Davos, one of the top ski centers in Europe. Classes met from 8:30 a.m. until noon, followed by a four-hour ski break. Instruction resumed at 4 p.m. until 8 p.m.

The unusual daily schedule was extremely popular with skiers. Many of the participants came to the classes wearing ski outfits. As noontime approached, they began to look at the clock frequently. The minute I said, “Let’s take a break,” most of them were gone. The ski lift was next to the hotel where I was teaching, and in a few minutes, the students were on their way to the slopes. I often wondered how many of them came to learn about circuit design.

I skied on Saturday after the five-day course had ended and headed home the next day. As I had several times, I boarded the train at 7 a.m., allowing ample time to make my Zurich to San Francisco flight. The Swiss trains have a reputation for always being on time. People could set their watches by the exact arrivals and departures.

As I was reading the course reviews of the students, our express train made an unscheduled stop. The other passengers were as surprised as I was. After we waited several minutes, a conductor passed through our car. “Please take your luggage and leave the train,” he announced in German, French and English. “There was an accident on the line, and you’ll be transferred to a bus.”

“How much delay will that cause?” I asked him. “I need to catch an 11 a.m. flight.”

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. You’ll arrive at the airport around noon.”

That was bad news. The conductor, however, was extremely helpful and asked the station to notify Swissair about our delay. “They’ll probably reroute you on different flights,” he said, trying to comfort me.

We learned later that a military truck had accidentally struck a utility pole at a railroad crossing ahead of us, knocking it across the rails. Power was down for a segment of the line. Buses would

take passengers around the affected area. Another train would pick us up at the next station, about 25 km away, to complete our journey.

Several small, well-heated buses waited for us outside the station. I took a window seat in the first one and hoped the airline would succeed in sending me home without my having to stay in Zurich an extra day. Our convoy took off in a light snowfall.

The winding mountain road had no guardrails. Seeing the steep drop-off at the edge of the narrow, snow-covered road—extremely close to the wheels—made me nervous. The driver kept a steady pace, seemingly unconcerned with the danger. I closed my eyes and hoped for the best.

We made it safely to the next station and transferred to the second train. However, my flight had already departed when we reached Zurich Airport. Swissair gave me two alternatives: take the nonstop morning flight to San Francisco the next day or fly to New York via Geneva and catch the last cross-country connection to San Francisco. I opted for the second choice. Sympathetic to my delay, they upgraded me to first class on the transatlantic portion. That part I liked! Due to my frequent flying, the airlines usually upgraded me to business class, but the passengers in first class were even more pampered.

My flight arrived at JFK in New York 45 minutes before my United connection was scheduled to leave. According to federal regulations, all passengers had to clear Immigration and Customs. Seeing the line waiting at the immigration area, I approached a roving officer and told him about the Swiss railroad accident. “Would it be possible for me to bypass the line to catch my connection to San Francisco?” I asked.

The officer sized me up with suspicious eyes. “No, sir, you’ll just have to wait your turn.”

When I finally reached the Immigration window, the officer I had spoken to earlier walked to the agent behind the window and whispered into his ear. The agent took my passport and the customs declaration form and looked at his computer monitor. I looked at my watch impatiently.

“Seems like you are in a hurry,” he said.

“Yes. I only have a short time before the last flight leaves for the West Coast.”

“How many watches are you carrying this time?”

“None,” I smirked. “I learned my lesson the hard way.”

He did not smile. He returned my passport after making a mark on my customs form. “Proceed to Customs with your bags.”

I ran to the carousel, waited for my bags, and rushed to Customs. The officer there looked at my form and, without asking any questions, sent me to have my bags inspected. The two suitcases received a thorough scrutiny. The man knocked on the covers, perhaps checking to see if they had double walls. Of course, I missed the San Francisco flight and had to stay in one of the airport hotels overnight.

When I became a US citizen several years later, the U.S. Customs eased their attention on me. However, I was still recently refused acceptance into the Global Entry Program. I guess I’m still on their blacklist.

Visiting the Ford Motor Company

Susan came with me to Detroit while teaching a course for the Ford Motor Company. The National Car rental van that picked us up from the airport was packed with customers as we

headed to their car lot. Because I was a member of their elite Emerald Club, I had the privilege of choosing any car from their fleet. As we entered the rental car lot, the driver called my name and asked what car I wanted.

After graduating high school, our three-year-old Nissan had already been promised to George, and I wanted to try their newer model. “Do you have a Nissan Maxima?” I asked.

Suddenly, all conversation in the shuttle ceased. Everyone stared at me. Susan jerked the sleeve of my jacket and whispered, “We’re in Detroit!”

I realized the capital sin I had committed. “I was just kidding,” I shouted. “Take me to a midsize Ford.” People laughed, and conversation resumed.

Ford brought many participants from various countries to take my course. In addition to their U.S. employees, engineers came from Brazil, Germany, the U.K., and France. The first morning, more than 100 people were waiting for me in a large auditorium. As always, at the beginning of my courses, I asked them to introduce themselves briefly and say a few words about their work.

Because of the large audience, the introductions took longer than planned. I was about 15 minutes behind my regular schedule as we approached lunchtime. “Would it be OK to cut back the lunch break to 45 minutes instead of an hour to catch up?” I asked the group.

“Monsieur, one hour is already too short,” protested the French, sitting in the center of the front row. “We need two hours for lunch.”

“Well, if that’s what everyone wants, we can take the longer break,” I replied, “but then you need to stay in class until 6 p.m. Let’s take a vote!”

Most of the class accepted the shorter lunch break and wanted to leave at 5 p.m., so we agreed to return in 45 minutes. I asked them to be on time so they could see an important computer simulation I planned to show at the beginning.

The German students came back ten minutes early. Most others, except the French, were in the room on time. Staying with my established policy, I began the instruction. Approximately 45 minutes later, the French group walked in. Their seats were in the front row, so stepping through the tight space between them caused some interruption. During the coffee break, they talked about the outside restaurant where they had eaten instead of the Ford cafeteria.

I ignored them. We kept our scheduled one-hour lunchtime the next day, and the French were late again. It was time for me to act!

After turning on the overhead projector, I set its lens slightly out of focus—not enough to make the text of my slide illegible but noticeably blurry. Then, I rehearsed the joke we would play on the latecomers with the class, turned off the projector, and proceeded to lecture. The students liked my idea and agreed to play along.

In a while, the laggards showed up and took their seats. I turned on the projector and began to talk about the page on the glass.

“Excuse me, but the projection is out of focus,” said one of the French.

I turned around and looked at the screen. “It looks OK to me,” I replied.

“It’s fine.” “No problem.” “Don’t touch it,” my conspirators butted in.

The Frenchman who had spoken up first rubbed his eyes. The person next to him removed his glasses and began cleaning them. Then, they began to talk among themselves.

“Did you have too much wine with your lunch?” I asked. “Perhaps it was bad and affected your vision.”

“Well, yes, we did, but we always drink wine with lunch,” he said, looking confused.

I could not keep a straight face any longer and began to laugh. The class also joined in and began to tease their French colleagues. There were no more problems with lateness the rest of the week.

More Experiences with Snakes

In the late 1990s, another Asian trip took me to Penang, Malaysia, where I stayed in the beautiful Equatorial Hotel outside the city. Not finding a gym within the building, I went out for a cross-country run in the early morning before my teaching.

“You better stay on the road,” a guard warned me. “The forest is full of vipers, and you don't want to meet them.”

I took his advice and ran in the center of the road. It was a scary task as hundreds of scooters buzzed by me from both directions. Still, I had more faith in the drivers than the poisonous snakes. Most of the drivers and the passengers did not wear helmets, nor did they have shoes on their feet. Occasionally, I saw three or four families hanging onto each other on the small scooters. I guessed that safety laws were either non-existent or not observed.



Left: Bicycles and scooters waiting for a traffic light in Penang. On Sunday, the pictures on the right were taken in Taipei when mothers took their nicely dressed children to shop.

The class took place at Motorola's educational facility located near their plant. Over half of the students were women, unlike in other countries where most engineers were men. All employees wore colorful company uniforms and were eager to learn new computer-aided design techniques.

Lunch was served buffet style in another part of the building. Large trays held various foods, and I helped myself to a heaping portion. The manager of the cafeteria, a queen-sized lady, was impressed with my appetite. She gave me a big smile when I passed by her with my tray. However, as I began to eat, I found the food extremely spicy—far beyond my tolerance level. I could only consume part of what I had on my plate and tried to be inconspicuous when I had to dump the rest.

The following morning, I ate a large breakfast in the hotel and tucked some fruit into my briefcase. I told the students I'd stay in the classroom at lunchtime to work on new examples. Just as I was ready to start on the fruit, the cafeteria manager showed up with a food tray. “I heard you're busy,” she smiled, “so I brought you lunch. Please eat.”

There was no way out. I ate most of the spicy meals, drinking lots of water to ease the burning of my digestive system. Not wanting to repeat the process, I confessed to her at the end of the

day that the hot spices were more than I could tolerate. “Why didn’t you tell me on the first day?” she asked. “We often prepare special lunches for foreign visitors.”

For the rest of the week, she served me great meals. If I had found the courage to “fess up” the first day, I could have saved myself much pain.

I learned that electric power losses were standard operating procedures in that country. Twice during my one-week stay, we received notice in the classroom about brownouts. When the power was cut, the temperature in the room quickly became uncomfortably high. The students moved outside and continued the lecture under a large shady tree, holding the class notes. Nobody complained. I learned to respect the easygoing, peaceful nature of Malaysians.

The hotel concierge mentioned that the nearby Snake Temple would be an interesting place to visit. One day, I discovered he was right. Behind protective screens on both sides of the walkways, snakes of various kinds and sizes slid in the grass or coiled on the tree branches. Monks wearing yellow robes watched the visitors to prevent possible accidental interactions. Although there was a belief that the snakes would never strike good people, the monks wanted to ensure no problems. As I was leaving, a group of Japanese tourists surrounded two vendors; one held several vipers in his hands, and the other had a large camera. They offered to take pictures of those, allowing the snakes to crawl over them. The group tried to coerce one of their members to pose for the picture, but he was reluctant.

“Go ahead,” I said to the man jokingly. “They don’t bite good people.”

“I’m not good!” he replied. “Why don’t you do it?”

Suddenly, the group switched their target. “Do it, do it,” they yelled at me. “Don’t be scared!”

For some foolish reason, I agreed. The salesman placed three snakes on my shoulders while the Japanese tourists feverishly snapped pictures of the action. I stood motionless, feeling the cold bodies of the vipers on me and hoping that their fangs had been removed. The episode probably took less than a minute, but it seemed long before they removed the snakes. The Japanese cheered and bowed. My heart continued to pound long after we parted.



Left: Entry to the Snake Temple. Center: One of the thousands of deadly residents. Right: Not being certain about their fangs, I held two of the vipers close to their heads while trying to appear brave for the pictures. The largest one, however, decided to stay behind my neck and that worried me.

Hungarian Visitors

After turning down our numerous previous invitations, my half-sister and her husband decided to visit the U.S. in 1994. I arranged their travel to meet Susan and me first in Florida and then come back with us to California. We had a two-bedroom timeshare condo in Orlando, where our trip began. Kati had been outside the former Eastern Bloc countries, but her husband had not.

The four of us met at the Orlando airport, where I picked up a rental car and drove to our condo near Disney World. Both of them, particularly Lajos, were overwhelmed by the heavy traffic on the Florida freeways. Lajos was impressed by the “courteous Florida drivers.” Susan and I snickered at the compliment, remembering our bad road experiences in that state.

Our visitors were exhausted after their long trip, so we relaxed at the resort the following day. During the rest of the week, we alternated between visiting the theme parks and recovering from all the walking. Our timeshare at Orange Lake Resort offered several swimming pools, hot tubs, and other amenities for relaxing.

Kati was multilingual, so Susan could easily communicate with her. Lajos, on the other hand, spoke only Hungarian and Russian. Kati and I acted as translators for him. However, when Lajos and Susan were alone, they understood each other through gestures and facial expressions. Enjoying a vacation is a universal experience, I guess. Sometimes, Kati and Lajos ventured out by themselves to explore. They enjoyed their visit immensely.

One evening at dinner, Lajos told us he had a good impression of the United States. People seemed to be patient, happy, and polite. He was also impressed by how well the staff at the theme parks maintained order and had the crowds wait for their turns at the various rides.

They both felt that Americans dressed too sloppily. “I can understand people wearing informal clothing while visiting Disney, but they should dress properly when going to a restaurant,” Kati said, pointing to her husband, who wore a suit and tie, as an example.

They also observed the large portions of food served in the restaurants. “I now understand why so many people are heavy in this country,” Lajos told me. He was disturbed by the food thrown away at the end of most meals. “Americans are lucky to have such an abundance of food,” he added.

After a week in Orlando, we drove to Fort Lauderdale, where I was to teach for Motorola. During the ride, Lajos commented that he had liked almost everything he had seen. However, he did not think such a tourist area had given him an accurate picture of America. “Most of the people we saw there were probably well-to-do. I want to see where the poor people live,” he said. I promised to take him to the poor areas later.

We stayed near the ocean in Fort Lauderdale. While I was teaching, Susan took our visitors to the various outlet stores and the famous Festival Flea Market. Kati and Lajos were astonished at the selection of goods and the low prices. They talked about that shopping experience for years.

Fulfilling my promise, I drove the two of them to the low-rent district of the city, where the houses and the front yards were noticeably different from other neighborhoods. “This is where the poor people live,” I told Lajos.

“I see, but to whom do all those cars belong?” he asked, pointing to the big American cars parked all along the street.

“The poor people,” I replied. My answer was somewhat misleading because, most likely, the finance companies owned a large percentage of each automobile. However, I did not explain that part, leaving him baffled that even the poor people had cars. He shook his head in disbelief.

From Florida, we flew back to California. Kati and Lajos stayed with us for another week before returning to Budapest. Two local newspapers, the *Los Altos Town Crier* and the *San Jose Mercury News*, interviewed our visitors and wrote lengthy articles about their impressions of the U.S. The *Town Crier* had a front-page picture showing Kati, Lajos, and me sitting in our living room, looking at a 1956 issue of *Life* magazine that described the Hungarian Revolution. One of the photos in the magazine was taken during the battle for the district Communist Party building. Lajos, an Army colonel at that time, had been sent there by the Defense Ministry a day earlier to organize the defense of the building. He was seriously wounded when the revolutionaries took the building. His body still carries some of the scars of injuries he suffered there.

At the end of their visit, they left with a vastly improved opinion of America. I was glad they had come because they had seen with their own eyes that this country was not as the Communists described it. Yes, the U.S. had its problems, but they could now see that it might be one of the best places in the world to live. They could finally understand why so many people wanted to come here.



Left: The three of us looking at the 1956 *Life* magazine story.

Right: The *Mercury* article described when I met my sister for the first time at the Budapest Airport.

Police Action

A powerful new Dell laptop I had purchased arrived at our office the day before Thanksgiving in 1995. After loading half of the various proprietary circuit design programs used in my courses, I left the machine on my desk at the end of the day. I looked forward to using the ultra-fast computer during my teaching and intended to complete the installations the following Monday.

The machine was not on my desk when I returned to work after the holiday. I asked around the office, but nobody knew about it. In addition, our sales manager's portable radio and a couple of other items were also missing. The door lock did not show any damage or sign of tampering. I called the Los Altos police.

Detective Laranjo responded to my call and took a report of the apparent burglary. A few days later, he informed me that although he suspected an inside job by the building cleaning crew, he had had no luck finding anything. I reported the stolen items to our insurance company. We received full reimbursement for the lost items quickly, and I replaced the \$2,200 laptop.

The day before New Year's Eve, I received a strange phone call. "Are you missing a portable computer?" asked a man at the other end of the line.

"Yes, I am," I replied with surprise. "Have you found it?"

"I saw two men in my company's lunchroom trying to use a laptop. They asked me to help. Your name and your company's name came up on the screen during the boot-up," the man told me. "I had the feeling that the computer didn't belong to them. Because they did not know how to use it, they offered to sell it to me for \$500."

"Hold on for a minute while I go to my office," I said, and on another line, I immediately called the Los Altos Police Department.

"Keep talking to him and see if he will bring the computer to your office," suggested Detective Laranjo, who took my call. "I'll wait to hear what he says."

I switched to the other line and told the man I was eager to have the computer back with no questions asked. He assured me that he was not making any money on the transaction. "I feel bad seeing someone like you lose a valuable item. I'll go back and buy it from those men," he added and agreed to bring the computer to our office at 10 a.m.

I relayed the information to the police. Within a short time, two detectives showed up and began to plan a sting operation. I became a crucial part of their scheme.

Our building had two entrances. Not knowing which one the crook would use, the police assigned plainclothes officers to watch each door and look for someone carrying a computer bag. A policewoman would replace our receptionist. They set me up with a hidden wireless microphone. Two detectives would wait in another office for my signal. I was to act natural, greet the man, and ask him to let me check the computer. Once convinced that the machine was mine, I was to say, "Yes, it's mine." At that point, two detectives would rush in to arrest him. They assured me that I would face no danger, although I was unconvinced and trembled with excitement and anxiety.

At 9 a.m. the following day, two detectives and the policewoman came to our office and took their positions. I rehearsed my keywords with them again. The system worked well. Then, we waited for the signal from the lookouts.

Shortly after 10 a.m., the policewoman received a call from downstairs on her radio. "A possible suspect, carrying a black computer bag, is approaching the building," I heard on the crackling message. The detectives took their hiding places, and I tried my best to look busy and calm.

Our "receptionist" knocked on the door of my office. "Your appointment is here to see you," she announced.

I walked to the door and looked at the slightly built man beside her. He was holding a black computer bag. He smiled at me and offered his hand. I shook it and led him into the office. I offered him a chair and closed the door. "Thanks for coming here. I have the cash for you."

"I'm so glad to help you with this," he replied, taking the laptop out of the bag. "Please check to make sure it is the right one."

I plugged in the computer and turned it on. As expected, my name appeared. There was no doubt it was the stolen machine. "Yes, it is mine," I said, expecting the detectives to come through the door.

Nothing happened.

"Yes, it's mine," I repeated, fearing that the microphone tied to my chest was not working.

"That's great. If you give me the money, I'll be on my way. My girlfriend and I are flying to Las Vegas to celebrate the New Year."

What's wrong? Where are the detectives? What should I do? "Yes, it's mine," I said for the third time, feeling increasingly desperate.

The man looked puzzled and began to rise from his chair. The door burst open at that moment, and the detectives rushed in. In a split second, they pushed him to the ground and handcuffed him. "Are you armed?" asked one detective.

"No, I'm not. What's going on?"

"You're under arrest for the suspicion of handling stolen property," said the other detective as he began reading his rights to the man.

After they helped the man to his feet, he turned to me. "Is this what I get for being a Good Samaritan?" he asked convincingly.

I did not know what to say. "Don't pay attention to him," the detectives told me as they led him away. They also took the computer as evidence.

Susan had been hiding in a nearby cubicle during the entire incident. When the commotion ended, she came over to me. "I was so worried about you," she said with a sigh of relief. "I hope they lock that guy up for a long time."

The possibility that the man had been telling the truth bothered me for some time. He did not look like a burglar, and he seemed sincere. On my way home, I stopped at the police department to learn more about the case, but the detectives had taken him to a jail in San Jose. However, the receptionist assured me they had found enough evidence to keep him in custody.

I never found out how the thieves gained entrance to our office. The building manager stood firmly behind the cleaning crew he had used for many years. He told me that when the cleaners come to work late, they open several offices and move from one to another. It is possible that someone familiar with the cleaners' procedure sneaked into our office while the cleaners were working on another one. After the burglary, the cleaners were ordered to keep the building and all the offices secured while they worked.

The following February, I received a summons to appear as a witness in the Palo Alto Courthouse. The defendant who tried to sell me my computer was also in the courtroom but avoided eye contact during my testimony. Later, I heard from the detectives that the man provided information about the gang that had committed several burglaries on the Peninsula in a plea bargain for a lesser charge.

Family Events

Although it was never easy to coordinate the schedules and preferences of our four children, over the years, we managed to visit three different Club Med resorts in Mexico. The Club was one of our favorite vacation spots. I loved the informal atmosphere, the excellent buffet-style food, and

the wide range of sports activities. In addition to Ping-Pong, soccer, tennis, and volleyball on the ground and in the pool, I participated in new events, such as archery, the high trapeze, and simulated mountain climbing. In addition to the daily schedule of fun activities, the staff and guests performed plays and skits. Having our children share the fun made it even more enjoyable.

Susan's and my birthdays are separated by only two weeks—both of us are Virgos—so we often celebrate them together. As her 55th and my 60th birthday approached, we decided to take a relaxing trip to Hawaii in late September instead of having a party. Nanci told me that since we hadn't planned a party or anything, she and her boyfriend Jim would like to take me out on my birthday to see a recently released sci-fi movie. *Independence Day* received good reviews, and I looked forward to going to the cinema with them.



Left: The six of us departing for Club Med Sonora Bay. Center: George defeated me in the semi-final of the beer-drinking contest. Right: After winning the largest number of medals at the awards ceremony.



Left: I was receiving last minute instructions from a staff member. Center: Ready for action. Right: Daphne's hands were grabbed by the catcher a split second before leaving the trapeze.

On August 27, 1996, Nanci and I left the office mid-afternoon. Jim drove us to the theater. The film was great. On our way home, Jim asked if it would be OK for him to pick up something from his boss, who was attending a meeting. I agreed, and he pulled up to the front of a single-story building. "I'll be back in a minute," he told me and entered the front door.

When he returned, he asked if I would like to meet his boss. “In his last job, he also worked with microwaves,” Jim said. “He took one of your courses.”

I was always eager to see former students. “Sure, I’ll come,” I told him.

Nanci and I exited the car and walked through the front door. I walked in first, and I found myself in a dark space. Suddenly, the lights came on, and I saw a large group of my family and friends yelling, “Surprise!”

Not expecting anything like that, I was stunned. People rushed to wish me happy birthday. I had not seen some of them for years, like my college roommate Bill Day. We had a great party; I will never forget that special day.

What amazed me was how my family and all the others involved managed to keep the arrangement secret. Susan—not known for her ability to keep secrets—organized and coordinated the party. Later, I learned there had been a couple of close calls. One day, Susan forgot to remove the announcement from the copy machine and snatched it away seconds before I was about to use it. Another time, someone had left an RSVP on the answering machine. Our office manager abruptly halted the message before I could hear its content. The party was terrific, and I was amazed. I was also glad their secret plan had not been spoiled.

By the late 1990s, our four children had graduated college and found employment in various capacities. Daphne and Kent moved to the San Diego region; George and Nanci still lived on the San Francisco Peninsula. Daphne combined her computer skills with her artistic ability and became a graphics designer. George worked in his uncle’s physiotherapy clinic and later at my company for several years. He then decided to pursue a medical career and entered med school. Kent was employed at Qualcomm as a mechanical engineer, and Nanci helped to broaden the marketing efforts of Besser Associates. She traveled with me to Europe and Asia to visit customers.

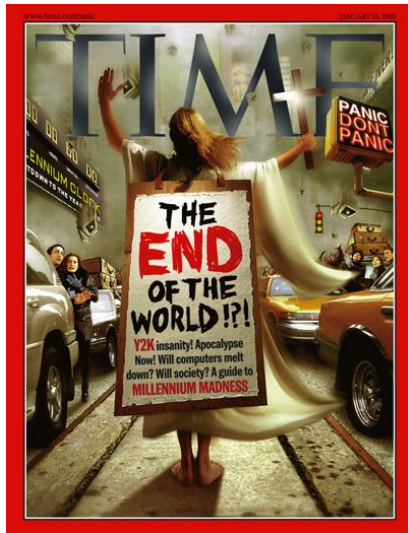
The year 2000 arrived without any of the dire happenings that some expected. The much-publicized Y2K³ did not lead to a financial meltdown as the doomsayers had predicted (see below). My mother’s belief in the end of the world and resurrection of the dead did not occur. Instead, we calmly entered into the twenty-first century.

Approaching Retirement

The IEEE presented me with various awards to recognize my achievements in the RF/Microwave engineering field. In addition to reaching their highest membership level, as a Fellow, I received the “Microwave Applications Award,” the “Third Centennial Medal,” the “Meritorious Achievement Award in Continuing Education,” and “Distinguished Educator” honors. I was also listed in Marquis’s “Who’s Who in the World” and the “Microwave Hall of Fame.” I felt that there wasn’t anything more to achieve in my technical career and began to think about retirement. Excessive business travel became tiring—I was sometimes more than 50 percent away from home. It was time to give up the fame and switch to a more relaxing lifestyle.

³ Fearmongers forecasted a total collapse of the financial markets, riots, food shortages, mass suicides, widespread power outages, and shutdown of computer networks.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the ongoing operation of my company concerned me more and more. I pondered two logical alternatives: sell the company or turn it over to someone else. A publishing company approached me with a buyout offer but wanted to move our operation to the East Coast. I knew that none of our employees would want that. Also, my previous sellout to Comsat did not bring back good memories. I decided to pursue the second approach and began an active search for someone who could eventually take over the operation of the business. After several unsuccessful trials, I found a person with a background in engineering and business. I transferred my responsibilities to him and planned to phase myself out entirely in 2001, being 65.



Chapter 11: The Autumn of My Life

One of Frank Sinatra's big hit songs, *It Was a Very Good Year*, became my all-time favorite. As the song lyrics describe, I've also had my share of good years.

- When I was 14, I began running track, significantly influencing my life.
- When I was 20, I came to the Free World and discovered new opportunities.
- When I was 30, I graduated from college and began to work in the Golden State.
- When I was 35, I became the father of a son.
- When I was 40, I started a full-time business and had a daughter.
- When I was 53, I married again—this time for life.
- When I was 65, I retired and began participating in various volunteer activities.
- When I was 77, Susan and I moved into a retirement community.

Beginning in 2001, at the age of 65, I phased myself out of day-to-day business activities, although I occasionally taught courses. Stepping out of management was easy. Leaving the classroom abruptly would have been too difficult because I genuinely enjoyed interacting with the students.

In addition to the live courses, I began to present webinars online. Conducting online courses inside my office, looking at and talking to a webcam instead of directly to the students, brought back memories of when I videotaped my courses. At least then, there were some people in the TV studio. Teaching a webinar, I was alone in a room, which was not nearly as much fun as teaching a live class. On the other hand, no travel was required.

Coaching Track and Field

I began coaching track at Blach Intermediate School in Los Altos to keep me occupied. Nanci and George had attended that school a decade earlier, and I was glad to see the 65-yard hurdle record George set still stood.

I worked with a variety of kids. Children learn new skills and techniques quickly at that age, and some become decent hurdlers in a surprisingly short time. During my second year of coaching, the head coach from Mountain View High School came to watch one of our track meets. "I was wondering who had been teaching some of our incoming freshmen how to hurdle," he told me after introducing himself as Evan Smith. "I could use your help at our high school. Please come by and talk to our athletic director."

I visited the high school the following week and agreed to work with their hurdlers the following season. Occasionally, they also asked me to help with the sprint and relay workouts. The kids at Blach practiced Tuesdays and Thursdays and competed only a few times. High school teams worked out five to six days a week and had weekly track meets during their four-month season. It required a more serious commitment.

Being interviewed was easy. Completing the large amount of paperwork and passing security procedures and medical exams took much longer. Schools wanted to prevent pedophiles and criminals from being closed to children, so I had to pass rigorous background checks. On the medical side, the district physician was alarmed to learn that I once had

tuberculosis. Thorough examinations and comparisons with previous x-rays finally convinced him that I presented no danger to the kids.

As a high school student in Hungary, I trained at my club year-round. The four-month spring track season at Mountain View High was short compared to that. Several kids from the team also participated in other sports during the winter season and could not show up for track practice until we were three to four weeks into our spring training. It took me some time to adjust to the local customs and coaching philosophies.



Mountain View High School stadium, with an all-weather track, was conveniently located close to our home.

One of my surprises was learning that even for some star athletes, the sport was not their highest priority. At that age, I had given up everything else—parties, dating, and other activities—that could have interfered with my training. At Mountain View High, most kids had many other interests, including acting, choir, club soccer, and various social and academic groups. In addition to the distraction and time commitment, playing on a highly competitive club soccer team — away from the school — also opened opportunities for injury.

I had trouble convincing some sprinters and hurdlers to take the track warm-ups seriously. Even on cool days, they did not like to wear sweatsuits. “I don’t like to perspire,” one of the girls told me. As a result, each year, we lost several athletes to painful sprains and pulled muscles.

Eventually, I learned to live with their various side activities and personal habits. However, One Monday, an unprecedented conversation spotlighted the reality. “Coach, I won’t be running at the CCS Preliminary Meet on Saturday,” our best sprinter told me. She was the fourth runner on our 4x100-meter relay team.

“Why not?” I asked, alarmed.

“Our senior prom is Saturday,” she replied.

“I don't see any problem with that. The track meet is in the morning, so you have plenty of time to clean up and go to your prom in the evening.”

“No, I can't. I'll have my hair done Friday afternoon, and I can't have it messed up.”

I stood there in disbelief, not knowing what to say. She probably took my silence as a sign of approval because she just smiled and walked away. It took me some time to accept the idea that even though she was our fastest sprinter, looking pretty at the prom was more important to her than helping the relay team win.



Two of my League-champion hurdlers

In addition to coaching, I was a counselor, listener, and financial helper to those who could not afford to purchase track shoes or sweatsuits. A couple of the kids also poured their hearts out about their problems. Some parents were reluctant to support their children's participation. Conversely, others pushed the kids too hard. “Even though I'm doing my best,” one girl told me, “My father expects me to do much better. He doesn't want to accept that I'm not as good as he wants me to be.”

I thought about talking with the father, but another coach discouraged me. She told me about a recent incident where she tried to convince a parent not to push so hard. The parent complained to the administration, and the coach was told to back off. I followed her advice and did not interfere.

Another time, however, I decided to stick my neck out. The boys' sprint relay team had an excellent chance to place at a prestigious track meet, but our fastest sprinter told me he had to see the Assistant District Attorney that afternoon.

“What did you do?” I asked him.

“I've been tardy to classes too many times,” he replied.

Replacing him with a slower alternate would have risked the baton exchanges and resulted in a slower time. I went to the DA's office and pleaded for a different appointment for the student.

“If he’s the fastest runner on your team, why is he always late for classes?” asked the DA with a smile. However, he agreed to see the boy later so he could participate in the meet. Our star promised to stay out of trouble for the remainder of the school year.

Two weeks later, the same boy was placed on academic suspension and missed the rest of the season. At that time, there was nothing more I could do for him.

Because an alarming number of American children are either pre-diabetic or already diabetic, I encouraged the team members to eat healthy food. Most of them listened and drank water instead of sodas. I also unsuccessfully tried convincing the snack bar officials at the various track meets to use whole wheat buns for the hamburgers and hot dogs. “I was born and raised in this country,” bellowed the man in charge of the food stand. “No foreigner will tell me how to prepare hot dogs.” Others were more polite but showed no interest in changing the buns.

In my ten years of volunteer coaching, our team performed exceptionally well. Winning the El Camino League championship twice moved us up into the top-level De Anza League. Through 2011, the boys’ and girls’ teams finished at the top of that league for four consecutive years. Equally satisfying was witnessing the parents’ participation. A large group of volunteers helped to conduct our home meets smoothly and efficiently. I have good memories of being part of such a great team.



Two of the souvenirs I received from the teams. In the group photo, I was wearing a white shirt.

Coaching track athletes brought new enjoyment into my life. Even though I liked coaching AYSO soccer teams earlier, I had better opportunities to get to know some team members much closer this time. I promised myself to do it again in the future.

A new resident in our home

We considered having a dog at home when our heavy travel schedule slowed. Susan, always more of a cat person, was not overly enthusiastic about the idea. To make things worse, with her recently developed allergies, she could not tolerate having any furry animal nearby.

A man I met at a social gathering was a veterinarian. Hearing how much I liked dogs, he asked me if we had one. "No, we don't," I replied sadly. "I would love to have a Lab, but my wife has allergies. What I need is a Lab that doesn't shed."

"You need a Labradoodle," he told me.

I smiled politely, Thinking he was telling me an insider's joke.

"Don't laugh!" he said. "There is such a breed. It was developed in Australia as a guide dog for blind people with allergies. They mated standard poodles with Labrador retrievers. The combination led to puppies with the Lab's personality and the poodle's hair and intelligence. Because they have hair, they don't shed like Labs."

Although I told Susan what I heard at the meeting, we did not follow up. Importing a dog from Australia did not seem very practical.

However, Labradoodles became popular in the United States within a few years. One of our neighbors said they had purchased one from a breeder in Burlington, Iowa. Their puppy would be shipped to them by air within the next few days. The family waited with excitement.

After their little black puppy arrived, I took Susan to the neighbors to admire it. Harley, as they called him, was simply irresistible. Everyone who saw him, including Susan, instantly fell in love with him. When we went home, we began to talk seriously about having a dog. Soon after, we contacted the breeder. One female from the litter was still available. They e-mailed photos of the puppy and her parents—a white poodle father and a black Lab mother.

After some deliberation, we purchased the puppy and called her Missy. We decided for her to be shipped, and within a week, she arrived in a crate at the San Francisco airport. I parked the car at the freight terminal, and Susan went inside to receive the shipment. "They brought the crate out and placed it next to me," she told me later. "While signing the papers, I felt something wet touching my leg. I looked down and saw the puppy's tongue reaching out to lick me. I immediately knew that I would like her."

Missy quickly became a part of our household. While we slept in the bedroom, she was supposed to stay in the living room at night. She did not like the idea and found ways to express her resentment. One day, after receiving a new HP printer, I left the user manual and instruction CD on the coffee table when I went to bed. The following day, I found a shredded version of the manual and CD pieces spread around the living room floor. Concerned about what the CD might do to her stomach, we called the vet for advice. "There isn't much you can do at this point other than overseeing her," the doctor told us. "If she's acting strangely, bring her in immediately."

Fortunately, no harm was done to Missy. I took a digital photo of the remainder of the manual and the CD and sent it to Hewlett-Packard. "Our puppy chewed up all the instructions," I wrote on the attached note. "Please send us a replacement." HP obliged and shipped everything without charge.

After seeing too many rambunctious dogs, we decided to train her properly. As soon as she was old enough, we took her to an introductory puppy class to learn basic obedience. Approximately 20 other young dogs were enrolled in the six-week program.

The trainer came into the classroom, carrying a large pillow, followed by a beautiful large golden retriever who ignored the noisy, unruly puppies. After telling her dog to sit, she placed the pillow in a corner. “Go to your bed,” she said to the retriever while pointing to the pillow. To our amazement, her dog obeyed the instructions immediately without paying attention to the other dogs chasing each other. “If you train your dog properly, once she outgrows puppyhood, she’ll behave just like mine,” the trainer told us.

Looking at five-month-old Missy running wildly around the room, I had trouble believing such a miracle could happen, particularly when I recalled my bad experience with our German shepherd, Princess, back in the 1980s. Our determination for Missy paid off, however. She graduated from that first schooling and six other courses and now has the equivalent of a Ph.D. She is friendly, obedient, and an excellent travel companion when we take her in our car.

We have had many memorable experiences with Missy. One occurred during the high school’s spring break when our track team worked out in the mornings. I was not impressed with the athletes; they seemed lazy and not motivated to run. “You kids look so sluggish and slow,” I scolded them. “I bet that even the young female who lives in our house could easily outrun you.”

“How old is she?” asked one of the sprinters, his male ego aroused.

“She’s younger than you,” I replied.

“Where does she go to school?” asked one of the girls.

“She is from another state and takes private courses here.”

“Has she been competing?”

“Although she’s done a lot of running, this will be her first race,” I led them on. “Would you accept a challenge from her? I’ll throw in a prize to the winner.”

Everything I said was true. Missy was younger than the kids on the team, even if we considered the one-to-seven-year ratio between dogs and humans. She came from another state and was taking obedience courses. She had never run a race.

The runners began to talk among themselves and decided to take on the “girl.” We made a bet. If she beat them, I asked them to do something they did not like—wear their full sweatsuits at every practice for the rest of the track season without complaining.

“What if one of us wins?” asked one boy.

“Anything you want,” I replied, believing in Missy’s speed. We settled on my buying a frozen yogurt for every sprinter and hurdler at practice that week.

A 50-meter sprint race was set for Thursday morning. The group agreed on five boys and two girls to compete. The eighth lane would be for the challenger.

To practice, Susan and I took Missy to the track in the late afternoons. Susan held her at the starting line, and I waited at the 50-meter mark. I would call out the start commands, “Take your marks,” “Set,” followed by the emergency call we had taught Missy—a sharp, high-pitched ululation, like how Arab women express celebration by rolling their tongues. Whenever she heard that sound, she immediately ran to us at full speed. I timed her running the 50-meter

distance in 4.5 seconds. No human could run that fast, so I had complete confidence in our victory.

The challenge inspired the kids to work hard every day. On Thursday morning, I arranged with Susan to bring Missy to the track only after the kids finished their warm-ups. They were eager to meet their opponent, but I told them my runner preferred to warm up alone. I gathered with the runners at the starting area and called my wife's cell phone, letting her know we were ready.

Susan walked to the track, holding Missy's leash. The kids still did not suspect anything. They thought Susan just came with the dog to watch the race.

"Where is your runner?" asked one of the boys impatiently.

"She's right there," I said, pointing to the one-year-old Missy.

I wished I had used my video camera to record their reactions. "That's not fair, she's a dog," "She has four legs," "You misled us," they complained loudly.

I reminded them that I had never said Missy was a human. They grudgingly agreed and lined up for the race. I took my place at the 50-meter finish line.

When the race began, Missy quickly took the lead and won. Unfortunately for me, she did not stay in her lane. The kids protested, and Missy had to be disqualified for a lane violation. That infraction cost me 30 frozen yogurts at the local ice cream parlor.

The race news quickly spread around the team, and I am certain those present will never forget it. One of the former MVHS sprinters posted on Facebook recently:

"...From what I recall, she disqualified herself for going outside her lane, even though she still finished ahead of us. She was distracted by looking back at us. I still remember how you led us to believe that we'd be running against this young phantom female who was going to a private school, was super-fast, and had a chance of beating us. We all scoffed at the idea. When your wife brought out Missy, my heart stopped as I connected the dots from the clues you gave us. Ha-ha, thanks for the great memory! I'm glad to hear she's doing well - Amazingly, she's 8! When we ran against her, she was still a young puppy! Oh, how the time has flown by..."



A picture of Missy at age five, while she was looking for squirrels in a park.

I routinely took Missy outside before Susan and retire for the evening. We walk through the garage and step outside through a side door. In the past, Missy immediately charged toward our backyard, and I walked toward a storage shed at the corner of our lot. Once convinced that

there were no intruders, she went to the side of the playhouse to do her business. Then we came back inside.

One night, when I opened the side door, Missy growled and angrily rushed into the dark. In a few seconds, I heard a strange rustling noise from the opposite side of the backyard behind our gazebo. Fearing that she had grabbed the neighbor's cat, I sprinted in that direction, pointing my flashlight ahead. Suddenly, the noise stopped, and Missy appeared, wiping her face with her front paws. *Maybe the cat scratched her face during the fight. Most likely, that darned feline is dying behind the gazebo. I'd better check it before taking care of Missy.*

As I approached the side of the gazebo, I saw a small dark creature standing with its backside toward me, her bushy tail pointed upwards. *This is no cat. It's a skunk. Run for your life!*

I spun around and ran for the house, calling Missy to follow me. When she caught up with me, I was overwhelmed by the awful stench. Phew! Her face was wet, her eyes bloodshot; she looked miserable.

We entered our garage, and I yelled for Susan's help. She had heard that washing a skunked dog with tomato juice might provide some relief. While she started the vegetable rinse, I called our vet's emergency number. "Use diluted hydrogen peroxide and dish soap to clean your dog," the operator advised.

Fortunately, our nearby Safeway was open and had a supply of peroxide. After we washed Missy in the tub, she felt more comfortable, and we could finally retire for the night. We washed her daily for quite a while, but our house retained the foul odor for some time. Strategic bowls of vinegar lying around helped diminish the disgusting smell.

I've heard that there are two kinds of dogs: one that learns from its first exposure to a skunk and one that is skunked repeatedly. Fortunately, Missy belongs to the first category. Since that awful night, when I take her out so she can relieve herself, she stays close. If there are skunks in our backyard, she doesn't chase after them.

When we traveled by car, Missy always came with us; she happily jumped into the back of our Tesla and rested peacefully on her bed. If our trip required flying, she stayed with a neighbor. Susan and I always looked forward to the reunion after our return, where Missy's exuberant reaction frequently brought tears to our eyes.

As the years passed, Missy's eyebrows and feet gradually turned gray. One day, as we prepared to leave for a car trip, Missy missed the jump into the car, falling to the ground. Her second try was unsuccessful, and she agreed to be lifted into the vehicle. On our way back, she patiently waited for my assistance, seemingly accepting her limitation. Sadly, she passed on to Dog Heaven three years later, leaving many happy memories with us.

Family Stories

The boyfriends and girlfriends of our four children varied as the years passed. At times, Susan and I lost track of their love interests. We kept guessing which child would be married first. Then, in 2001, almost following their birth order, they began to give up their single lives.

Daphne

Our eldest was the first to change her status. Daphne lived in San Diego then and told us she would visit us over a weekend with her boyfriend, Jim Hagan. Susan and I had met Jim several times before and liked him very much. We felt he had all the qualities of a “good husband.”

Following the old-fashioned custom, Jim asked us for our daughter's hand during their stay. We happily agreed and elevated him from boyfriend to fiancé. They planned to wed in San Diego at the end of the summer of 2001 and planned for the occasion.

Susan and I enrolled in classes at Arthur Murray's dance studio to improve our ballroom dancing. We focused on classical forms such as the tango, foxtrot, and waltz and thought we were prepared. At the wedding, however, we realized our style was outdated. After a few slow dances, the disk jockey switched to music the young people preferred. We'd wasted our tuition with the dance studio but had a great time at the wedding. *One child married—three to go!*

In the fall of 2002, Daphne announced that we would become grandparents. She and Jim had moved to Los Angeles, where he entered UCLA's MBA program. They planned to return to San Diego after he completed his studies. Susan and I were excited about this new phase of our lives. As Daphne's due date approached, we packed our SUV, ready to drive to Los Angeles.

On the evening of April 20, the call came. “I just took Daphne to the Kaiser Hospital,” Jim told us. “Looks like she's ready to deliver.”

“We'll be there tomorrow!” we replied. The following day, we left early in the morning to beat the rush-hour traffic in Los Angeles. Missy stayed behind, and Éva promised to look after her. Even though Missy is very loyal to Susan and me, she loves to be cared for by my sister, who is convinced that our sweet Missy is grossly underfed.

During our drive, Jim called my mobile phone with good news. Their son, Matthew, had been born that morning. The mother and baby were both doing fine. We increased our speed on Highway 5 so we could be there sooner. Later that day, we visited Daphne and took several pictures to record the occasion. I had not held such a tiny baby in my arms since Nanci was born, and it was fascinating to see Matthew's tiny hands and cute little face. I looked forward to teaching him to play soccer one day.



Pictures taken during the first day of Matthew's life, showing the proud parents and grandparents.

When Susan and I visited San Diego before Matthew's second birthday, Jim shared his concerns about Matthew's lack of response when he was called. Other distressing signs were the boy's loud voice and the quick loss of interest in his daily activities. "Unless he looks at me when I call his name, he does not react," Jim said. "I'm afraid that he might be autistic."

I recalled seeing the Dustin Hoffman movie *Rain Man* but knew little about autism. Hearing that our grandson might be afflicted by it was hard to comprehend, and I tried to comfort Jim by telling him that his concerns might not be justified. Unfortunately, his suspicion was confirmed by a specialist they visited shortly after our return to Los Altos. Matthew was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS), which is a mild form of autism; individuals with AS can often function at a high level.

In our search for more information regarding Asperger's, Susan and I recognized some of its signs in Matthew's behavior. Individuals with AS have problems maintaining eye contact during conversations, but they are often social and ready to engage in a one-sided, long-winded speech about a favorite topic. Generally, they find it difficult to establish friendships.

According to medical experts, early diagnosis and treatment significantly improve the person's condition and pave the way to a normal, well-balanced lifestyle. The State of California, as of the time of this writing, offers a wide range of programs to help those with AS. Daphne and Jim took advantage of all the available assistance. In addition to giving Matthew their loving care, they have learned how to deal with his being slightly different from other children.

From an early age, Matthew has shown some remarkable abilities. He could spell long words before he was three years old and memorized the long, complex names of the various dinosaurs. He quickly became proficient with a computer keyboard and could use the computer independently. With the support and love of his family, his skills can be channeled into a positive and highly successful life.

By the time Daphne and Jim learned about the Asperger's, she was again pregnant. Although the preliminary tests did not indicate any irregularity, they were still concerned about their second child, Grace, born in June 2005. They monitored her first two years, watching for any signs of AS, but none emerged. Grace turned out to be fine.

George

During his last year in medical school, George planned to marry Erica Bertorello, the young woman he had been dating for ten years. They had arranged a trip to New York in the summer of 2002, and George wanted to surprise her by proposing in the Big Apple. He shared his plan with us. Recalling the sights from a trip he and I had taken to New York five years earlier, he decided the top of the Empire State Building would be the perfect place to propose. Before leaving for their trip, George visited Erica's parents and requested permission to marry their daughter. The next day, he and Erica's mother, Ardith, went ring shopping.

We heard later that at the Empire State Building, they took an elevator to the observatory at the top. It was a cold and windy day. While Erica enjoyed the scenery, George was anxiously preparing for the moment to pop the big question. "Every time a group of tourists left, another bunch came up and took their places," he told us. "Erica was ready to leave, but I kept her there

longer and longer, hoping for some privacy. Finally, she asked if we could leave because she was cold. I told her we should stay a little longer and enjoy the view.

“We walked to the other side of the observation deck, and she complained even more about being cold. At that point, I gave up, pulled the ring out of my pocket, and knelt before her. ‘I love you, and you are the only person I want to spend the rest of my life with. Will you marry me?’ I asked. She was stunned into silence, then said, ‘Oh my God, oh my God, I can’t believe you did this! Yes, of course, yes!’ Feeling cold was suddenly the last thing on her mind. People around clapped and congratulated us. I’ll never forget that evening.”

The young couple purchased a townhouse in Pleasanton, California, in May 2003 and were married the next month in nearby Blackhawk. After the wedding, George began his residency at San Joaquin General Hospital outside Stockton. Next, he joined Palo Alto Medical Foundation’s clinic in Dublin, CA, representing the new breed of physicians with computer skills. Having some of his older colleagues ask for help filing reports and searching the Internet allowed him to become a valued medical team member quickly.

Initially, Erica commuted to the law firm in San Francisco, where she worked as an attorney. Later, she enrolled in additional graduate work and opened a home business in estate planning. Their lives have been busy taking care of their Pugs and with occasional travel for relaxation.

Kent

A year after the 9/11 tragedy and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, Kent, like Daphne and Jim, was living in San Diego. His employer had just closed the division where he worked and had given him a generous termination package. He significantly changed his life and revealed his plan to us. “I want to serve my country,” he said. “Now that I have some extra money, I’ll join the military.”

Susan and I were shocked to hear his plans. Susan had lost a brother, a Marine, during the Vietnam War and did not want to have another family member exposed to danger. Kent, however, had his mind made up. The only compromise he was willing to make was to become part of the Army Reserve’s psychological operations group (PSYOP). Somewhat relieved, we accepted his decision. A few months later, Kent went through basic training in South Carolina. After returning from Basic, he bought a house and proposed to his girlfriend, Joan Potter. She accepted, and they married in San Diego in May 2003.

Two months earlier, the U.S. had invaded Iraq. We hoped Kent, already 32 years old, would not be called up for active duty. He lived a regular civilian life besides regular weekend army exercises and a four-month advanced combat training program in North Carolina. He began working at the Sierra Wireless Company as a mechanical engineer. Their daughter, Madeline, was born in June 2004.

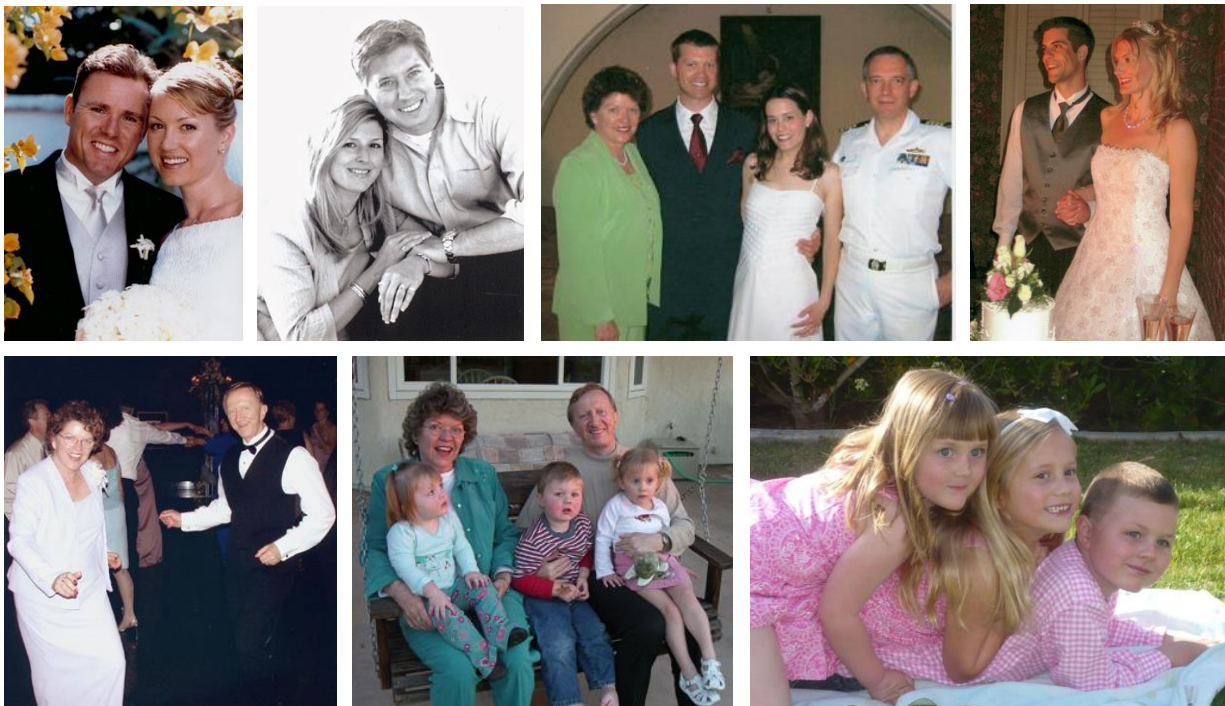
Our prayers to keep him out of the wars were not answered. He received orders to become part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and obtained a leave of absence from his employer. After a lengthy pre-deployment training, he was shipped to Iraq, leaving Joan and their infant daughter behind. Being a PSYOP did not shield him from daily patrol duties. At home, we watched the news about the extreme hazards our troops faced in that part of the world and prayed for his well-being. Joan and Madeline moved to her parents’ home while Kent was away.

Fortunately, he did not suffer any physical injuries. When his one-year deployment ended in May 2006, he returned home with the rank of sergeant and continued with his engineering work. It was not easy to step back into civilian life and leave the trauma of the war behind. Another task was building a new relationship with two-year-old Madeline, who hardly knew her daddy. Joan worked diligently to rebuild the family unity, and she prayed that he would never have to leave again for any extended period. Knowing that his seven-year contract with the Army specified that he would not be sent back to the war zone again, Joan, Susan, and I felt reassured.

Because the U.S. did not have enough soldiers to fight two wars simultaneously, President George W. Bush signed an Executive Order that invalidated the prior commitment of the Army Reserves to a single foreign deployment. At the beginning of August 2008, Kent had to leave his wife and four-year-old daughter behind and serve an additional one-year tour of duty in Iraq. He had faced his first deployment enthusiastically, eager to help establish democracy in Iraq. The second time, he was disillusioned and did not feel the American military could force the Iraqis to change their living form. After some hair-raising experiences, he returned home once again without injury and resumed his work at the Sierra Wireless Company. His contract with the Army expired in October 2010, and he received an honorable discharge.

Nanci

In 1997, Nanci met a young man named Aaron Reed at the wedding of George's closest friend. They developed a relationship, and he eventually came to work for my company while Nanci also worked there. Among other interests, the two shared a love of skiing and took frequent trips to the Lake Tahoe ski resorts.



Top left to right: Daphne & Jim; Erica & George; Susan, Kent, Joan, and Captain Potter—Joan's father; Nanci & Aaron. Bottom left to right: Susan and I are swinging at one of the weddings; with Grace (1), Matthew (3) and Madeline (2) in San Diego; two years later, ganging up on Matthew.

Aaron was interested in real estate and also volunteered to fight forest fires, a frequent occurrence in California. Their closeness led to a marriage in July 2004. For their wedding, they chose a former gold mine in California's Gold Country that had been converted to a modern resort. Susan and I joined some of the guests for a tour of the mineshafts before the ceremony. We did not find any gold but still felt happy knowing that all our four children had found good life partners.

Aaron focused on growing his real estate appraisal and sales business into successful enterprises for the next decade. Fellow entrepreneur Nanci concentrated on developing her private Pilates Instruction business with locations in the SF Bay Area.

As a Pilates Instructor and Spiritual Life Coach, Nanci transformed over 1,000 private clients worldwide. She also created a micro philanthropy movement called '32 Favors: A Deliberate Kindness Project.'

They moved to Concord, CA, closer to Aaron's real estate office a few years later.

Éva's daughters

Our children's good outcomes have filled the autumn of my life with satisfaction. Sadly, during the winter of 2006, we have lost a family member.

The ringing of the bedroom phone brought me out of a deep sleep. It was 2:30 a.m. I fumbled in the dark and answered sleepily.

"I'm sorry to wake you," my sister Éva said. She was crying at the other end. "Sandy is dead."

The shock of the unexpected news woke me up completely. "What happened?"

"A police officer told me a few minutes ago that they found her dead in her apartment."

"What about Évike?" I asked, as my thoughts raced to my niece's 16-month-old daughter.

"She is in a hospital in Monterey. I have to drive there in the morning to pick her up."

"I'll take you," I told her. It would have been comforting for both of us to include Susan in the trip, but she was still in San Diego visiting the kids.

After our phone conversation, I thought of how differently the lifestyles of each of Éva's two daughters, Debby and Sandy, had turned out. They had both been drawn into the wrong crowd when they lived in Cleveland. By middle school, they began drinking and using illegal drugs. Éva's second husband, their father, was an alcoholic and a poor role model for them. Both girls became destructively addicted, their genetic background contributing to the problem. By age 15, however, Debby joined AA. She has maintained sobriety and achieved a productive life.

When Éva and her children moved to California in 1985, Debby entered college and continued to graduate school. She earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, specializing in neuropsychology, and accepted a clinical research position as a faculty member at a prominent medical center. She married, had three boys of her own, and was also raising a stepson.

Sandy was as talented and capable as her sister. But despite many interventions and much therapy, she never achieved sobriety and freedom from her addiction. She continued to associate with troubled peers. As a high school dropout, she worked as a restaurant server, switching jobs frequently. Soon, she had her first DUI citation. Because she was beautiful and intelligent, she could talk her way out of trouble. My sister, my wife, and I feared that she might

be involved in a more severe traffic accident while under the influence and hurt others as well as herself. When we heard that Sandy had been arrested for the second time for drunk driving, we decided not to post bail. After serving the two-week jail term, we hoped she had hit bottom and would clean up her life.

The effect of the incarceration quickly wore off, and my niece returned to heavy drinking. This time, however, an additional complication entered her life: she became pregnant and delivered a baby girl in January 2005. She moved into a one-bedroom apartment in Monterey and lived on public assistance. Éva, Susan, and I had visited them just a few weeks earlier to celebrate Sandy's birthday. As I contemplated Sandy's life and the sad trip to Monterey we would take in the morning, I was grateful that we had been able to share that birthday with her.

I slept a few hours before picking up Éva in the morning. She was relieved to have me along and filled me in while we drove, although she did not have much additional information. She had been awakened in the middle of the night when a policeman knocked on her door and gave her the horrible news. She learned that a neighbor had heard Sandy's little girl crying all day and notified the police. When officers responded to the call and entered the apartment, they found Sandy lifeless on the living room floor. Her 16-month-old daughter was crying behind a locked bedroom door. The mother was pronounced dead at the scene, and the child was rushed to the hospital, where she was treated for severe dehydration.

Our first stop was the Monterey police station, where we learned more somber details. According to the initial medical examination, Sandy had been dead for five days by the time they found her. The time passed was a sad testament to the isolation that was a byproduct of her chosen life. No foul play was detected, but a wine bottle and some medications were nearby. An autopsy later confirmed the cause of death as an overdose of alcohol and multiple prescription medications.

Éva had met Sandy's social worker in the past. Now, this woman had arranged for us to visit Évike in the hospital. Surprisingly, the child showed no sign of trauma other than the IV attached to her arm. She recognized us and was especially glad to see her grandmother. A doctor told us that if the little girl had been found a day later, she might not have survived.

With the help of the social worker, Éva received clearance to take little Évike. By the time we arrived home, Susan had returned from San Diego. Since our house was already fully equipped with everything necessary for visiting baby grandchildren, we all decided it would be best to keep the little girl with us temporarily.

The regional newspapers quickly learned about the tragic event and gave it front-page coverage. Several television stations also mentioned it in their evening news. The *Los Altos Town Crier's* write-up even included Éva's home address, and she received condolences from many people. She was deeply touched by reading their comments.

Within the week, Debby could take a leave from her work. She came to California to comfort her mom and help with the funeral arrangements. A memorial service was held for Sandy in Monterey. After making all the legal arrangements, Debby took Évike home to become her fifth child.

Our family worried about the long-term effects of Évike's parents' drug and drinking habits. To our relief, she has blended into her new family without any problem and has done well in school. Eventually, she'll learn the truth about her birth mother's heartbreaking past.

16-month-old girl survives five days without food

BY BANKS ALBACH
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Eva Koltai is safe and sound in Mountain View, and in much better shape than when police found the 16-month-old girl alone in Seaside on Tuesday after discovering her mother dead in a nearby room.

Seaside police responded to a call around 1:30 p.m. from a property owner who saw his manager, Claire Koltai, through a window, lying face down in her living room. An officer entered the apartment

in the 1100 block of Noche Buena Street and saw that Koltai had been dead for several days. The officer then opened the bedroom door and found Eva, Koltai's daughter, sitting on the floor.

It had been nearly a week since her mother was last seen by neighbors.

"She was listless, crying and very skinny," said Seaside police Capt. Steve Cercone. "The doctors said if we had waited another day, she might not have survived. She

was just very lucky."

Autopsy results ruled out any foul play in Koltai's death but investigators are waiting for blood toxicity results, which should arrive in two weeks, Cercone said.

"There's no concrete evidence as to the exact cause of death," Cercone said.

He added that both Koltai's boyfriend and Eva's father had been interviewed and are not suspects in her death.

Eva was severely dehydrated

when officers found her. An ambulance dropped her at the Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, where doctors immediately hooked the toddler up to an IV.

Eva is expected to make a full recovery and was released to the care of her grandmother, who lives in Mountain View.

Family members preferred not to be quoted and said only that Eva is doing fine.

E-mail Banks Albach at ballbach@dailynewsgroup.com.

'The doctors said if we had waited another day, she might not have survived.'

Steve Cercone,
Seaside police captain

This is one of the many newspaper articles about Sandy's death. They refer to the baby as "Eva"; we used the Hungarian nickname Évike in the family.

Heartbreak is nothing new to my family's history, nor is caring for the heartbroken. Debby's adoption of her sister's child carries echoes of the past. When Éva's mom was killed during World War II, her sister—my mother—adopted the little girl and raised Éva and me together to our mutual benefit. How strange that the story is so much the same in this generation!



Left: A week after her mother's death, 16-month-old Évike took over Missy's kennel. Center: Évike at age four, with her three new brothers. Right: My niece Debby with Évike on her sixth birthday.

Cousin Pista

During the 20 years I lived in Hungary, Pista and I spent much time together. He was my closest friend, like a brother to me. After lung cancer took his wife at the age of 55, Pista's life turned sour. He began to drink, withdrew from family and friends, and mostly lived in seclusion. My efforts to help him find a new partner were unsuccessful. Even a trip to California did not cheer him up; he could not enjoy life without his wife.

In addition to seeing him in Budapest during my frequent visits, we talked regularly by phone. Susan always commented how happy I sounded while chatting with Pista in Hungarian, recalling the times of our youth.

In the early 2000s, Pista's excessive consumption of alcohol began to take its toll. He was hospitalized several times for progressively more extended periods. Finally, his children hired a caretaker to assist him at home. He spent most of his time in bed.

My last time with Pista was in 2008, when George was also with me. I was shocked to see Pista's poor mental and physical condition and feared that my dear friend would not live much longer. He passed away a month after our visit at the age of 72. I will miss his presence for the rest of my life.



Three photos of myself with Pista: At the age of 2 (with his mother), Having a snack in Budapest, age 64, and at 72, while visiting him with George)

Becoming an Author

Technical book publishers had been after me to write textbooks about RF and microwave circuit design for years. They offered free editing and printing, as well as assistance with illustrations. "It won't cost you a dime to write the book, and you can receive royalties for a long time," one publisher told me. "We'll take care of everything. All you have to do is give us a manuscript."

In the past, I had contributed to several books, but to write one by myself seemed to be a monumental task. I put off those offers by promising that "next year I would consider it." When my teaching activities began to slow down in 2002, I discussed co-authoring a book with one of our instructors, Rowan Gilmore, who lived in Australia. After reviewing the list of topics we wanted to cover, we quickly realized that a single book would not be practical and agreed to do it in two volumes. We narrowed down our choice of publishers to John Wiley and Artech House. After initial discussions and negotiations with both, we chose the latter because they focused more on our industry. Rather than competing with several textbooks written on microwave theory, we decided to pursue practical circuit engineering and settled on the title *Practical RF Circuit Design for Modern Wireless Systems*. The publisher liked our choice.

Rowan and I had been teaching technical courses together for nearly two decades, so we knew each other quite well. We split the task evenly; I would write most of the first volume, and he would focus on the second one. We committed ourselves to delivering our first draft in nine months and the final copy within one year.

Because I am not a fast typist, Susan agreed to transcribe the text onto the computer after I recorded it with a Dictaphone. All worked fine, except in a few cases when she interpreted some of the technical terms her way. My favorite example was in the filter design section of Volume 1. As I was proofing Susan's MS Word file, the phrase "chubby chef filter response" surprised me. "How did you come up with the term 'chubby chef'?" I asked her.

“That’s what you dictated,” she replied, playing the audiotape to prove it.

“**It’s not chubby chef, but Chebyshev**,” I explained, telling her about the great 19th-century Russian mathematician after whom several mathematical functions were named.

“I’m not an engineer,” she shrugged. “How am I supposed to know that?”

She was right. I would have to pay closer attention to proofreading to catch those mistakes.

Dictating the text went faster than I had anticipated. Most of the time, I talked into the microphone like I did to my class students. The illustrations and equations came from the slides of my course material. Rowan and I submitted the first draft to Artech House in MS Word format ahead of schedule. I assumed that most of the work had been done.

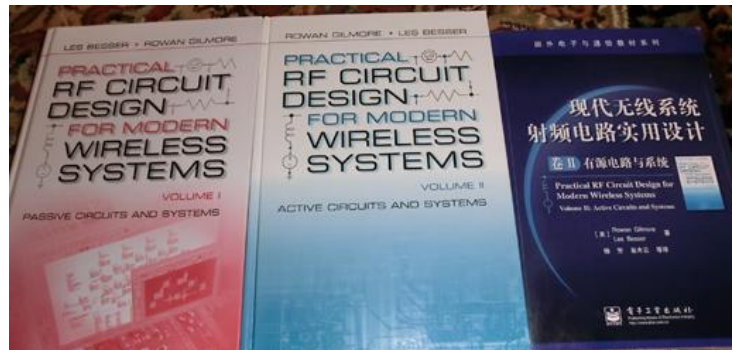
Well, I couldn’t have been more wrong. Artech House still had to convert the Word files to a desktop publishing program. My assumption that it would be a simple automated procedure was only valid for the simple text portion of the book. When we used special characters, such as Greek letters, subscripts, or superscripts, an operator had to enter them individually into the publishing program. All the equations throughout the books also had to be recreated.

After receiving the galley proofs, I could not believe the large number of errors. The operators who did the manual conversions did not fully understand the significance of subscripts, superscripts, and parentheses. Many of the equations were also incorrect.

My complaints to the Editor at Artech did not help. “I’m afraid you’ll just have to mark up the galley proof sheets,” he told me. “Be sure to check everything carefully because the page proofs you’ll receive next can only be changed for serious mistakes.”

It took me nearly two months to finish the corrections and send the pages to the publisher. To my dismay, many mistakes still appeared in the page proofs I received later. Because the production date had already been set, they only had time to change a limited number of the errors. “You can create an errata, and we’ll place one into each book,” the man in charge of production told me. Having the books going into production with many known mistakes embarrassed Rowan and me, but we could do nothing at that point.

After the two volumes were published in 2003, they moved quickly to the top of Artech House’s best-seller list. Despite their high prices—\$119 for each 570-page volume—they remained there for a year. Most of the errors were finally corrected at the second printing. Both volumes were also translated into Chinese and published in China.



Left: Coauthor Rowan Gilmore and I are signing books at a conference. Right: Pictures of our two hardbound books and the paperback edition of Volume 2 published in China.

Our royalties for the books sold in the Western countries were reasonably high for the first three years; then, they tapered off. We did not receive any royalties on the Chinese editions. Rowan and I joked about the return on our investment, saying that we had almost earned minimum wage for the one year we spent writing the books and correcting the errors. In our case, publishing did not bring millions!

Health problems

Except for having contracted TB after being exposed while visiting Hungary in 1966, my adult life until age 65 had been exceptionally healthy. I was proud that I had only missed one afternoon in over 2,000 teaching days—when I accidentally placed a sleeping pill into my vitamin case. After announcing my retirement, though, almost as if according to schedule, health issues began to show up.

Sleep Apnea

I complained to the doctor about my low energy level during the required physical exam for high school coaching. “I feel tired after only a 20-minute warm-up with the track team,” I told her.

“Well, that’s natural,” she replied. “You’re not a teenager anymore.”

I agreed but still suspected that something was not right with me. She checked my vital signs, but they looked fine. Next, she ordered various tests, including an X-ray and an EKG, but she still did not find anything wrong. “How do you sleep?” she asked at that point.

I thought that I slept normally. Susan had mentioned that I sometimes snored but was unaware of it. “Let’s do an overnight sleep test,” the doctor suggested. “You may have some problem that you’re not aware of.”

I went to a small sleep laboratory in Sunnyvale for an overnight evaluation. A technician attached approximately 30 small stick-on sensors to my body, from head to toe. The sensors were connected to a central system through a wire harness to monitor my heartbeat, body position, brainwaves, and limb movements. He told me that I would also be watched via an infrared camera while I slept in addition to the electronic monitors. He wished me good night, turned off the lights, and left.

Falling asleep with an array of wires connected to me was not easy. Going to the bathroom later was even more complicated. After returning, I had to ring the technician to disconnect and reconnect the wire harness. That night was certainly far from a restful experience.

A few days later, the sleep clinic asked me to come in to discuss the test results. “Your RDI is 61,” the doctor began. “You have a severe case of sleep apnea.”

I had no idea what that meant and asked him to explain. “Apnea is a complete or at least a 50-percent blockage of breathing for over ten seconds,” he said. “RDI, or Respiratory Disturbance Index, is the sum of all sleep disturbances within one hour. While you slept here, you experienced sleep problems at an average of 61 times per hour. Even though you were unaware of it, when your brain sensed the low blood oxygen levels, it instructed your body to

do something—gasp, snore, or jerk. When that happened, your rest was interrupted. That explains why you feel tired during the day.”

“What do you suggest I do?”

“I would recommend you use a CPAP machine.”

“What’s CPAP?”

He took me to another room and showed me a small electrical machine. He turned the switch on after connecting a strange-looking mask and a hose to the machine. I heard the noise of air rushing. “CPAP stands for Continuous Positive Air Pressure. It pumps air into your nose at night through a mask like this,” he demonstrated. “The high-pressure air opens up your breathing passage and helps you to breathe normally.”

The weird setup did not look appealing. “Isn’t there something else I could do?”

“There are various surgical procedures, depending on the blockage’s origin and the apnea’s severity. In your case, Maxilla Mandibular Advancement would probably be the only one recommended.”

“What would that entail?”

“A surgeon would break your upper and lower jaws and reposition them to increase the size of your breathing passage. It’s major surgery that would require a fairly lengthy recovery.”

I did not like this man or his proposed solutions. *To start with, he must be making a mistake. How could all this happen to me so often at night without my knowledge?* “Let me think this over,” I told him and left.

The next day, I went to see our family physician. “I don’t trust the lab results,” I said. “Could the test be repeated somewhere else?”

She sent me to the Stanford Sleep Laboratory, which has a renowned group of sleep specialists. To my dismay, the outcome confirmed the previous diagnosis. I had severe sleep apnea. Another unexpected hurdle in my path!

The third overnight sleep test, this time with me wearing a mask, determined the optimum CPAP pressure setting needed to overcome the blockage in my breathing passage. I went to an equipment provider company, Apria, to obtain the necessary gadgets. A technician conducted a 20-minute training session on how to utilize CPAP for about a dozen patients. That evening, with much apprehension, I prepared the equipment for the first use. Susan watched me sympathetically as I put the mask over my face and head and went to bed.

The noise of the machine and the air leaks from the mask made it difficult to fall asleep. After waking up several times during the night, I had trouble going back to sleep and was glad when the morning finally arrived. My eyes were running, my nose was twitching, and I sneezed frequently. Because I had never had any allergies, the new symptoms irritated me.

I called Apria for help, explaining my troubles. “Which would you rather have, runny eyes or a stroke?” asked an unsympathetic staff member. “It takes a while to become accustomed to using it. Have patience!”

It was not the answer I wanted. A few days later, after my runny nose stopped, I used the machine again. The problems returned the following day. A week later, my third try led to the same results. Angrily, I shoved the machine into a closet. No more CPAP for me!

I continued my regular routine and occasionally napped during the afternoons when I felt tired. Our doctor noticed my blood pressure had increased during my next annual physical. "Have you been using the CPAP?" she asked.

After I sheepishly admitted the truth, she recommended a support group at the Stanford Sleep Clinic. "See if they can help. You'd better learn how to use the machine, or your health will suffer," the doctor warned me.

I shared my experiences with the group at the Stanford Newcomers' Meeting and received several valuable suggestions. Someone pointed out that a different machine and mask might suit me better. Applying their recommendations, I gradually found some success with the equipment. In a few months, I reached the point of being able to utilize it every night, even when I traveled.

I attended the Stanford sleep meetings and eventually became the group's co-leader. Four years later, however, the Clinic relocated to Redwood City. Not liking the longer drive, I convinced the Palo Alto Medical Foundation (PAMF) to start group meetings in their Mountain View Center. I have moderated the monthly sessions for the past five years, helping many patients tolerate CPAP and learn about new techniques and equipment.

Nearly 60 million people in the United States, including children, have obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), and less than 25 percent of them have been diagnosed or treated. The vast majority of those who are aware of their condition do not follow their doctors' recommendations. Untreated sleep apnea can lead to severe medical problems, including hypertension, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, reduced libido, and weight gain. In addition, because poor sleep results in sleepiness and reduced concentration during the day, the probability of driving-related or other accidents is significantly increased.

Within the sleep support groups, I have discovered that even the patients who are diagnosed with OSA receive only a limited amount of support with their problems. My experience with the first attempts to use CPAP is quite typical among patients. Most of them are quickly discouraged and would not use the equipment.

CPAP machines are expensive and, in most cases, not exchangeable after being issued. The face masks can be uncomfortable and are not custom-fitted to a person's face. When someone needs arch support, a podiatrist can provide orthotics custom-designed for that person's feet. A similar solution is not available to sleep apnea patients. They are stuck with masks designed for a "typical" face. Additionally, if patients opt for surgery, they are not guaranteed success. Most of the procedures can only help those with mild cases.

To sum up, we need to make people aware of the common existence of this dangerous medical condition. Without finding treatments that most people will adopt, the quality of life of many will suffer.

Hearing Loss

As if dealing with sleep apnea was not enough, an additional problem popped up the week before Christmas in 2001. Daughter Nanci was visiting us one afternoon, and while we were sitting on the sofa, I suddenly became dizzy and nauseous. The room began to spin, and I could barely stand on my feet. A quick trip to the bathroom to throw up did not help. Susan called our

doctor and obtained a prescription to ease my condition. After a few hours of lying in bed, I began to feel better.

Later that day, I received a call on the new mobile phone I had purchased that morning. The voice quality of the caller was inferior. My first reaction was to return the phone to Verizon the following day. Then, the caller gave me some information I had to write down. I changed the phone to my other hand and listened to it with my left ear. The phone sounded perfectly normal.

I switched the phone back to my right ear, and the voice quality again deteriorated. Going back and forth between listening with my right and left ear, the results were always the same—the sound was consistently poor on my right side. At that point, I realized there was nothing wrong with the phone. My right ear was the problem.

The next day, I made an appointment with an ear, nose, and throat specialist. First, he looked at my ears to see if there was any visible blockage inside. When he did not find any, he conducted a thorough hearing test while I sat in a soundproofed booth. “You have significant right ear hearing loss at the low frequencies,” he told me after he concluded the test.

“What should I do?” I asked.

“Nothing at this point. Come back and repeat the test in two weeks. Hopefully, your hearing will improve by then.”

After a few days, I noticed that my right-side hearing seemed normal. The new phone sounded OK with either ear. The second hearing test verified my judgment. The doctor asked me to come back to see him again if the problem recurred.

Researching the possible causes on the Internet, I learned that the cumulative effect of excessive noise could be one of the reasons for hearing loss. Being exposed to shots and explosions back in Hungary might have contributed. Another possibility was using the 32-caliber starting gun during my role as a starter at the Junior Olympics track meets. Unfortunately, I had not used ear protection when using a gun that I held only about a foot away from my head.

The hearing loss in the right ear gradually worsened and eventually remained low. At that point, the doctor recommended the use of a hearing aid. After experimenting with various types, I settled on one made by Phonak and have been using it for over a year.

Although the tiny hearing aids in the ear canal are highly sophisticated, they cannot truly reproduce low-frequency sounds. Perhaps one day, someone will develop a subwoofer supplement to help hear those frequencies. As long as the hearing in my left ear was normal, however, my daily life was not significantly affected by the problem with the right ear. I began to use the telephone at my left ear and walked on Susan’s right side to better hear her.

Before my hearing loss, I never realized what a devastating disability it is. I understand why people who cannot hear well gradually withdraw from others. Not being able to understand what is said entirely is embarrassing and frustrating. Being in a noisy environment increases the problem. Even state-of-the-art hearing aids can only help somewhat and do not replace normal hearing. This was another unexpected hurdle in my path.

Back Problem

My next old-age health problem was a nagging lower-back pain—exaggerated by many of the physical exercises I was doing. Playing tennis or running particularly irritated that part of my

back. Epidural injections helped temporarily but only masked the problem without fixing the cause. Finally, I consulted a neurosurgeon.

After looking at the MRI report of my lower back, the surgeon pointed to several vertebrae with extremely narrow nerve canals. He recommended a surgical procedure called Laminectomy. "It takes a three-to-four-hour operation to widen the canal," he told me. "You'll be out of the hospital after a short stay."

Another doctor I saw for a second opinion agreed with that recommendation. I decided to have the procedure done.

When I woke up after the anesthesia had worn off, I did not feel any pain. The nurse told me that if I had any discomfort, I should push the morphine injection button attached to my bed. It was unnecessary, and I could walk later in the afternoon. The following day, as they were ready to discharge me, my final blood test showed that my sodium level was too low. "Looks like you need to stay until it returns to the normal level," the head nurse told me.

Oh, no! I did not want to stay any longer than was necessary. The blood test on the previous day showed normal sodium levels, and the nurse concluded that the excessive amount of water I drank probably washed the sodium from my body. I called Susan and asked her to bring me Gatorade and saltine crackers. Drinking two bottles of the fluid and consuming many Saltines helped. By noon, my sodium had increased to an acceptable level, and they let me go home.

The one-day hospital stay was not the bad experience many people had warned me about. A few weeks later, I began physiotherapy, and my back felt new. I wished that my sleep apnea and hearing problems could be solved as easily.

Cancer

During the early 2000s, I learned that my prostate was enlarged, although not to an alarming size. In the spring of 2011, my annual prostate-specific antigen (PSA) index increased from 2.2 to 4.5 in one year.

"We need to monitor this," the urologist warned me. A year later, the level climbed to 6.4. At that point, the doctor recommended a biopsy. The result showed an advanced case of prostate cancer. This was no longer just another hurdle but a significant obstacle!

I'd heard before that most men die of prostate cancer rather than of it. My first reaction was to do nothing. I did not think that there was much more I could accomplish in my life. Our physician son, George, had a different view. "You are in much better condition than most men your age," he said. "Talk with the specialists about the available treatments." Susan concurred with him.

The recommendations of the specialists varied. The urologist suggested hormone therapy followed by radioactive pellet implants. The radiologist recommended external radiation. Our family doctor agreed with my initial plan. "Do nothing until the PSA level increases to 10.0, and then have the prostate removed," she told me. "You'll live a normal life for several years without the side effects of the other treatments. Your PSA may never reach that level," she added.

I talked with a highly regarded urologist George recommended. After reviewing my case, he advised me to combine the first three recommendations: hormone injections, pellet implants,

and finally, external radiation. “Combining all of them provides a high probability that the problem will be cured,” he predicted.

The following week, I received a hormone injection to lower the testosterone level in my body. Within a few days, my energy level dropped significantly. Halfway into my regular 30-minute elliptical machine exercise, I found myself exhausted. I could barely do one instead of the two sets of my weight-lifting routine. Hot flashes followed. To make things worse, within two weeks, I gained six pounds—all the predicted side effects of the drug.

A month after receiving the injection, during a one-hour outpatient procedure, a surgeon implanted radioactive pellets. This treatment led to pain and urinary complications. I questioned the surgeon as to how long these unpleasant effects would last. “A few weeks to a few months,” he replied. “The half-life of the radioactive material is only two weeks.”

The next shock came when I received the hospital’s bill: \$67,000 for the three hours I stayed in the hospital, including the initial preparations and the recovery period. In my case, Medicare and my AARP secondary insurance fully paid the approved portion for the surgeon’s fees and the hospital charges. Still, it made me wonder what happens to those not covered by medical insurance.

Six weeks after I had received the pellet treatment, Susan and I flew to Vancouver to attend the memorial service of my long-time friend and former Montreal track teammate, George Gluppe. On our return trip, we arrived at the Vancouver Airport three hours before our scheduled departure. We planned to have a nice, relaxed dinner before leaving Canada.

As we approached the U.S. Customs and Immigration area, Susan remembered the two apples in her handbag. “Are we allowed to take these with us?” she asked one of the roving officers after she took them out of the bag.

“No, you’re not,” replied the man after looking at the apples. “Go back into the hallway and dispose of them in the designated bin,”

“I’ll eat one of them,” I said, taking one out of Susan’s hand.

“You’re not allowed to consume it here,” the officer said sharply after I took a large bite of the crispy red apple. “Take them back and dump them!”

Recalling my Hawaiian incident with the U.S. Customs, I wasn’t about to argue, so I followed his instructions. Then Susan and I waited for our turn to clear Immigration.

When we handed our documents to the immigration officer, what seemed like a pager attached to his belt began to buzz. *Is the customs agent we talked to earlier signaling him about us?* I looked alarmed at Susan, expecting to have our bags searched for more fruit.

“Has either of you had any recent medical procedure?” the officer asked.

“I had a hip replacement several years ago, but my husband had an operation last month,” Susan replied.

The buzzing sound weakened as the officer moved his device closer to Susan. I realized it was not a pager at all but some radiation detector. Then he moved toward me. The noise intensified. “Looks like you’re radioactive,” he said to me.

“Possibly, it comes from the pellets the doctors implanted into my prostate,” I offered.

“My instrument can’t distinguish whether the radiation comes from a bomb or a medical device. I’ll turn you over to a specialist with a more sensitive instrument. Please follow me!”

He led us to another section and turned me over to another officer. After lengthy questioning about my medical and surgical history, he checked the amount of radiation my body emitted and then reviewed his results with another officer. I did not hear their conversation but saw both shaking their heads. They sent me back to sit next to Susan while they analyzed the data.

“What if they won’t let you return to the U.S.?” she asked. “We both have classes to attend tomorrow.”

“I’ll contact the doctor who performed the surgery. He can verify that I’m not a terrorist,” I said, trying to comfort her. However, I was also concerned.

The first officer returned, holding a different instrument resembling a large hairdryer with an electronic display window. “This is a Geiger counter combined with a spectrum analyzer,” he told me. “It will reveal what type of radioactivity you have. Let’s go into another room for more testing.”

He scanned me several times from head to toe with different settings for another hour, frequently consulting a user manual. After each scan, he appeared more confused. “It doesn’t make sense,” he mumbled. At that point, I offered help.

“I am an electrical engineer and worked at the company that developed the Spectrum Analyzer. May I help you?”

After a short hesitation, he agreed. We detected the signal frequency still radiating from the pellets in my prostate.

Then, he led me back to Susan. “Please wait.”

Ten minutes later, he returned with my passport. “We were able to identify the radioactive material inside you as iodine. Next time you leave the U.S., carry a document from your doctor to explain what he did.” After having me sign an official paper, he led us out of the Customs area. “Thanks for your help, and I’m sorry about the delay. Have a safe flight home.”

The airline had already paged us, and we rushed to the gate. “Now, you’re probably back on their blacklist,” said Susan after being seated, “In addition to being a smuggler, they also suspect you of carrying radioactive bombs!”

The Future

Coach Besser, how old are you?” one of the hurdlers on my 2013 high school track team asked me when I told them about my running days. The others in the group waited curiously for my answer.

“Two times, three times, two times, three times, two plus two plus three,” I replied.

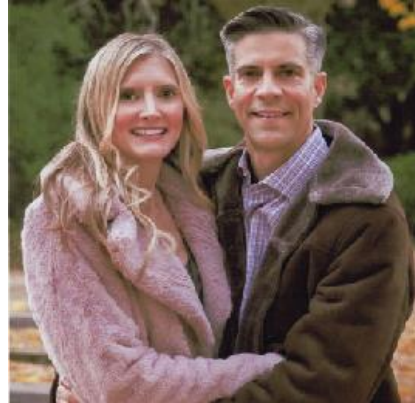
It took some time until one of them did the math in her head. “Seventy-seven!” she exclaimed. “That’s three-quarters of a century. You’re older than my grandpa!”

She was right—I had reached old age. The last part of Sinatra’s song, “But now the days grow short, I’m in the autumn of my year...” describes how I feel. Time seems to run faster. The weeks, the months, and even the years pass by rapidly.

Now that I have fewer demands on my time, I plan to assist others in return for all the help and support I have received. As I continue my volunteer activities in coaching, working with the IEEE, and leading the sleep apnea group, perhaps I can aid others in passing through their

hurdles. Sharing life with Susan, assisting Éva, and visiting my widespread family more frequently are also high on my list of priorities.

Daphne and Kent's children help me to fulfill my grandfatherly role. Matthew, Madeline, and Grace call me by the Hungarian name for Grandpa, *Nagypapa*. During our visits, I enjoy doing special activities with them, like hearing Matthew's discourses on the planets and dinosaurs, counting the freckles on Gracie's face, and watching opera DVDs with Madeline (*Pagliacci* is her favorite). They love to hear my bedtime stories, particularly about Missy's adventure with the skunk. These kids represent the future to me.



Top left to right: Daphne & Jim, Kent & Joan. Bottom: Erica & George, Nanci and Aaron.

My life has been a learning experience. Coming from an environment that barely provided the basic necessities needed to survive, I gradually progressed and now live in one of the most desirable places in the world. I have a loving family, many friends, financial stability, and the best medical care available. What more could I ask for?



Left: Niece Debby with her mom and four children, Center, top to bottom: Our three grandchildren Matthew, Gracie and Madeline. Right: Susan and I with Missy.



Left: Surprise birthday celebration for Susan in Budapest – with gypsy musicians. Right: Visiting one of the oldest Hungarian wine cellars in Eger.



Celebrating George's 50th birthday

Chapter 12: Moving Away from Silicon Valley

After I completed my memoir in the spring of 2013, the curator of the HP Memories website agreed to post several abridged chapters of the second volume on their site. Both of my books may also be downloaded free of charge at:

https://www.hpmemoryproject.org/timeline/les_besser/hurdling_to_freedom_00.htm

I am grateful to HP for their generous offer, and I appreciate that several thousand people have shown interest during the past years and accessed the books from their site.

Our family's life has changed significantly since I first published the books, and I added this chapter to Volume 2 to cover the most significant events of 2013-2024. Of course, I might do that again sometime in the future.

Susan, the Author

For two years, Susan participated in a series of unique classes called Guided Autobiography (GAB) to complete her 150-page book, *Keeping the Faith*. Rather than telling her story chronologically, it is organized by various topics, such as "Daddy Dearest" (relationship with her father), "Little Miss Helpful" (her eagerness to help others), and "Trust and Betrayal" (first major disappointment), among others. She is an excellent writer, and everyone who read her book loved it. One part, however, required unexpected changes.



Left to right: Susan's book, with her beautiful smiling face on the cover; Reading a section in her GAB class; Susan's grandparents, Opa and Oma, married in Oakland in 1900.

Here is what she wrote about her German-born grandfather, Opa, who lived in Oakland during the early part of the twentieth Century:

Opa loved music, especially opera. On Saturdays, he would dress up in his finest, put a boutonniere in his lapel, and take the ferry to San Francisco to enjoy music in the Opera House.

After her Cousin Dorothy in Washington D.C. read the book, she called us immediately. When Susan asked how she liked the book, Dorothy dropped a bombshell: "Susan, Opa never liked opera."

"Why else would he dress up fancy and go to San Francisco every Saturday?" Susan asked with disbelief in her voice.

"He visited the ladies of pleasure in a certain part of the city," Dorothy replied, laughing.

Susan's book now includes both the original and the updated version.

Considering a New Lifestyle

A friend and former colleague, Zvanko Fazarinc, called me sometime after my retirement. "I've sold my Palo Alto home and moved into a retirement community near Stanford," he said. "Let's have lunch here one day and catch up with everything. Bring Susan, too," he added. We agreed to meet the following week.

I'd heard about the Hyatt Vi, a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), where my friend lived. Before my former brother-in-law (Dave Bogart) retired, he was the head of their Physiotherapy Department. Susan and I had often driven by the apartment complex across from the Stanford Shopping Center but had never been inside. Naturally, we were both eager to see how retired people lived there.

Zvanko greeted us in the reception lobby and gave us a thorough tour of the facility. The 600-plus residents live in upscale apartments—ranging from studios to three-bedroom penthouses. The complex has many recreational facilities, including a gym and swimming pools inside and out. In addition, well-appointed meeting halls, a large movie theater, a computer room, and a beauty salon are just steps from the residences. Of particular interest was a well-equipped library with a special section for books authored by residents—some of whom were Nobel Prize recipients. The Vi's activities calendar was loaded with exciting programs: presentations, lectures, and guided tours. Our delicious lunch was served in one of the spacious, elegant restaurants. The entire facility was clean and impressive.

I liked the idea of the residents participating in activities without driving to another location. Life without grocery shopping, backyard chores, and home maintenance also appealed to me. "I am ready to move here," I said to Susan on our way home.

"Oh no, we are not ready for an old-age home," she replied. "Didn't you see all the wheelchairs and walkers parked outside the restaurant?"

She was correct; the average age of the residents we saw seemed to be in the high eighties. Some of them couldn't even walk unassisted. At that time, I was seventy, and Susan was sixty-five—both of us fit and in good shape for our ages. I did not push the idea any further.

However, moving to a Continuing Care Community became more appealing as we started exploring the options for our "old age." Living in such a place would be a gift to our children; they would not be burdened with looking after us as we age. Growing older in our large Los Altos home, as some neighbors had done, did not appeal to us.

Another consideration was the hot residential housing market in Silicon Valley. As the cost of homes in our area rose higher and higher, Susan and I began to talk about cashing in on the capital gains of our large house, downsizing, and moving closer to our grandchildren in the San Diego area, where housing prices were 60- to 70 percent lower.

Finally, the prediction of another significant earthquake looming over our region bothered us. The San Andreas fault line runs less than two miles from our house. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake served as an early warning, shaking us physically and emotionally.

In early 2012, we contacted realtors to find a home for us in the San Diego area. Our ideal home would be a single-level, low-maintenance type, recently constructed and located in a good neighborhood—close to shopping and medical facilities. However, finding a house like that was far more difficult than we assumed. Newer developments generally spring up far away from established shopping areas and hospitals. Those homes are also large, with two stories. Even after renting a condominium in Rancho Bernardo for a month to see what was available, we still

could not find the right place. The realtors kept us in their active files and occasionally called us with new leads; we occasionally flew down south to evaluate. Nothing appealed to us, so we just waited and hoped for the right home.

A TESLA in Our Garage

During the summer of 2012, the two founders of Tesla, Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning, gave an eye-opening presentation about electric car technology to our IEEE retired engineers' group. They compared the energy efficiencies of various automobile power sources: conventional combustion, biofuels, natural gas, hydrogen, plug-in electric, and hybrid—from power generation to actual driving—and convincingly demonstrated the advantage of electric car technology.

Someone in the packed auditorium argued that although electric cars do not produce harmful emissions, the power plants that produce electricity do. The speakers quickly countered by pointing out that the electric car maintains the advantage even when coal is used to generate the power. At the same time, they lobbied to replace coal with renewable, clean energy sources throughout the world.

The presentation left a deep impression on me. When Susan and I were ready to retire our third Prius in 2013, we test-drove a Tesla Model S. The quiet ride, instant smooth acceleration, a 17-inch LCD control panel, and simplicity of the mechanical structure convinced us to order a Tesla. With our selected 60KW battery options, they promised a 200-mile driving range without recharge, which sounded reasonable. The company already had several free charging stations along the major highways so that we could visit our grandchildren in San Diego with only two stops. For its size, the car had generous luggage space and comfortable space for Missy in the rear of the cabin. The “frunk,” as they call it—a front trunk under the hood—also had room for two standard suitcases.

After installing solar panels on our home's roof and an electric battery charging station in the garage, we eagerly awaited delivery news. When the call finally came, a friend took us to the factory at Fremont to pick up our fire-engine-red vehicle. Susan generously allowed me to drive first. Halfway through the 30-minute trip, she enthusiastically took over.

Driving the Tesla was an absolute joy. The low center of gravity created a safe feeling through cornering. When we released the accelerator pedal, regenerative action slowed the car and simultaneously charged the battery. As we passed other vehicles on the highway, people often turned their heads to stare because, in 2013, Tesla was still a rare specimen. We quickly became the envy of our neighbors as well. *Our only mistake was not buying Tesla stock because its price increased 100-fold during the next ten years!*



Picking up the car at the factory; Our custom license plate: Zero CO₂; Charging in our garage.

Within a few days, we adjusted to driving the Tesla and only used our Lexus SUV when the larger cargo space was required. Tesla's door handles are unique because they are flush against the car. They only extend when they sense the fob is nearby. The intelligent sensors also automatically turn the car on upon entrance and turn off everything when the driver leaves with the fob. This clever feature, however, frequently led to problems for me when I drove the Lexus and forgot to switch off the engine before walking away. Fortunately, nobody took advantage of my absent-mindedness by stealing the car.

A Fast Decision to Move

In the spring of 2014, son-in-law Jim's father passed away, and we flew down to Carlsbad, California, for the memorial service. While driving on El Camino Boulevard later that day, I noticed a large sign outside a housing development: "La Costa Glen, A Retirement Community." Despite our previous frustrating housing search, I told Susan, "Let's go in to look." To my surprise, she agreed.

An attractive and friendly marketing employee showed us around the facility. Instead of having only four-story apartment buildings like the Vi in Palo Alto, La Costa Glen (LCG) also offered various floorplans of two- and three-bedroom villas with attached garages. The community had about 850 residents; the restaurants, libraries, entertainment, and exercise facilities looked compatible with what we saw at the Vi. The saleslady showed us different living units—apartments and villas of various sizes. We appreciated seeing the units completely furnished and chatting at length with the residents. They all seemed to be happy and healthy, and they expressed their enjoyment of living at LCG. Susan and I were impressed with what we saw and heard.



Aerial view of the La Costa Glen Retirement Community, located in Carlsbad about three miles from the ocean. The red tile-roofed buildings form a unique cluster with distinct Southern-California style. A convenient large shopping center is within walking distance, just across the street. (Our future villa is just above the yellow dot, near the bottom of the picture.)



L to R: LCG facilities; One of the courtyards; One of the libraries; Fitness Center / indoor pool

Next, the saleslady took us through their large healthcare center, GlenBrook, which included Assisted Living, Skilled Nursing, and Memory Care. She explained that LCG residents may move freely to the GlenBrook without increasing fees when needs arise. Recalling the problems some of our senior friends had faced as they pursued suitable and available care facilities after

a stroke or significant fall, our interest perked up. We knew that we each might require more care than the other could provide in the future.

“Does La Costa Glen look like the right place for you to live?” the saleslady asked at the end of the tour.

“Please give us a few minutes to talk about it privately,” I replied, hoping Susan would also consider moving there.

“It’s lunchtime. Let me take you to one of our restaurants and let you discuss it there,” the saleslady suggested. We agreed.

I noticed Chicken Schnitzel on the menu, a meal we both like. After ordering it, Susan and I exchanged our impressions of the facility. By the end of lunch, we concluded that neither of us had seen anything we did not like. Because we had been considering the relocation for some time, moving 600 miles from the area where we’d both lived for nearly a half-century did not scare us as much as we expected.

“It’s modern, clean, and close to our grandchildren,” said Susan. “Let’s find out the costs and availability.”

“I would only be interested in a villa. The apartment section did not have a garage underneath, and parking our cars elsewhere doesn’t appeal to me,” I replied. In agreement, we proceeded back to Marketing. During the next hour, we learned more about becoming residents of LCG. Their health and financial requirements did not pose a problem for us, but the villas had a two-to-three-year waitlist.

“We also have a brand-new retirement community in Pleasanton with available villas,” said the saleslady, sensing our enthusiasm was fading. “Our Stoneridge Creek (SRC) facility is less than a year old. Living there temporarily would place you higher on the priority list.”

“That’d mean moving twice,” I objected.

“True,” she replied. “But the villas of both places are virtually the same. The second move would be straightforward.”

She showed us the floorplans of the villas, and we saw that she was right. Downsizing from our five-bedroom Los Altos home with its large backyard to a three-bedroom SRC villa with a small patio would require careful planning and much work that we could not avoid. After living at SRC, once a villa opened at LCG, a specialized moving company could handle the relocation easily.

The saleslady’s reasoning made sense. In addition, our physician son, George, lived in Pleasanton. Living close to him for a while would certainly be nice. We completed the required paperwork, made a down payment that placed us on the waitlist, and flew home with a strong sense of accomplishment.

Visiting LGC’s sister community in Pleasanton was also an enjoyable experience. SRC opened in 2013 with nearly 600 residents and several unoccupied villas. Owned by the same company, the requirements and rules of the two developments were nearly identical. The facilities were even more impressive. For example, their state-of-the-art meeting hall could comfortably seat more than 300 people. Their sparkling clean woodworking shop was equipped with modern new machinery. PC and Apple-equipped computer room was open 24/7 to residents. The large dog park even featured a fake fire hydrant to please the male dogs.

The condominium where George lived was within a five-minute drive from SRC. He and his wife came over to look at SRC and liked it as much as we did. Given their positive assessment,

it did not take too long for us to decide to move there.

We spent a day puzzling over the available three-bedroom villas and finally chose one that faced a beautifully maintained shared backyard. The entire community used recycled water for irrigation, so even at the height of the California drought, all the lawns and plants looked magnificently healthy. Following our request, the owners agreed to fence in part of the backyard for Missy but declined to cut an indoor/outdoor dog passage into the wall for her. (We had one in Los Altos that allowed her more freedom to go in and out when we were away from home.) They allowed us to choose appliances, floor and window coverings, and paint colors. They installed a charging station for Tesla in the garage. Susan and I excitedly looked forward to entering the sparkling, clean home.

Selling our home in Los Altos was easy. Even though prices had escalated sky-high, the available Silicon Valley housing shortage created many eager buyers with cash who thought nothing of bidding above the asking price. Realtors would only talk to prospective buyers if they had cash or preapproved guaranteed loans. Our home was sold “as is” one day above the listed price, without contingencies.

Once we decided to move to SRC in Pleasanton, downsizing our large home in Los Altos was a top priority. What to keep and what to toss was a challenge. Our new three-bedroom villa offered half as much floor space with a somewhat smaller garage. We carefully measured our new villa's closet space and room sizes, then set about discarding. Thirty years of accumulated “stuff” slowly found its way to family, friends, charitable organizations, and recycle bins. Expecting a significant capital gain on the house that year, those charitable deductions would come in handy for tax purposes.

At the beginning of June 2014, less than two months after deciding to relocate, we contracted a moving company that showed up with two large trucks to take us to Pleasanton! They packed the furniture and boxes with amazing speed, leaving Susan and me alone in the empty house. With teary eyes, we said farewells to neighbors, and in our two cars, we followed the trucks to Pleasanton. In less than an hour, we all rolled into SRC. Some curious neighbors met us when we arrived, offering advice and directions. Our lives undoubtedly took a new path, and we hoped to be ready for it.

A New Addition to our family



Finn is sitting at six months, Playing with Cousin Matthew, Held by little mommy Madeline.

Our big move was only one of the significant family events of 2014. Just over ten years after

their daughter Madeline came into the world, son Kent and his wife Joan added a boy to their family. Baby Finn made his appearance on September 6. Adorable, super-active, and playful, Finn's joy for life is highly contagious; he keeps all of us on our toes. His big sister, Madeline, is pleased to be an "only no longer"; she now has a sibling. Madeline's babysitting skills have been sharpened with Finn in the family, and all breakable objects have been hidden safely in the attic. There is never a dull moment when Finn is nearby!

Parting with My Sister

My sister, Éva, lived close to us. Her sixty years of heavy smoking have led to a severe case of emphysema and eventually to COPD. The diseases slowed her lifestyle considerably and forced her to use oxygen. Living on the second floor of a condominium required climbing stairs, which became increasingly difficult. Gradually, her driving skills deteriorated, and we noticed several dents and scratches on her car. One plane trip to North Carolina to visit her daughter and grandchildren almost required an emergency landing during the flight due to her breathing complications. We all had to face the sad fact—she could no longer maintain independent living.

Once we decided to move in 2014, Susan and I reviewed with Éva two options for her: either come with us to Pleasanton and eventually San Diego or relocate to North Carolina, where her daughter and grandchildren lived. Both alternatives had some negatives.

If she came with us, she would rarely be able to see her daughter and grandchildren because of the difficulty she had with flying. Moving to North Carolina would mean giving up the Bay Area climate and physical and emotional closeness to Susan and me. Since Éva came to California in 1985, we have lived near each other and worked together for about 20 years. Losing the close sibling relationship with me would be difficult for all of us.

After weeks of agonizing, she decided to move to an assisted living facility located near her daughter in North Carolina. Although the choice hurt me, as a parent, I understood that being close to her daughter and grandchildren had to come first. Susan and I helped her with all the relocation tasks and, with teary eyes, escorted her to her last flight out of California.



L to R: 1) Éva's 81st birthday with granddaughter Evike, taken a few days after her move to North Carolina; 2) Her health decline was apparent 18 months later; 3) Éva's daughter Debbie's extended family photo, with all six teenage kids.

Éva's new home, Caroline House, is a three-story Durham building near her daughter's family, Debbie. At first, seeing her grandchildren more often had perked up Éva, but eventually, the long-

distance move and the related physical and emotional strain took a toll on her. Forced to give up driving was another blow. When I visited her a year later, the change in her condition was shocking—it seemed like she had aged 20 years. The orderly who took me to Éva asked me if she was my mother!

To make matters worse, she fell and broke her hip. Due to her poor health, the doctors declined to perform surgery on her. Unable to walk again, she remains bedridden indefinitely at a skilled nursing facility, weighing only 75 pounds. All we can do now is pray to God to make the remaining days of her life comfortable and without pain.

Life at a Retirement Community in Pleasanton

Thankfully, Susan kept track of the contents of the nearly 200 moving boxes and meticulously grouped them by their intended locations, using different colored labels. We also prepared a detailed villa map to show the location of the furniture for the movers. These turned out to be extremely helpful later during unloading.

Darkness had set in by the time the movers unloaded everything. Son George and his wife Erica came to assist and brought food for our refrigerator. They also helped us set up our bed before they went home. Exhausted after the long day, Susan and I went to sleep in our new bedroom next to the stacks of boxes.

A welcoming committee greeted us the following bright, sunny morning and took us to breakfast. We learned that they had lived at SRC for less than a year, and the moving experience was still fresh in their minds. They all wore small nametags, a practice we quickly adopted; they helped memorize names. Susan and I felt accepted and agreed that coming here was the right decision.



L to R: View of the SRC Clubhouse and the inner courtyard, the indoor swimming pool, and the front view of our new home, showing the typical blue sky and newly planted trees.

Within a month, we emptied the boxes, mounted the pictures, learned the layout of SRC, became familiar with the neighborhood, and settled into a new daily routine. Being an early riser, Susan took Missy for an hour's walk at one of the nearby open fields in the Pleasanton-Dublin-Livermore tri-city region. When they returned, we all had breakfast at home. Susan would then go to swim class while I worked out in the spacious, well-equipped gym within a few minutes' walk from our villa. Lunch at home would be followed by various activities: yoga, table tennis, sewing, and computer work. I would then take Missy for another walk at a substantial nearby sports complex, surrounded by large open fields, where she had a humiliating experience on the first day of our walk.

In the backyard of our Los Altos home and at one of the nearby parks, Missy frequently encountered squirrels that she loved to chase. Generally, the squirrels found refuge by climbing a tree or fence, where she could not follow. Occasionally, they met in open fields, where the short-legged squirrels could not match Missy's blazing speed. Blood was never shed, but wildly shaking the poor little creatures quickly moved them into "squirrel heaven." Missy then proudly brought the victim to us to show off her prowess.

In the open fields in Pleasanton, giant jackrabbits replaced the squirrels. Not knowing the difference, Missy immediately chased the first one she saw. About a hundred yards later, she returned exhausted with a humiliated look, admitting that these new kinds of "squirrels" were much faster than the ones in Los Altos. Of course, she did not give up hope but never succeeded in catching one. Those chases, however, kept her in excellent shape.

I developed a close relationship with the fitness coordinator during my daily workouts. After he nominated me to the Fitness Committee, I was elected the Co-Chair. Our committee developed program recommendations to improve the general fitness of the residents.

Before coming to SRC, I rarely had the opportunity to play table tennis—a game I learned in my childhood and always enjoyed. Occasionally, someone set up a table at Los Altos block parties, but the level of play was at the beginner level. Well, it was a different story at SRC! The first person I played was a five-foot-two-inch Chinese-American man a year older than me. Looking at him before we started, I assumed an easy victory, but after hitting the first few balls, I realized he was a far more experienced and accomplished player. Fortunately, he did not mind the skill-level difference and agreed to play with me regularly. During the next two years, "Master Han" helped me to become a much better player, and I appreciated his expert coaching.



The top four SRC table-tennis players; My sleep presentation for the residents; Portrait in 2015

The meal plan was one of the many benefits of living in a CCRC. Each person received 30 meal credits a month; they could be used for breakfast, lunch, or dinner but couldn't be carried over to the next month. We used the credits primarily for dinner in the elegant restaurant or casual lounge. Arranging to dine with other residents allowed us to become acquainted with many fascinating people. Occasionally, our children also visited and shared meals with us.

Susan joined the Livermore Presbyterian Church with other new friends from SRC and soon started singing in the choir. She also joined a women's Community Bible Study group that met weekly in Pleasanton. After the first year of our residency, she became a Villa Representative and sang with a small group of residents to perform at various functions. Although she had downsized much of her fabric and sewing equipment, she continued to quilt and sew, soon joining the Quilting Club. They worked on several projects, including providing the SRC veterans with personalized

quilts on Veterans Day.

Recognizing that many of our neighbors had various problems with sleep, I gave a presentation on that subject in the large ballroom/meeting hall attended by 130 residents. That led to organizing a sleep club. We had regular monthly meetings to hear outside speakers and to share our experiences. I also made frequent “house calls” to help residents learn how to live with their CPAP machines.

Those house call activities gradually increased when residents learned about my familiarity with computers, audio equipment, and remote controls. It all started during dinner with one of our neighbor couples, and they complained about the interface between their audio system and TV.

“We have a great set of speakers but can’t use them with the LCD TV,” the wife said.

“Les can probably help you with that,” offered Susan.

“Our son is handy with electronics, but even he couldn’t solve the problem after we moved here,” the husband said.

Of course, I could not turn down such a challenge and showed up the following day at their place, hoping to find familiar equipment. As it turned out, their high-end Bose was new to me, and it took me several hours to get the entire system working.

The news of my volunteer technical activity spread fast around our small community. Within a few days, a new resident who lived just two doors away from us asked if I could help use their Comcast cable TV’s remote control. When I saw them, the man proudly took me through their three-bedroom villa to show off their electronics.

I could hardly believe my eyes. Every bedroom had a TV, cable box, VCR, and a DVD player—sometimes made by different manufacturers. Each component had its separate remote control. In addition, the living room boasted a sound system and a universal remote control.

During the next week, with his wife’s help, I convinced him to use only one remote control in each room. We wrote clear instructions for each one and the functions he used most. She put the other controllers away in carefully labeled boxes. After that, he only called for help when he could not find the instructions.

SRC had strict policies for dog owners. Before moving in, Missy had to pass tests to prove her friendliness with people and other pets. We also had to sign an agreement to walk her only with a short leash and to clean up and properly dispose of her waste. Being such a highly trained dog, we never had any problem keeping our agreement, although Susan told me about an odd experience shortly after we moved in.

After returning to SRC from a morning walk with Missy on a leash, Susan noticed another resident approaching her on the sidewalk. When the woman saw Missy, she immediately moved to the other side of the street.

“Don’t worry,” said Susan to the other resident as they were getting closer. “Our dog is very friendly.”

“But I am not,” replied the woman angrily as she hurried away.

So, we learned that not everyone is a dog lover. Also, we soon found out that not all dog owners honored their agreement to “pick up poop.” After several reminders in our weekly publication, management threatened to follow the procedure used at LCG in Carlsbad. Having faced similar problems, LCG required all dogs to be DNA-tested. After that, when poop wasn’t picked up, the guilty pooch could quickly be identified, and the owner was fined \$300. Their new policy promptly solved the problem.

I called a meeting of all dog owners to discuss the issue. Hearing that the majority wanted to prevent DNA testing, I proposed the formation of a club that would help residents obey the rules specified by management. As the one who proposed the meeting, the group elected me president. In our following meetings, among other tasks, we identified fellow residents who had difficulty walking their dogs and searched for ways to help them follow the rules.

In the spring, the Activity Committee arranged with some stores in the nearby shopping mall to have a fashion show. They asked a dozen residents, including Susan and me, to model. Susan readily accepted that invitation, but I had trouble seeing myself parading in front of a large group while wearing borrowed clothing. After some arm-twisting, I agreed and, to my surprise, enjoyed the experience. So far, however, none of London's Burberry Street fashion show organizers have called us to participate in their events.

Near the end of our first year at SRC, their Resident Council president informed me that one of their members resigned and asked if I would consider taking his place. Although I knew the president well—we frequently worked out together in the gym—I wanted to hear how others felt about the council's operation first.

As I searched for advice from the residents, some did not sound encouraging.

"The owners make all the decisions," said one. "Why waste your time?"

"The council members constantly argue with each other. They don't accomplish much," said another.

Listening to such negative attitudes, I wondered whether it might be better not to be involved. Then, a third resident spoke up. "You have quite a bit of business experience," he said. "Perhaps you could help to settle some of the disputes."

After discussing the challenging task with Susan, I decided to go forward and apply for the post. Within a short time, the council members voted, and I became one of them. During my first year of service, I participated in a Task Force to handle issues between the residents and management. I became Treasurer and Chair of their Employee Gift Fund in the second year. These tasks required a fair amount of time, but I enjoyed participating.



L to R: SRC Fashion Show, Opera night, Halloween with neighbors while dressed as Jack Lalanne.

Health Care Concerns

The Los Altos area offered excellent medical facilities. The offices of all our dentists and all doctors were closed; some were located within walking distance. If needed, we could quickly drive to the Palo Alto Medical Foundation Clinic, El Camino, and Stanford Hospitals in less than 15 minutes. Naturally, finding new facilities for our coverage in Pleasanton was a significant

concern.

Discussing our worries with Doctor George helped put our minds at ease. The Dublin PAMF Clinic where he worked was only one freeway stop from SRC; we could be there door-to-door in ten minutes.

“I’ll recommend a good team of physicians for you,” he assured us. “Because all your health records are already in our computer, viewing them from the Dublin Clinic will be simple.”

He was right. The GP he introduced us to at his clinic was as skilled and caring as our former doctors.

Whenever we visited his clinic, we wore our name tags. “Is Dr. Besser your son?” the receptionists would always ask.

“Yes, he is,” we would proudly reply, and the royal treatment always followed. All our medical needs were handled exceptionally well during our two-year stay at SRC.

Life in Silicon Valley Compared to the East Bay Region

After living in Pleasanton for a while, we recalled how prejudiced many San Francisco Bay Peninsula residents were about life in the East Bay region. Some of our former neighbors did not hide their feelings when they heard where we were moving.

“The East Bay is culturally backward,” said one with a snobbish expression. “You’ll miss the theaters and opera companies we have around here.”

“They don’t have the wide variety of ethnic cuisines,” warned another.

“The climate is more extreme. You’ll hate the hot summers,” added a third at our moving-away party.

Others cited examples of friends who had moved to the East Bay and felt remorse later.

“Don’t sell your LOS Altos home because you won’t be able to afford to move back here later,” we heard repeatedly. They were confident that we would not last long in the East Bay.

Well, those statements had some truth. Compared to the Los Altos climate, the winter in Pleasanton was somewhat colder, and the summer was warmer. The price of our former home continued to appreciate rapidly, much faster than in the rest of California. It took a while to find truly high-grade restaurants. Only when Tesla opened a nearby dealership in Dublin did our Tesla meet too many of his cousins. Back on the Peninsula, we could only watch the performance of the Live from the Met movie broadcasts in a theater if we purchased theater tickets weeks earlier. Being cautious, we bought tickets early to the first opera broadcast we attended at the East Bay—only to see the movie theater about 25 percent full.

On the other hand, being close to the Lawrence Livermore Lab, we frequently met highly educated people, many of whom also lived at SRC. We purchased inexpensive Senior Clipper Cards and enjoyed taking BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) into San Francisco, Oakland, and SFO Airports when we traveled. Life, in general, was more relaxed than it was in Silicon Valley. We would not move back!

Back to Coaching

Following retirement, I immensely enjoyed twelve years of volunteer coaching with the Mountain View High School track team. After contacting some of the schools in and near Pleasanton, I agreed to work with the hurdlers of Granada High School in Livermore during the spring of 2015.

Due to a previous improper relationship between a teacher and a student at the school (as well as other issues), I had to go through all the health and background testing again. In addition, the district required me to take and pass nine lengthy online programs: Coaching Fundamentals; Concussion in Sports; Conflict Management—Managing the Angry Parent; Sexual Harassment; Child Abuse—Identification and Intervention; Boundary Invasion; Mandatory Reporting; Bullying and Response; and Sport Supervision and Safety. Never before have I worked so hard to become eligible for an unpaid volunteer job!

Track season started at the end of January and ended in early June. My commitment required me to be at the school's track Monday through Friday afternoons and to travel with the team to occasional track meets at other schools. Granada was only a ten-minute drive from SRC, which usually allowed me to be home in time for dinner. Although we did not have too many star hurdlers that year, an enthusiastic group appreciated my help. Eventually, we caught the attention of the local newspaper, *The Livermore Independent*, and they published an article under the heading "Teaching Others to Conquer Hurdles." At end-of-season ceremonies that year, I received an honorary team uniform.

Teaching Others to Conquer Hurdles

By Carol Graham May 21, 2015 Updated May 21, 2015



Les Besser coaches Granada hurdler Katy Johnson.

The headline picture in the *Livermore Independent* was taken while I was working with a beginning hurdler. I hope only a few of the readers realized that the young girl was supposed to reach out with her opposite arm while attacking the hurdle.

Honoring My Mother

In the first volume of my memoir, I described how my mother had saved the lives of several Jews in Budapest during the Fascist regime. Among those, Mimi Fürst was able to snatch her young daughter from the ghetto using my mother's christening documents. Mrs. Fürst had passed away, but her daughter, Judit, lived in Stockholm, and the two of us have maintained contact for some time.

"Laci, I want to nominate your mother for recognition by Yad Vashem¹," she told me during one of our Skype conversions.

Her offer touched me deeply. "That would be wonderful. What do I need to do?" I asked.

Judit downloaded and forwarded me the requirements. After I provided her with all the information, she completed the application and sent it to Israel. About six months later, Yad Vashem informed us by mail that my mother was accepted. The Israeli Consul General in San Francisco would present her award to me at a special ceremony on the 2015 Holocaust

¹ An official Israeli organization that recognizes non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust (see more on the back cover).

Remembrance Day. The local media would also be invited to the event.

Upon hearing the news, SRC's Executive Director generously arranged for a bus to take Susan, me, and thirty residents who wanted to witness the occasion. George, Nanci, and some other close friends also came along. At the ceremony, I gave a short talk about my mother. The entire memorial was beautiful, and I hoped Mom's soul was watching it from heaven.



The Yad Vashem certificate; Accepting the award from the Consul; Posing with Nanci and George

We attended the International Microwave Symposium (IMS) at the San Francisco Convention Center a month later. I was cited with the honor of **Microwave Legend** for my contribution to Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and continuing education.

Although the microwave industry has expanded significantly since my retirement, we still recognized many friends and former colleagues among the 14,000 participants. One of those, a Hungarian professor and longtime associate, received the Career Award, the highest recognition of the Microwave Engineers' Professional Society (IEEE). We also stopped by the booth of our former company, Besser Associates, to chat with their current management team.



International Microwave Symposium IMS2016
22-27 May 2016 San Francisco, California

Moving Again

Wanting to be closer to our grandchildren, Susan and I periodically contacted LCG about the status of the villa availability and received the same answer, “18 to 36 months.” Finally, during the spring of 2016, a villa became available. Susan was visiting Kent’s family in Carlsbad then, so she rushed to inspect it. Within a short time, she phoned me.

“Les, the whole interior of a three-bedroom villa is gutted, and they are ready to refurbish it,” she told me excitedly. “Fly down to see it.”

The next day, I joined her. We liked the unit on the community's south end and agreed to take it.

Selecting appliances, countertops, window and floor coverings, and paint colors took a few more days. Marketing informed us that the remodeling would only take about a month. We returned to Pleasanton with a feeling of accomplishment and began to plan our move south.

An Unexpected Pleasant Surprise

I met Nanci, who lived in Concord, about 30 miles from Pleasanton, and I told her about our planned move during lunch. She and George knew we’d eventually relocate to Carlsbad but didn’t know when.

“I am sorry to move farther from you, but it is only a one-hour flight,” I told her, seeing how surprised she was. Then, she sprang a big one on me.

“Aaron and I also have news for you. I am pregnant,” she said with a sparkle in her eye.

I gasped with disbelief. I thoroughly enjoyed the four wonderful grandchildren from Susan’s side of our family, but I had resigned myself to the fact that neither Nanci nor George would have children. It had been a deep regret of mine.

“That. is wonderful,” I stammered when I finally regained my composure. Then I jumped up and hugged her. After sitting down again, we called Susan to share the good news. We learned that the baby would be a girl a few months later.

Under the impression that biological parenthood was not possible, both Nanci and Aaron shared total surprise when a doctor’s visit confirmed Nanci’s suspicions that she was pregnant during the spring of 2016. Several months later, their ‘miracle’ baby girl, Holly, joined the family right before the fall holiday season. Nanci, Aaron, and the rest of our family welcomed the new addition with joyful hearts. Susan and I spent time with the parents, helping them adjust to their new lifestyle.



L to R: Holly, being two months and one year old. With her parents and cousin Madeline.

Holly is a sweet, intelligent little girl with a penchant for curiosity; I naturally assume she inherited my persistence and perseverance. We all enjoy watching her grow and develop into a person. I cross my fingers and hope she will share my love of opera, soccer, and Hungarian food!

Transition to Southern California

Although Susan and I had known that we'd move to LCG sometime, we didn't know when. Now we knew and had to act fast. Finding replacements for the various committee functions we held was a significant task. Fortunately, with the help of some old-fashioned "arm-twisting," other residents agreed to take over our responsibilities.

A quiet little song to mourn the Bessers' departure.

Sung to the tune of "Clementine"

Written by Maryanne and David Silber

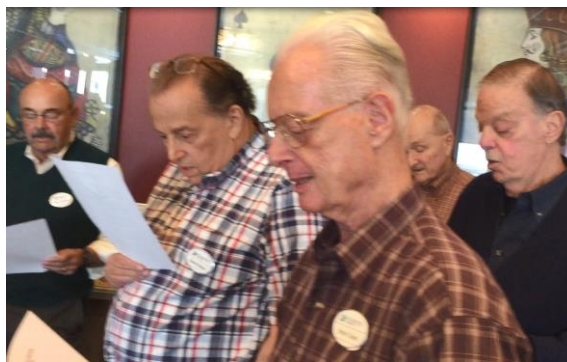
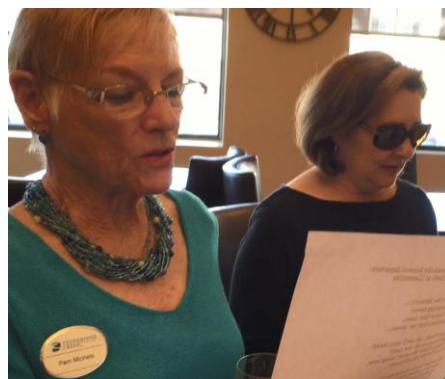
Oh the Bessers, Oh the Bessers....
Les and Sue are leaving town.
They are off to La Costa Glen soon,
Stoneridge Creekers feel let down...

We will miss them...oh, we'll miss them!
Who will Treasure all our cash?
As for Sleep Club? We won't sleep now,
And our CPAPs all will crash....

We know Susan missed the "Singers."
But she quilted with her group,
Walked dear Missy, in the morning....
She'll leave friends here in the soup...

Yes, we hope you'll both be happy.
Little kids will bring you smiles,
But please know we'll always miss you,
Though you're many miles away....

Oh, the Bessers, Oh the Bessers...
Les and Susan will leave town.
They are off to La Costa Glen soon,
Stoneridge Creekers feel down!



Photos taken at the sing-along farewell party.

The replacement Resident Council treasurer and his wife arranged a farewell party for us where some of our friends performed the following song; of course, we joined. The next day, the RC arranged another party. With tears in our eyes, Susan and I said goodbye to the many new friends we made during our two-year stay at SRC.

La Costa Glen — Our Final Destination

As Marketing predicted, our second relocation was relatively simple. The current villa and the new one were nearly identical. *Gentle Transitions*, a company dedicated to moving seniors, assigned three teams for the task: packers, movers, and unpackers. The first team came to SRC, took pictures of the furniture layout, and packed our belongings for the movers. The following day, the movers showed up with two large trucks and loaded everything into their vehicles by early afternoon.

Before driving to Carlsbad at the beginning of June 2016, we decided to simplify our lives and part with our Lexus SUV, becoming a “one-car family.” The Tesla’s hatchback and generous room behind the rear seats provided a comfortable space for Missy. After the movers left, we loaded our computers into the car and took off with Missy for the 450-mile trip.

Our Tesla could cover 260 miles with fully charged batteries, so we could have made the trip using a free Supercharge station only once. However, to avoid “range anxiety,” we stopped several times for short rests at the Tesla recharging stations.

At LCG, the third Gentle Transition team directed the movers to unpack and place the furniture and furnishings where they had been in our previous villa. When finished, they folded the empty boxes and left. Susan and I watched with amazement at the ease and efficiency of the operation.

The two years we spent at LCG’s sister community proved to be very helpful for us in adjusting to life at La Costa Glen. Although LCG opened in 2003, their customs and operations were very similar. Construction standards, however, seemed to have been higher up north, as we learned soon after moving in.

“Looks like we have heated tile floors in the kitchen and bathrooms,” Susan told me one morning when she walked barefooted in the villa. After checking it, I agreed, but it did not make sense. Asking around the neighborhood, I found that nobody had the same experience. A few days later, I learned the real reason: the hot water pipes, buried in the concrete slab foundation under the building, had developed leaks.

Our Plant Operation department followed up on our complaint and soon gave us the bad news. The underground hot water pipes must be terminated and rerouted through the attic. Then, the pipes would be brought down to each water faucet by cutting holes in the walls. The messy repair would take an entire week!

The news hit us hard, particularly Susan because we assumed the clutter associated with the move was already behind us. Our Persian rugs had been cleaned, pictures hung on the walls, and the entire home was sparkling clean. But there was no other option, so we faced the construction. To ease our pain, management generously compensated us for our inconvenience.

Because Susan and I jumped on board at SRC quickly and became involved with too many activities, we promised each other to go slower at LCG. We agreed to refrain from doing

committee work during the first year. Instead, we'd become more heavily involved with our family, spending more time with them—particularly with the grandchildren. After that self-imposed limit passed, we gradually began participating in more activities. Susan became a villa rep and a Food and Beverage Committee member. Not to be left behind, I applied and was elected to be a member of the Resident Council.

Unlike the Council meetings held in a large auditorium at Stoneridge Creek with 20-30 residents, the LCG Council meets in the Board Room, and residents rarely attend. Other than that difference, the topics reviewed and actions taken are similar. During the first two years of my three-year term, in addition to assisting with special projects, I was the liaison to our Safety and Plant Operation Committees. As the Council's Treasurer in the third year, I was responsible for our annual Employee Appreciation Fund. Planning the campaign, creating a promotional booklet (see on the right), soliciting contributions from the residents, and distributing the receipts was time-consuming, but watching the faces of our employees and hearing their gratitude at the award ceremony made it a worthwhile experience.



In addition to my Council activities, I also studied to become a certified AARP Safe Driver Course instructor and a Coordinator of AARP's CARFIT program. Although in 2020, the Coronavirus restriction interfered with the classes, over 250 residents participated during the first three years, learning to be more aware of the various factors that affect our driving (aging, medical conditions, medications, new safety features, road, and traffic conditions, etc.)

After our third grandchild was born in 2005, we assumed that no more would be coming. I received a nice sweat jacket for my 75th birthday in 2011 with the lettering "The World's Greatest Nagypapa," listing Matthew, Madeline, and Grace around it. I treasured the jacket and only wore it for special occasions. After Finn was born in 2014, Susan added his name, and the same happened after Holly came along in 2016. Will there be any more surprises???



Left: Front view of our new villa at LCG, looking just like the one we had at Stoneridge Creek. By coincidence, the house number is 1987, when Susan and I met. It must be a good omen. Center: Senior double tennis players, average age is 84! Right: Holly's first birthday.

Becoming a “Writer”

Justified or not, engineers are often labeled as being “poor communicators.” Although Susan needs to remind me frequently to “talk more,” I’ve always enjoyed writing. Speaking Hungarian only during the first twenty years of my life, writing in English is not as easy as I would like. Holding a part-time job in the 1980s with a technical magazine and co-authoring two textbooks twenty years later encouraged me also to write my memoirs later. In 2018, an unexpected opportunity popped up at La Costa Glen.

While having dinner with another resident couple, our conversation turned to dogs. I told them the embarrassing time when our Labradoodle, Missy, passed an obedience course, but I—her handler—failed (see pp 237-238). “This is a great story,” said the husband, a writer in our monthly magazine. “Write it up and submit it to the *Glen Tidings!*”

During the next few days, I extracted the story from my memoir and emailed him the file. He called soon after and told me that the Editor was interested in publishing it, but I needed to reduce its word length from 1,150 to 300 words.

“It cannot be done,” I protested. “It will not make sense if I reduce it to nearly a fourth of its length. “Oh yes,” he replied. “I’ll guide you.” I did not believe him, but he proved me wrong. It was possible (see the final copy below).

After receiving positive feedback from residents, I asked the Glen Tidings Editor if I could become one of their writers. She agreed. I began to attend their meetings and regularly submitted articles on various topics. In addition, I have also been taking pictures of various activities for the magazine and enjoy my participation.

Another Tesla S

When the lease of our second Tesla expired, we contemplated whether to keep the car or replace it with a newer model. Tesla has been cleverly adding new features that cannot be added to older models, so we opted for a 2019 model. Our garage has electric charging connections, so we don’t know the nearest gas station.

As you can guess, we love the Tesla, although it would be nice to have a version with less road noise. Perhaps Lexus will build one in the future.

Flunking a Course

Contributed by Les Besser

While living in Silicon Valley, Susan and I heard that some patients in assisted living and skilled nursing facilities seldom had visitors. Knowing that dog-lovers enjoy touching furry friends, we signed up our Labradoodle, Missy, for a demanding, eight-week patient visitation course by Delta Society.

During the first session, the officials handed out a thick manual and explained that all graduate dogs and handlers are covered by a million-dollar liability insurance policy during visits. Therefore, only those who pass Delta’s rigorous requirements graduate. Susan and I agreed to take everything seriously and faithfully attended all the sessions with Missy.

The final exam was held in a large noisy hall filled with volunteer patients in hospital beds or wheelchairs or on walkers, with distractions like delicious food spills on the floor. I decided to go first with Missy, and Susan was to follow.

An examiner gave me a map that showed a looping path to

follow. Holding a clipboard, he shadowed us and made notes as we passed by the various stations. The hardest requirement came at midpoint: ask the dog to sit and wait while I walked out of the room for 30 seconds. No problem—Missy sat there patiently and waited for my return.

“Missy is wonderful,” the examiner said at completion, adding, “Unfortunately you failed!”

I was stunned and asked, “Why? I thought I did everything right.”

“You didn’t introduce yourself and Missy to the patients you encountered,” he replied. “You didn’t engage them in conversation either.”

“Those weren’t stated on the map you gave me,” I protested.

“They’re in the manual! Haven’t you read it?” I had not. So he flunked me.

Overhearing the conversation, Susan passed easily. A month later, I retook the exam and succeeded.

The joy our visits created was priceless!



Travel, Travel, Travel

Repeating previous Club Med excursions, in early 2013, we flew to Cancun to join Daphne, Jim, Matthew, and Grace for a week. Swimming in warm turquoise water, lounging on white sandy beaches, playing various sports and games, and feasting at the delicious buffets kept us busy. Four years later, Susan and I returned to Club Med, but this time to their Ixtapa location, where our friends, the Lahrs, joined us. We agreed to make it an annual visit, perhaps bringing some of our grandchildren with us next time.

Keeping with the tropical theme, we also spent time on the various Hawaiian Islands, meeting again with friends to share lazy days in the surf and sand. Susan and lady friends always signed up for Black Tiger Yoga to stretch and joined in the water aerobics while I struggled with weights in a local gym. Somehow, the ladies' workouts always look more fun!

We flew to Washington, D.C., on September 2013, the same day as the famous Naval Yard shooting. Once again, flags were lowered as a sad reminder. We stayed in Silver Springs, Maryland, using the Metro to enter the "District." The highlight was a visit with Susan's cousin, Dorothy. Her son and family were visiting from Australia, so we also had a chance to meet them. They took us to Annapolis to tour the Naval Academy on the Severn River in the Chesapeake Bay. We enjoyed watching the parade of the trim, well-dressed cadets.

In June, I flew to Eugene, Oregon, to watch the US National Track & Field Championship with my former college classmates, the Lahrs. The meet occurred in record-high temperatures and provided opportunities to watch some of the world's top athletes closely. Even more thrilling, my long-term dream came true after talking with one of the American national women's team members—she allowed me to hold her Olympic gold medal in my hand!

Some people enjoy vacation travel to a single resort, packing and unpacking only once. Others prefer hopping through different cities or countries during their trip, being exposed to various scenery and cultures. Susan and I have found that an excellent way to combine the benefits of both choices is by taking cruises—either on rivers or the open seas. The former has the advantage of docking the small ships at the hearts of major cities, allowing convenient visits by simply walking off the vessels. For ocean cruising, we prefer medium-size ships, carrying only 600 to 700 passengers, large enough to offer more amenities like swimming pools, gyms, and a choice of restaurants, without the large crowds of the mega-ships. Our favorite cruise lines are Viking, Oceania, and Regent Seven Seas.

In 2014, a fantastic South Pacific Cruise started in Auckland, New Zealand, and ended in Moorea, French Polynesia. The South Sea islands are indeed paradise in the Pacific. Halfway through the cruise, the captain announced a major typhoon heading in our direction and asked if there would be any objection to changing our planned route. As expected, all passengers quickly agreed to alter course to avoid the storm. We gladly gave up one of the Bali ports to prevent a shaky experience. Sunriver, Oregon, was colorful in October 2014 and VERY cold. The power was out when we arrived, so we drove back into town for pizza, candles, and matches! By the time we returned, the power was back on. But from now on, we carry matches.

In July 2015, we sailed from Copenhagen to the coast of Norway, where, at our first stop, we realized that their summer is much colder than ours. Being thrifty shoppers, we quickly bought heavier clothing at the local Salvation Army Thrift store. Passing into the Arctic Circle and stopping at Longyearbyen, where the World Seed Bank is located, we continued toward

Russia's Murmansk, where we toured the first Russian nuclear submarine and spied the Russian military fleet as we entered the harbor. Next, at Solovetsky Island, our tour guides took us through a former monastery that became one of the most severe prisons of the Soviet regime, where political prisoners had lived under inhumane conditions. Scary place!



Pretending to be an Olympian, Different October years, one in Hawaii and another in Oregon.

On our return down the coast to Norway, we took an RIB (Rapid Inflatable Boat, capable of moving at 50MPH) to a crab safari. After a harrowing ride with the young hot-rod Norwegian crew, they pulled up the crab pots and allowed us to pose with their catch. Later, we dined on fresh crab and steamed over an open fire in the icy Norwegian air— a memorable, delicious meal. Breathtaking fjords lay ahead as we continued down the coast, eventually returning to Copenhagen.



Warming on a heated bench in Bergen, Holding one of the captured king crabs; Sunset at 11 pm.

In April 2016, we flew to Miami and boarded a Regent SS cruise ship. With Erica and George joining us, we sailed through the Panama Canal and to San Francisco. During one of the open-sea cruising days, I gave my sleep presentation to the passengers in the main theater. The cruise was fabulous, even though our scheduled stop at Acapulco was canceled due to safety considerations on shore. After coming home to LCG, we learned that our new neighbors, MaryJane and Jim Wiesler, had been on the same cruise at the same time, two floors directly below us. Small world!

In July 2016, we traveled to Mt. Rushmore and the Badlands with our three older grandchildren, Matthew, Madeline, and Grace. We spent a week of exploration with the Road Scholar Intergenerational (programs specially designed for grandparents and grandchildren).

Lots of spectacular scenery, history, horseback riding, panning for gold, and s'mores around the campfire provided busy, fun-filled days. (In 2017, we took them on another Road Scholar tour in San Francisco to visit Muir Woods, the Golden Gate Bridge, and explore Chinatown, the Natural History Museum, and Fisherman's Wharf—all on public transportation!)

In September 2016, we flew on the huge Airbus A380 to Budapest and spent ten days at the fabulous Marriott Hotel on the shore of the Danube--enjoying great weather and good Hungarian food. We were especially delighted in the companionship of friends and relatives, including Les' sister Kati and grand-niece Emese, who had been married that year. We did not lose any weight!



Budapest at night from the Marriott; Eating “Lángos” at a market; Celebrating Susan’s 75th BD

One of our most memorable trips took place in the spring of 2017. After flying to Singapore, where we stayed for a couple of days, we boarded the Oceania Insignia for a 17-day cruise to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), docking at Myanmar, Thailand, and India on the way. While visiting one of the largest Muslim mosques in the world in Abu Dhabi, the “Moral Police” challenged Susan’s full dress because her wrists were still visible.



Impressive view of the former Soviet gulag; Burj Khalifa, 2,722 feet; Susan’s “promiscuous” outfit.

In Dubai, we rode a high-speed elevator nearly to the top (148th of 163 floors) of the highest building in the world, Burj Khalifa, as shown with the arrow in the photo). By the way, UAE knows how to spend our oil money; most of their skyscrapers have unique architectural designs, their roads are clean and smooth, trains are modern and quiet, and most automobiles are new. We’d

never seen so many luxury cars in any city before Bentleys, Maseratis, and Rolls Royce swarmed all over!

On New Year's Eve 2017, my niece was married in an old airplane hangar in Durham, NC. Being sissy Californians, Susan and I shivered in the large building until the heat came on, but it was worth seeing the happy couple saying their vows. My sister Eva was bedridden in a skilled nursing facility nearby and unable to join the ceremony, but we visited her later.

Our annual "pilgrimage" at Club Med, Ixtapa, in February 2018, 2019, and 2020 were also joyful. We learned that the company was sold to Chinese investors and hoped the new owners would maintain a high-quality environment and service.



Niece Debra's wedding Sundown at Ixtapa Gym workout is a must With George Washington

Our last major cruise before the coronavirus shutdown was on the Viking Seas in mid-2018, starting at Bergen, Norway, with stops at the Shetland Islands, Greenland, Iceland, and several Canadian ports, and ending at Montreal. Before departure, we spent a week in Budapest, enjoying native Hungarian food, shopping, and visiting friends and the few remaining family members.

A strongman has headed the Hungarian government for nearly a decade, and it was interesting to hear that some people, mostly the younger generation, liked him. In contrast, others would prefer a different kind of government. Those in the first group enjoyed traveling and being involved with business opportunities. Older residents miss the safety and the government subsidies provided by the former Socialist System. Interestingly, considering the 150-year Turkish occupation in the 16th Century, most people are openly opposed to Middle Eastern Moslem immigrants.

We have taken Viking river cruises in various parts of the world, but this was our first ocean cruise experience. Decorated in modern Scandinavian style, the 650-passenger vessel was new, luxurious, spacious, and comfortable. They served delicious food and offered good evening entertainment in their large theater, outfitted with state-of-the-art AV equipment. Their Activity Director knew me from a previous Oceania cruise and allowed me to give my Sleep Disturbance presentation to nearly 200 passengers. Highlights included breathtaking scenery and the Northern Lights.

Flying to Kauai in March 2021 was a new experience. Concerned about public health, all the Hawaiian Islands required proof of Coronavirus vaccinations and a three-day quarantine before allowing free movement around the island. Nevertheless, after a year of restrictions, we enjoyed the mild climate, the ocean, and the lush green landscape.



Left: Breathtaking view of the Northern Light in Greenland.

Right: On the way to Kauai, I learned that I've flown more mileage on United than our Captain.

Life in my eighties

In my youth, I considered people over sixty to be old. I don't recall anyone in our four-story Budapest apartment building who had lived to their eighties, and I could not imagine myself being that old. I am an octogenarian now, living in a retirement community with an average age of 84.7 years; I don't feel so bad. My 90-year-old tennis partner calls me a kid. Medicare provides me with complete health insurance coverage at a reasonable price. I don't have to remove my shoes at the airport TSA checkpoints, and in Europe, young people offer me their seats on public transportation. Yes, I do have pains and aches after extensive physical exercise. Still, Susan and I live in a luxurious, excellent environment within a short drive of one of our children and two grandchildren. We regularly visit our other two children and their families in the San Francisco Bay Area. Kent and his family recently relocated to Kalispell, Montana, so we must also start traveling to that state. Alaska Air recently introduced a nonstop flight between San Diego and Kalispell that will simplify our trips.

After owning three Tesla S models in nine years, we switched to a Genesis GV60 electric SUV for two reasons: although a great car, the Tesla was low-profile – not easy to get in and out. We found that other seniors did not like to ride with us. In addition, Tesla refused to add Reversed Cross Traffic Warning (RCTW) to their cars. Owning the Genesis solved both.

Just before Thanksgiving day of 2023, an IEEE Microwave Section representative called with excellent news: they selected me for the 2024 Career Award. The citation reads:

“For a Career of Leadership, Meritorious Achievement, Creativity and Outstanding Contributions in the Field of Microwave Theory and Technology.”

After working in that field for nearly 60 years, I felt honored to receive the highest recognition from the Electrical Engineering Society. Susan and I will fly to Washington, DC, in June 2024 to attend the International Microwave Symposium and pick up the award. Hopefully, I will have opportunities to meet many of my former professional colleagues, customers, and students!

After learning that my half-sister, Kati, was placed in hospice in Budapest, I flew over for a short visit in June 2024. She represented my generation's last living family member, and I was thankful to spend a few days with her. She passed away shortly after.

At this point, Susan and I look forward to seeing our family's progress in life. May God give them happiness, good health, and prosperity. Amen.



Our Southern California family members: Finn, Kent, Madeline, Joan, Susan and I, Grace, Matthew, and Daphne; Love of Hungarian food; Spiderman and Wonder Woman at the La Costa Glen Halloween party.



Nanci, Aaron, and Holly; Daphne and Erica with George; Grace, the Irish Dance champion.

Epilogue: Special Tributes to People Who Have Played Major Roles in My Life

Life has placed many “hurdles” in my path! Thankfully, my guardian angel has provided people to guide me through those obstacles. Most helpers are no longer alive, but I want to recognize them for their actions.

- **My Mother.** Finding suitable work with only a third-grade formal education and raising an illegitimate child alone had been extremely difficult for a single woman. When the Fascists took her employer, Mr. Braun, away, she had to find a new place for the two of us to live. She found ways to feed, clothe, and care for me by working as a laundress, a house cleaner, and doing any other available work. Her working day began early morning and stretched late into the night. Unselfishly devoting her life to my welfare, she was always there when I needed her. When my cousin Éva was orphaned, my mother adopted her and shared our meager resources with the young girl.
- **Mrs. Dancsa.** Right after my birth, my single mother could not find any domestic live-in work where I could be with her. This young mother, with two young sons of her own, agreed to provide

a loving home for the first years of my life. During my stay, I cemented a lifelong relationship with my “milk-brother” Pista and his grandmother, whom I also considered my own *Nagymama*.

- **Mr. Braun.** When my mother realized I was closer to the Dancsa family than her, she searched desperately for ways for us to live together under the same roof. After numerous failures to find suitable employment, she considered ending both our lives. At the last minute, a kind man, Mr. Braun, saved us by hiring her as a housekeeper and accepting me in his home. He became my mentor and helped me to develop mathematical skills at an early age.
- **Elementary School Teachers.** Three teachers provided exceptional care and guidance during my early days of schooling. My Class Chief and Hungarian language teacher, Mr. Hered, encouraged me to read and saw that I always received free school lunches. Mr. Bordás, the math and science teacher, elevated my self-esteem by declaring me a “math genius.” Our PE teacher and former Olympian sprinter, Mr. Vadas, directed me to track and field.
- **Coaches.** At the track club, three of the coaches, Messrs. Agócs, Sugár, and Kovács-Kléri, helped me to develop running skills and learn how to both win and lose graciously. They ingrained in me the importance of proper running form by following the fundamental laws of physics. The lessons they taught me became invaluable in my coaching practice.
- **Pista.** My “milk brother,” or, as I usually referred to him, Cousin Pista, was my early-life role model. I immediately followed his example when he began to build radios, joined a sports club, and chose technical high school instead of the conventional gymnasium. I thank him for the involvement in electronics that influenced my entire adult life.
- **Mrs. Leflinger.** After the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, I feared the Communist retribution for my minor involvement and considered escaping to the West. The path, however, was narrow and dangerous. I don’t know if I would have tried to leave if it hadn’t been for the assistance of my sister’s colleague. A small group of her friends and I safely reached Austria in a stolen Army truck and received refugee status.
- **Canada.** When the restrictive US quota system did not allow me to immigrate to this country, Canada accepted me with open arms. Although I chose to stay in the US after college graduation, I will always be grateful to Canada for allowing me to live and work there.
- **Mr. Leahy.** Finding work in my new country was not easy without sufficient language skills. I am thankful to the Irish Canadian man who had faith in me. He hired me to work in his radio-TV repair shop, though I had no Canadian experience, at the same wage he paid his other technicians.
- **Professor Wicks.** After learning that I was not eligible for a track scholarship at the University of Colorado, I found myself without enough money to pay for the out-of-state tuition. Professor Wicks, the head of the electronics laboratories, gave me a job as a half-time lab assistant, which reclassified me as a state resident. The lower tuition allowed me to stay in school. He was also my mentor throughout my three years at CU.
- **The Hewlett-Packard Company.** After working at HP’s Microwave Division for only eight months, I learned I had been infected with TB while visiting Hungary. Management was extremely helpful and subsidized my expenses during my three months of mandatory hospitalization. They also placed my project on hold until I could return to work. No wonder I loved the way HP treated their employees.

- My Family.** When I was facing divorce, my two young children rallied to keep up my morale. The kids asked for a 50-50 shared custody arrangement that helped me stay in close contact with them. Being a single father for eight years taught me to appreciate the role of parenthood. In the absence of belonging to a church or social group, my in-laws and close friends provided me with much-needed emotional support. The lessons I learned at Lifespring also contributed to my acceptance of what could not be changed. Last but not least, my former in-laws have maintained a close relationship with me throughout the years. I appreciate their friendship.
- My wife.** After a lengthy search as a single parent, I met Susan, who became my life partner. During the past 32 years, our relationship has taught me to appreciate true love. She has enjoyed many good things with me and stands with me when I need help. Her two children quickly integrated with mine, enabling me to enjoy being a grandfather. I am incredibly grateful for having this wonderful woman in my life.



Left and top right: Two photos showing our five grandchildren, their parents, and the two family dogs. However, Missy is now in heaven.



Bottom right: The two youngest grandchildren, Holly (6) and Finn (8).



L to R: Sharing dinner with Kati two years before her death. Godson Laszlo’s family. Niece Debby and husband at one of their daughter’s high school graduation.

Four of my Famous Runner Mentors

Although I initially hoped to be a soccer player, I had the good fortune of being advised by four mentors with international track and field fame: Our neighbor, József Galambos, my two PE teachers (József Vadas in grade school and Sándor Rozsnyói in high school), and club sprinter/hurdler coach József Kovács were all Olympian runners:

József Galambos's running talent was discovered during his military service. In his mid-twenties, he started competing in 800 and 3000 meters but did not succeed in these distances. He became an excellent marathon runner in the colors of Kisvárdai SE (1924-30) and later became a member of the Egyetértés SC (1930-35) and then the BSZKRT SE (1935-37). He competed in the marathon at the Amsterdam Olympics in 1928, although he finished towards the back of the field. He reached the 4th position at the European Championships in Turin (1934) and won four times at the famous Košice International Marathon. He won the Hungarian Championship title 7 times in the marathon and twice in the 15 km run. During his career, he improved the national record four times.

József Vadas started athletics in his hometown in the colors of Székesfehérvár TC. In 1935, he moved to Budapest and joined OKHT SE. From 1937, he competed for Magyar Athletic Club; in 1945, he was with KAOE. Vadas won the Hungarian championship at 400 meters in 1936 and 1939, in the 4 x 400m relay in 1946, and in the 4x800 meter relay in 1939 and 1943. Between 1934 and 1940, he represented Hungary 14 times internationally. At the 1936 Berlin Olympics, Vadas reached the semifinals of 400 meters, the quarterfinals at 800 meters, and finished sixth in the 4x400 relay, as Hungary set a national record in the final, which stood for 16 years. In the 4x400 relay, he also finished sixth at the 1938 European Championships. After completing his sports career, Vadas worked as a coach and physical education teacher.

Sándor Rozsnyói was a steeplechase specialist who, in August 1954, set the first IAAF-recognized world record in the 3,000-meter steeple, recording 8:49.6 at Bern, Switzerland, while winning the 1954 European Championships. He also set four Hungarian records in the event and won Hungarian titles in 1954-55. Rozsnyói set another world record with 8:35.6 in Budapest in September 1956 and went to Melbourne as the favorite in his event but was edged out for the gold medal by Britain's Chris Brasher. After the 1956 Olympics Rozsnyói elected not to return to Hungary and settled initially in Austria, running briefly for them and then was national team coach in 1960. He studied geography at the University of Wien (Vienna) and emigrated to Australia in 1964, where he worked as a physical education teacher and tennis coach at the Epping Boys High School, Cumberland High School, and Model Farms High School, and as a coach with the Ryde-Hornsby Athletic Club until his retirement.

József Kovács started his sports career as a high jumper with KAOE, but in 1927, he moved to Budapest Budai Torna Egylet (BBTE) and switched to the sprints and hurdles. He won 29 Hungarian championships and set 20 Hungarian records in multiple events. He was the first Hungarian to run 400 meter under 48 seconds and the first under 15 seconds in the 110 meter hurdles. His national record at 200 meter was only broken 31 years later.



József Galambos leading a Marathon race



József Vadas



József Kovács



Sándor Rozsnyoi at the Melbourn Olympics

Chapter 13: Short Articles from Glen Tidings

To end my story, here are some articles I wrote for our retirement community's monthly publications about events not mentioned previously in the previous chapters.

Birthday Surprise

Szilvás Gombóc, a plum dumpling, is not a food but a vice. Grown Hungarian men daydream and reminisce about plum dumplings they have known from childhood—they remember the exact circumstances of their last exposure and brag about how many they can eat in one session. If a season passes without a plum dumpling orgy, they feel deprived and gloomy.

In earthbound reality, however, szilvás gombóc is a potato dumpling with a pitted purple plum and a melted sugar cube inside. To the eager initiate, the revelation comes even before the first bite, when the fork jabs into the dumpling and the hot plum juice squirts out. From then on, it's a riot of sensation: gluey versus chewy, sweet and tart versus tender and bland—a unique experience for anyone's gastronomic repertoire.

I've missed this exquisite joy for several years, but in 2020, Susan took pity on me and cooked szilvás gombóc for my birthday. Preparing this Hungarian treat is a labor-intensive exercise in culinary skill, starting the previous day with boiling and ricing the potatoes and letting them dry overnight. The following day, the potato crumbles are made into a buttery dough, the sugar cubes are tucked into the plums, and just the right amount of dough is wrapped around the plums and their sweet surprise. The moment of truth comes when the dumplings rise to the surface in the pot of boiling water, hot and ready. Voilà! Success!



A Sudden Realization

Switching on my mobile phone after our Glen Tidings editorial meeting, I read an alarming text: "Susan tripped over a curb and broke her arm. She is at Scripps Hospital ER in Encinitas!"

Remembering that she drove our car to the beach that morning, I rushed home to get my wallet, planning to take an Uber to the hospital. But, hearing the news, a kind neighbor offered to drive me to Scripps, and I gladly accepted it.

At the ER, they ushered me to one of the treatment rooms where an X-ray Technician was already imaging Susan's arm. She looked pale, with an IV stuck into her right arm, and her left hand seemed to be in a crooked position. After greeting her and noticing her blood pressure was low, I Googled the picture of her favorite movie star, James Mason, on my cellphone! Whether it was the photograph's effect or the saline drip, her blood pressure gradually returned to normal!

An ER Physician soon informed us that Susan had fractured and dislocated her left wrist. After injecting pain medication into her wrist, I breathlessly witnessed the unique "reduction treatment!" While a



nurse held Susan at her waist, the doctor raised the injured arm and pulled her hand up forcefully. Her hand position straightened.

Before being discharged, the team wrapped a temporary splint around her arm to prevent the shifting of the bones. We visited an orthopedic hand specialist two days later and learned that the fracture did require surgery and she would need to wear a permanent cast for six weeks.

During her recovery, the reduced effect of her homemaking activities made me realize how much extra work she does taking care of me and our villa. Therefore, I will love and appreciate her even more!

Beautiful Budapest Birthday (written by Susan)

“Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Besser! Let me sit you by the window,” said our hotel’s hostess, leading us to a cozy table overlooking the pedestrian walkway along the Danube. The sparkling blue sky held the promise of a day filled with celebration—not only was it my birthday, but the Pope was also in town for a special Sunday mass at Heroes Square.

Our table was suddenly surrounded by servers singing “Happy Birthday,” surprising me with a colorful custom-decorated chocolate torte. Cake for breakfast! The day was off to a great start.

“A children’s choir is singing at the Rock Church, next to the Gellert Hotel in Buda—I know you would enjoy that”, Les suggested later. After a short metro ride, we climbed the hill to the church and walked inside. Spiritual, contemplative, and comforting—but no choir. Disappointed, I walked out of the bright sunshine.

“Oh, look! Someone has prepared for a wedding,” I commented after we exited the church. *How romantic*, I thought as I viewed a small table and two chairs draped in satin on the veranda overlooking the Danube. The table was set with flowers, candles, and two champagne glasses. Curious, I walked closer to get a better view. Two gypsy violinists approached me, singing, “Happy Birthday to you!”

What!! This is for me? Les and our guide, Nora, beamed as they saw stunned surprise spread across my face. I never expected this and kept shaking my head in disbelief. “Oh, my gosh, how did you plan this without me knowing?”

I was shocked! We sipped champagne and ate delicious cake as the gypsies played their favorite melodies. As we gazed at the panorama of the city beyond, I knew this was one birthday I would never forget!



Tree Climbing

One of my favorite fruits is the delicious Blenheim apricot. Unfortunately, its harvest season and shelf life are extremely short, making transporting and selling difficult. Most growers have switched to more extensive, genetically modified types, yielding more plump apricots – without much taste. After a resident told me about a Blenheim apricot tree near Lemonberry Lane, I eagerly monitored the growth progress of the fruits. Finally, when the ripe apricots began to fall off the tree, I took a

bag and climbed up the tree to pick some. Finding my way upward was relatively easy. However, standing on oblique-angled tree branches and holding on to the bag and a tree branch with one hand while reaching out to pick off the fruit with the other was more difficult.

I finally decided I had collected enough apricots and started my descent. At that point, however, I realized how much more challenging it was to get back to the ground safely. While going up took me less than a minute, getting down stretched into a long and stressful process. My arms and legs trembled by the time I reached the ground.

Another resident chuckled as I shared my experience with other residents the following day. “Don’t feel bad, Les,” she said. “Even the animal king has trouble with coming down from trees.” With that, she played me a video taken during her African Safari. It showed a magnificent male lion balancing awkwardly on tree branches high above the ground. “The female lions know how to climb up and down trees, but the males don’t. They jump down.”

Next year, I’ll ask Susan to pick the apricots.



Second Place

Visiting family living afar involves careful planning. Making reservations, packing suitcases, flying in fully loaded planes, and renting cars — in addition to missing some LCG community activities and my regularly scheduled pickleball games — takes energy and expense. However, all those events become insignificant when we share joyful moments with our loved ones.

Susan and I enjoyed seeing how our granddaughter Holly embraces life. Tall and extremely slender, our just-turned-six-year-old loves singing and dancing, and her Disney Princess admiration is all-encompassing.

However, Holly is a slow eater, often leaving large portions of her meals unfinished. Coming from a nearly starved childhood, my reaction to rejecting food is quite strong. With her parents’ agreement, I invented creative ways to encourage her to eat more. Food games like *Dinosaur Battle*, fought between two bitesize foods stuck on two forks, where the loser must be eaten, and Treasure Hunt, where the “treasures” (also small food portions) are immediately swallowed, were highly successful. With the help of such games, she consistently finished her meals with us while having fun.

One morning, though, she showed no interest in eating breakfast. After we listened to one of her favorite Doris Day songs, *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better*, I challenged her to see which of us could finish our cereal first. Having enjoyed that competitive song so much, she couldn’t refuse my challenge, and we proceeded to eat. She completed her last spoonful while I still had some cereal left, so I lifted her arm high and declared her the CHAMPION!



She enjoyed her victory for some time, obviously pleased with her new title. Then, she stepped next to me and lifted my arm with a big smile on her pretty face, announcing, "SECOND PLACE!"

Columbia River Cruising

With twenty-five other LCG residents, Susan and I cruised on a memorable six-day journey through the Snake and Columbia Rivers, starting at Clarkston, zigzagging among the states of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, and ending at Portland. We passed through evergreen forests, locks, and rocky gorges, visited eventful sites, listened to historical lectures, and ate delicious meals on the ship. Before boarding the paddle-wheeled American Empress steamboat, we stayed one night at the luxurious Davenport Hotel in Spokane to have all passengers tested for coronavirus! Mask-wearing was mandatory on the ship during dockings and all bus trips for additional safety. Our ship's route coincided with part of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804. Thanks to the control of the rivers during the last century, our boat did not have to deal with treacherous rapids and waterfalls that made the early explorers' lives difficult.

At each stop, the ship passengers could choose optional excursions and frequently run Hop-On-Hop-Off buses to visit well-documented local museums and other exciting parts of the towns. Notable areas we saw included:

Richland, WA, Manhattan Project Historical Park, where Plutonium production took place for the WW2 *Fat Man* bomb, as well as for our nuclear weapons for decades.

The Dalles rolling hills in Oregon, where Native American Indians lived for thousands of years. Pioneers, adventurers, gold miners, gunslingers, and other characters of the Old West rushed there to settle in the mid-1800s. Now the region is famous for its vineries.

Stevenson, WA, where we visited the Bonneville Dam, which generates 5.5 Gigawatts of electricity. A separate river-branch protects fish migration, allowing visitors to view the fish swimming upstream.

Astoria, OR, is the oldest American settlement west of the Rockies. Climbing 186 steps to the top of the Astoria Column Tower exposed visitors to a magnificent view.

It was an unforgettable trip!

Touring the Channel Islands

The Channel Islands between France and the UK may be better known internationally, but the California Channel Islands offer a neighborly invitation to astonishing wonders. Susan and I recently toured some islands with a *Road Scholar* group to enjoy the scenery and wildlife and learn about the islands' long history.

Our Channel Islands were formed by volcanic activity millions of years ago and, according to fossil evidence, have supported human life for 13,000 years. Isolation from the mainland created and protected a specific range of plants and animals that cannot be found elsewhere. The fight to preserve these is ongoing.



A 1904 electric car

Indigenous peoples included the Tongva and the Chumash, whose presence dominated the LA Basin and the South Channel Islands for over seven thousand years. The arrival of European explorers brought disease and conquest. Surviving Chumash and Tongva were forcibly removed from the islands in the early nineteenth century and transferred to mainland Franciscan missions. An era of European-style settlement of the islands followed, introducing sheep and cattle ranches and creating havoc on island ecosystems, including the local extinction of sea otters, bald eagles, and other species.

In 1980, five islands—Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara, and the marine environment surrounding them—were designated a National Park, and destructive invasive species were cleared from the place. The wild and unique land is being re-established, and research teams regularly track ocean health.

Primitive camping is available year-round on a limited basis due to the fragile nature of the ecosystem; other attractions include hiking, birding, whale watching, snorkeling, and kayaking. From the Channel Islands Visitors' Center in Ventura, visitors can access the islands via park concessionaire boats or helicopters.

Plan a trip that will open a rare and precious new world!



This island fox only lives there

Calling 411

Back in the time when phone companies still offered operator services, one of our sons declared, “Mom is like 411. She always knows where we can find our things.” From that day, that name stayed with Susan, and whenever a family member could not find something, all we had to say was, “Calling 411!” After Susan appeared and learned what we were looking for, she immediately led us to the right place. It always worked!

Asking her how she developed such incredible capability, she modestly said, “I am the one who puts things away, so naturally, I know where they are.” But that still does not explain how she always knows where I put things!

Now that we all have access to Google and Siri, they can answer virtually all questions, but in our home, I still call out for 411 whenever I lose something...



Dear Mom

Even though Valentine's Day greetings were not practiced in Hungary while I was growing up, I am sending this card to you now with the hope that it will reach you in the skies. I want you to know how much I appreciate your unconditional love while raising me as a single mother behind the iron curtain. I still remember the long days you'd spent in our apartment building's dingy laundry

room, washing and ironing other people's laundry so I could wear decent outfits and become our family's first high school graduate. You also found time to keep our place clean, buy fresh food at the market, and place a home-cooked dinner on our table daily. On the rare occasions when we had something special to eat, you always gave me the larger and most tender portion.

When I could escape to the West following the unsuccessful 1956 revolution against the Soviet Union, you unselfishly advised me to take it. You told me I would have a better future—even though it meant leaving you behind. Only much later, when I had my children, did I realize what a tremendous sacrifice that separation must have been for you!

Dear Mom, please forgive me for not verbalizing this to you during your life!

Your loving son.



High-Tech Car Service

Because I am such a caring husband, I surprised Susan at the end of her water exercise class and offered her a ride home from the Capistrano Swim Center. She settled into our Tesla, and just as I'd done thousands of times before, I pressed the brake and moved the drive-controller lever toward the drive position.

To my surprise, instead of the car moving forward, a message appeared on its 16-inch LCD panel: *To move, select either DRIVE or REVERSE.*

I selected Drive again, but we didn't move. Switching to Reverse brought no movement. Repeating the process did not help; I could not make the vehicle budge in either direction! All the other readings seemed fine, and the battery level showed 230 miles' worth of charge. But our Tesla stubbornly remained in the parking spot, refusing to move!

After years of computer experience, I knew what to do, almost without thinking. I defaulted to the universal fix—and rebooted the car's operating system!

Still no change. Other tricks did not bring any results, either. I had exhausted all my IT ideas and knew I had been defeated. I felt helpless and frustrated.

Tesla's App offers free Roadside Assistance, so I called them from the car. A personable service technician answered from a Salt Lake City home. He remotely confirmed our problem and sent a "Hard Reset" command.

Just like that, the Tesla completely shut down around us. The screen went dark, and every system died. Susan and I sat, each as silent as the car, realizing our vehicle was much brighter than we were.

All the displays returned to everyday life after a few minutes of scary silence. With relief, I selected Drive, and we headed home.

Technology is indeed fantastic—when it works!



Just Google It!

After our morning meeting, while heading to 24HR Fitness, I stopped by Spectrum's office to replace our ailing DVR.

"May I have an ID?" one of the two young clerks asked me, standing behind the counter.

Reaching my sweatsuit pants pocket, I realized that instead of my wallet, I took with me my business card holder. Pulling out a card, I handed it to the man, hoping it would be satisfactory.

"Sorry, but I need a photo ID," he said.

"Just Google my name," I replied jokingly— not wanting to drive home for my wallet.

The two men looked at each other, and one began typing on the keyboard. Then, both looked at their monitor with increased interest.

"Wow, it's you," said one with an impressed expression. Then, he twisted the monitor so I could see the display, showing my portrait and biography. Next, they looked at the other Google postings about me.

After asking more about my past, they gave me the best service I've ever received!

New Password

Our small regional bank recently faced a financial crisis, and a new bank took over our investment portfolio. The Account Executive assured us the paperwork would be conveniently handled online using DocuSign. After electronically signing hundreds of pages of new documents, we finally reached the point of assigning a new bank account. Here is the following online exchange.

BANK: Please enter your new password

ME: hungarian

BANK: Sorry, the password must be more than ten characters

ME: hungarian american

BANK: Sorry, the password must contain at least one numerical character.

ME: 1 hungarian American

BANK: Sorry, the password cannot have blank spaces.

ME: 1hungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, the password must contain at least one uppercase character.

ME: 1HHungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, the password cannot consecutively have more than one uppercase character.

ME: 1*!*Hungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, "*" and "!" are not allowed to be used.

ME: 1Hungarianamericanwhoisbecomingveryannoyed

BANK: Sorry, that password is already in use.

Northern Lights

Lists of the Natural Wonders of the World compete to name favorites, but every single list includes the Northern Lights, also called the Aurora Borealis. The latter name comes from two ancient Greek gods: Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, and Boreas, the north wind god.

Ancient cultures thought the lights were unique, too. The Chinese thought they must result from fights between good and evil dragons. The Finns believed they were magical spumes of water ejected from giant whales, while Greenlanders considered the eerie, shifting lights to be the souls

of dead children. More cheerfully, the Cree Indians saw them as images of their ancestors celebrating in heaven.

Modern science has provided a less dramatic story. In reality, the Northern Lights emerge when particles emitted from the sun collide with the Earth's upper atmosphere. Earth's magnetic field bends the resulting solar winds toward the magnetic poles. These winds collide with atmospheric particles in their path and gain electrical charge, producing visible light above the northern regions of Earth. Similar sights, Southern Lights or Aurora Australis (dawn and the south wind), occur near the southern magnetic pole.

During our recent North Atlantic cruise, Susan and I had the good fortune to witness this magnificent phenomenon in one of the Greenland fjords. Even though we had to crawl out of bed in the middle of the night and march to the top deck—only to wait for an hour in the cold wind—it was well worth the inconvenience. The display was breathtaking, and our “Bucket List” has been shortened.



Blame it on the doorways!

Are you frustrated when you walk into a room to do something but cannot remember why you went there? You might feel better knowing you are not alone, and there might be a scientific explanation for your problem.

Researchers at Notre Dame University's Psychology Department conducted experiments in two different forms. First, they asked participants to perform specified tasks at one end of a long corridor, pass through a door, and repeat the same tasks at the other end. Next, they had to experiment with assignments in another corridor the same length as the first one. This time, however, they did not have to cross a door. The distances walked in both experiments were identical, and the assigned tasks varied randomly among the groups.

Comparing the outcomes of the two types of experiments showed that those who did pass through the doorways scored consistently lower than those who did not.

“We learned that passing through doorways might cause such memory lapses,” the professor in charge concluded. “Entering or exiting through a doorway serves as an ‘event boundary’ in the mind, which separates episodes of activity and files them away. Recalling the decision or activity made in a different room is difficult because it has been compartmentalized in the brain.”

Now that you know this when the same problem happens, you may think, “All I have to do is to go back to the first room.” Well, not so fast—crossing through the doorway again, you might forget why you are going back.

Conclusion: Doorways are evil! Avoid them at all costs!

Senior Drivers

Before the coronavirus restrictions stopped us from having large group activities, over 200 LCG residents participated in the AARP Safe Driver courses I'd conducted. Reviewing recommended driving techniques, recently introduced State driving laws, and available auto safety options, in

addition to discussing the most common traffic violations seniors encounter, has helped many of our residents maintain safe driving practices. Of course, exceptions always happen.

Last year, a few weeks after taking one of the eight-hour courses here, a 'graduate resident' called me. "I received a traffic ticket for not stopping while turning right at a red traffic light. The instructions are not quite clear. Would you help me?" she asked.

After reviewing her ticket, I phoned the Encinitas Traffic Court: "I am calling on behalf of a lady who resides at La Costa Glen. She received a traffic citation for a red-light violation. She wants to know if..."

"Is she your wife, Sir?" the clerk interrupted me.

"No—I am an AARP Safe Driver course instructor. This lady took my safety course here last month..."

Interrupting me again! "Well, Sir, if I were you, I would not be bragging about that!"

Remaining silent, I listened to her instructions. After reviewing the information with the resident, she agreed to attend a one-day traffic school instead of getting a point off her driving record.

A few weeks later, the resident told me. "Traffic school was quite interesting. And guess what? Another LCG resident happened to be in my class at the same time. She and I are also members of our Safety Committee!"

Senior drivers...



Signs of Becoming Old

Public transportation is free to seniors in Budapest. As a dual Hungarian–American citizen, I can use the streetcars, buses, and subways without cost. They are clean and safe and do not require long waits.

I boarded a streetcar loaded with passengers during a recent visit to that city. A middle-aged woman stood up from her seat and waved in my direction, offering me to take her place. I first assumed she was inviting someone behind me, but looking back, I did not see anyone else. Embarrassed, I thanked her but declined the offer, puzzled as to why she would invite me to sit down. *Perhaps she took me for being a foreign visitor?*

After spending long and stressful hours with my ailing sister a few days later, I returned to my hotel, taking one of those lengthy escalators to a subway station during rush hour. Within a few minutes, a long train arrived, and I stepped into one of the cars. A man immediately jumped up from his seat and asked me to take it. Being physically and emotionally drained, I accepted the offer this time, wondering, *Do I look so tired that even others can notice it?*

One morning after returning home from the trip, I mentally rehearsed my opening statements for a forthcoming LCG Safe Driving presentation while getting dressed.

"Did you say something?" asked Susan, stepping into the bedroom.

"No, I did not."

“It’s funny – I heard you talking,” she said.

I suddenly remembered when my mother occasionally talked to herself. Once, I pointed it out to her, and she replied, “You’ll do it also when you’re old!”

Have I reached that age?

Steak Dinner

Near the end of August, our Food & Beverage Director announced beef steak as a menu option for an entire week. The first available day, Thursday, August 27, was my birthday. Selecting a medium-rare steak, I asked for a “large portion,” indicating that it was a special occasion. The steak arrived as specified, with a baked potato, sour cream, and sautéed mushrooms. I looked forward to a tasteful dinner and selected special wines to accompany the meal.

Around 6 pm, Susan and I started dinner. After taking the first bite, however, the phone rang. “Step outside with your wife,” our neighbor asked me. “You must see this,” she added.

Interrupting the meal, we walked outside and were promptly greeted by several neighborhood couples singing “*Happy Birthday*.” I was moved, and we chatted with our friends for a while.

Returning home, I was ready to finish dinner. To my surprise, however, my plate was empty. Susan’s vegan Tofu plate was untouched.

“Am I losing my mind?” I wondered. “Yes, I’ve been forgetting things lately,” or so I thought until I saw the happy face of our dog—wagging her tail. She had eaten the rest of my steak, the sour-cream-covered baked potato, and the sautéed mushrooms!!! The plate was licked clean!

Feeling frustrated and hungry, I emailed our F&B Director the story. Even though he must have been home by that time, within 30 minutes, there was a knock at our door: One of our servers brought me another complete steak dinner!!!

Don’t we live in a wonderful place?



THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS AWARD

Presented by Consul General of Israel Dr. Andy David in honor of the late Anna (Besser) Valkar. Anna's son, Les Besser, will be accepting the award on her behalf.

Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to those who perished during the Holocaust, presents the Righteous Among the Nations award on behalf of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Persons recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations" are awarded a specially minted medal and a certificate of honor both bearing their name. Their name is also added to the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.



Anna (Besser) Valkar Anna Besser, the eldest of five siblings, was born on June 14, 1911, in Szekesfehervar, Hungary. In 1939 she became the housekeeper of a Jewish man who allowed her to move into his residence with her young son. She worked there for three years until Fascist laws forbade Jews to employ Christians. Sympathetic to her former employer and other Jews, she helped them obtain "letters of protection" from the consulates of Switzerland and Sweden, neutral nations.

As World War II raged on, the German army occupied Hungary and the Hungarian Nazi Party took control of the government. Anna, now living in her own apartment, helped Jews to escape persecution by giving them her own identification papers and those of her deceased family members. During the war's final months, she hid two elderly Jewish men in her small apartment, putting herself and her son at grave risk.

Anna continued to work in domestic service after the war. She raised her son and adopted her 12-year-old orphaned niece. After the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, her children escaped to Austria and immigrated to Canada. Anna remained in Budapest and visited her children and four grandchildren in the United States, where they eventually settled. Anna passed away in Budapest in 1993 at age 82, her son at her bedside.

