

**CANNED
ROADDUST**

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CANNED ROADDUST

Injera, balalaika and some other things

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Introduction

Children, especially boys, are very prone to dream about adventurous future professions such as engine driver, boat commander, or discoverer. It comes from the fact that man is born to have adventures, this is proven by what happened with our common ancestors in the Garden of Eden according to the Bible, as when something is unknown or forbidden it will not leave you in peace, even if it takes you into trouble.

I myself have been no exception, as soon as learned to read, I wanted to do so -- there was no TV, video, for me didn't even exist cheap movie theatres with a lot of fleas in them that were open for kids in the capital, as I have grown up in a village where there was only an open air movie theatre, even that only during summer, in winter what remained was the light of kerosene lamps for reading.

I have grown out tales except The Arabian Nights very soon, which had been written for adults in my opinion, and after that adventure stories and travel books became my main delicacies. I wouldn't have become anything else than one of those I listed above, weren't life so hard to them who haven't been born rich, well, life is not mild in any way, it is a closed cage for people of the lower layers of society, so, my fate has been written decisively. World literature discloses many cases of young people dreaming about interesting futures, who had to take such trades for themselves that have seemed dullness in itself.

My brother who was my senior by four years has left us in his childhood because of a fatal accident, and I have been sucked in by his long-dreamed would be, but never come-true, profession of mechanical engineer -- he had always had an extraordinary sense of technical things -- as if by a vacuum cleaner. My parents have ne-

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ver cared that I am very far from being another genius for technology, they only wanted me to become a mechanical engineer in place of my late brother -- that even had some attraction that time, today nobody is considered a human being who is no banking or IT professional.

Well, I haven't become either any skipper, not even a captain on a river boat, although I was working on river-boats as a machinist, or a discoverer, although I made trips to Africa and have seen animals and people not widely known to everyone, even less an engine driver. I have become a mechanical engineer and later also an economist. And, just the opposite as expected, this fact hasn't isolated me from adventures and opportunities to see the world, but helped me to fulfil my dreams of childhood.

Those who commit the stupidity of taking this book into their hands, what more, wanting to read it, I ask to excuse me, if they would not always find what they were looking for. It is similar to that when you ask for the bill in a Greek restaurant and find another sum written on it than you expected. I try to talk about events and things seen and experienced in foreign places not simply to report as in a diary, but to tell the essence of them in a distilled form. A great help is the fact in it that some of them are already decades apart. But this effect is balanced by the opportunity that a reader always has: he simply turns the pages to the collection of pictures and can see all in reality what he has read. I have had my photographic hobby since I was a teenager. The majority of my nearly four thousand photographs is color slides developed mainly by myself -- although some of them had so poor raw materials that they were not worth doing it, but I couldn't afford more -- in my dark room or developing tank.

I did my best to give a kind of description of the visited places beside pictures, but it is understandable, I hope, that also occurrences happening with me and my companions got their entries. Certain details do good even for historical snapshots as I didn't go to most countries or towns from my free will, but I was sent there officially by my employers. And always there was a fair, or on the

opposite, motive in the background. In the world everything is in connection, there is no need to prove it.

It is my hope that, in spite of all the drawbacks, the following account leaves more pleasant than unpleasant experiences in readers. Maybe, if the text is not considered good enough by everyone, the pictures can compensate for its shortages.

PART I

Chapter 1 Home Landscape

Before I began -- either from my will or led by my fate -- to make trips, my parents and events in history helped me to get into more distant corners of our country (the sizes of which I mean in the corresponding time). When I was three months old I got to the southeastern corner of Transsylvania by my father's customs officer job and the Munich II Treaty. Northern Transsylvania switched back to us by the treaty got its state officials from the mother country, so my father was assigned there too. It's unnecessary to say that what I know about that country and its inhabitants I haven't learned myself personally, as my whole family joined the flow of refugees before I became three, so I couldn't have any memory of the visited villages that time.

In 1947, when I was six, my father lost his job at the Gyöngyös office of customs authority that had been reorganized after the war. He had no alternative than move with his family to Fonyód on the southern shore of the lake Balaton, the living place of his relatives including several sisters and brothers. As we have been living there for nine years, affection for the "sea of Hungary" has been sucked up by me that time.

Those distant memories freshen up also the injustices at the beginning of the '50s that were most easily sensed in small villages in the country, of which mainly such things got through to me that my mother took me with her to the woods to collect fallen wood for the winter, or sometimes we had to pick up a little cooking oil by bread from the bottom of plates for a lunch -- at least there was oil and bread. However, an intellectual child could also sense that he was not accepted by the village kids for his being different. While they envied him for the easiness he could learn embraced by a family of broader than average education, they wanted to balance that dis-

advantage with their physical force or powerful connections, and not omitted a single opportunity to humiliate him.

From among my memories the most powerful are those storing the wonderful, arresting beauty of that country. The lake Balaton has a thousand faces, first of all that can be seen from the top of the high loess abyss on hot summer days, when the surface of water, green otherwise, reflects the pale sky; and when the sun is hiding behind clouds, the whole area becomes gray like a metallic plate, but it retains its shine as before. During fall, as two-foot waves are whipped up by the north-westerly wind, you feel only the force of wind up there, but with such an intensity that twigs thrown out over the precipice spring upwards and come back like boomerangs onto the head of the caster. The color of water remains dark gray below low-flying clouds of the same shade, and the line of waves following each-other in thirty to fifty feet in a regular pattern can be seen to the farther. The waves turn to white breakers nearing the flat shore. This phenomenon produces the wonderful gray quartz sand on this side of the lake. Alas, it is gone almost completely now that the lake has been locked into a concrete trough since the sixties; this time you can only smell rotten deposit, the sand stays at the bottom; earlier sand was let down by water that flew back empty and clean, lighter deposit made some more trips up and down and at last it landed there too as free prey for small living creatures.

So many things you could find there in such cool, windy autumn days. Mainly they have been mussels -- one species of them comes from petrified broken shells of small mussels resembling fallen hoofs of goats, they are called goat-claw -- and empty shells of tiny snails, but once I have found a badly damaged toy boat. It has been the first of my model boats in a long line. Then "Robinson Crusoe" and "Mystery Island" were fresh in my brain and I wanted to try, at least in miniature, how to build a boat. This first one I have repaired and enhanced in all ways and until our moving from the village it has been an item to decorate my room. He who decides for a walk along the shore in such a weather, may count on that nobody disturbs him until he gets home, or turns into the pub to take some spirit-warmer.

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Those who live on the lake cannot avoid taking part in excursions, as a child, with fellow pupils, as an adult, with his friends or his family. This involves mainly boarding a boat and crossing the lake by it. Well that other shore! What a fine sight! The extinct volcanoes in a long line. Finest of them all is the coffin-shaped hill called Badacsony. On an average day in the summer or early fall the line of hills is tinted deep blue by the mist rising from the surface of water, the woods, vineyards and wineries -- called in our language squeezing huts -- cannot be seen clearly. But, when an anti-cyclone sweeps the vapour away, it looks as if the hills had waded the flat water of the lakeshore to come over to this side, you have the feeling, you can touch them. The four miles between you and them dissolves. You can see all clearly from the white boat at the wharf puffing up black smoke as it starts its 20-minute trip to Fonyód, to the tiny sailboats and angler boats, to the fine gardens of the well-to-do people a little higher on the slope and, even higher on the hillside, the huge vineyards, their "squeezing huts" having survived many centuries in the same style, eventually turned into living quarters.

The original forest of oak, beech and many other species that covers the hilltop as well as the collar of 300 feet below that can be seen as crystal in such a fine weather. Even people walking on the dirt roads are seen unmistakable, you can even tell, who they are, if you know them.

According to geologists, the hill of Badacsony has been created by a natural, however rare phenomenon: three nearby volcanoes in a line had so many lava eruptions that the solidifying magma filled the gaps completely up, only the three humps on the top shows you where the original cones stood. The hilly landscape from Szigliget to Tihany has its many volcanic cones in a rugged line, from Southwest to Northeast. The finest vineyards lie on the slopes going out to the lake Balaton on the south-eastern side. On the other side the climate is not so favourable, the wine got from there is not so tasteful. The solidifying lava at the north-eastern end of the hill has built wonderful stone columns, they look as giant humps of pan-

cakes. From his nature man saw in them less the natural beauty than money: large amounts of the basalt has been quarried out to use it at railway beds. I used to hear the sound of explosion several times a day when I was a child. This time the remaining basalt is in safety, since 1964 there is no quarrying any more.

There is another lava park on the other end of the oval hill, but there has been no quarry there, here stand a high stone cross. You can see it from the other shore in clear weather. The walk up to the hilltop is a good exercise, sometimes you have to climb steps.

The southern shore of the lake is low county, there are only three hills there, two of them in Fonyód, the third one in Balatonboglár. The hills in Fonyód make a really good impression on you only, when you are sailing on the lake and the sun is going low. The double hills are well illuminated and that on the right side shows you the white loess wall. It is brilliant white then. Otherwise both hills are partly covered by woods. On hot summer days it is most pleasant to sit on benches along walkways in the woods.

The two hills in Fonyód had a guardian role some thousand years ago. They safeguarded the entrance of the narrow bay opening from the lake to the Southeast, until it became locked and separated from the main body by the silt driven there by the dominant north-westerly wind. The isolated independent pond with no feed or drain were made first wetland, swamp by the natural development process of lakes, then bog and moor at last. Although the last drop of water has been pumped out, this land is still called Nagyberek, i.e. The Big Moor. When I was a child, people used to produce peat, as it was still in a bog state. The ponds left open after peat production looked like filled with red wine instead of water. Then, as the water level in the lake Balaton usually dropped in the summer season, because water from the lake fed the canal of Sió, being the waterway for boats up and down between the Balaton and river Danube, the red peat juice drained into the lake to the last drip. Today the moor is a fine agricultural land.

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The shores around the lake Balaton is fine for recreation, but only in the summer season. The inhabitants, however, live there during winter too. In winter it is a very boring place, except the ice of the lake. When I was living there, people used it for fishing under it, also reed has been cut above the hard ice surface with machines, not mentioned the special ice-sledge -- called in Hungarian a "wooden dog" -- that looks like a high stool from grandfather's dining room attached to a sledge-chassis and driven by long rods with nails in the end. Well, it can reach a considerable speed, until its driver is lucky enough not to find a wide gap in the ice. Ice has also been used for storage for the summer. Actually, the lake Balaton is no hit during winter. Life is not easy, either. The glossy surface lets the air flow freely, always there is a strong wind, and it is very cold when temperature is below zero. You find it hard to tell where is water and where is land, it looks alike.

During my years of life on the lake Balaton the traffic of trains was not very dense, although the village lies on a magistral line between Budapest and Nagykanizsa, even a side-line starts from here to Kaposvár, the seat of Somogy county. This is almost completely true today, trains are not really numerous. There was only a short period during the 60's, when, if you missed a train, you had better hurry in the refreshment room with your beer, so as not to repeat the mistake with the next one. Well there is one difference, it is not the same to have there steam engines like those in my time there, or Diesel engines. Nowadays, that electrifying is complete on that line, there go up-to-date electric trains to my old place and further. Of course, it has developed into a town of twelve thousand from the three thousand inhabitants earlier.

Fonyód's upward climb began with its becoming a district seat in 1950, the village has beaten the neighbouring Balatonboglár at it, the eternal rival. District, as a notion in administration in our country has vanished already, but the population and living standard of the settlement has been rising until today. Beside the eight-class elementary school, I have learned in, there is a secondary school too. Good Luck for people in Fonyód as before!

Of all the other settlements on the lake Balaton, although I know most of them, I became acquainted with Siófok best. Nearly one and a half year I have spent in the comprehensive secondary school "Perczel Mór" there during 1955/56. The town is frequently named also the capital of the Balaton, but this title is more apt for Keszthely at the lower end of the lake. Siófok has rather become lately the capital of another activity, namely that of the underground society of organised crime.

I have been living in Budapest since I was fifteen. About this metropolis it is very hard to tell a new detail to anybody, and I don't want to rob the precious time of my readers by listing my impressions. The only opinion worth expressing is that the city has developed as much in this 40-plus years I spent here as during its whole history. Alas, it brought with itself the negative sidekicks too. One example of these changes only: I have lived with my wife in a small rented room for six years at the start of our marriage; during that time or rather the last three years of it our neighbourhood turned a living estate with prefabricated concrete blocks from the suburban district of one-family garden houses; we moved then into our own flat also built up during that three years; it was all so new that public works involved only our living estate of four-storied blocks called the KISZ (Hungarian Youth Association) estate of the eighteenth district of Budapest. It grew up beside the so called State Estate built in 1941 for the Hungarian fugitives coming home to the mother country from Transsylvania following a twenty-year long isolation. On its other side there was a large meadow, and still farther the planted municipal woods. Part of the woods was occupied by a clay hole producing raw material for the brick factory nearby. The factory is gone, on its place stands now the out-patients' clinic.

Today the woods is framed and penetrated by roads. Part of the meadow has been wetland, almost a swamp with frogs and sedge and reed. A big bullfrog was freed there, which was given to my son by a sarcastic fishmonger for a "living barometer". The only hitch has been that it was no green frog. This time the same place keeps my cabinet with the PC on it, as it is my employer's office in one of

the buildings of Gloriette estate.

Parádsasvár, a small village in one of the valleys of the Mátra mountain is the place where I became acquainted a short time after my moving to Budapest. I was 16 then. The highest place I met so far was the hill Badacsony. Mátra is my favourite of all domestic mountains still. For the trip I had to thank to one of my aunts. She spent her summers usually in small country settlements, she had a constant correspondence with her acquaintances in the country. That time, in the 50's, it was not very expensive to spend two weeks in a lost place, and she did it actually. She wanted company and for this reason she took me and another young boy there. For the owners of the house it was a lucky surplus income and they provided us with fine Hungarian country food.

The village lies near to the town of Paráds where there is a sanatorium for illnesses of the digestive tract. In the nearby runs to the surface the spring Csevice, the healing water that is used by the sanatorium too. Since ancient times the water has been everyone's property, but now it is monopolised by the state sanatorium, the spring is caged up and its product is sold on place and bottled in the whole country. Locals get bonuses for such a quantity of water they cannot consume all covered. The water has a little carbon dioxide too, but its chief characteristic is the sulphurous compound unbearable for anybody trying it first time. Something like old beer mixed with rotten eggs. Anyway, you can get used to it step-by-step, just like to nicotine. At last you don't want to drink ordinary water, it has neither taste, nor smell.

There are two attractions of the neighbouring country beside the spring. One of them is the Mátra with the odd majestic forest. You can bear the cool air in the shade under the giant trees even in hot summer days. Vegetation withholds also moist, even during the driest months mushrooms grow there. And when they grow almost everywhere, here you don't have to search for them, they tease you from the roadside. Only here could I find emperor agaric that had been the favourite for emperor Claudius. Mátra remained the wild-

est and most romantic land in the country in spite of the fact that two big towns are quite near, Gyöngyös and Eger.

There is one more attraction worth visiting. That is the glass factory. I saw it first in the '50s with the original technology present, all products were made manually, or rather *pneumally* (I mean by lungs). Some years later everything was modernised, but their traditional supply needed manual production. So they returned to manual methods, but on a much higher level, on the conditions of today. Almost all of the factory's products go abroad, hardly anything remains here, it is the old song: abroad there are customers with a greater buying capacity, even artistic handwork can be paid for.

More than ten years later I managed to spend some time in the Mátra again. I have got a bonus from the trade union and went there with my wife for recreation, including a lot of kilometres on excursions by foot. Following those days we made some more trips there, our rented room had little power to keep us home. Some development we have seen, but the forest hasn't changed anything.

As I mentioned already, the village lies near to Parád, where there is a sanatorium within the castle in the old mansion. An unequalled sight is that of the stable and the village-museum. In the village there is even a wood-cutting artist of their own, he is Joaquin the Carpenter and his works are uniquely rustic.

Well, as I have reported, the lake Balaton has a special cache in my heart of all natural phenomena and geographical places, but in my youth before finishing my studies at the university I went frequently with my close friend Zoltán to the shore of another small lake, that of Velence situated around halfway between Budapest and the lake Balaton. Even later, such trips were possible for us with my family, as there were summer houses on the shore belonging to our relatives. This small pond in a later phase of development for natural bodies of water is no match for Balaton, of course, but it has some advantages compared to its sister. One of these is the proximity of the capital for those coming here only for a day's beaching. More than that is the more abundant fish for anglers.

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During my student years, in 1961 I decided to be a member of the Hungarian Youth Association (KISZ). As a new member, I was drawn in at once into a building camps program that summer. Some years earlier the state started that movement and it became a widely accepted youth program to that time. The first such camp was organised in 1958 with the aim of draining the swamp Hanság in the west of the country to gain good agricultural lands (recently the process has been turned back, as no good land has been gained and some species of rare birds and mammals disappeared from our country). Another camp has been organised for the groundwork of the Vác cement factory. My opportunity has been to take part in the digging of the groundwork of the would-be chemical works in Berente.

On the opposite to my expectations, life in the camp has not been unpleasant. I knew physical work, I did it sometimes during my summer vacations, and company was excellent. It was a rather long program, it lasted four weeks in July. Our camp was exclusively for boys, girls in such camps had to do easy work.

Berente was a microscopic-size village at the town of Kazincbarcika. Rather, it has been part of the town in the administrative sense. Its landscape, the valley of the small river Sajó, is beautiful, although at that time we could feel already the effect of the would-be large complex. Anyway, I can advise it to those who like hilly country with some woods.

The river Danube has been keeping me a captive of its wonderful, wild beauty, since I have known it. Alas, today its environment is so contaminated that the river cannot fulfil the traditional expectations for recreation, sports or fishing. Forty or fifty years ago however, the situation was quite different, or, rather, it has not been so widely known, what contamination means, how great danger threatens those trying to take their time in a dirty environment. Following directly the camping in Berente, I spent a month working as a machinist on board the passenger steamboat "Kossuth". This employment came with my drawing a scholarship fee from the ship-

ping line MAHART. This month I recollect a little later.

I left this job at the end of August that year and, as I still have around ten days to the beginning of my next, fifth semester. Accidentally, my friend, Zoltán was also free to come with me, we decided to board a boat on the river and steam to the town of Baja to spend some days and nights in our tent in the fine early September weather swimming, sunning. For easier movement I took my bicycle with us.

It has been a very pleasant week except one thing. One morning we discovered that during the night someone stole my bike. It was confusing as around dawn, when I went out to relieve, it was still on its place. It was gone forever.

Otherwise, as I mentioned it, the holiday has been pleasant. There is a backwater canal called Sugovica making an isle near to the centre of the town, it is named after our national poet Sándor Petőfi. This backwater is in connection with the complex canal system, which was created after the Freedom Fight of 1848/49 and later, during the Monarchy, to connect the small settlements along the Danube and further to the river Tisza by waterways. Sugovica itself has been used to this day as wintering place for boats, it needs a lot of cleaning by dredges. As the water flows only with a moderate speed, the sediment is very fine sand. At the time we were there the bottom was freshly dredged, the shore was covered by many thousands of cubic feet of fine sand. In the mild weather this sand became warm, it looked like a beach on the South Seas. We called it the Sahara for its extent and clean white sand.

It is almost impossible to recognise the same place today. I had the chance to see it some decades after my pleasant stay when business brought me there again. Neither the Sahara, nor the virgin state that I had experienced there. The isle is a busy recreation centre of the town today.

Of the mountainous landscapes of the country my next favourite location is the mountain Bükk. Alas, I don't know the whole mount-

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ain, it would have needed more time than I had, or I would have to move to Miskolc to live there. It is the same you can tell about the Louvre: you must work in that institution to learn all that is important about it. Otherwise it is an empty boast that somebody knows it.

The two factors that made me travelling in the country possible were my first employer after getting my diploma and my first flat after marriage. MAHART provided its employees with the opportunity of cheap travel by train and river boats, while my rented room at the same time has not been attractive, we left it alone as long as we could. That time our country had few good quality railway lines, the only such line (with a final stop that could be considered a fitting target) has been that for Miskolc. The Lillafüred Express took us there in less than two hours. Miskolc in itself is no interesting town, but it has the nearby resorts of Miskolc-Tapolca and Lillafüred. The latter was our favourite excursion aim. A narrow-gauge railway took us up to the Grand Hotel (a trade union recreation home at that time), we got out there, as we generally made only one-day excursions in order to save accommodation costs.

The landscape surrounding Lillafüred lake can offer programs for some hours, beside the visit of three caves nearby. But if you have time for only one of them, that should be the one called Szeleta where the ancient man had his residence (by the latest findings he has not been our ancestor, he belonged to the Neanderthal branch, and that has not been our race). On the backward trip it is worth walking down to the next stop, and catch the narrow-gauge train only there. The path is going through a wonderful original forest of beech. Even without the prospective mushroom booty, the experience is worth doing it. We stand there as if being in the Cathedral of Cologne. The silence can be heard, it is composed of a million little noises. An everlasting experience.

Most people keep it very important to learn as much as possible about the world, but at the same time they neglect their own home country. That is a mistake, you have to maintain the right balance

and get into acquaintance with the unfamiliar places of your birth-place too. Exactly that I did together with my family in 1984. Our son was a seventh grade schoolboy at the time and we took him with ourselves to show him the beauties of our country. First we went to the Hortobágy National Park. Early morning we caught a train to Füzesabony on the same track that goes to Miskolc, then changed to the Hortobágy. No Hungarian man can be free of the influence of this plain. This sense can originate in our past, in ancient times before our ancestors settled the land. Their life had belonged to vast grassy plains and nomadic livestock raising. Although many centuries has gone since that time, the magic of our Great Plain is still existing. This landscape can offer you unmatched experiences. Perhaps it would be the same, if there were no buildings on it. But, as it is today, the well-known symbols of the country make a Hungarian even more touched.

We took lunch in the famous wayside inn then visited all the museums available. After seeing the herd of gray cattle -- a special kind of ancient Hungarian cattle famous for its low-fat meat and long horns -- and the Nine-hole Bridge we returned home the same way.

In the same year we made a trip to the Aggtelek stalactite cave that is found in the north-eastern corner of our country. The night we have spent in a local tourist hostel. The visit in the cave has been an excellent recreation not only for the child, but also for us. Besides, we could see places that we had known only from books and the TV.

Some decades ago the environment of the cave has been no far-away location, but following the end of World War I the new border was drawn in the proximity and its relative distance from the capital has grown since. It is hard to get there from Budapest even by car in a way that the return trip could be accomplished by evening. We haven't tried it either. Our trip consisted of good train, poor train and coach until we arrived. The poor train was drawn by a small steam engine and contained only three cars.

The cave itself is such an attraction not to be described in short.

Canned road dust

Everyone had better see it in person. Advisable to go there neither in summer nor in winter, because in summer you would catch a cold in the cave, in winter you can carry your warm cloths in hand. A cave should be visited in spring or in autumn, as the temperature of the air within and outside is almost equal. Even then people sensitive of high humidity should avoid this visit. In the cave the air humidity is very high. Sometimes, however, you take some kinds of extra hardness on yourself to make a sentimental journey.

In case you afford more time to visit the surrounding country you can spare some time for a walk in the forested hillsides. That is also a fine experience, especially in autumn, when mushrooms grow. It makes a challenge in itself for someone seeking adventures.

Sopron is the domestic town that I have known only by tales and books. I had had a relative there, who had invited me every time we had met in the capital, but any time, when I had tried to take advantage of those invitations -- which must have been necessary to go there for the place lying inside the border zone with Austria --, accidentally the time had not been fit for them. At last in 1986 I got a trade union voucher on my working place and I could spend two weeks there. The border zone was still existing and it prevented my son to try his fishing skills in the Lake Fertő. Admission he could have got only in his living place, but we didn't return for that to Budapest. Even the lake was out-of-reach for us without permit.

I didn't have to be disappointed about my ideas about the town. It cannot be characterised otherwise as a mixture of the ancient Hansa cities and the Alpine mountains. The town covers a considerable area, for this reason I advise all to visit it by car, however, the city buses can take you everywhere, even if they come a little rarely. We have been walking a lot as it is the best way to get acquainted with an unknown place.

The iron curtain was proverbial at that time. Well, there were big holes on it already. In the prettiest spot of the city the frontier guards still had there barracks, but we could go into the area shown as a

closed one on the map, when we missed a path. I hope that in some years, when we will be a member of the EU, that country can lose its importance politically, and it will serve it very well.

Chapter 2 Danube

Esztergom to Mohács

At the end of the second year during my university time I had to choose my specialisation. Earlier, when I had spoken about it -- shipbuilding has always been my goal --, fellow-students had been laughing at my simple-mindedness: they had said, about half of the 400 boys and girls had wanted the same. One day towards the end of my 2nd year, when I was just placing an application for some financial help in the dean's office, the lady questioned me about my plans. To solve my problem she suggested to go to the national shipping company and to sign a so-called scholarship agreement. At that time our economy was called socialist, but actually it had a lot of feudal characters in itself, among others there were no jobless, instead of it there was a shortage of workforce. It had become fashionable for companies to get some employees with high education by giving them scholarship at the university and binding them for as many years as they received the money.

I have done as she said and so my place as a would-be naval architect has been secured.

This summer has been a very busy time for me. Shortly after returning from the Berente camp I got a job on a river passenger steam-boat as a surplus machinist. It has been my first time to live on a vessel. I have got a small single cabin with an overhead spare bed that had been broken. The boat has been named after the leader of our freedom fight "Kossuth". My first job on a boat has formed my mind on a mass scale. A boat is a complete world, but it is so compact, everybody knows everything about everyone else.

The boat has been a pleasant one, built in 1913 in a shipyard still existing that time in '61. It has been a typical river steam-boat with side paddle-wheels and a big gallery as wide as the wheels and

meeting the lines of the hull at both ends. The hull housed the cabins of the crew-members ahead, the passenger cabins astern and the engine room and boilers amidships with large built-in fuel tanks. On the main deck there was the gallery all around, the restaurants in front and the common passenger room aft. In the gallery the cabins of the officers, the galley and the shower rooms have been situated.

There was the so-called promenade deck at the next level up, a vast open space in the front and the back. From midship to the front there stood the bridge, behind it the upper shaft of the engine room with skylights, and on both sides a big apartment, one for the captain, one for the studio of the loudspeaker system. Her funnel was enormous and could have been lowered during passing under bridges.

The boilers were still the original flame-tube types, very easily serviceable. The ship's engine had three cylinders and after five minutes it could have been handled by a child of 10. The only unbearable thing has been heat. Sometimes the temperature grew above 125 degrees F. Noise has not been great, we could speak in a normal tone when in full speed.

I have met some very kind people among the crew and the officers. The captain was a true gentleman. His manner and character could have secured him a pass into any clubs in England. The chief machinist was of a special type. He was fat and his temper as flammable as gasoline. But he was a kind man and could not have done any harm. During the first week I have done some things wrong because of my inexperience. He has always been angry and used rough expressions, but after that he has never been unkind and taught me about all details of the trade.

The deputy chief machinist has been a small man and he looked very ugly. He has been a good example that the majority of women are hare-brained and without good taste. Ugly and conceited he was, he has had the greatest number of love affairs of all the men I

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have met in my life. No woman could avoid his courting, and even his wife, a good-looking and fair person has not left him for his adventures. I found only one property of his to write on the positive side and it was his skills in the trade. He had started his career at 15 and there have not been boats on the Danube he could not have anything to say about.

There have been two ordinary machinists, a young man and an elder one. The young's wife was pregnant and he left this job soon after to be able to stay home with his family, and took the job of a refrigerator mechanic on the company's ships. The elder man has been a very simple, but really good person. He could also tell me anything about the trade and knew what to do in different situations, but his theoretical knowledge has been next to nothing.

There were some unpleasant people, too, but I do not remember them very well.

The boilers have been heated by mazout, the firemen had a much better work than before, when fuel had been coal. The only unpleasant condition of the boiler room that remained: it has always been even hotter than the engine room.

The passenger steam-boats of the company have been doing two different missions. From the capital to the southern border town of Mohács they were passenger and produce transporters. At that time the capital was the industrial and commercial centre of the country to such an extent that there was only one wholesale market in the country, at the southern part of the capital. From all over the country produce has been carried there and along the Danube the state farms and newly established private farms loaded their vegetables and fruit onto these "market-woman" boats. The upriver trips have been much slower than the down-river ones, not only because of the current, the upriver stops have lasted more than one hour at some settlements, there was so much load to be placed on the promenade deck. Sailors liked these trips: their wallet became thicker as loading has been done by them and market-women paid in cash.

Along the river south of the capital the traditional dress was still usual at that time. A big part of the population has been of German origin and the women carried on themselves a lot of under-skirts. Some had more than ten. They looked much fatter than they really were. We called them parachuters as the uppermost skirt took the form of an open parachute.

It has been funny to see these market-women take their nap. They arranged their sleeping place on top of their full sacks. As they lay down, half of their skirts served as bed-sheet, the remaining ones as cover. Not all of them spent the night this way. Some of them had enough money to take a comfortable cabin and paid to the sailors to guard their goods. Today's millionaires in this country began their original capital accumulation that time.

On these routes most passengers have been ordinary poor people, who took the boat instead of train, as it has been cheaper. To sit through the 17-hour upriver trip has not been very easy. Even in down-river it took 13 hours. Down-river the boat left at 8 p.m. and arrived at 9 a.m. the next day. Upriver she left at noon and arrived at the wholesale market at 5 a.m. the next morning. At the terminal she reported at 8 to 9 a.m.

The other assignment for the boats have been excursions. To the north from the capital there are two towns on the riverside that are famous for their historic sites and ruins. Saturdays and Sundays during the summer season have always been excursion days. The boats were leaving at 8 a.m. and back at 2 p.m. from the other end. The trip took 4 hours upriver, 3 down-river.

The Danube has always attracted me and this feeling has grown even stronger during the years, or rather only months, I have spent on the river as a boatman. He who has read Mark Twain's book about his similar period spent on the Mississippi river can have some idea about the beauty and dangers of a great flow. The boat itself has contributed to this addiction of mine by turning my readings in childhood into reality at least in part. But actually it is

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the river that acquires an independent personality, and it becomes a true partner of man during life on a boat.

When I got on board the "Kossuth", or, as boatman say, "shipped in", after my tiring work of the first day done with the kind assistance of Uncle Mike, the elder machinist, I nested in my microscopic cabin as a practised camping tent-living man and tried to sleep. However, it has been made hard by two characteristic phenomena of the boat. One of them was the unmistakable putrid smell of the water. No wonder, this smell could come in to me through the porthole in the hull of the boat placed a little above the waterline, which was necessary to be kept open for the small volume of the cabin. And I can declare that Danube water has a very strong smell. My nose is especially good, smells disturb me very much, for this reason that first night has almost been sleepless for me.

The other has been the sound of water. At the riverside in Budapest the speed of the current is 2 to 3 mph at most, but the Danube sending its flow along the steel hull of the boat has been loud enough for me. Later I became accustomed to both things, a little more to the smell, as the porthole had to be kept closed during the trips, so as not to let in five cubic feet of water into the cabin from the wave by another passing boat. Noise I didn't notice when the boat lay on the pontoon, and during trips something even helped me sleep fast. To understand this it is better to have a small lecture of physics. The boat weighs some hundred tons, the moving parts of the steam engine only some tons. The pistons have diameters of one and a half to three feet. When their mass, together with that of the unbalanced crankshaft, moves fore once in a second, then comes back again, the centre of gravity follows them within some inches. This shift moves the whole boat in the opposite direction at the rate determined by the ratio of masses, perhaps by some tens of an inch. Being in a linear motion at a constant speed, the boat has therefore also an alternative swinging at the same time. For this reason every object not fixed specially, including crew members sleeping in transverse positions to the longitudinal axis of the boat, and taking over the linear motion, but not applying to the swinging

effect, will make a similar vibration related to the boat. The best cradle in the world. I have never slept nearly so fast as there in that bunk. The mild monotonic noise even made this effect stronger.

I have more pleasant memories beside good sleep from that month. In summer the Danube has generally a medium water level, except in extreme years, about which I still have more to say. In spring the river swells usually eight to ten feet following snow-melt and rains, and in autumn, before the regular cold-season precipitation, water-level is the lowest. At that time buoys (in boatman jargon floats) multiply on the surface, captains stick to the paths rigorously, they never use shortcuts as otherwise. And the radio station Petöfi from Budapest uses more often the expression "passing of towages is prohibited".

At my boatman time the Danube gave place for a busy sport life. There still existed the traditional boat-houses (pontoon-like bases for rowing boats) at sports facilities along the riverside in the ownership of independent clubs. Membership charge was mainly symbolic, and they were open for every young person, their managers still remembered the banal truth that every person is growing older by one year annually, consequently, replacement is necessary. In good weather kayaks and rowing boats were swarming on the river, during week-ends shipping was almost impossible, especially in the so called Small Danube (the west fork at the Szentendre island). In swimming season also swimmers were a nuisance, even when they knew that paddle-wheels can be very dangerous. They neglected even that risk. Sometimes drastic means have been used: the oil-pump was filled up with used oil and they got a shot from it.

Every mile on the Danube is different. A boatman needs several years to get acquainted with the river, a certain section must be passed many times, until he can store the information about the whole section in his brain, every item of it connected to a given event. I myself have never had the opportunity for this, but I can remember many details, and they are mainly pleasant memories.

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When you leave the capital downwards, you first pass Csepel island on its right side, first of all the opening of the wintering harbour, then nothing for long, only the giant works, of which today almost nothing is in operation. On the right side you can see Budafok and Tétény. If there is a westerly wind, you had better to close all portholes: the smell of the pig-farm can be sensed from as far as 12 miles. Or, better to say, could be sensed that time. Today no pigs, no smell.

On the left the lower end of Csepel island is left behind, some more hours and you reach the wintering harbour in Dunaújváros (it means "new town on the Danube", poor settlement, the original name, Dunapentele was not good enough after the death of Stalin, when it had to be renamed from Sztálinváros, it had to be given a new name). We reached this town during night by the time-table, I found the lights of the town on the high bank attractive. Steaming farther downwards you cross under a bridge spanning the current, the upper one of two only under the capital within the country. There follow some stops during the night still, but they take only minutes each, only a few passengers get in or out. At dawn the boat reaches Érsekcsanád then Baja. Here always there are some mail items, or private cargo to unload, it can take as much as ten minutes. At the next stop, Dunaszekcső, it is already broad daylight. At last Mohács, that time it was the last frontier, nobody was allowed to enter the border zone without special permit. Mohács lies on the western bank of the river.

Mohács was a sizeable country town at that time. Since those years the border zone has gone, and besides the tourist attractions built on the former battle-field has helped to raise the number of visitors. I have not been very interested in that town, during the several trips made in that market-woman boat I looked around only once. Rather I remained on the boat to help oil the engines during the three hours of waiting.

Exactly at noon the steamboat left for the capital. While downwards its speed to the bank was almost twelve miles per hour as the

nine miles per hour speed to water was supplemented by the velocity of current, upriver our advance was hindered by the oncoming current, we couldn't make more than seven miles hourly. My watch has been timed from 4 p.m. to midnight, upriver it meant from Baja to Dunaföldvár. Tremendous quantities of produces have been transported from riverside settlements to the wholesale market by the market-women, for this reason several stops lasted more than an hour each. The riverbank that was well-recognisable in daylight, hid in darkness during loading, you could only distinguish the pontoon and the office on the bank. The boxes and sacks have been carried up to the boat-deck, after a time the whole upper level resembled an overstuffed store-room.

At midnight I finished my watch and went to sleep. Well, my rest didn't last long generally, around five we reached the whole-sale market, and the noise of unloading woke me up.

In some weeks I have got accustomed to the life on a boat completely. Anyway, it got to an end for me, as my practice expired and I had to go back to go on my studies in the university. Only, before that the "Sahara" in Baja was waiting for us with my friend Zoltán.

My first trip to the Lower-Danube

In July 1962 I boarded the tug “Esztergom” on a trip down-river to the Danube delta. It has been my first trip abroad. At the ship-ping company a special group of the personnel department has dealt with the delegation of crew members to different boats, tugs or barges. Our man for the engine room crew has been Uncle Louis. He has not been old, but his character has made him uncle for even the oldest. His fate has fixed him to the desk: during the final days of 1956 he lost one of his legs below knee from a rifle shot as he had been standing in a queue for bread. He had got an artificial limb, but he could not go back to his loved engine room any more.

As a student with company scholarship I had come to him a year before and he had sent me to the boat “Kossuth”. Everyone had to begin with domestic routes. After that have come trips down-river from our country to the delta. To be assigned to a ship that was going upriver to Germany has had its preconditions. My turn has been to be assigned on a down-river trip. The tug has been waiting in the backwater harbour of Dunaújváros 60 miles down-river from the capital. In such cases, if there was no maintenance or repair activity on the boat between two trips, there remained on board only one man from the deck crew and one machinist. Nobody could ever forecast where the next trip would be, so, these people were spending their time with relaxation.

I have taken the train to the town and after arriving there I walked to the harbour. My suitcase has been heavy and I became tired after the 2-mile walk. The tug lay there secured by two ropes at the head and stern, as well as by two poles, and I entered it through the boarding plank. Everything was deserted, I called loudly into that nothing:

“Anybody here?”

Some minutes later a small, but broad-shouldered man with a kind face appeared at the head of the forecastle stairs. He asked:

“How can I help you?”

“I have been assigned here as a machinist.”

“You must wait some minutes. The chief machinist is at home and the other machinist, your colleague is out in that boat with a girl.” He made a gesture toward a small paddle barge in 300 feet from us. It also looked deserted.

The man called out:

“Hooligan!”

From the boat the head of a blond young man popped up.

“What do you want?”

“Your colleague has arrived.”

There was an unintelligible grumble and a girl was sitting up putting her bra on place. They paddled to the tug. The mood of the young man mirrored his disappointment for being disturbed. I thought he would not like me and I guessed it right. His name was Julius.

It became soon clear that the girl was a woman married not long ago to another man, but, as she was 16 she did not find much difference between lying with one man or another. I did not bother as it was not my business. He showed me to our cabin in the rear end of the hull below deck. My bed has been under the deck at the side of the ship. If I wanted to stand up, I could only do it at the middle part of the cabin that was already inside the deckhouse.

The deck above our cabin, the winch-deck, has been situated at most four feet above the main deck, the side wall between the two decks carried portholes for the illumination of all such cabins.

This boat has been a typical sample of Diesel-tugs on the Danube that time. With a length of about 130 feet, beam (breadth) around 24 feet and a 6-foot draught this tugboat had an approximate displacement of 300 to 400 tons. Its side at the main frame was about nine feet high (measured between its flat bottom and the main deck at the hull). The living quarter for the engine room crew at the

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stern must have been designed partly above the main deck, just to have enough standing room inside, as the bottom has been raised there to make place for the propulsion screws. The main deck has been left intact at other places, the deckhouse has been situated directly on it. With one exception, and that was the engine shaft inside the engine room. The deckhouse occupied around 80 percent of boat length. On the head the deck was raised by two feet on a length of about ten feet, it supported the winch and the small mast for the white position lamp and the flag of the country where the boat was sailing. This raised deck was connected to the main deck by stairs on both sides. Behind it there followed an open section of the main deck on a length of five feet, and there was the front bulkhead of the deckhouse. In the head, under the raised deck, the quarter of sailors was situated. They numbered 5 to 6 persons, depending on the kind of trip for the boat. In that very limited space bunks could not have been mounted longitudinally, the lines of the hull determined their position. The lower ones have not been under the upper ones, only below them.

The front bulkhead of the deckhouse went by one level higher, as it made also the front bulkhead of the bridge. The bridge was situated on the boat-deck, one level above the main deck. It also went out on both sides to the outer limit of the boat, although the covered wheelhouse was as wide as the deckhouse itself (on both sides along the deckhouse there was a strip of free deck of three feet). At more difficult manoeuvres the officer went out to the side to have a better outlook. Inside the deckhouse at the front the canteen of officers, otherwise the saloon, was situated, behind it smaller rooms, then the engine room. That was the biggest place with a large volume of air on the boat. Vertically it went up to the boat-deck from the bottom occupying two complete levels. It was at least half as long as the boat itself. About two feet above bottom the engine room had a steel plate flooring supported by steel structures and made of separate plates to be taken up anywhere for access. The largest space was taken by the two main engines driving the propulsion shaft systems with the screws.

The main engines came up to above the main deck. They had a piston size of 15 inches, with a height of two feet. There were large thrust bearings to carry the thrust of the screws more than ten tons each. Of course, both shaft systems contained more than one shaft connected by considerable couplings. The switchboard was situated at the lower level, it took the complete front bulkhead. At the hull on both sides a watertight compartment has been constructed called well. They have been open at the bottom, but could be closed by the bilge valves. The two wells were connected with a large-size pipe, every items of the equipment, main and auxiliary engines for cooling, water supply, fire extinguishing pump, etc. were getting water from there. The boat provided its crew with all the comforts of a town as water or energy supply beside its main function. This is the reason, why so many small pumps and other devices were built in along the two sides of the hull and on the steel floor.

As a tugboat it had its most important piece of equipment mounted to a rigid foundation on the winch-deck above the stern living quarter. It was to carry the force needed to tow the barges. Its drum kept the 650 feet of the steel towing cable (one and a half inch diameter). The cable was drawn out by the thrust of the screws when necessary, but to draw it back again it was the job of a large electric motor. I have to write some lines about the mentioned machines and devices, this is why I considered it necessary to introduce them.

J. showed me everything in the engine room and in the two days before we left to take the barges and, having arranged them behind the tug, to begin our down-river trip, I have learned all needed. But in that two days I had a funny accident that made it necessary for me to return to the capital for a fast visit.

In the morning following my boarding, my colleague, his lover, her friend -- another young girl that has been a maiden yet -- and me, went to see the whole harbour around from the paddle boat. In the middle of the bay the girls made a fuss, the boat tilted and I fell into the water. There would have been no problem had I taken off

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my glasses as usually before swimming. But, as it came suddenly, my glasses remained on the bottom of the bay under 20 feet of water. In the muddy bottom it has been impossible to find them.

I had carried glasses since when I was 9. Beginning with a minus half diopter it soon became minus 6.5 and 7.5. Without my glasses I could not do my work on the tug. I hurried to the station, took the next train and by noon I reached the optical shop selected for urgent service. I have chosen the cheapest frame to make my money cover the expenses. As I did not have time to go to the doctor for a prescription I had to pay full price. By late afternoon I had got my new glasses and arrived to the tug before sunset.

This tug had been built in the year 1941 in Linz, Austria -- part of Germany that time -- and had two five-cylinder two-stroke Sulzer Diesel engines for propulsion. Her screws have been situated normally below the stern in two half tunnels within Kort-rings. The rings were fixed to the hull and for steering she had a set of three parallel moving steering blades. When I first saw the engines I counted 6 cylinders.

“The sixth one is no working cylinder”, laughed J., “it is the compressor for the air system.”

It was new for me. The year before on the steam engine it was very easy to put it into motion: you would let the steam flow into the cylinder at the position to start. The Diesel engine is a closed unit you cannot see which of its cylinders are prone to start fore and which aft. There is an automation to start it: you decide in which direction to turn the screws and you shift a lever to the appropriate position, front or rear. Then compressed air would flow into the cylinder on the starting position and, as it is turned away, air is blowing into the next one coming to the right place. Having started the engine by air, you shift the lever to the mark of full acceleration until the engine gets enough fuel, then back to the proper place to adjust the speed required. I have learned it very quickly.

The equipment of the tug also contained two auxiliary engines

coupled to generators. The bigger one with four cylinders was started by air and the smaller two-cylinder one by a starter cranking lever.

The main engines had been built in Switzerland, the auxiliaries have been domestic products of the Jendrassik design. The latter made a much bigger noise than the main engines because of the system of their injection pumps. Anyway, their noise has been nothing to that when the next year I became assigned to a freighter with 109 dB Jendrassik type main engines.

The six weeks I have spent on that ship have stored in my mind a lot of pleasant and unpleasant events. It is funny, but however hard I try to catch a memory of the chief machinist, I cannot remember him. But his deputy I can. He was an engineer with a diploma who did not want to follow the compulsory hierarchy of construction offices, he had taken the job of a ship machinist and wanted to see and experience as much of the real world as he could. His character was alien to me, with all his self-confidence and other human short-comings. But during that six weeks he has been my boss and I had to bear his practical jokes and unintelligent remarks about the possible misbehaviour of my fiancée during my absence. At that time I have almost been an adult with 21 years behind me and I had lost a lot of my born naivety. It has been a further lesson to me about human society.

On the tug there was a mixed crew, but I could rely on the sailor whom I first met on board. He was a very good-natured honest man. The captain made me sometimes chat with him. He reminded me of one of my teachers from elementary school and we understood each other very well. He has seen in me rather the intellect, the would-be engineer and not the simple machinist as the deputy chief machinist has.

There was a system of kitchen crew assignment at the company having its roots from times long before the war. On every tug and freighter with a crew of more than 12 there was a woman cook and a

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kitchen hand, another female. At their assignment it had to be taken into account, currently who their partners were. It had caused a lot of problems before, as women had been assigned to boats different from where their partners had been serving. On the tug-boat "Esztergom" there were no problems, they have been on the right boat, and all took it into consideration. For this reason the crew members of the tug have lived their life as a big feudal family with a lot of single members and strict rules.

I can consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to see the cataracts of the Danube in their original state. Now they are closed in a concrete frame and most of them is under many feet of calm water. As soon as I became accustomed to the routine of life on the boat I have spent most of my leisure time seeing as much of the environment as possible. It is not my intention to mislead the reader about my views. The condition of shipping routes had to be improved somehow. But there would have been other solutions, e.g. the building of a separate shipping canal parallel to the river provided with sluices. The other aim of the Iron Gate dam has not been to improve the quality of shipping at the same time, but to line up with the hydropower mania of the '60s, both countries on the river wanted to squeeze as much energy out of the power station on the dam as possible. The decision makers have not been affected by the fact that places with historic and cultural fame will have been flooded and the landscape of a whole region will have changed forever. Energy must not always be produced and consumed. If there is not enough of it, balance can be created also by reducing demand. These principles have taken place at least in our mind since, but it still takes time to put them into practice.

Life on a tugboat is not very eventful. Everyone does his or her duty. Usually the tug and barges are moving at a constant speed day and night, stopping at frontiers or, when mist or other conditions make it necessary. Deckhands, from commander to sailors, were on watch twelve hours a day, not depending on where the boat was sailing. The engine room crew was a noble society from this point of view, we worked 12 hours daily only on the Upper Danube and on

the Cataracts, otherwise stuck to the Labour Code with our watches of daily eight hours. It was our duty six days a week, on the seventh work was paid for as overtime, even higher on national holidays. The engine room crew consisted of four persons, the chief machinist, his deputy, and two machinists. During day the deputy and the senior machinist had lone watches from 4 a.m. to noon and from that to 8 p.m., but the junior machinist had his watch together with the boss during night. It goes without saying that arriving at the Cataracts we also changed to six hours twice a day. From that time no-one could sleep enough in one last.

As soon I got accustomed to the rhythm of life on the boat I spared as much time as I could for the observation of my environment.

The boat, having built in Germany, have been typical of the thrifty material exploitation. Its hull had been made of so thin sheets that during function, especially with a heavy towage, vibration has been unbearable. The ordinary crew members had their common room for their meal under deck in the stern. From the common room there was access to the cabins. Under our feet the two propeller shafts have been turning. Overstepping critical speeds upwards or downwards, the shafts made a vibration you could see the floor bounce under your feet vertically several inches. Every change in kitchen hands required a new set of plates: put on the table before people sat down and could hold them, the plates went off and were broken. A new kitchen hand had to learn it always.

Vibration has other reasons too, not only thrifty use of raw material. I have mentioned that the main engines, although having six cylinders, had only five of them working, the sixth one was the piston of the compressor. It caused significant unbalanced forces as, while masses were in balance, it did not take part in combustion. There was something more besides: first I thought J. was joking when he said that the main engines were of the two-stroke design. In my mind two-stroke engines meant small mopeds or, at most, a large motor-cycle. At any rate, he was right. The Swiss manufact-

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urer could achieve to produce a Diesel-engine with five cylinders that had a power of 550 HP, when similar size six-cylinder Diesel engines used in the other tugs could give off only 400 HP.

Noise became less bothering when you went to the head or ascended the stairs to the bridge. On the bridge officially it has been prohibited to stay beside members on duty there. But I could come in any time I wanted, when I have not been on duty myself. All the people usually having their place of duty there have had a great experience and so, the bridge has been always resembling a naval club. I found it extremely interesting to listen to topics discussed.

In good weather -- and about 95 percent of the days during my trip has been fair -- I sat down on the foremost place in the head and listened to the hiss of water under the prow. It was so calm that sounds from the distant bank could be sensed. At the stern it was the opposite. The hull was vibrating, making a loud noise and the sound of water jet behind the screws made it even stronger. The jet sound became even louder by design: the screws were turning inside at the top making stern wave a foot higher.

The large towing winch has been mounted on the boat-deck, and, when down-river, of the 600 feet of steel cable only about its ten percent has been given out to the barges. The prows of the barges, three abreast behind the tug and three rows altogether, were virtually touchable from the ship. Upriver the cable has all been sent out making the barges, submerged to their deck from load, almost invisible. On the barges the crew consisted of two men each. They all have got their food from the tug: the containers have been sent on the towline to and from. Sometimes their food has been spoiled when the sailors have not been careful enough. During mailing manoeuvre the controls of the tug had to be left alone, otherwise the towline would submerge together with the food.

Our first stop has been at the Yugoslav border. Overstepping frontiers is a slow business for a riverboat. The barges are aligned

lets the towline go. It is taken in by the winch. The tug is running to the frontier guard office and the first officer -- he is the first assistant of the commander and a radio operator as well -- gives in the appeal for border check. The tug returns to the barges then.

Depending on the number of boats to be checked in turn, the signal to call the tug to the office is placed on the signal-post. The tug takes in the group of guards and customs officers. First they check the tug-boat and her crew, after that they instruct the commander to take them to the barges. One by one they are surveyed. Sometimes we had to deal with eccentric guards or customs people. One of them claimed the boarding plank to be unsafe and demanded that next time we provide a better one, "not that tightrope for chickens".

The stop can last from one hour to several days. And it is repeated over the border again. Our first stop has been a short one. In two hours we could continue our route again.

Preparation for the trip is slow and complicated. The tug takes a place in the current above the front line barges. By slowing down the engines to a dead slow she is let to descend near to the barges. A manila line of about a quarter inch in diameter with a heavy wooden weight at the end is thrown to the uppermost barge. Its other end is fastened to the loop of the towline. The towline is drawn over and placed around a stake. The tug then starts to go upriver and lets out as much cable as needed. Secured to the tug, the barges in the front line lift their anchors. It goes on, until the last barges are in towage. In a down-river trip there remains to turn the whole unit into the right direction and to regulate the right cable length and speed.

At the time of my first down-river trip, i.e. before the building of the Iron Gate Dam, the 90 miles of cataracts made a real obstacle in the way of shipping. It is the place where the Danube flows through the southern line of the Carpathian mountains. The beauty of this country is overwhelming. That country has an impression of wildness, it is quite different from the mild valleys of the Upper-Danube,

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rather it resembles the Wild West in America with its bare cliffs and sometimes completely inaccessible gorges.

There were three sections on that part of the river for the grades of difficulty in shipping. The uppermost section was about ten miles long with a normal wide basin that was, however, full of piercing cliffs. Actually there was only a narrow navigational route created 160 years ago by the best engineers of the country to make the Danube navigable. In the drier season when the water-flow decreased, almost the whole current flew via that route and the current was strong. At tide the current lost its speed, as water could flow over the cliffs.

Down-river a tug and two barges could safely pass the route. It meant, the 9 barges behind us had to be anchored at the bank -- turning the unit around before that -- and two by two slipped through the bottleneck. For the tug the upriver period was hard, but with full speed she managed it without the help of the chain-tug.

When a towage has been coming upriver the tug was to tow her barges one by one and besides, she had to take the help of the chain-tug. It has been a special equipment. Originally a steam tug-boat herself, called "Vaskapu" (Iron Gate), the tug has been equipped with an enormous chain through-winch. An anchor chain of an extreme size had been laid down on the bottom of the river and, as the chain-tug operated its winch, it moved up or down in the bottleneck shipping route. The chain simply went up onto its deck, through the winch and back again to the bottom. But it gave a high boost to help vessels to go upwards against the current. The tug and barge to be assisted have been fastened to the chain-tug.

This uppermost section on the Cataracts has not been terrible-looking, its entrance on a down-river trip was at the town of Moldova Veche. This landscape resembled that around Visegrád in the Hungarian Danube-Bend. The harbour or rather anchorage has been full of tugs and barges waiting for or just having finished their Cataracts trip. The flow had a width of around a quarter of a mile as

usual, there was enough place for all of them to their manoeuvres. People on boats on downward trips came soon to the sight of Babakai Cliff on the left side, well in the current. It is in connection with a legend about a fight between a girl separated from her lover and her father. On the same side, but of course on the riverbank, you could see the ruins of the medieval fortress of Galambóc, here our king Matthias had an affair with the Turk (alas, he wasn't too hard on them, otherwise they wouldn't have dared to come to our country in 1526). From here downwards the mountains began to rise much higher on both sides. That time there were signal stations on both sides for making shipping easier. Drenkova, Izlás, both are names that river-men recognised at once even if aroused from sleep. Today nothing significant is meant by their names, they are simply memories.

When we reached Svinnitsa with the first two barges, we left them in safety, then turned back for the next package. When we finished our shuttling at this section, we continued our trip for some miles until we reached the next bottleneck. It is the Kazan Straits. It had almost the same look at that time as it has today, with two exceptions. First difference is that between the upper and lower stages of this place, the Greater and Lesser Kazan Straits, there is a section where at one side the mountains keep a certain distance from the river bank. At that time this widening of the river-valley made a gulf on that side, and a pretty small village had been situated there. In the middle of the bay there was a neat little island. This island has also appeared in the novel of Mr Jókai "The Golden Man", where the hero at last finds his place at the side of the woman he loves. Now it is all under deep water and the river stretches to the mountain-side far away.

The second exception is even more sad. During the 2nd century AD the Roman emperor Traian conquered the south part of Transylvania being then the country of Dacia. He went along the Danube and his legions made a route on the riverbank hewn into the rock of the two Kazans above water-line. It has remained intact until the dam submerged it. Now only skin-divers can see what we saw pass

by from the board of our boat.

The two Kazan Straits have the most majestic view on the Danube. The river is pushed inside a very narrow basin. The width of the river at places is less than 300 feet. At the same time its depth is even more than that. Having enough cross-section and a moderate fall the speed of the current is not very high. But because of the very narrow navigational route a tug in both directions can only handle one barge, taking it alongside and securing very well.

Both Kazans are about two miles and a half long each. Descending through the lower one too you could see the Traian Board commemorating the emperor's trip. I don't know it has been raised or has got under water. One by one our barges got through, and we arrived to the anchoring site of the town of Orsova. That town had the anchorage place of Dalboka, here the lower end of the middle section on the Cataracts has been. When I first visited it Orsova still had a lot of Hungarian residents. Before its disconnection from Hungary it was a significant settlement with the nearby recreational village of Herkulesfürdő.

On the whole section of the cataracts the Danube is a frontier river. The left side belongs to Romania, where Orsova had lain. Now only the outskirts of the town is visible, other territories are under water. The same fate is shared by the one-time island of Ada Kaleh, whose minaret had been famous before the building of the dam.

In that town our shipping company has had a representative, and there the tug's commander has got an instruction to put the barges on anchor and take on board a group of film-makers. The group consisted of six people: three actors, an actress, a cameraman and a director. They arrived here by train and wanted to finish their work in a week. They managed to do it in four days. It was the first seven minutes of the film based on the novel "The Golden Man". We have been shown a medieval-looking small tow-berge called contrabass barge because of her prow design. It had originally been a 300-ton river barge made of steel, but it was clad by planks and was looking as the original "St. Barbara" in the book.

In the coming four days it was really interesting to watch the film in shooting. We always stayed aside to be of assistance when needed. As the small barge was only looking right from the outside, some of the interior shots have been made in our spare cabin -- after a small rearrangement --. The famous people were accommodated in a hotel in Orsova, but during day most of the time they spent on our tug. Once or twice even we from the crew have been selected to have a talk with one or the other.

The actress played the role of the Turkish girl, who becomes the wife of the hero, but never lies with him. She looked like. I have never seen her to make a conversation with anybody. The actor playing the hero was of Transsylvania, just as the other one for the father of the girl. They had been hindered in their work in their native language by the official Romanian policy, so they emigrated to Hungary. That time it was common with Hungarian-speaking actors from Transsylvania. Both have been very modest men. They stopped many times to have a talk with us. The third actor was playing the helmsman and he could have been easily mistaken for one of our crew. The remaining two persons I have never seen outside the commander's cabin.

When I returned from that trip and saw the film, it was a good feeling I had been there on the spot.

I have not mentioned yet, that as soon as we entered the dangerous sections, we had to take on board two pilots. They could have come from one of the novels of Joseph Conrad. Their recollections have been even more interesting than those of the commander. During the week we did the hard job of taking the nine barges through the difficult section they have been with us all the time.

Now it was time to slip our barges through the last and most dangerous section. It was the Iron Gate. On the left side the high mountains reached to the riverbank, the other side had a plain about half a mile wide and behind it rose the mountains. Originally,

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before the taming of the river, the very narrow navigational route was on the left side. At the very edge of the bank there was a narrow lane, where horses could walk along one by one towing the barges against the current. At a sharp bend the rope had to be cut, and the barge ran by her impulse farther to follow that bend, until the crew could drop her anchor. When the river has been tamed, the navigational route was switched to the right bank by blasting out the cliffs from the bottom. A levee has been built parallel to the bank, where an embankment has been created. In this way a closed canal resulted with enough cross-section to take in a tug and a barge. At the time of my first trip that was the uppermost of the three canals called Iron Gate. This had a length of about two miles and was called Dzevrin Canal. At its lower end you could see open the actual Iron Gate Canal (called so) at the right bank, its official name was Sip Canal. It was the route being blasted free of underwater cliffs. Subsequently a levee was built parallel to the stonewall of the bank, creating a closed canal with a proper cross-section.

With the creation of the Sip Canal low and high level navigation became quite different. At high tide during spring and early summer, there was enough water to flow over the cliffs, and the speed of the current in the canal was only 8 miles per hour. At low level almost all the water had to flow through the canal. At that time the current was very strong at 14 miles per hour. In both cases there was a need for an additional boost to help the tug to tow her barge. It was a steam engine. An ordinary locomotive with 2,000 HP was moving to the down-river edge of the one-mile track. It lent its towline to the barge, and together the tug and the engine forced the barge through the deadly current.

It could be deadly. One year before my trip the biggest steam tug-boat on that section was taking two barges at once -- it was high tide, the crew took the courage to do it -- up in the canal. By human failure the controls of the tug have not been left at the same position throughout all the time within the canal. The towing cable became loose, submerged and a rock on the bottom severed it. The two barges were still sitting high on the rocks, when I was there. Luckily,

the crew of the barges could be saved in the accident, but the vessels remained there forever. Our case has not been so hard, as we were taking our barges one by one down the canal. Anyway, in one or two cases we did not do the upriver trip alone, we helped to other tugs of our company in their duties.

The lower end of the Sip Canal has almost been in the same cross section as the upper end of the Small Dzerdap Canal. This route made only one mile, then the river got wider, its drop reduced, and our trials ended for a while. Anyway, the barge in tow still had to be taken to Turnu-Severin, it could drop anchor only there. And this operation must have been done nine times.

Getting through the hard section our barges were again arranged in a 3 by 3 format and the long trip to the delta began. The weather was hot, even a shower could not refresh you, as the water temperature reached 86 degrees F. The river at that section is 4 to 5 miles wide and sometimes the bank you see is only an island, the bank itself is actually behind that. Down-river the scene is changing constantly, but upriver you go down to sleep and when you come up, you see the same big tree on the bank, only somewhat farther behind.

There is an anecdote about this country worth telling. A sea-going passenger ship built for the Poles in our capital was on her way down the river to find her way to Poland. Her auto-steering went out-of-order and the ship began to run to the shore. Her speed could not be reduced sufficiently, she ran aground. Nothing serious happened, only her artistically designed prow hit a tree on the bank and it was felled, killing a cow. The herder, who slept under the tree, remained unhurt. This is a true story, it happened in 1954. The ship has been built for Poland in barter for black coal.

Not far after Turnu-Severin, perhaps a half day down-river, Yugoslavia was left behind, from that time on the right bank was the territory of Bulgaria, and on the left Romania could be seen as before. Actually it could be seen always less, as the land became as

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flat as a pancake, and the river tremendously wide. We left behind such settlements as Vidin, Lom, but they remained on topographical notions for me, at least on the downward leg. Russe and Giurgiu, places made known in the novel of Jules Verne, "The Boatman of the Danube", did not become more similarly, than settlements probably lying there behind islands on the horizon. Well, something more, as we have seen here the first bridge under Belgrade, even, if it was only a railway bridge. After Silistra also the right bank became Romanian territory, from here the Danube, while it remained an international shipping route (this status has been violated so many times since), was considered Romanian domestic territory. The massive of the Dobroudja forces the flow into a turn to the North not far from this point. There came another railway bridge at Cernavoda then there was a turn to the East and the Danube Delta began. Directly before the delta we could see Braila on the left bank with the large shipyard. On the launch-slope there lay seagoing cargo ships of several dozen thousand tons of displacement. At last we reached the place, where we were heading. It was Reni, a small town, but a big river-side reloading place within the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova then. Later there was a swap of territories between Moldova and Ukraine, Moldova got the Pridnestrovia -- a hot spot lately because of Russian troops relocated there from Afghanistan - - and Ukraine took all the lands on the Danube and the Black Sea for national security reasons. But that time it was still part of Moldova.

The harbour was so enormous that I have never seen a bigger one on the Danube until this day. The place could have been easily in Siberia, as there was no facility, everything was arranged on the open water of the tremendous flow. Reni is situated on the left bank in the Sulina arm beginning at Braila. At that point it is the northernmost arm, it carries the complete seagoing traffic. Fifty miles downward the Kiliya arm springs into being, it becomes the northern branch and the Sulina arm with the seagoing traffic turns into a Romanian domestic channel.

As a machinist I did not have much to do with load, I went to see the town. For my allowance I wanted to buy a camera. As I have

mentioned, it was my first trip abroad and during the whole trip it was the first place to go to shore. I had already seen big poverty and terribly arranged settlements. But never before such a town of 40 thousand inhabitants. There were no roads, only lanes made by the wheels of vehicles. No shops, no restaurants, only a ruined church, as I later learned, grain has been stored in it. The whole town looked as the lower end of the village at home where I have been living as a child.

Following 9 years of Russian lessons, I could hardly get any information where to buy a camera. At last I found a shop. I could only recognise it by the Cyrillic inscription: MAGAZIN. I could get only one type of camera, a 35 mm plastic box-camera. There was no way to focus it and to regulate shutter speed. It represented the same level as my own make 3 years before. There were 3 aperture positions: a sign of the sun, that of a shaded sun and a lamp. I bought it for half a day's allowance.

Anyway, this small camera served me for a short time only. The next year I was assigned to the tug-boat "Kaposvár", and she had to be serviced in the repair yard of the shipping company. I was late in deciding to take my camera from the engine room desk, lest it could be stolen. It has been already. Alas, someone else have my freshly shot pictures about the Upper Danube had developed. On the upriver leg of my first trip abroad I made a lot of good shots with it, as did the same during the coming year from the excursions with my fellow students. Also, about my family I still have photographs made with that simple Russian camera. It was handy, and I could take it with me everywhere.

About the famous Soviet Union I have got an impression that made it impossible for anyone to try to convince me about the opposite. I have visited the same place in two years, and my first trip to a really large Soviet city happened in 7 years after that first visit. My view has been greatly formed by these experiences.

The upriver trip has lasted much longer. The tug could not make

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more than 3 miles per hour to the bank, sometimes less. And the long hours to do nothing made bad-mannered people worse.

To buy provisions for the kitchen, our commander decided to stop in a Bulgarian port, Russe. There I also went to shore and in a shop -- there were ordinary shops as in my home country -- I bought a pair of leather gloves. I had always considered leather gloves a luxury, in my life before all my gloves had been knit by my mother.

After many days on the lower Danube, our towage has arrived to the cataracts again. We had 10 barges, and it was a slow work to shift all through the three bottlenecks. A good week's work, at least nobody had time to make practical jokes. It was a custom on the boats of the company, that in the engine room, outside the cataracts, there were 8 hours daily to be on duty, while at the cataracts we had to be downstairs 12 hours a day.

When the normal routine began again, I was secure from bad men, I had learned how to defend myself. And never again on any ship or in any company could anybody disturb me permanently. It has been a good training and I took it for my advantage. Once more we stopped, that time in Belgrade. Slowly I understood that, if crew members are given currency of different states that the crew has crossed, they have the right to spend that money. In my childhood I had read about the battle of Nándorfehérvár, i.e. now Belgrade. Now I had the opportunity to see the fortress by my own eyes. I felt a little disappointment, it was very small and unimportant in look.

After almost six weeks far away we have crossed the border and came home.

Making acquaintance with the Upper-Danube

My next boat trip was no simple consequence of the agreement between the shipping line MAHART and me, there was a certain contribution from the part of the university too. This was the school-year 1962/63 and at its beginning a reform package has been introduced in the higher education system. My life has been mostly influenced by the details of the reforms that has made a 16-week practice part of the eighth semester in technical education. Students of fourth grade had to finish the semester to the end of March passing all their examinations. After that they had to fill the prescribed jobs with companies. This practice lasted until the end of July. As far as my own duty was concerned, I was a student in the shipbuilding department, and for this reason I went on two different fields after one-another: 13 weeks I had to spend on boats as a machinist, the remaining three in the Angyalföld (then Gheorgiu Dej) Shipyard to get acquainted with activities in the workshops. The boat trips have been planned down-river first, then upriver.

There was something else, too that has had a significant influence on my mental progress. Our dean had tried to get his suggestion accepted by the Ministry of Education about a swap of student groups with universities abroad, but up to that time always there had been excuses, why it was not possible. That year the suggestion was accepted and included in the reforms. This way I got the opportunity to take part in such a change of students. Anyway, this trip to the GDR has not been made compulsory. There were six shipbuilding students within the 18-head group, the remaining students came from the machine tool department. Later I am writing more about that trip.

It was a heavy winter that year. From 1956 when I came to the capital, I saw the Danube frozen solidly only twice: in 1957 and in

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that year, 1963. After finishing examinations we had to come to the shipping company to get our assignments. It looked, as if on April 1 we could not board our ships, as they were still staying in the wintering harbour. But some days before that dead-line the mild weather arrived and the ice has broken up.

Uncle Louis gave me an assignment to the tug-boat "Kaposvár". She has been one of the tugs built on the northern shore of the lake Balaton in a small shipyard in Balatonfüred. Her two domestic main engines gave 800 HP to the screws. Otherwise she had the same propulsion and steering as any tugs at that time. The boat was to go to an upriver trip to the German town of Regensburg. It was the upper navigational limit on the river, because a medieval stone bridge was only passable by paddle boats there. A round-trip took two weeks. I have made two trips on that boat and between them took part in the oil change on the main engines. Such maintenance jobs could be done in a week.

Pack ice was still dense on the river, when we arranged the towage and started our slow motion up. At first our progress have been fine as, expecting a higher current speed in the Austrian section, the towage consisted of only six barges.

The upper Danube is completely different from its lower stretch. The river bed is narrower and, with the exception of a hundred miles, where the river makes the border line between Hungary and Slovakia, as well as the same length in Bavaria, the bank is always hilly. That section had been tamed much earlier than the cataracts on the Lower Danube. The higher industrialisation made it impossible to transport raw materials by surface means only, inland water-ways had been created by taming rivers and constructing canals. At the time I write about the first dam on the Danube below us was a plan only, but in the Austrian section I have seen the fourth one in construction at Aschach.

Most beautiful part of the Hungarian Danube section is the Danube Bend, it is well known even among foreigners. On the right bank you can see the silhouettes of Pilis, on the opposite bank those

of Börzsöny. Both are only two to three thousand feet high. Moving farther upriver, the territory soon becomes Slovak and this is not to change, until the boat enters Austria. On the left side you can see Hungarian villages and towns, but, before reaching Austria here too, for some miles this bank becomes Slovak. This is the place where lush green flood area woods grow on both sides, within Szigetköz (among islands) and Csallóköz (among bushes). On this section of the river to manoeuvre a boat you face the hardest difficulties. The large mass of deposit that the river can still keep in floating on the Austrian section, here will be dropped to the bottom. Without a drastic regulation of this section in favour of a bigger depth, here such an enormous dredging would be needed that on the one hand is impossible to realise, and on the other even the construction industry of all the world could not use up the resulting gravel. So much water must still flow down in the Danube (especially by the reduced rate of flow coming still into the main channel), until the people living on both banks of the great river can find a common solution for this problem. If there is no way to improve shipping compared to the present conditions, it will mean a brake not only for the economies of the two neighbouring countries because of unutilised potentials, but goods from far away will also avoid this circulation. The Rhine-Main-Danube waterway will be a chain falling apart on two separate pieces for the missing link.

Tugboats destined for the Upper Danube had generally been dispatched from the capital with a towage assembled only temporarily, as the final assembly had been done in Komárom. We have got our valid disposition also at that place. You sure guessed already that my family name has something to do with this town. Well, it has been originally also a title of nobility, my ancestors, although they were poor people (in our country called "noblemen with a bare seven plum trees"), three generations earlier were living there. This was the first time that I saw the town -- not Új(new)-Szöny that was the original name of today's Hungarian Komárom, but the city called today Komárno, originally a Hungarian country seat --, but I only had time to make a mental picture about it over the

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river. Later I had the opportunity to visit it. About this first route only the two bridges at Komárom and the one at Medve has remained in my memory. And Pozsony (or Bratislava in Slovak and Pressburg in German), a little farther upriver with the unequalled beautiful castle. There was no bridge at that town that time, today there are two of them, they block the fine view. That time only the bridge above town, used both for railway and route traffic, provided a crossing opportunity.

Above Pozsony we soon reached the Austrian border, first on the right, then on the left bank. The latter is synonymous with the Dévény fortress ruins at the inflow of the river Morava. It is the same today, but then the difference in the sight of land at the two sides of the border was even more apparent. The Austrian section has been properly built keeping in mind the modern rules of protection against flood and ice drift. Looking out through the porthole I could see the signal stones integrated into the embankment every 100 meters, as well as the kilometre signs of the river. The gardens and meadows coming down to the river were well kept, a proof that the owner considered it important to give them a fine appearance. From the border to the first houses of Vienna there was only about twenty five miles. There opened the wintering harbour of tank-barges, then a little further the other wintering harbour became visible. Another hour and we arrived at Handelskai (commercial port), there was our rented place to let the barges drop anchor. The lowermost Vienna bridge, the Stadlau one, lay there with its traditional grid structure.

We stopped in Vienna for only a short stay, this way only the sight from the Danube remained in my memory that time. The Danube was spanned by a special suspension bridge at the place, where the road led to the city centre. That was the Reichsbrücke, it had got a (then) new name after the Soviet Army stationed there until 1955, but got back its original one like public places in our country, when the occupying forces went out. Well there is another detail with this bridge, independent from Russians: in the '70s, during renovation work, the bridge collapsed. Today no trace of it. Before we left town upriver, we sailed under three other bridges,

then we met the first such part of our trip, where towing was really a hard job. The speed of current neared six miles per hour, no accident that we were towing only four barges.

In Vienna no tug has had anything to do. Even to get an instruction from company headquarters has not needed to go into the local office, the on-board radio has been a good means to receive any message. But as the commander was only a human being, too, he also had his private channels.

At Vienna the current was already quick, the towage was creeping upriver slowly. Soon over Vienna the tamed section began. About two hours in route upriver from Vienna we sighted on the right side the Korneuburg shipyard where the most beautiful passenger ships on the Danube of that time were built, and also the push-boat series taken over for further manufacturing somewhat later by our Obuda shipyard. The landscape was indescribably fine, like our country's western part, hilly, and pretty houses on both banks. Everything was to be seen well, as the river was at most a thousand feet wide. A railway bridge was left behind, then another two the next day, after that we arrived at Krems. There followed Dürnstein, a tiny town on top of a high cliff. About this I have something to tell later. About ten hours of slow motion, and we passed a long island, over which and the channel we could see the building of the Melk Abbey. Another twelve miles and I caught a glimpse of the first sluice in my life. It was the one at Ybbs-Persenbeug. As we were waiting for coming into the sluice, we could admire the swans on the left bank. We passed the lowest lock and were travelling in a country very much similar to that on the Rhine. On both banks there were small villages or towns in picturesque surroundings. To travel that time in our country meant seeing a disorderly, dull landscape. I have been much surprised by this neat fine-looking countryside. The second lock had been built at the castle of Otto Habsburg. That time he was in exile, even in his home country he has not been welcome. Further up, over the town of Linz, we have reached the hardest section on the upper Danube. As the dam planned here has only been in construction, the current has been unaltered in speed. The

tug has not been able to tow up all her barges in one step, the six barges could only be taken up in three packages.

Locking remained interesting for me also later, and first time I observed every detail attentively. Being off-watch made it simpler for me. At the upper level the mirror-like surface of the reservoir has been wide and reached to the horizon. This sight was waiting for me when we came up. The filling of the lock chamber ended, the gate opened and the boat slowly steamed out. At the other side of the dam (about 50 feet lower) the river remained as it had been before the building of the dam. Neither water level nor the speed of the current changed, as the flow of the river must have been let through the gaps and the turbines. Arriving at the lower level the boat passes into one of the two locks, their sizes can house the boat and two barges. A bigger towage must be divided and sluiced through in more packages. The gate is closed and water is let into the chamber from the upper level through openings until the water level in the chamber is equal to that of the reservoir. Then the other gate opens and the road is free upriver. Boats arriving from above are processed in the opposite way.

The lock and water power station (hydro-power dam) is actually a dam built in transverse direction to the riverbed that has three main functions. The most conspicuous and primary role for ages is the improvement of the shipping route by creating a deep-water reservoir lake above the dam. The other function is to connect the lower and upper levels by means of lock chambers. Generally two chambers are built together along one bank. And the third, but not least important function is energy generation utilising the potential of difference between the two water levels. Besides, there are two auxiliary roles that go without saying. First, to ensure the original water-flow below the dam by controllable gates that are almost closed at low water level and then only the turbines will let through any water, in this case the water-flow is reduced and the difference between the two levels is large. When the river is high, the gates are widely open to let through the bigger flow at the naturally much smaller difference between upper and lower level. The second

auxiliary function is the creation of a reservoir, from which industrial and communal water demand can be fulfilled.

Somewhere above the Ybbs lock we have reached the section that was the reason why the dam had been built. That was the Struden. Here shipping possibilities were retained only by such measures as on the Lower Danube. In order to overcome this steep section, another dam had been necessary to raise at Kachlet directly below the Struden. As the reservoir above this dam had also flooded several smaller difficult places, it was easy for us to get to Linz. The country offered wonderful sights, with perhaps Wallsee as the most interesting one, some of the boatmen stated that it reminds you to the Rhine valley at the cliff. On the right we could see other attractions too, also the Mauthausen camp was in the same condition as it was deserted at the end of the war. We went under some bridges, then reached Linz. One of the barges was addressed here, so the towage was let drop anchors, and the barge was taken into the harbour.

For the passengers of a boat in upriver direction the most picturesque country along the Upper Danube starts here, the river is just leaving the Passau-Linz alpine section. The steep forested mountain sides come down to the riverbank, only some narrow valleys of side-streams can reach the river. At such places there usually is a small settlement, although they are not exactly the finest places for human life, as these canyons lead the snow-melt into the Danube, or even they serve as the inflow of a smaller side-stream, and this is equal to the danger of flood in the spring. People in this country are very hard, they live on anything, for this reason such small villages you can find not only in those canyons, but almost everywhere. One thing is sure: there is no village without a pub and a church. Well, the Aschach dam has been built to improve the shipping possibilities along this sixty miles long section. When I was there first time, the riverbank was being reinforced by square stones.

There was a funny event one evening near the dam in construction. The tug let the barges drop anchor and did the same her-

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self at the village of Schloegen. Those little settlements of Upper Austria have always consisted of a church, a mayor's office, a shop and a pub beside the half dozen houses making up the village.

I had remained on board, but the majority of officers, the crew and the galley hands went to shore. The fine beer had its effect, as, when our people joined the locals in dance, and the partner of the cook was too impressed to recognise a fellow-mariner, he said:

“What does this ‚Ambassador of Shragen' want from our girls?” He wanted to say “this stone-layer from Schloegen” and in our language they are almost similar in pronunciation. From that time on the man, who asked the cook to dance with him that evening, has been called the Ambassador of Shragen.

Somewhere before I have mentioned already that shortage of goods had been a usual phenomenon in our country that time. That shortage had made the prices of sophisticated manufactured goods higher than sensible. For this reason people having jobs on international transport means as mariners, rail-roaders, truck drivers, etc. had always joined the very old trade of illegal import, or call it smuggling. Of course, customs authorities knew that this activity cannot be annihilated and tried to regulate it.

All the employees of international transport companies registered in our country had special service passports and they were allowed to import a limited quantity of wares. They had their “Import Booklets” and so, they could take with them home the gifts, food, technical equipment they bought on their allowance.

Behind these goods in the booklet, there has always been a much bigger quantity hidden in proper caches that has not been for declaration. The customs authorities have had their informers among crews -- mainly people whose fate on being caught would have been sudden debarkation, unless they undertook the role of informer -- and it would have been dangerous to hide things with the knowledge of anybody on the boat. Trust in each other is one thing, business is another.

The main source for purchasing goods has been a certain woman living in the southern outskirts of Vienna. Her name was Frau Molnár, she left our country in 1956 and had been living there to become the most important factor in our mariners' trade. We could not only get every kind of goods, but she took on her the risky business of currency change. The rate of change has been coded: it was said Frau M. was so and so many years old, it meant, she was giving so and so many Schillings for one hundred Forints. She has been a good saleswoman. Beer was always cheaper with her than with her competitors. Of course, she lost some money on people, who bought little beside beer, but she had her customers and prospered.

To get goods of unique properties, especially technical ones, you had to discuss every aspects with her, and on the return trip you could pick it up. But such cases have been rare, the bulk of her sales consisted of fashionable items.

There were three of them that days: nylon scarves, feathe-rlight impregnated raincoats and wrist-watches. The last one was the most risky business. Watches could be of different quality and they looked alike. Mariners have not been experts to choose the right ones. If you wanted to take a good-quality watch, you would have to avoid buying it from Frau M. But ordinary watches, dubbed "kilo watches" -- they were sold by weight, not piece --, you could buy at her as there was no way of being caught by the end-consumer. Even if you sold it to somebody who knew you, there were enough spare ones to replace it.

For me joining this trade has been out of question: I had no capital to change at any rate of Frau M.'s age. I had a good watch of Russian make and did not need any. But of the scarves I took a dozen -- not a hundred dozens as others --, among my relatives there were women. And I tried to get my rain-coat, only I did not find the proper size. It had to wait for me a year more. The centre of the city I could not see in Vienna. It, too, had to wait for one year. But from the river I have not only seen the beautiful embankments, I

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have made many shots by my small Russian camera.

My friend Z. has had access to his father's photographic laboratory and he made me possible to do the magnifications, as well as the chemical developing.

Beside the dam being built at Aschach there was another lock between Linz and Passau. It was at Engelhartzell, after overcoming that one we reached Passau in a short time. We had our hands full, but the beautiful sight was worth it. That 65-mile section will have become tamed by the Aschach dam with a difference of 55 feet between the upper and lower water levels. The next year I saw it many times on another tug. Above this hard section we were sluiced through the lock at Passau, the most beautiful town on the upper Danube. Two side-streams are running into the river, the one on the right bank is the Inn, the river of Innsbruck.

There are a multitude of bridges on all the three streams, the finest one spanning over the Danube. On the right side it has an ordinary head, but on the left the flow of vehicles is disappearing in a tunnel through the hill coming to the water's edge. The cables are fixed high in the cliffs of the hill. At this town on the left bank below the bridge the Austria-Germany border comes to the river and upwards the frontier is made by the centre-line of the navigational route. On the hillside, although its inclination was high, I saw a tractor collect hay puff-puffing along parallel to the river. Those Germans, they are really diligent people.

After another fifteen miles the river became wholly a German one. We have entered a section, where on both sides the banks have been low and to the horizon there were no hills. Depth in the navigational route has only been enough to slip through the constantly maintained shipping canal. The whole river-bed has not been wider than 300 feet. Regulation of the river has had a tradition for already many centuries. Only by dredging all the time and by transversal levees limiting the width of actual current was it possible to maintain navigation even at low level. Delivery of water is im-

proved by some tributaries, e.g. the Isar, the river of Munich on the right side at Deggendorf, but in the summer season water in the Danube is very low here.

Somewhere here there occurred an encounter that almost led to a crash. We avoided accident only by miracle. We were creeping upriver at a pace less than 3 miles per hour. For the narrow bed and the limited depth the engines were regulated to less than half power. The river was making sharp curves. Suddenly in one of these bends, from the cover of the bank, there appeared a tug with her towage coming down-river.

I could see all well, I was off duty and the fine weather attracted me up to the boat-deck. When we became aware of the towage coming on us, the distance between the two tugs has not been more than 200 feet. All that the men at the wheels of both boats could do was to steer them as far to the right as possible. Everybody was expecting a big crash, but it did not come. A few inches between us and the near-most barge of the down-river towage, it was all. And the relative speed of the two units was about 15 miles per hour. At the rear it carried a Yugoslav flag.

The last thing we saw of the other towage was the turbaned man at the deserted wheel of the left rearmost barge: he was repeating the sign of cross on himself. A real puzzle: the turban indicated a Muslim, he could have been somebody from Bosnia, throwing the cross on himself the impression of a Christian. Who could he have been?

For a day this event has been discussed many times. It was real miracle, a crash -- called by our mariners "havarie" by the French word -- could have led to the loss of a barge at least, or the tug, even lives. During the year I have spent on ships I have never been nearer a catastrophe.

About halfway between Passau and our goal, Regensburg, there is a small town, Straubing. There the river flows through between two hills and, as on the road, the river-boats can only pass

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when the traffic-light is green. Otherwise such a system you can find only at locks. At the town of Straubing the river is 300 feet at most, a Hungarian feels as if he were on the Upper Tisza river at home. The current meanders in the classic way, there are sharp turns, sometimes only ten to fifteen feet remain between the side of the boat and the riverbank. You see events on both banks clearly. Once I saw a man in an original Bavarian *Lederhosen* (leather shorts) step out of a free-standing peasant house not far from the river, go to a barn, then I heard the noise of a tractor and saw the vehicle come out and go to the other side of the meadow. In our country the co-operatives were queuing up at the so-called machine-stations (state leasing stocks) to get agricultural machines. Well, passing through that bottleneck you will have a free route to Regensburg.

Before reaching the town to the left you see the wintering harbour and on the other side, just below that, a small hill crowned by a neo-classical collonnade. It is the Walhalla, exhibition place of all the great Germans.

The river is only 150 to 200 feet wide here. The entrance to the harbour on the right bank is even less. For long-distance tugs it is not advisable to take their barges into the harbour. There are small boxers that can do the arrangement much better. We have left our barges at the harbour entrance and have floated to the town with the tug. She was laid on the pontoon.

Between that and the harbour we passed the old port that is making an isle opposite the pontoon. There are several bridges built in the town. The river at that point -- 2379 kms from the sea -- is an unimportant stream with a bed not wider than 200 feet between its embankments. On the left side of the main channel the town looked rather industrial, but on our laying side orderly-looking high-rise living houses stood side-by-side. When I had the opportunity to look around a little later, the right bank I liked very much. Especially the cathedral attracted me. At the same time, I have pleasant recollections also about the neat small shops and the jovial pubs. People were thinking there and then similarly -- not mentioned the differ-

ence that they were Germans and we are Hungarians, a cultural difference in itself -- what I experienced at home later at the turn of the '80s and '90s. Today, with the Rhine-Main-Danube canal in operation, the traffic of boats is much bigger. When I first saw it in April 1963 it was almost empty of ships but three: our tug, another one of ours and a Soviet one. It was the first ever Soviet boat to come that far. And for some years the last: the crew has made a fight in a pub, and Soviets will not have got visa for a time.

It was a Thursday, a day before Good-Friday. The boat has been quickly deserted. The officers and the crew went to shore as one man, except a sailor and me. Dusk has been near. Half an hour later there was a call from the embankment in German:

“Is somebody here?”

I went up and saw a woman stand there. She was taller than an ordinary male and very thick. Her weight could have been double mine. She had a uniform cross-section from head to feet.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“Your captain is sending a message by me, you are to come to our pub at once.”

“Are you sure?” I asked, as I myself have not been sure that she delivered the message to the right place.

“Yes, yes”, and she told the surname of our commander. We were hesitating with the sailor, but, as the ship could be locked and the pub was not far, we decided to go.

She led us to the pub. Entering it we caught sight of our officers and crew-members sitting around a big table in a long room. We were invited by a gesture of the commander to sit down. We took a glass of beer each and paid for it. Soon the whole company was involved in a lively conversation, the commander and a lady -- soon it became clear she was the owner of the pub -- as initiators.

It was early spring, dusk came soon. After 8 p.m. a lot of local customers left. A fellow-student from my circle did it, too. He has been assigned to a boat down-river, but, as I later got the information, he managed to alter it to an upriver assignment -- his father

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has been in government circles, he had been included into our circle in the university later than us --, and he was on the other tug of our company. At that time, too, he was true to the impression he made in people. As he stood up, he went to the middle of the room under the lamp to see better and, with a big difficulty, selected the coins needed to pay for his beer.

At 9 p.m. the door was closed. In Germany, at least in those days, there was a prohibition on alcohol in public places from Good-Friday morning through Easter Sunday evening. Pubs with no food closed at 9. This way we remained locked into a pub. We were the guests of the owner lady and there was no shortage in drinks from beer to brandy.

I cannot drink much, I spent the time talking and observing people at the table. The most interesting spectacle could be seen not far from me, it was the assistant chief machinist and the giant girl who had summoned us there. The girl must have had no full wit and she might have felt like a mother to him. He was a small thin man and she embraced him completely, he almost disappeared in the cover of her enormous arms.

There are legends about boatmen and alcohol, it is even more true to sailors. This man liked drinks so much that, as a gossip went around, he had never had a hangover yet.

Our commander expressed our gratitude at 10 and we all returned to the boat. I have never seen another commander, neither before nor after that case, that could have been able to keep discipline in such family-head manner among a crew of 17, as that one on the tugboat "Kaposvár".

We had another 3 days in the town, and I took advantage of my first trip to the western world to see all I could. Walking on the streets and window-shopping I was addressed by a youth of my age. He asked me where I came from and spoke to me about himself. He was a student in a military academy shortly before the end of his training. He proposed me to go into correspondence. I agreed, but

have never get any letter from him, although I have sent him two.

Making big walks in the town was very interesting. The gothic style cathedral has been my favourite, but I liked the characteristic wood-and-brick houses, too. I went to the cinema to see a film made of a classic Edgar Wallace novel.

The goods in the shops were mainly of German make and they represented the excellent quality and ultimate practicality of German products from before the war. I have always liked fine fountain pens and could not resist buying one. I have got a 10-year warranty certificate with it and in that 10 years my pen has never gone out-of-order. My son would use it as his first pen in the school. I couldn't forget the purchase of my boss, the chief machinist, either. He had two sons, he bought pair of a Bavarian leather shorts for each. He showed us them proudly, it has not been a cheap bargain. It was so memorable for me, because he reported us also consequences next time. At home he gave the shorts to the boys and, when he thought the boys were sleeping already, he told his wife that these shorts would be indestructible. He became shocked the next day to see that both shorts have holes at their bottoms. Following the punishment he asked the boys how they succeeded to do it. They disclosed that previous evening they overheard the discussion and wanted to check the quality by polishing the leather with the knife sharpener disc.

When our barges were ready in the harbour we began our backward trip. Generally tugs on upper trips have not been instructed to go to the capital. They have got a new towage at the town of Komárom. This time our tug was due in the repair yard for oil change and so, we went to the wintering harbour and took a place at the embankment.

Freighter

Oil change meant not only draining and filling in. A naval main engine has to be cleaned from the inside before it could be filled up. As the work is done by the crew themselves, it takes about a week in the yard. In the meantime, other repairs on board can be finished, too.

For the crew of a boat, it is a very unpleasant time to stay in the yard. Cabins must be locked, and in the engine room all things are apt to disappear. So did my small camera left in the engine room desk, with it went my shots made in Regensburg. The deck will be covered by a thick layer of dirt to the time when the boat leaves. It is a two-day work on route for the sailors, to clean all.

The tug has been ordered once more to the upper Danube and I have remained on it. My second upriver trip has bought me nothing new, I have enjoyed it, although duty on a river-boat is far from easy. Time on duty on the upper river, as well as on the cataracts has been twelve hours a day, compared to the ordinary shifts of 8 hours. Higher security has been proven. Both the more complex conditions of navigation and the higher scale of perspective loss, when an accident is blocking the shipping route, has justified it. Duty time was divided to three 4-hour shifts. You can guess how hard it is to sleep always less than three hours in one last and daily less than 6. Border-steppings made it even less, when the crew has been aroused to expect the arrival of guards in the common room.

I have felt the loss of my camera and decided to get one as soon as possible. Returning from the second trip I was assigned to another boat, that time a freighter called "Hunor". It has been actually a barge with an engine room instead of Nr 3 hold. Also, around the upper shaft of the engine room a deckhouse has been erected. The

two other holds have also been a little shorter, making room for a fuel deep-tank. Between the openings of the two holds has been another deckhouse with the bridge on top of it. Its floor on the main deck housed the common room for the officers and the commander's cabin. The crew has not have any common room. In good weather a table has been put up on the cover of Nr 2 hold and the crew took their lunch at that. As the weather on board of a ship can be windy, especially during a turn, sometimes our soup has been blown out of the spoon before we could have sipped it.

All the officers and sailors, as well as the engine crew have been eccentrics. For a day or two it could cause me identity problems, but I remembered a case from my sister's career. She had heard the group of backward children make a dispute with ordinary ones and one of the backward pupils say: "You imbecile normal." Also, there is the joke about the ape. He thought, when he looked out between rods of his cage: "Poor people, they are so numerous and are locked up all in a large cage."

It is always a question of view-point, who is sensible and who is a lunatic. Even among them the cook is worth mentioning. She had been an ordinary peasant woman -- perhaps a parachuter --, never to have stepped over the limits of her village as long, as her son decided to take the job of a sailor on a river-boat. Then she went with him and was always working as a cook on the same boat as he was assigned. Her son was a fine young man not effected at all by the guardian role of his mother.

I have been assigned as a surplus crew member and for this reason my accommodation has been arranged with the sailors in the fore-castle. My bed was small and asymmetric because of the lines of the hull in the head, but on no other ship could I sleep so fast for the pleasant sound of water hissing at my ears.

To board that freighter, I had to make a trip by suburban train to the duty-free harbour, near the wholesale market. It was the middle of May and the level of the river began to rise from melt-water. In the

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spring it is always a short period. That days only the nearby lands send their moisture into the river-bed, melt-water from the Alps raises the level -- and causes the so-called "green-tide" -- only in June.

Coming out of the harbour we took our course upriver. The freighter has been loaded with flour exported to France. I think, you would never guess what our cargo was on the downward trip: flour from France. It is no joke: I will have learned years later, bread-making technology depends on flours from different kinds of wheat, and in one country it is impossible to grow them, as they are different because of climate and soil. Well, even a monk is learning as long as he lives.

For the flour the trip has not been very urgent and it was all right. Our trip has been interrupted by an accident in the navigational route in Austria, where the river-bed is the narrowest. Following spring tide the water level began to go down, and one of our Diesel-electric tugs succeeded in towing a barge aground. That tug has been one of the two built in the thirties on a quite unique concept.

Mechanical propulsion of ships, after the era of rowing galleys and sailing ships, began with propeller screws mounted on shafts parallel with the central line of the hull. At first they used to be made of wood and, to give them strength, they resembled transporting spirals. Fortunately, the ship on her maiden voyage crashed her screw to the pier and only a third of the blade-surface remained. Its performance suddenly grew. So the screw of present-day propulsion has been invented. There was another road to develop propulsion: the paddle-wheel. It was sturdy and, after the invention of controlled blades, its efficiency surpassed that of the screw. The blades of a controlled paddle-wheel are not simply mounted radial. They are suspended from their turning points and are also connected to an out-of-centre wheel that regulates their positions in a way that they be always submerging vertically, ensuring the maximum boost to the hull.

Different waterways determine different kinds of propulsion. On

the seas paddle-wheels had a short career, as high waves have a bad effect on them. But river-boats with steam-engines preserved this design for long. Paddle-wheels are easily coupled with slow-motion engines, screws are fit to a higher speed. It means, the kind of the engine has always determined the kind of propulsion. The main dilemma has been: how to raise the efficiency of steam-engines to the level of Diesel engines, or how to put more efficient screws under the stern of Diesel-driven ships.

With limited navigational depth on the Danube the latter has its natural upper limit, although inventive engineers found some ways of getting around the problem. The use of Kort-rings has made screws virtually bigger: a screw of 6 feet in diameter gave a boost of a 7- and-a-half-foot ordinary one. Also, the rules of hydrodynamics allowed to place screws in tunnels, i.e. a foot of the screw was above water level. As it began to turn, the pressure behind it gradually filled the empty place with water, and the screw at higher speeds was working in normal conditions.

There was the other way: to improve the efficiency of the engine on paddle-wheelers. This was the unique concept, that had its roots on German submarines: Diesel-generators and electric propulsion motors. In the case of the above mentioned tug-boat the three 400-HP Diesel engines have been coupled to DC-generators and the current has driven a big slow-motion electric motor mounted on the shaft of the paddle-wheels. In that way the overall efficiency has grown by 50 percent.

But it was not all so fine. First, maintenance time -- and costs -- grew 100 percent. Second, the navigability of a paddle-wheeler is worse than that of screw-driven tugs. A double-screw tug can go even to the side, by turning one screw fore and the other aft. A paddle-wheeler must always float above the selected place and let the current take her down. On a down-river route such a tug is like a bullet shot out of a gun. If the original aiming has been incorrect, it would not follow the right route and has to repeat the manoeuvre.

The ebbing river has made salvage harder every minute. The

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commander of the tug tried to draw the barge off, but the hull has broke open and one of the holds took in water. There remained only one way, to rent lighters and to instruct all the hands of the two company ships nearby -- the tug and our freighter -- to help in unloading the damaged hold (and possibly others) until the barge would come off the ground.

It was an unpleasant job to go into the holds of the barge and shovelling the red material -- raw material for chemical processes -- into containers to be lifted out by a floating crane. The damaged hold has solved part of the problem gradually: water washed the load out through the leak.

Before jumping on that salvage, we dropped anchor and were waiting for proper conditions for two days. As we were in a separate trip, i.e. no barges to be towed, upto that time we have made about 10 miles per hour. Evenings we played games and listened to music through the radio in the officers' common room. During day I went walking, gathered mushrooms and ascended to the nearby village. I didn't know at that time, but it was Dürnstein, where Richard Lionheart had been kept for a ransom. It has been at the top of a hill and looked as if four apartment blocks had been taken from the down-town of a big city and placed there. In the café the sweets have been very fine and the young waitress was friendly with me.

The evening of the second day found me there. A big group of young locals celebrated some event and invited me to take place among them. They prepared "mariners' beer". There was every kind of drinks in it from light beer to dark beer to snaps -- fruit brandy --, even a raw egg has been placed in it and mixed. As I cannot take raw meat or raw eggs, I only mimed drinking. The drink has been put into a cup of half a gallon with a spherical bottom, so as not to be laid down until empty. It went around and at the end everyone was in a good humour.

When waiting time run out with the arrival of the floating crane, the salvage we finished in one day by emptying two of the four holds

and taking out as much as possible from the damaged one. Our trip has been continued.

At that time I bought my new camera, another Russian one, but an up-to-date device with an original Leica lens. It has been serving me more than ten years and it is still with me in working condition after 35 years. I took it from the first officer of the boat. To him I told my story of the stolen camera and complained about having none. Then he offered me his spare device that he had bought on the lower Danube from a Russian sailor.

Arriving at Regensburg we were taken into the harbour to unload our cargo and receive the return load. As it lasted about 4 days, I took advantage of the illegal possibility of doing black work with unloading barges. I have got 2 German marks for one hour -- locals have got 8 --, and the two days I was working earned me more money than I have got as allowance. Manual work has not been any novelty for me, I had been working as a helping hand in unskilled jobs on construction sites every summer. This little practice was nothing for me. During two days I with another young man freed one hold of the three of a 700-ton barge of the rests of bauxite that could not have been collected mechanically.

My trip on the freighter ended in June. The next day Uncle Louis assigned me on a two-day trip on our first hydrofoil. It has been a specimen of the smaller from the two Soviet types. Our company has purchased two pieces of that series "Rocket". In the '60s ship-building revived all over the world. On one hand traditional ship-building countries lost their significance in that respect and others, where industry was just in infancy, sprang to leading places, and on the other hand design techniques were in change, institutions with towing tanks started developments in three fields: that was hydrofoil, hovercraft and special propulsion equipment. The leading builder of hydrofoils became the Soviet Union. In such countries, where small aircraft and private cars took the medium-distance transport sector, there was no sense in developing a kind of transport means that needs extra high power to lift it out of water --

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although for the glide it needs only as much energy as a bus -- and has no essential advantages against ordinary ships. On the opposite, where private cars were scarce and fuel was cheap as in the Soviet Union, state money could be found for research purposes. A hydrofoil is an ordinary ship at small speed, but when it reaches a limit the uplift on the profiled wings under the hull will lift it out of water. After that it is gliding exclusively on these wings. This glide needs no significant power, but just before out-lift the thrust force is high. The Soviets built two types of hydrofoils, the smaller had 60, the bigger one 150 seats, with one and two 1,200-hp Diesel-engines respectively. The bigger one was called "Meteor".

When my family caught the news that it would be my last trip that year, everybody gave his or her order on goods to take from Vienna. It was the main reason, why that time I did not go to Frau M., I had to buy things at the source.

The hydrofoil gave me no work to do, the engineer of it would not let anybody touch anything. It has been a true Russian design, but of the better type. Its main engine had a life of 500 hours, no wonder: it has been the same engine used in T-72 tanks.

I don't remember too many things about that trip, the most obvious is, that those sections that we conquered with pain with a towage and left behind at a snail's pace, either because the engines could not bear more, or the riverside was too near and it had to be protected from the destroying effect of higher waves, this time we run along with 50 miles per hour. It is clear, the surface of water was cut this time only by the profiled supports of the wings, with no visible waves, and there was only need for two feet of depth under them. This time we lay at Mexiko-Platz, under the Reichsbrücke and didn't visit the headquarters of Frau M.

Falling level

The tiring practice has been followed by an even more tiring trade excursion to the GDR, but I tell you more about it later. And for almost a year I haven't got near to ships, there followed my last year at the university with diploma work and final examination called also defending of the diploma (although, by the remark of one of my fellow-students, it is hard to defend something you don't have yet). Leaving all this behind, I married my fiancée. And after some weeks of common life I started to work, as it was regulated in my scholarship-agreement, as a machinist on a river boat. Uncle Louis assigned me to a boat that would be sent by all probabilities exclusively on upper-river trips. For a newly married man it has not been all the same, if he had a home trip every second or eighth weeks. She has been a low-draught tug-boat. Instead of the usual five feet and a half, she has submerged only four. By a larger breadth and a lighter hull and deckhouse, it has been designed to work on the upper Danube, even at low tide.

She was in the repair yard freshly refurbished after a bad crash. It could have been named even funny, had it not been so dangerous, but, as no casualty has resulted, all, who have heard about the event, laughed at it heartily. The crash had happened in the newly finished lock of Aschach in Austria. By the regular water-level forecast the boat could have gone under the bridge at the upper sluice. But, as from the forecast a certain time had elapsed, the water level has grown about four inches. The captain led her into the lock from above. As her lowered mast crashed into the sluice bridge, it went under it forcing the head of the boat to submerge more in the water. By this trim, the wheel-house of the ship slipped under the sluice structure. The trouble came, as the mast could bear the load no longer. As the ship popped up, the wheel-house crashed from below into the bridge of the sluice. In an instant the

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captain and the steering-man jumped for their lives to the doors, and the aluminium structure collapsed. Witnesses described the sight after the crash, as the wrecks of an air-plane.

In the yard she has got an ordinary collapsible wooden wheelhouse. After my boarding, she has remained for another ten days in the yard for other repairs. During that time two factors were effecting my health in an unfavourable way: the boatswain of the boat and his stupidity.

The drinking-water tank of the ship had gone empty. The man saw a hose lying in the court of the yard and water was coming out of it. He put it into the drinking-water tank of the boat and filled up the tank. Alas, it had not been drinking water from the city works, it had been ordinary unclean river water. In a day everybody began to have diarrhoea. Some members of the crew, not sensitive to bacteria of that kind, soon overcame it, but, as infected water has remained in the tank, and later fillings have made the fluid only a little diluted, but not clean, some of us were not immune enough to defeat the sickness. I went at once to the doctor and have got a good medicine. As long as I have been taking it, my condition has been fair. After stopping with it in a few days, my troubles returned. For a week I was in a bad condition, having diarrhoea and feeling ill.

The start of the boat has been timed on a Saturday evening. My wife came with me. She has not been the only wife on board, there was a sailor, whose wife has been pregnant in her last month, and the boatswain -- the "clever" one -- has also had his wife there. We could move into the spare cabin for that night, actually she, as half the night I spent on duty. At noon the next day we reached the anchoring site in Komárom, the town, from where my ancestors originated. As soon as the border check has been complete, she went to the railway station and caught a train home.

I was in a familiar place, but this time there were a lot of inconvenient people in the crew. The boatswain has been one of them. He was always trying to make me angry, and one day I told

him to keep his mouth, if he was not to be thrown over the bulwark. Otherwise, I haven't been a man to use excessive force. After that time he has kept his mouth, but the weeks on a common boat with him have not been easy. For the next trip we have got a new boatsman.

The chief machinist of the boat could have been a good fellow, had he not been envious on me by my schooling. As I have been a diploma-engineer, he has not stopped proving me that my knowledge was nothing compared to his. Even in cases when my arguments were true, his obstinacy drove him into bad situations. He made me the six months on the boat much harder than it could have been otherwise. I was sorry for our disharmony as I have thought already then, now I am even more convinced about it, that practice in the case of a clever man can balance his lower education. That man had a faulty character, but otherwise he had nothing to be ashamed of with his knowledge in the trade.

The first officer has been a conceited dandy, but as we have actually had no direct connections, he could not make me any trouble. All the other members of the crew and the remaining officers have been honest people.

The assistant chief machinist has been the favourite of his boss, who needed someone to make a fool of. His face was speckled and for this the boss called him first "Spotted", later "Motley". He had a really good nature, nothing could drive him into anger.

My colleague and cabin-mate was a kid, but his technical knowledge has been a good help to me in the first days on that boat. We have stayed friends, even after I left shipping and went to the yard, to work as a designer.

One of the sailors had a pregnant wife, I have mentioned it. He was a simple, good-hearted man and he has told me a lot about his past at the military flotilla.

The boatswain, who joined us on our second trip, was a sly man.

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He could keep his thoughts for himself, but he has not been malicious. I think, he has had some bad experiences with educated people, that was it only. The cook has been his partner and, for this reason, on the first trip, she was not really talkative.

Another sailor has been a clever guy -- sometimes he had the same problem with both boatswains, as me with my boss -- and completely in love with his fiancée. Later he would invite me to his wedding with her. During both upriver trips, our trio with him and my cabin-mate has been discovering the towns, where our boat let us go to shore.

One day on our first trip in Regensburg, the upriver end of the route, we were roving the streets chatting, as a small elderly woman addressed us in our language. She had been living there for twenty years and had had a tailor's shop. She invited us to come to her and, once in her apartment -- that has been her shop with three employees --, she offered us a business. She wanted us to take her regularly some loaves of red pepper salami, and she promised us a good price. At that time Germany has not been today's buyers' paradise yet. It goes without saying, when we came again she wanted it on half price. She wanted us to cut the loaves in two to check it. We took them back home, and she had to find another victim.

Sometimes we went to the pubs. There were some famous ones, where the whole building had its only entrance through the pub, and girls have been coming and going on the stairs. American soldiers frequented them, too. But it was only needed for an MP to come in and stand in the doorway, GIs have been running out fast.

The famous pub was called "The Stone Bridge" for the medieval bridge blocking navigation upriver. We called this pub "The Blind Mouse". This was the most popular such institution of double function. We took this situation matter-of-factly, there was excellent draught beer like everywhere in Bavarian territory, nothing else could disturb us. I could not find the pub, where we have been pro-

vided with free drink before Easter the year before. The building was new there and a night bar took the place of the pub.

Our second trip has been the last upriver one for our boat for a long time. The water level was so low that it was true as Motley said:

“I do not like it, when swimmers are walking on us in the navigational route.”

It was true: on the German section the boat sometimes touched the bottom. The barges have been partly loaded, and transport has not been economical. That autumn there were no rains, and until April the next year, there could be no traffic. But then! I can tell later, how the Danube behaved the next year.

Between the trips the boat stopped at the usual place, and my wife came to me. It was in August, the weather was fine and we had so much to make up for. During the trip I had written at least five letters, but had not received any. It has not been her fault. When in Vienna on the down-river trip I grumbled for the lack of mail, my boss said:

“Be patient. You will get it next time. The sailor in love has got a basketful of them.”

Yes, he has, and they all were 3 months old. Exactly, she has written me many and the next time in Vienna I have got them. But now we could speak in person and do much more. The two days of waiting has not been too long, worse still, she could stay with me only one day.

Cataracts

Floating down-river in our second trip we have got the instruction to continue our route to the capital. It meant, the boat would be going on a Lower Danube assignment. Even worse, our boat was to become a helper tug at the Cataracts, to assist other boats of the company there in taking over their barges. So far that task had been assigned only to the most powerful tugs of the company, but two of the three such boats went to the repair yard for maintenance and, besides, the water level of the river was record low also on this hard section. In the capital, a short stay has been allowed to enable the crew to travel home, before the long stay down-river. Also, there were some members leaving the boat and new ones coming. The young man, my engine-room mate, has also gone ashore. His successor has been first time on a boat, he had been a Diesel engine driver at the railway company.

My wife took it sadly that we were to be separated for months. She brought me also news, I had been invited to take my diploma. In my absence she would have to go to the ceremony. Her sister was to get the new apartment in the next month, then it would be time for her to move in. Her brother and his girl-friend had been engaged. When I had to leave her standing on the bank at last, I felt terribly lonely.

We have taken a lot of barges behind us. This time they were our towage only to the cataracts. We had an assignment to serve there for six weeks, actually we did it for eight weeks. And then we would be sent not home, but down to Reni again, that time already belonging to Ukraine.

Nothing changed from the time I first saw these beautiful, but terribly dangerous waters. But this time I have been an active crew-

member on a helper tug, I have not had any leisure time even to photograph. When not on duty, my occupation has been sleeping. The weather has turned colder, it has been better to be inside. The heater boiler, used in summer only to prepare hot water for showers, has been in constant use. The heat in the engine room became pleasant, down, where the draught has been strong, it was even cool. Out on deck, the morning cold was even worse. It was there on that boat first, that I admitted the truth of the saying I had heard somewhere: heat can be unpleasant, but cold hurts.

At the end of October at last we got the instruction to take the barges waiting for a down-river trip at the lower end of the cataracts and tow them to Reni. Load would be again iron-ore. On route our second officer, who has been doing also the work of radio operator, got a message about the power take-over in the Soviet Union. We had to learn a new name that was Brezhnev. Anyway, we would have almost 20 years to memorise it.

Timing has not been very good for our arrival at Reni. There was a 3-day break because of their November 7 holiday. Even there was an assembly of celebration and the crews from all the boats have been invited to it. Winter has come already, snow has covered the harbour and the numerous railway tracks full of cars. All have been laden with ore frozen into them. Reloading it to our barges meant to thaw it by steam and load it by 10-ton grabs. It took eight days to download the eight barges.

For my forty days below the cataracts, I have taken all my allowance in Soviet currency. It has been a stupid thing, taking into account my experiences two years before. I spent it buying an electric heater and a guitar. Both would end up elsewhere within the family. I was coming back from town in the evening darkness with the characteristic Russian paper packages, when a uniformed man stopped me and asked about my shopping. It was astonishing for me, but I showed him my goods. Of them only their prices interested him. He took me into his office, wrote down the sum I told him I had got, and made a calculation. Sixty kopeks were missing -- I forgot to

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tell him I took a bag of candy, too --, but it was only his first problem. His bigger one was: did I tell the truth about the origin of my money, or might I have changed it on the black market.

I was instructed to wait in the office. The situation was similar to that at the frontier guard barracks three years before, when I attempted a trip to my girl-friend's village without having a border-zone pass. Well, you are able to break rules by doing nothing wrong, in case, the rules are wrong. It is the same case, how millions of my compatriots became strangers on their own land after World War I, by the wrong decision of the winners to shift large pieces of lands from one country to another. Half an hour passed, and the man returned. He told me everything was in order, *I was allowed to leave: "Vysvobodny" (You are free)*. No apologies, of course.

The day to arrange our towage came at last and we left for home. We have reached our capital in a record of two weeks. The tug has been laid on the pontoon of the popular pub "Matrózcsárda" (sailors' pub) on the embankment, and we all have been allowed to get one day off.

Although I stayed assigned aboard it took only some days for Uncle Louis to get me on land. My boatman career was finished. In the following years I changed to shipbuilding, even later got acquainted with machine tools and was travelling in the world by other means. For a long time my trips were in connection with shipbuilding, but later my attention became focused on other issues. I revisited also places where I first get to as a shipyard executive, it goes without saying, I found them a little different not only for the time lapse, but for my different job too. I hope that readers will find interesting those other narratives too.

Chapter 3

Czech and Slovak country

For many people in Hungary a trip abroad meant Czechoslovakia some decades ago. Not only, because this country was the nearest one to us, where, besides, a significant Hungarian population has been living, but also for the fact that this was the first foreign country that had signed an agreement with Hungary that made it easier for tourists to visit it. For me it wasn't the first foreign country, I had seen half a dozen others to the date of my first visit there, even then it was only a transit stop for me. It happened in 1963, when, as a member of a student group from the Technical University of Budapest, I made a trip by train to the GDR for a summer practice. Our teachers organised this one-day stop for us to enable us to see also Prague, although our prime target was Berlin then. Well, time was short, but to make our inconvenience worse, it also rained heavily, but that is no rarity in Prague. Having an area equal to the inner districts of Budapest Prague was covered by us quickly. I have been astonished to see the similarity with towns in West-Germany, where I had had the opportunity to visit some of them a couple of weeks before. Now I wouldn't be, as I know that the Czech lands had been organic parts of the empire of Charlemagne, Prague had even been named the Holy Roman Emperor's capital later, in the 16th century. I liked very much the castle Hrajín, the river Vltava with its fine old bridges, and especially the hilly landscape where the city has been built. So much I remember of Prague. Although I travelled there also by car some years later, that time we drove around and didn't stop.

My second trip to that country took me to Komárno. I have been working for the Óbuda Shipyard as an engineer and have been sent there to take part in a symposium and make a lecture in the name of my company. It was in 1973.

At the beginning of October I went to my namesake town on the

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Slovak side of the Danube and took part in a conference on anti-corrosion. It was a very modest event, rather a seminar, most of the people understood my native language. The organiser has been the shipyard of the town having a double profile. It exported freighters for large water reservoirs to the Soviets and built the best dredges on the Danube. Their factory originates from before World War I, when the land was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and belonged to our country. Actually this event has been a little self-celebration of the company with foreign guests present.

The town has been known for me, but it was the first time I entered it. There was a little nostalgia too, my family name had been a title originally, my ancestors had been living here. They had moved from here not voluntarily, together with several other families they were deported to the village of Buzsák in Somogy county south of the Lake Balaton after the freedom fight in 1848 to 1849 as a punishment for taking part in it. Anyway, before this trip I consulted with my young colleague, a girl from this town, and could find my way. I liked the town, there was certain care for order and cleanliness in the '70s in the Eastern block. Buildings were well maintained, both old ones and new houses, traffic was civilised.

My lecture has not been apt to the main line of issues of the conference, besides, this was the only German-language letter. The organisers did not care too much about the composition and linguistic knowledge of participants at sending out the invitations and promising German to be official language. De facto official language was Slovak, but all Slavic people were speaking in their own tongues, in Polish, in Croat, there was no need for a translator, all understood each-other. I have been informed about happenings by my new acquaintances, Hungarian nationals being citizens of Slovakia. The next day it was very instructive to see all the original "K. und K." (Austro-Hungarian Monarchy) pieces of machinery and buildings during the factory survey. Only production technology has been up-to-date, but it really has.

My son was four when we decided with my wife to take advant-

age of the newest opportunities to get passports and make a visit all the three of us for a solo day in Komárno. It was fine autumn weather, we walked in the small-town streets, bought the necessary ornaments for the Christmas-tree and walked back to our country via the road bridge over the Danube. My son made it public in the kindergarten the next day that "yesterday we were in another country".

My next trip to Czechoslovakia originated again in my job three years later, I represented my employer at the autumn industrial exhibition in Brno. I was a newcomer there at that time, in November, 1978. Among the sights of the town there is one real unusual place. It is a monastery turned into a basement-pub, and it has a special room where the "dry monks" are kept. Already at that time I was appalled by the sight of mummies, my real disgust of that custom came fore in Egypt years later. The town itself I didn't find attractive, my manner is always spoiled from industrial settlements. No less important has been the ugly November weather, even snow was falling, the thick cover of clouds made you think of night. You could also feel the characteristic policy of "socialist camp" about accommodation. Brno is a sleepy small town all the year round, except the two exhibitions annually, that is twice 8 days. Why should the state have invested into hotels being empty in 95 percent of the time? You could only reserve rooms in family houses via travel agencies. I have also been accommodated in a house in the outskirts, where the housewife reminded me of my mother, and the pie that she helped me to has been an item of traditional from Austrian times, she called it *strudel*. She also spoke German, her teenage daughter knew only some Russian.

In 1983, after my stays in Africa and several countries in the south of Europe, I found my way to the northern Carpathian Mountains, that has always been the favourite of Hungarian sportsmen, since the opening of the borders for tourists. That November my family joined an excursion, organised again by the trade union of our directorate, to those mountains. That part of the mountain is called Tatra. That excursion was well arranged, weath-

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er was beautiful, last days of the Indian summer, but one of our experiences made us, my wife and me, wish to forget it as soon as possible.

Late afternoon one day we stopped and the group went to see a kind of attraction. This involved a long descent to the site and ascent on the return walk. My son was with us downwards, but, as we came up slower, he would go to the front and back again. I told him not to make detours as dusk was on us.

Arriving to the bus we could not find him. Darkness fell already and I began to run down and up, my heart near to an attack, but he was nowhere. It is impossible to describe my despair. I could not help imagining him dead. Our group slowly learned about the situation and some of them helped me in searching for him, others were very sympathetic.

Suddenly another child came to us and said:

“Joe has been sitting on the other side of the road for half an hour.”

Well, he became tired and sat down unaware of the fuss about him.

I remembered the despair of my parents when my brother died in his childhood. I could feel now something similar they felt. This was the last trip I joined my colleagues.

I haven't seen Slovakia for years after that, it has not been attractive for me, the positive changes in 1989 induced a lot of negative ones, too. As I was returning to my assignment in Kiev from my holiday by car in 1993, I crossed it with my family, that time my impressions were less favourable than in Poland or at home.

Chapter 4

Poland

Poland had had a very important role in my world since my childhood, both as a topic of the literature I consumed and as the language many of my fellow-students decided to learn at the Technical University in Budapest. At the same time when I had the opportunity to visit the GDR as a student, another group of the us went to Poland. At that time Poles were living in a relative poverty, for this reason I haven't had the intention to go there for a time. My opinion changed soon, when I made a trip there first time in 1974. In that year there was a conference on shipbuilding in Szczecin organised by the local shipyard. The three of us had been nominated to it in the previous year by the Scientific Society for Mechanical Engineers, where I had been a member for some years. My fellow participants were my colleague, Steve, who had been doing his study at the Technical University and Otto, a middle-aged man, who had come to work with us a short time before. He was named head of the Documentation Department.

Otto has got an assignment of expert at the municipal police for his great knowledge about river transport and emergency cases. His life is a good example for a man, who fell off from a high place because of a minor fault, but could climb up again by gaining a high esteem anew with his honest hard work. At any rate, the four days of the conference have been useful for us, I kept the guard with my English knowledge, while they were discovering the town. I myself was suffering from my injury in my ankle that had happened some months before, I was freshly out-of-plaster. I moved only when it was necessary. This way I have seen less of the town than I wanted, what I know about it I know more from the collected prospects and magazines.

Polish language is understood by a foreigner with difficulty,

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even, if he is speaking Russian. Neither O., nor S. spoke it. But O. would have deserved to be rewarded by a prize for cold blood, as he queued up for lunch with a notebook in his hand. After ordering from meals on exhibit, he handed the notebook over to the saleswoman to write the sum on to be paid for. This method has worked and he has always kept his temper.

During conference we mutually earned the respect of each other. He with his good nature and limitless calm, I with my knowledge in technical topics and languages -- beside English that I could use well at that time, I have never completely lost Russian, let alone German --. About Poland I have got a very positive impression, after that time I have never passed any opportunity to visit the country.

The next one came for me in two years. The head of the hull department in the shipyard, Michael, a very good sailor of sailboats in international championships, proposed me as project manager for the current object under construction, a river tug for rafts with a power of 1,200 hp, to be present at the tow-tank experiments in Gdansk. The factory management agreed. At that time I was a student of the evening course at the University of Economics in Budapest, the exam season was in full swing, it has been my last semester. As soon as I finished my exams, we flew to Warsaw and took the train there to Gdansk. Our room has been reserved in Sopot at the outskirts of Gdansk, as in the town it has not been possible to find any rooms. It meant the use of the electric suburban train, but the hotel was really good. It even had a large beach and we took advantage of it under the June sun at late afternoons. Being the end of June and our staying some degrees to the north from Budapest meant considerably longer days, the sun stayed up almost endless. The beach was full of rambling vendors, they offered their goods, mainly food, but most often we heard the voice of the ice-cream vendor.

As we were waiting for our train in Warsaw during the first leg of our trip, we also had time to make a walk in the old town. Later, in the

mid-eighties, when I travelled there much more frequently, I could look around more properly, this time we made only a short walk, but I shot enough pictures to retain the beauty of fine old buildings. We set aside some time to see the sights around Gdansk. We took a ride on the hydrofoil from Gdansk to the Hel-peninsula making a long tongue of sand of about 40 miles into the Baltic to Gdynia. It is very narrow, only some thousand feet wide, and springs out of the sea only about ten feet. But people like it and you can see small weekend-huts everywhere. The farther terminus of the electric local train is Gdynia, which doesn't have great historical traditions, but it has an important port. There I have met the passenger ship "Mazowsze", about which I wrote earlier in connection with my Lower Danube adventures. It was built in the Ganz (then Gheoghiu Dej) shipyard in Budapest in 1954. In Gdynia it has been used as restaurant-ship being laid at the wharf, not because of her age, but for the reason that she had an aluminium deck-house and superstructure, which lowered her centre of gravity so much that it became too stable. Against the normal period of swinging its period is three seconds that makes even the oldest seamen sea-sick. As a ship it is unusable. Gdynia is well-known for the Westerplatte, a place where World War II broke out. We also carved out time during the free week-end to take a ride and see the reconstructed medieval fortress of the Teutonic knights in Malbork. It was the place from where they ruled all the surrounding lands until the joined forces of a popular uprising backing the Polish nobles smashed them. It was a great experience to see this fortress, even more, as I have seen few better films about historic themes than that made of the novel "Crusaders" from Sienkiewicz, for which this castle has provided a proper setting.

This trip furnished us both with a lot of useful knowledge also professionally. Our time otherwise has been filled completely, as we both wanted to get as much information as possible. The equipment of the tank has been up-to-date, imported from Scotland, but our contract was the first of that kind. We took with ourselves all the drawings necessary to prepare the models of the hull and the screw.

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The rudder-blades had not been designed that far, the institute put in an ordinary three-blade assembly for the tests.

The specialist, who did the work itself with the tow-bridge, was a young engineer, Marian. His wife was expecting their first child. His boss, the chief of the tank, was a peculiar elderly man with a unique English-type wit. Not by chance, as he had been living in England during the war as an officer of the Liberation Army. Our third constant partner, chief for the business activities of the university, was a true gentleman. The older Poles were fluent in English, but the young M. could only communicate with us through his bosses or by his extremely poor French with Michael. That time French was me like Chinese.

The two weeks on that trip was very successful and we left with the promise to return in September for the results and the free-turning tests on a lake in the middle of Poland. In September Michael and me went again to Poland. The Polish countryside is much more beautiful in the autumn, as rains make it lush green. It was cool and windy, but we could not be aware of that, because we were constantly busy. After the free-turning tests of the model -- for this experiments a battery-operated propulsion has been mounted into it -- we have been taken back to the university and we had some days to see through the results. By the tests the propeller-screw has proved good and the pitch properly selected. But the turning tests suggested that with one central screw, the traditional three-blade rudder would be ineffective. Thank to this question, I could have a trip into a town in Germany the next year where I had never been before, I will give an account about it later. Soon after that above trip to Poland I left my employer for another one, and my next visit to that country was due to a Comecon section meeting in the representation of my new employer, Machine Tool Works.

The winter of 1978/79 was very heavy with a lot of snow everywhere in Europe. Even in February, when the weather has warmed, the winter had something in spare. An ordinary multilateral meeting on machine tools was on schedule. The place was a resort house

30 miles from Warsaw in Poland. In that country something has been wrong that time, but it could only be sensed, there were no uprisings that time yet. The meeting had to be postponed because of forecasts in snow. One week later a decision has been taken to assemble the participants after all.

From our country about 10 people have been there, including a saleswoman, representatives of other machine tool manufacturers, even people from firms buying import machine tools for their own use. The total number of participants has been around 80.

Arriving at Warsaw we all were received by the organiser Polish foreign trade company. They took us to our hotels. On the next morning buses were taking us to the venue of the meeting, a typical modern recreational home of a big party. Built for summer vacationers the single-glass windows radiated cold when you got near to them. Heating was almost nothing. All the same, the first two days everything went in order. The third day a big quantity of snow fell, about two feet, and a forceful wind made snow-drifts. The temperature fell to around 0 degrees F. We finished our tasks anyway and were preparing for the final party, when there came a black-out. The air cables could not bear the load of ice and were torn apart. All services had been based on light. Not only that we remained in dark, the water pumps and the heater would not work either. We had only one choice, to wait, until the People's Army of Poland would save us.

Two other days passed and, on the sixth day around noon the armoured tanks arrived. They made the road free and our trucks -- buses could not come in -- took us to the airport. I took my shave, went to the toilet and shaved. After the three-day-old Tartar-beefsteak even snacks in the airport refreshment room were delicious. Even the notorious Polish coffee tasted good. Polish coffee is made similarly as Turkish one, only Poles do not boil water with coffee. They pour boiling water simply on and mix it. At talks it is good. When your hosts do not offer you anything more and you are hungry, you can eat the remains from the bottom of your glass.

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Some months later I got an opportunity to take an assignment of an aid-expert for some years in Africa. About that you can read my recollections later. When this assignment ended I returned to the same employer, in almost the same technical salesman job as earlier, my next trip to Poland was the result of my business activities. I had not been there for four years, it was 1983, two years after general Jaruzelski prevented a similar tragedy that happened to us in 1956. Anyway, the Polish economy was very weak, it could only produce enough goods for the black market, and those goods came to Hungary through "export-tourism". The Polish market in the village of Gyál near our capital city has been in full blossom.

Shortly before that trip I made a visit to Plovdiv, Bulgaria with a young talented salesman who was to make a fine career, some years later I met him as commercial councillor of Hungary in Tunis. He was responsible at his employer for the Polish issues at this time, too. At the Plovdiv exhibition a Polish visitor found him with a suggestion about co-operation on air-brake components for trucks and buses. It was this trip that could come true in October 1983. Joe H., a leading designer in our brake factory at Kecskemét came with us, too. The seat of our co-operation partner lay far from the capital, we were taken there in the car of the representative of responsible foreign trade company.

For Poland it has been a terrible period. There were no goods in the shops, people were taking all abroad to sell them there. Poland was the only country where you could not spend your allowance, for this reason it was allowed to take it back to Hungary and change it into our currency. Poles were in low morale, a girl could be bargained for a dinner by any foreigner. I was suffering physically seeing that poverty, I have a very high esteem of Polish people. In the biggest store of the capital all the giant halls were empty. Even shelves had been taken out, there was activity only in one corner where stainless cutlery was sold -- without handles.

Our partners were true gentlemen. All the time we were engaged on business, even we got good food -- a little hidden from the

eyes of their employees in a special room -- at noon. They were keen to explain the contradiction between food shortage in general and our ample food: the company was raising pigs within the factory and was providing the workers with meat on production cost, at least in a minimum quantity. It was the same in the evening, we had enough food and vodka. It was a concern for me, I cannot drink without getting sick, but it was impossible to reject drink completely, and it spoiled my night in large part.

Sorry to say, in spite of all our goodwill and that of our partners, this technical co-operation would never realise. It was one of the most unstable times in policy. Almost anything might have happened, it is not only by chance that such films as "The Day After" have been produced.

My next trip to Poland has been the first one on machine tools and it has been in April 1986. It has been a monster event, two sales executives, sales engineers from machine tool manufacturers and service representatives. In Warsaw we have been placed in the hotel "Forum" in the centre of the new town. In Warsaw we had our talks with foreign trade partners, the next day we travelled to the airplane works in the country, where the seat of the customers for our five-axis machining centre could be found.

A very pleasant sight the Polish country is, we had a fine experience, although the roads were far from excellent. As a result of centuries old influence Polish settlements resemble German country towns. Poles have also saved their historical objects, such as castles, palaces, monasteries. A lot of beautiful forests remained in virgin state thank to the size of wooded area. This has not been my only trip by car to the Polish countryside, and I guard the same memories about all of them.

In the Mielec factory of the Polish airspace industry we have been welcomed cordially. They would be the actual customers. A very hard day followed, problems had been turned upside-down. Ordinarily sellers would sell more, customers buy less, than proposed. We could sell less, than they wanted to buy. In the Comecon it

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has always been that way. In the meantime the other sales executive went to another customer, a buyer of Csepel machine tools.

At dinner I had to be alert. First, I was to drink as little vodka as possible. Second, Poles are always offering Tartar beefsteak -- raw minced beef with a raw egg -- for savoury dish. Neither raw meat, nor raw eggs I consume. My hosts would not notice it, as I covered my bread with butter and mixed meat as long as I needed, only ate my bread and butter, but never meat and eggs.

The very day we were returning from Warsaw there happened the calamity in Chernobyl. We did not know about it then, but we have got a fair dose.

In June I had to be present on the international fair in Poznan, Poland. I had to meet my customers all. Our representative in Warsaw, chief of our service office, Leslie T., helped me to find them. It was a short, but very tiring trip with as little time to see attractions as possible. My next trip to Poland followed in August, but the situation was the same as before. In the meantime there came changes in my conditions. Leslie T. had decided to terminate his assignment in Poland and to return home, he had tried to help me in getting his place, but the Polish economy turned again downwards and events developed differently.

Chapter 5

Germany

I have mentioned among my boatman recollections that the summer of the year 1963 was a dense period for us fourth-grade students of the Budapest Technical University in our year. As soon as we completed our practice in the yard we had to pack up our suitcases for our practice abroad. As we have been collected at the university to get our instructions, one of the other mariners has expressed my thoughts: "The last thing I desire now is having a trip to the GDR." All of us have been mistaken. The three weeks of the GDR practice have been the most useful of all we had that year.

Our practice have been organised in the form swap of student-groups. The group of the German students have also been called together to have a meeting with us before they left for home after their practice time. This "white table" meeting took place in a small open-air pub up in Buda castle. Being in the same building as the students' hostel of our university, it has been the place our students visited regularly. The Germans knew it, too, as during their stay they have been accommodated in the hostel.

At the table laden with beer many long-lasting relationships have been created. It was also there that I have met my would-be German friend, with whom later my wife and me will have met many times in our country and in theirs. His name was Hans, he said he had a wife and a family. We were to meet again in the GDR.

Our trip started with an 18-hour railway journey on the Balt-Orient train. The first hours have been fine, but as night came, and we had no sleeping-car tickets, it became hard. We arrived at Berlin early morning. We had two teachers of the university as guides, and at the station our German guide met us. There was another colleague of his to help us, but he was to join us later. During our

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stay we visited five big cities in the country beside the capital, the eastern part of Berlin. One of our own guides from home was dr. B., our lecturer in propulsion. He was the finest man I have ever met in my life.

In Berlin we were astonished to find the town in ruins, almost in the same condition as it had been in the last days of the war. Even two years later we, my wife and me, will have found it the same. Our team of 18 students and two teachers soon fell apart, and a number of smaller groups has formed. We mariners were only six, and it automatically became a close group. Out of us Emery has always been running after girls, he seldom came with us. Stephen and Anthony have been friends for a long time, both of them with a background of important fathers. They could not accept us with Theodore in their circles, as T. has also come from a poor family. And there was Andrew, he has been, and remained as long as I had him in view, a technology fanatic.

Actually in Berlin we did not have any official programs, only privately our group of six have visited the Pergamon Museum. The other officially organised program has been the visit to the Sans Soucie Palace in Potsdam that had been the summer resort of Friedrich II in the 18th century. The palace had only a small part restored yet and we knew about Potsdam only that treaties about the future of Germany after World War II have been signed there, anyway, the trip was worth the effort. We made the trip in the double-decker train being a novelty at that time, but the route took about 40 miles instead of the actual 10, as we had to circle the whole of West-Berlin. Our group of six allotted a small sum to an evening program in the place of entertainment Friedrichstadtpalast. The main reason of our visit has been that Theodore had always been a great fan of the dancer Edina Balogh, who with her partner György Klapka had their contract just there. After three days we have been packed on a train for Rostock, the seat of the university, our partner at swap. In the evening after our arrival there was a dinner for our team, where some of the students, who had visited our country, have also been present. There I met Hans again. We renewed our relationship and

changed addresses.

Both in Rostock and its seaside resort sister-town of Warnemünde there was an up-to-date shipyard each. In the latter even 60-thousand-ton freighters have been built. We were deeply influenced by the vast cable-crane that covered the whole territory of the launch-site. In general we had learned a lot, because eighteen years of "socialist" (actually feudalist) system could not wipe out of the Germans the ambition for precise, excellent work. Even the smallest details held something worth learning for us. This meant at the same time that larger towns had an ugly industrial look, all of them. Only little settlements had retained their homely character, in German "Gemütlichkeit".

The official programs have been well organised. Beside them, we had leisure time to visit the beach. In August weather is usually fine at the Baltic, and it was so the first day we arrived. It was fine to enjoy the 80 degrees F temperature of both air and water. The next day the calm turned into a lively breeze. Air temperature remained the same, but as waves mixed warm water with the cold in the deeper bottom, water temperature fell to 62 degrees F. In that day only we foreign students had the courage to swim, locals didn't.

It goes without saying, I have taken my camera with me. When dr. B. saw me shoot he gave me some advice about photography. It has not been a new hobby of mine, but one piece of his advice I took seriously: I tried colour slides. And since that time I have always made my pictures on slides.

However hard it was for me to leave on this trip, I liked the country and its people. We liked also the well organised factories where we saw manufacture all the equipment needed to build a fine ship.

In Warnemünde, the ferry of the Malmoe line came every day to the pier. It was a great sight as the large gate of the ferry opened, and from the belly of the ship every kind of transport means from cars to trains were coming out. The ferry looked enormous for my

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eyes accustomed to river-boats. From Rostock our group made a small detour to Strahlsund, also a seaside town and the place of a shipyard. The yard was building floating fishing factories for the Soviets. Strahlsund is a real Hansa town, it looks like a model village for Piko railways.

Returning to Rostock we have been taken to the workshop, where the giant Diesel engines have been built for the 60-thousand-plus-ton freighters. The engines looked like steam-engines with open casings and their cross-heads. We learned, that these engines are taken apart, and in the engine room of the ship re-assembled again.

Finishing our Baltic program we moved our seat to Magdeburg, and there we visited the SKL engine factory, as well as the river shipyard on the Elbe. It was my first visit to SKL, but my employers in years to come would send me more than once to this place. Magdeburg has been one of the German towns heavily punished by bombing. The same as Berlin, it was in the same state as at the end of the war. Overall in the country, there was a shortage of food at that time. We had nothing to do with it, as our supply has been provided by our guides, but I have seen in the shops, as people got their butter on ration cards. When I returned there in later years with my colleague, he said it had been this year when he has seen only flowers in the windows of butcher shops instead of meat. Two years later, when I visited the country with my wife, there was no shortage at all.

It was in Magdeburg in the cathedral, where we saw a painting about the whole town in ruins after bombing, with only the cathedral standing upright unhurt. In the cathedral I have seen also a wonderful medieval clockwork with at least twelve different functions.

I do not remember in which of the visited towns, in a sports goods shop I caught glimpse of a set of springs, a true precise German product in a style from before the war. I needed it, as some

months before, on my first voyage that year on the tugboat "Kaposvár", I had damaged my right wrist during winding up the auxiliary engine. That time I had carried my arm in a Bonaparte pose and for two weeks I could not do my work properly. It must have healed faulty, to this day small bones are sometimes mixing up with each other. After the accident my right hand was very weak. For this reason I wanted some means to go over this trouble. In about three years, starting with one spring, and coming up to four of the six, my hand has improved well.

From Magdeburg we have been led to Leipzig. There -- it is the historical seat of the Saxon state -- we had nothing to do with our trade, but we have seen the famous field of the Battle of Nations and the valuable collection of the museum. In the hostel there were locals, girls among them, and our boys -- Emery and Theodore -- had their romance in the night before we left for Dresden, our last stop.

This last of the places visited has had nothing for us technically, it has only be installed into the program for tourist purposes. Now the town has its new centre created of awful concrete buildings. That time it was the same heap of ruins as Berlin or Magdeburg. Even worse. We could see how precisely, in the last month of the war, it was destroyed to a line, and over that line everything stayed intact. As if cut by a giant knife, even half of the palace Zwinger (cage) stood in its original state and in two steps from the line damage has been complete.

The town had been beautifully situated on the river Elbe. There is a hilly landscape on both banks, and on the embankment there are fine works of architecture. Farther, the mountains of the frontier between German and Czech lands can bee seen in a blue line. The German side of that mountains is called the Saxon Switzerland and it is a famous and really wonderful resort country. The river Elbe had not impressed me very much. It is a small river, not bigger than our Tisza, even water you could not see in it much. At least then as I saw it, the situation was that. I saw boats, but it was my impression that

to sail on such an insignificant waterway can be a very hard job.

My memory is storing four themes about Dresden. The first thing in the town has been our visit to the Zwinger. It has been turned into a large gallery of art and I think, there is no way to see all the precious works other, than having a job in the museum and a permission to visit all the halls and store-rooms. It is not behind in any sense of the Louvre or the Hermitage. The Germans at that time did not have the finesse to guard these artworks in a modern sense: I could make as many pictures as wanted in the halls illuminated well by natural light. Even flashlights have not been prohibited.

The other three are in close connection. First our farewell dinner. The German professor, our guide during these three weeks, has been very thrifty and, finding more money left than necessary for the remaining time, he wanted to increase his spending, to align it to schedule. He did not want to get less funds for a similar project next time by economising anything. At the dinner we had all we wished and, unfortunately more drinks than necessary. When at last we left the restaurant, all of us have been drunken. Except me, as I have had a liver problem, and instead of being drunken I felt unwell, rather to say ill. This is my second and third piece of memory.

The fourth one is meeting an old friend, the next day I would have a date with her. For this reason I was not leaving the hostel for the excursion to the Saxon Switzerland. I was waiting for the person whom I was to meet. During night I have not slept a minute, I visited the toilet a dozen times. In the morning I could go to sleep at last, my organism could overtake the trouble, and I have slept about two hours. As soon as we had arrived to Dresden I wrote to Renate, my correspondence partner from my secondary school years, to visit me at that day. I had not been aware then, it would be the day for the excursion. When I woke up after the short sleep I went to the gate-keeper and asked him to call me in case somebody wanted me. I did not know if she would come or wouldn't. I did not take anything for breakfast, but I wished nothing, either.

At about 10 a.m. I was addressed by a girl coming into my room. I had to confess photographs could cheat. She had sent me some photos of herself at the beginning of our correspondence. She looked a girl with a pretty face and a tall, fine figure. Actually her face has been ordinary, almost ugly, and her figure as a plank. Anyway, I have shown a great enthusiasm to see her and wanted to greet her by a kiss on the cheek. She avoided it and gave me her handshake, as masculine as it could be. Later I would see, it was only a GDR custom. Her manner has been non-committal, and I could sense she expected me to understand her indication. Well, I did not feel very much like courting a girl, it did not cause me any problem to follow her wish.

She did not want to speak too much about herself, I think she had her boy-friend all right. We have been the same age of 22. She might have considered that day an unpleasant obligation, and she fulfilled it in a proper way. Her accent was very Saxonish. First I could hardly understand a word, but later I became accustomed to her pronunciation.

We went to a modern gallery where she played the guide. After that she took me up to the top of one of the hills by a cable-car. There was a restaurant there named "The White Stag". She invited me to lunch, and, when I wanted to pay, she objected it. To tell the truth it did not cost her too much, as I took only a cup of tea with a piece of cake.

As I watched her eat, I observed the habit, by which Germans take their salad: they do not take it simultaneously with the main meal of meat and vegetables, they eat it after. That time it seemed me funny, but when I will have seen other peoples' customs, it will have become only one of the details, how different people do the same thing in different ways. For example, living in Russia and Ukraine, I have taken the habit of eating some salad before my meal to improve appetite.

Till afternoon, when she said she had to leave, my nausea has

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gone. I accompanied her to her coach -- she has been living in Karl-Marx-Stadt, formerly and from 1990 once more, Chemnitz -- and was making a long walk before returning to the hostel. Well, this was the last of my memories about the town I mentioned.

And now let me go over to my grown-up period. We have known each-other with my fiancée since almost childhood, but our partnership and engagement began only when I returned from my study-tour in the GDR. I have written some pages about my river boat assignment soon after our marriage, this time let me relate what we experienced with the family of Hans when he invited us to spend a holiday with them. During the preparation for our wedding we were sending out invitation to the ceremony to several acquaintances including Hans in the GDR. After the wedding we have got a small, but pretty present from them. In the half year on the river boat I neglected them, but, when the company gave me the job of engineer in the ship repair yard, I informed our German friends about how I did it.

One day in early spring in 1965 we have got a letter from them inviting us to spend 3 weeks with them on the Baltic coast in June. Both our families were against our going, but we decided to take the advantage of their invitation. It has not been a cheap enterprise for a couple just beginning their common life. We had to get money to buy our tickets. Also to purchase some gifts for all of them. And not to forget about the costs the next year to invite them in turn. Not to mention the trouble of getting permission from our employers for two weeks of unpaid leave. Against all odds, we succeeded in our proceedings.

I have mentioned that after my second trip upriver the previous year of 1964, there was no navigation, because of the extremely low water-level. For half a year there were no significant precipitation in the whole Danube basin. After New Year a large quantity of snow fell in the Alps. During spring the rain caused troubles, but at last the river could be used for transport, if not very long. From May, however, the water-level was equal to that of flood.

The flood had a great influence on the activities of my employer. As the Danube came out to the quay, work in the yard had to be reorganised. The vehicles under construction on the launch-site have been opened at the bottom to let water in, otherwise displacement forces could have lifted them off their scaffolds. Fuel had to be pumped out of the subterranean tanks to save environment from contamination. Two days before our trip to the GDR I worked five hours at the pumps. For the next day another rise in level has been forecast, with it there would be two feet of water on the premises. The forecast has been right. My last day before the trip is recorded on photos taken by colleagues and me. When we arrived by foot to the yard, we could reach our office only by paddle boats. The workshop have been deserted, only our office was working. The next day the water was to rise again and my colleagues were ordered to take a room at headquarters for emergency. The next day we departed on our trip. Through many miles the train was following the river-side, it was a terrible sight to be in the middle of a great sea of flooded meadows. Only here and there higher points remained dry.

Our journey has been tiring at the beginning, but later, when the old couple from the same compartment got out, we remained in two. We could even sleep on the benches.

Dawn woke us up and we sat to the window to see as much as possible. At the Czechoslovak-German border the check did not last long and after that only a few hours remained to Berlin. It has not changed much in two years since I last saw it. Ugly and industrial, it was even unchanged in 100 years. As our train arrived at the Eastern Railway Station, at once I caught a sight of Hans. We shook hands and my wife kissed him on the cheek, that has not been against his desires. He informed us we were to wait a little for the train to the village of their parents. His wife would wait us there.

We made walks in the station and outside. Then we sat down to take our food and offered it to him also. He accepted it and drew out his package. We tried the German sandwiches, cheese between two thin slices of dark bread smeared with butter. In the coming weeks it would be our staple for breakfast.

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The special double-decker train left the station and took its course to the north-east. In a short time we arrived at a small village, the home of their childhood. I imagined myself, had it not been my sister's wish to continue her study. It could have been my fate to find a girl in the country. A short stay in the village, to greet the mother of H. and to meet the wife of his, took only an hour, and we were waiting for the coach to their living place. They had come to the village to leave their smaller daughter with her grandmother. The other child, also a girl, has been 5 then. She was waiting at home with her neighbours in the small town of Oderberg. The small town is situated on a flood area called Oderbruch where there is an island cut out by the river Oder, the river's backwater and a canal. It was the place of a high flood in 1998 with a lot of people evacuated from their houses.

H. moved to this town on the backwater of the Oder with his family at the same time in 1964 when I was boarding the low-draught tug. He has got a job there and he has also been a designer in the small shipyard. They have been living in a community house with a common court and open-air toilets and no bathrooms. It has been a typical German worker-house from before the war. Their apartment in the house, however, has been kept clean, and their furniture was fine.

We were to wait for another day for our leave by the "Aalbeck Express". H's wife, Elfie, has been a pretty country girl with a very good nature. She took us into her confidence and has always behaved much more intelligently than her husband, understanding the fact that we were different. She was an excellent cook and had a very good taste for both fashion and home furnishing. Their elder daughter, Sabine, was so beautiful as a 5 year old, that I could not pair her to anybody else than an angel. She had light blond hair, blue eyes and an instinctive naivety. We both closed her into our hearts at once. The spare day we utilised for walking in the town. I visited the yard with H., where he was working. It has been a much smaller one than my working place at home.

The next morning the "Aalbeck Express" came to the house. It

has been an old German truck built before the war, on whose chassis a passenger cabin for 24 has been fixed. Its entrance was put to the back and on both sides of an aisle there were three sitting boxes for four, just as in an out-of-date railway passenger car. Even windows were of the same design. No need to say, the springs of the truck were a little harder, than ideal for a comfortable trip. Just as an ordinary GMC Blue Bird short bus. The 200 miles on wheels to Aalbeck, the resort village on the northern side of the off-shore island Usedom, have been tiring, but at last we arrived.

The island has been made of sand by waves of the Baltic. It stretches from west to east in a narrow heap, closing originally the mouth of the river Oder. On the southern side of the island, there is a backwater created by the current of the Oder and the sea. The seat of the neighbouring county is the town of Wolgast, then a GDR naval base, lies on the mainland. A narrow bridge has been built over the backwater and the railway track to the island is laid on it.

The Oderberg shipyard has had a property of a wooden barrack with bed-rooms and all sanitary facilities for self-supporting recreation. We had a room with my wife with two lower and two upper beds, but no room-mates, fortunately. The building has been situated at the edge of the beach, and had a large roofed terrace in front of the entrance. We have spent 12 days on this place and it is mainly pleasant to remember our stay.

Within the group of the Bootz family, beside us, there was another outsider for the yard, he was Werner, E's younger brother. A newly graduated physicist, not at home with women, and it could be seen at the first sight. He was a person to be liked at once. He had a great admiration to my wife, and she felt no risk in being friendly with him. Of course, I found it strange at first, but I realised the innocence of their relationship.

The weather was fine during all our stay, and the beach, with its enormous grains of pure quartz sand, a pleasure. Being June the water temperature did not exceed 60 degrees F. Only my trained

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skin could stand it, I have been swimming alone. The biosphere has been poor, no mussels, no snails, even no shells of them. On the shore of my childhood lake, you cannot make a step without discovering something even today. But there were always ships, mainly freighters, on the horizon, waiting for their turn in the nearby Polish port. Sometimes ferries or passenger ships could also be seen.

Breakfast and supper we took on the terrace, but for lunch we went every day to the village, to try the food in the restaurants. It has been of the category "not harmful for humans" -- it is an old joke from the university, listing meals in an order from poison through harmful to the food of the gods -- and, as for breakfast the good housewife E. has always given sausage, cheese, etc., we would not ruin H. financially. Even our butter has been consumed for breakfast and supper. On my previous experience I advised my wife to take along a few packages of butter, but there was no shortage like two years before, we even had to confess, their butter was better and cheaper. We also took along the bottle of wine from Badacsony we bought in a cellar during our honey-moon the previous year, and of all the gifts it caused the greatest joy with them.

Soon after our arrival H. has got the news through the radio that foreigners were to be registered within three days on arrival. I had to take our passports -- funny, there was no tradition in our country of that document, our passports were only leaves put into our ID booklets --, and with H. to travel to Wolgast for the register. We made this trip in vain, the authorities had not heard anything about it, and we returned without registration. I hope it has not caused a big hole in the information of the Stasi.

That time there began the toughening of the hidden state system in the GDR, but its influence has not been equal all over the country. Berlin was considered the main source of danger from outside, also the Wall had been built there a little earlier. Such a small recreation place, however, as ours was, could slip out of the noose for a while. One evening, sitting in a restaurant with our beer,

we have heard a loud chorus from the neighbouring table. The melody was familiar, but I did not recognise the old German (and Austro-Hungarian) hymn. The text of the song reminded me of something before the war. When H. saw my astonished face, he laughed and said:

“It is all right. All Germans are Fascists.”

It is not so today, but that time there were a lot of oppressed feelings. The year before simultaneously with the Germans, there were Polish students on practice in our country. There was a fight on the excursion bus between them over old topics.

Towards the end of our stay at the seaside, Werner made an offer to finance a voyage around the island of Ruegen for all six of us. It was an experience to remember and it has been the crown on this fine holiday. After the voyage, we did not return to the resort, but took a train to Rostock. There they had been living during the university years of H., while E. had been working as a clerk. I had been here two years before.

That time we have been accommodated in the apartment of an acquaintance of theirs, and the middle-aged couple was very kind to us. From Rostock we did an excursion to Warnemünde, and the tiny town caught my wife, as it did with me two years before. The promenade along the marina creates a line of holiday houses more than one mile long. The small huts are placed side-by-side with completely similar facades. The promenade has two levels, the upper one is going along in front of the huts, the lower level is equal to the quay, but it is well maintained and everything is clean. This is a true Mediterranean picture as the small power-boats and sailing yachts are moored side-by-side with duck-like fishing boats in the bay. The promenade is continued outside to the wharf proper to accept the ferry-boat from overseas, and it also has another leg turning to the left on the sands of the beach. It has been built parallel to the seashore, in a distance of about 200 feet from it, and creates an access to larger buildings, community recreation homes and hotels.

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From here we went to Berlin, and there E. introduced us to her friend, a girl, with whom they had spent much time during their maiden years. Her husband had enlisted and was away at the military. As she was bathing her son of two, she said to H.:

“Look here, this is the prototype of a boy.” She said it as they had two daughters, but no son.

In the evening H. has said good-bye to us, as his holiday was up. He had to go to work the next day. He took Sabine with him, too. The girls accompanied him to the station and probably went somewhere for a good chat about their good old times.

During night the little boy woke up and came to us in the bed. First I took him back to his room, but he kept on coming. We let him stay at last. Alas, the bed was an ordinary couch for two and the boy between us in a transverse position made it insufficient for us three. The women arrived only at dawn and it was a good fun at breakfast, to tell them the happenings of the night.

That time I could get a better image of the GDR capital. Although it was still a heap of ruins in the centre, the disposal of debris has begun. I would see on big posters how they built the TV centre in 1967, when I would come here again in five years. They have prepared for the new city to be built. In three with E. we made big walks and she was an excellent guide. She spoke about their slippings into the western side before 1958, when the authorities in the other part of the city became aware of spying. The GDR took measures only since 1961. Before that, people could find a way to and fro easily, but to that time the wall became harder and more real.

E. accompanied us to see the summer palace of the Prussian king Frederic II. I had been there in Potsdam with my fellow students to see the Sans Soucie, but together with my wife it has been more pleasant. To reach the town of Potsdam by the double-decker train, you were to make a big detour around West-Berlin.

The evening before our leaving for home, the girls invited us for a dinner out. We went to the Friedrichstadtpalast -- Frederic City

Palace --, the most famous of the restaurants from the era before the war. Still existing, it was imposing then, but I have never liked places like that. It must have been a place of sentiment for the girls. (Edina Balogh was not there that time.) It was the period when the characteristic GDR "estrade" music began to spring to life, it became the favourite of Russians, too, and was fashionable in this half of the world, until changes arrived.

Our homeward journey was more than tiring. The section of the trip involving Czechoslovakia the train has made in daylight, our fellow passengers have all been foreigners to us, no compatriots. The largest group was a team of schoolgirls bound for a Hungarian recreation camp. In Czechoslovakia new passengers got in with no reserved places. It was impossible to go out to the restroom, if we didn't want to find our places occupied and fight for them. Linguistic difficulties would have made our chances nil. We arrived early morning and, after getting home, we went to sleep for half a day, before visiting our relatives in the afternoon.

For five years I hadn't gone to the GDR, as an engineer just starting my career I hadn't got such a task that would have made it necessary. Privately, we couldn't afford to go abroad. We only travelled in our country, but that we did frequently as I had been entitled to get a cheap bonus system. Later, when I changed my employer for a new one where my former boss had been going a certain time before that, and he became my boss once more, he sent me to that country partly as a reward for my results in a job, partly to make me able to do another task. Actually the topic could have been settled by correspondence, but he wanted to reward me for the performance I did with the design work of a harbour-tug.

My exact job has been to acquire the documentation for the main and auxiliary engines for floating cranes from the engine builder SKL in Magdeburg. Because of the misty winter weather, I wanted to travel by train, but too many people thought likewise, and I could not get tickets. I went the next day by air. Peculiar, when you find that, having denied of something, you are spared from some in-

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conveniences. It happened then to me exactly that way. The train, I would not get ticket on, has derailed, and 13 casualties have been sent to hospital. The train could be only restarted after 6 hours.

I flew by the afternoon plane and went to the hotel in Berlin. I called Hans, my friend in the GDR, in his office. He wanted to see me, but I informed him, it was my duty to board the morning train to Magdeburg. He agreed, that I would call him on my return. He was living alone in Berlin and was shuttling home on week-ends. That time, in the GDR already every Saturday was a day-off. He was working in the Ministry of Transport for some time.

In Magdeburg I had so much time, that if I had been another type of man, I would have found it boring. But as I am always interested in everything, I have walked so much that in the evening my feet were aching. I had to visit the factory in Magdeburg three times, before I got all the drawings and descriptions. My last visit happened only an hour before my return train left town.

Something has been spoiled with my return trip. The reservation has been left open, and I would have to book my return flight. It could also have been a practical joke to leave me in a foreign country on my own, as before Christmas -- at last I got my place on December 22 -- between Berlin and Budapest, as well as between Moscow and our capital, all the seats have been overbooked and when I wanted to get my OK by phone from Magdeburg, I was said my name was the 15th on the waiting list. It looked hopeless. Somehow in the Berlin office of our airlines I got my booking all right, maybe, the flight of a tourist group has been cancelled.

Back in Berlin I found H., and he took me with him to Oderberg. They were living in the same house as 5 years before. Only the girls have grown a lot. Ute, the younger one, wanted to monopolise me, and I had to learn everything about her school deeds. It was good for H. and E., who could see each other only once a week and thus, they could leave their uninvited guest to the daughters. The elder girl, Sabine, was in her 10th year, but looked at least 12. She was

happy to see me again. She talked me a lot, too, and her speech has been intelligent and understandable.

E. has also been happy, but not only for my coming, rather for the news H. brought. It was the allocation of an apartment for them in Berlin to be taken the next summer. E. has prepared Christmas sweets, including the traditional German plain cake for Christmas, something like English Christmas pudding.

I was sleeping in the same place, where we did it with my wife. The family took me to walk around the town, and I shot a lot of pictures. It is fine to take the slides from that event and look them through again.

September 1973 has been a busy period in the world from Jordan through Bucharest to Chile. Unhappy news came through newspapers and radio, TV. Three of us from the machinery department, my dept head, my group leader and me, have been selected for a business trip to the GDR, to the town of Magdeburg. We had to settle all technical details with the engine builder SKL about the machinery of projects for our Soviet customers. This time we have not been released without the escort of a saleswoman, the GDR import executive from the foreign trade division. She was the most unpleasant woman to work with -- on our side of the table -- in my life. But the foreign partners knew her and behaved intelligently.

In Berlin we have only been her "enclosures" at the foreign trade firm to drink coffee with her, but in Magdeburg she was our "attachment". There technical details were agreed, and she was no expert in that field.

Returning to Berlin I visited my friends in their almost new apartment. They were happy to have at last their own private empire. The elder girl, S., was almost a lady at 12 and U., the little one became taller of the two.

Our visit in Berlin has been connected to two events seen on the TV-set in our hotel room, the Pinochet-coup in Chile and the earth-

quake in Bucharest. Even without proper understanding of the narrators we could all understand by the pictures on TV.

That GDR trip has lasted only some days, we did not have too much time for walk. Berlin has been in constant development (in case it is development to fill in empty places with concrete boxes), ever more new living estates were finished, the old Alexanderplatz has got a new cover, an underpass had been built under it, I could go on, but I think so much is enough. However, the most significant change has not been all these together, but the stabilisation of the situation that had been thought a temporary one ever earlier. The GDR, and especially Berlin (the eastern half, "*Hauptstadt der DDR*") was a shopping window against the other window, the western half of the country. In Berlin the supply of goods was limitless, prices lower than in other parts of the "camp", even in Hungary. We began to become envious. At the same time, people in Berlin saw the other half of the city from their high-rise apartment, saw the street illumination with so much more electric power, and, first of all, they saw the TV-News from over there (the GDR never took Eastern TV standards). Their envy was even greater.

In two years I repeated this trip. During spring in 1975 the same import executive woman took us with my department head with her and we travelled to the SKL factory in Magdeburg again. If possible, we had even less time to spare than last time, I could hardly find my friends. As I did so, I realised that time was flying, not only over me, also Hans and Elfie looked older, their daughters became adult ladies. They were all very positive that we should come with my family to visit them that year. They said we were overdue in it. I promised to convince my wife.

During the summer we went with my family to visit our German friends in Berlin. On the day when we prepared to go to the airport -- it was the first flight for both my wife and my son -- our red hibiscus, whose small sprout we had got from my mother years before, brought its first beautiful flower. The plant has a habit to lose flowers in a few hours. That morning my son found a beautiful beetle, the

size of a potato beetle, but it looked like metallic green paint, and he put it inside the flower. Just as we checked everything before a week of absence, he spotted the flower fallen and his beetle still inside. He took it and brought it in his hand. It remained there, the flower a little drooped, until we arrived to the apartment of our hosts.

My wife had been in Berlin 10 years before, and the town has been changed a lot since that time. The rubble heap gave way to prefabricated housing estates and vast open spaces. On the bank of the Spree the cathedral was in reconstruction, and a large ugly building has been erected with amalgam glasses. It was the Palace of the Republic. A typical GDR building with complete lack of taste. In a couple of years a rumour would go around that it had been built with an enormous quantity of asbestos and it would be dangerous to be inside.

The general standard in the town has further risen. There were exclusive shops and big roads for automotive use. The formerly primitive surroundings of the Alexander-Platz has been turned into a fine tourist place with an illuminated fountain, a reconstructed church from the time of foundation of the town and good restaurants without long queues at the doors. The income of people surpassed that in all other countries in the Eastern side of Europe. The shops were full of goods at low prices. And even so, our friends were not alone to look over the wall from their 7th-floor apartment windows to the other side of Berlin with envy.

Our holiday was a fine experience, and we again invited them to come to us, that time with their daughters. The pleasantest day has been that we spent on their rented recreation site. There was a small summer house on the site and there were fruits. In the cool climate the currants were of cherry size and of fine flavour. They had great plans to buy another hut on a better site, but it would not come true as they would divorce in some years.

There was another two years that I didn't go to Germany and even then the trip held some surprises for us. In February 1977

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again there was a business trip for the trio of my department head, my group leader and me, but this time without the lady, as they would be talks about technical details. We flew to Berlin, took the train to Schwerin -- it was the line to Hamburg -- and there we met our hosts from the Boizenburg shipyard. They took us there by car. Their yard lay on one shore of the river Elbe, where the frontier was in the middle of the stream. The river is so narrow there, that every time they launched a boat from the launch-site, the western neighbours were pushing it back from the Bundesrepublik by poles.

Our talks were quick and convenient. The issue was the river tugboat for rafts, mainly its rudder system that in the original form proved to be wrong in the tow-tank experiments in Gdansk the year before. The chief designer of this German shipyard had developed a system of multiple rudders where at a certain displacement of the steering wheel every rudder turned to a different angle programmed by a complicated mechanical equipment to achieve a higher steering effect. We talked only about technical aspects, within the Comecon that time there were no licence fees, the member countries provided each other with their inventions free of charge..

During the night a big snowfall occurred, and our return has been risky. Fortunately we caught our train back to Berlin. The afternoon Interflug plane would have left us behind for the late arrival of the train, but it waited still, not for us, but for the flight permit. There was a great fog at home in Budapest. We have got our boarding passes and waited. It was dark as we got our boarding instruction. As we were ascending the stairs to the plane the front wheel has been corrected by a 50-pound hammer. Either there were believers on board or somebody from the outside has sent effective prayers to heaven, we survived without any trouble.

In West-Germany my first trip happened in 1963 when I was working as a machinist on a Danube river boat during my practice from the university. I told my story about that earlier. Almost twenty years passed before I happened to go there by ordinary means on business, although on the other side of the country I have been a

frequent visitor. I have got this chance when at my employer, the Machine Tool Works I have become responsible for the supervision of a licence agreement between our company and the German firm Knorr Bremse, as well as for the export turnover in truck and railway air brake components. That kind of export has been called in our language simply Knorr delivery. This was a plain business for us. My first such business trip to KB happened in the summer of 1982. This was my first visit to Munich. We met on brake components for railway carriages, with NIKEX as foreign trade company. Our factory that produced the concerned parts sent their own man with us. We had no hot topics, this trip has been an annual customary occasion, so we could concentrate on experiences, the best side of a business trip.

Our partner from KB has been a Hungarian man living in that country and working for KB for a long time. His thinking differed from mine, it was natural, he was much older than me and our living environment was basically different. Sitting on the terrace of a small café we had a lively discussion about Israel's operations in the south of Lebanon. He said it was a minor thing compared to the war between Iraq and Iran and would be finished in half a year. I had been on the opposite opinion, I said we would not be living long enough to see its end. Neither of us was right, it has been 18 years, before the Israelis came out, but we are still living.

Munich I found a very pleasant town, actually a capital, if only at a regional level, at the same time it had kept its small-town spirit, especially its inner circle made into a pedestrian area without road traffic. The shops were mainly small retail units, although for him who loved gigantic shopping halls they were there too. Our accommodation was a relatively modest hotel, but it was situated near to one of the central places in town and offered all conveniences. Later I would come with the other foreign trade company that preferred another one similar and near to this. It lay in a fifteen-minute walk from the shopping centre. For a visitor all the sights of a big city are generally out of reach, you have to live there to visit every important attractions, but you can taste many of them.

Our partners at the talks have always been gentlemen, any time I went there they made me feel it was only an accident that we weren't all citizens of one country: unlike other German states (Lands) Bavaria haven't signed the Federation Treaty, only accepted it to consider it valid for the region as far as Germany observed the independence of Bavaria. In the opposite event, they said, they would form the Federation of Danube Lands with Austria and Hungary. We have a greeting coming from Latin, it is "servus" and Bavarians use it as frequently as we do. Another common characteristic for both of us is the good appetite, although the two kitchens are different both in raw materials and spices. They like red pepper less than we do, but fat is ample with them. And portions, at least in restaurants, are at least double ours. Well, prices about ten times as high as with us. Among courses with meat they eat a certain dumpling of similar stuff like the Czech "knedli", only it is not sliced from a big loaf, but made to dumplings, only twice as big as our plum dumplings. They adapted all European meals, a real Bavarian dish is grilled pork hooves, it is excellent for taste, but so fatty it is a criminal attempt on your life. Unnecessary to say, you have to drink large quantities of beer for this meal that is their national drink and besides it is very strong. The only exception is the autumn beer-festival, Oktoberfest, then beer is brewed milder to enable people to drink a lot of it.

Coffee is popular with them for breakfast and afternoon small meals, but it is more of "schwarzes Wasser" as one colleague of mine said to a German visitor at my first employer. Anyway, they take it seriously to get the "black" colour from a good quality coffee. Mocca, as our Hungarian coffee is called in Germany, is fashionable only in Italy and Austria in Europe beside Hungary. I can write more about coffee later with my experiences in a country that invented this drink almost two thousand years ago.

About the attractions of Munich there is lot to say, but I should like to touch two selected areas. One of them is the shopping area closed for vehicles. In the same way like Budapest's old downtown this area lies on the river Isar. Its well-known architectural work is

the Frauenkirche, i.e. the Church of Our Lady. Its double spire with the sphere-like domes can be detected on almost all pictures of Munich. There are, of course, newer buildings, hotels, restaurants. I should like to mention one of them, the name of which is Hofbräuhaus, that means Royal Brewery. It really had been that, but at present two large restaurants can be found in place of former production halls and stores. One of those is the hall of regular guests where beer is consumed at traditional cross-legged tables in a friendly atmosphere. Walls are covered with numerous lockable boxes for the regular visitors to safeguard their own mugs there. No possibility for anyone to call out with disgust: "Phew, somebody drank water from my mug!". The other hall is a restaurant with musical and humorous performance going on all the time. When we were there a true Bavarian lady was giving us a performance. She said after one of her jokes:

"I can tell easily, where who is sitting. Those who laugh at once are Bavarians. Where laugh comes half a second later, there Prussians are sitting -- she called other Germans Prussians --. Those who would only laugh a minute later are foreigners, as translation takes time."

The chief attraction of the closed area is the multitude of small shops, among them jewellers. But you can find shops for unique sorts of shoes, sports-shops and everything you want. This area also has importance from the artistic point-of-view. Almost always, even in bad weather, there are musicians, singers or other performers who call the attention of people on themselves.

My other lasting piece of memory is the Technical Museum. It takes a large area on the other side of the river. A tremendous building. Again something that can be digested only by someone who is working there. My favourite topic was vehicles, among them cars, e.g. the first car of the world, as well as submarines. Of the latter there are many, also such a one that you can enter. Even when not, you can see everything properly as their side is open for that purpose.

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I tried to compare the West-Germany I saw to that I had seen almost 20 years before. I would not think it was the same country. It resembled more America 20 years back. Actually our allowance has been little, and we could only buy some souvenirs. Or rather I would, had I not taken some extra money with me from my account. Thus I could buy a good watch for my wife and a model car with radio remote control for my son.

My next trip to KB was programmed on February 1983. The two issues were the renewal of our co-operation agreement for the production and delivery of truck brake components to KB and a consignment store for those delivered goods. The salesperson from the foreign trade company MOGÜRT was a lady whose extremely precise mood I liked very much. It was a pleasant, but hard program with very little time to walk and shop. The weather has also been very cold and those three days was few. We have returned contented with the results. Any time, also later, KB has been a very honest partner.

A business trip to the GDR occurred in May 1984. It had the venue I knew well. That time I could not find my divorced friends. By the way, their elder daughter was finishing studies that year. They have been divorced, we had got a letter from them in the final months of our African stay informing us about it. Their daughter, Sabine, had begun her study in math in Szeged in 1979, the year we moved to Ethiopia and she was at her finish that year. She had been frequently with us before our move to the new home and once or twice she visited us also here. Her younger sister became a nurse after she finished school.

Until the summer of the next year I haven't had any tasks that could have taken me to Germany, but then three of them. First I went again to KB in Munich. My travelling companion was the precise lady and we went to finalise the agreement about the consignment store. We succeeded in finishing our task in the very short time. There was also need to talk with technical people about the development of new brake components. This issue took me to Moscow the next January.

After that I had the opportunity to visit another big city in West-Germany, Cologne. My employer bought a licence from England for a special process to manufacture high-quality machine tool beds of cast iron. Four times in a year a very intelligent Englishman of about 60 came for a supervising visit to our foundry. Actually he was the boss of service engineers. In such cases we spent the day together and signed the minutes about details of our tasks in the following three months. This spring he made a suggestion, namely, to make a little modification in our method of calculating royalty-fees. In exchange his employer would pay the costs of participation for two of our specialists in the annual seminar that was to be organised usually in England. My boss assigned the trip to me and the manager of the foundry, this year in Cologne. That was the first in a series of similar Meehanite events I took part. I was deeply impressed by the high standard of the organising work -- compared to events organised by our Scientific Society of Mechanical Engineers -- and started to appreciate everything that was English. I haven't had any disappointment in years to come.

My trip in Cologne has been both useful and pleasant. The city's centre is a beauty, especially the Dom and its surroundings. My companion, our foundry manager, has been a well educated person with a high interest in all technical things. He had also a good eye to recognise the static wonder of this piece of architecture. It is no wonder it remained unhurt even during bombings in World War II. I would feel such an awe only years later in Russian churches and Cathedrals.

My third visit happened in Berlin and was organised by Maria, sales executive from the company NIKEX to export our railway brake units. We had to carry on talks about a co-operation between the former KB head office in Berlin and our Székesfehérvár factory on certain control units. The GDR firm wanted to utilise our agreement with KB, as they have not been allowed to have over-the-wall contacts.

Our partners were very unpleasant, but we signed our protocol

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and the matter could not be stopped any more. We had a lot of leisure time. She had her own private business, I took advantage of this and went to find our friends. I succeeded in it, but I found the four members in four places. Their family has fallen apart completely.

First I found Sabine. Her address we have had from her letters. After return from our country, she was living in a small flat in the most ugly old part of the city. She has not been home at my first visit, but, when I returned late afternoon, I found her. She was happy to see me, she has always liked me.

Now she was a true lady with her 25 years. She was working in her trade -- as a mathematician -- and she has had a boy-friend to live with. She helped me to find her mother. Elfie was living alone in a small, but comfortable flat. She said she would suggest to go to a restaurant to have dinner.

It was early evening. We spent time, after dinner where she would not let me pay, walking through the newly reconstructed centre. I did not know this part of the city, it has always been behind fences or under ruins. I have not been here for 9 years.

I asked her to help me to find a shop for the TV antenna amplifiers I needed. She could not, but advised me to look for it in the Centrum department store on Alexanderplatz. She was right. I could buy what I needed. Even a lot of cables, but after some years it would look a waste of money because of their poor quality. They might have been import goods from a developing country.

My last day there I spent to find Hans. He was living with his new wife and her son from her former husband. She was an energetic lady and I could not help thinking that Hans needed such a firm woman to rule him.

Elfie visited us the next summer with her friend, in whose apartment we spent some nights in Berlin in 1965, when her small son found us in our bed. She slept in our smallest room on a sofa. She enjoyed it, only barking of the dog in the neighbourhood was too

loud through the open window. She said:

“Diogenes could not sleep and he did not let me, either.”

I called the dog by that name, because his house has been a barrel.

It was the last time I have seen either of them. I have not heard about them, they have been completely lost for us.

Chapter 6

Great Britain

England is one of the countries that I have always wanted to see. It was so already before my four-year-long English-language course where I was learning a lot about her within the subject "Country studies", and also before the books of Somerset Maugham and Agatha Christie made me take a liking of people from there. Back in my childhood I had read "Ivanhoe" that became for me a kind of bible. In September 1985 I had again the possibility to take part in a Meehanite conference, and that time in Torquay, Devon, England. That was the first time I could enter here. This time it was my task to get everything, money, air tickets, visas. Again two of us have been travelling. Only hotel reservation has been done by our English partners. Our flight has been pleasant. Arriving at Heathrow, after the official checks I was looking for the way to Tube. Then I heard a question said in English, but with a Western-Hungarian accent: "Where is the Underground?" It was a small thin elderly man. I asked him, if he was an Englishman. No, he said, he was a Hungarian. Then we introduced ourselves and helped him. I had studied my maps and tourist information -- acquired back in Addis Ababa -- and knew where to ride, how to walk to our hotel. The man said his name, Péter Hanák, we recognised him as an academic in historical fields. He was participating in a conference about the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the London University.

The trip of about one hour in the Tube has been enough to discuss topics of the conference and it was pleasant to see that my maverick thoughts were meeting those of his many times. He got out earlier, we rode one more stop. We found our hotel and our room. It was a traditional hotel with common bathroom on the corridor, but otherwise everything was fine. In the evening we went walking, although it rained. Our hotel lay in the close neighbourhood of the British Museum, we walked to Oxford Street, but the longer

distances we left for the next day.

Our host, Mr Knight, was to meet us in the afternoon to take us in his car to Torquay. The morning we utilised to visit Westminster and the City and to shoot some pictures. We walked all the way, even to the flea market. I liked very much souvenirs called "pebble crowd". It was like a scene from a documentary film about revolutions.

London didn't cause me any disappointment, everything looked very well organised. Prices have not been set to meet our allowance, but it goes without saying, where incomes are so much higher there prices can also be the same. My professor in the University of Economics in Budapest had told the truth in the middle of the '70s that could only be said as a private opinion: at the comparison of two different economic areas you don't have to focus only on prices and wages, but rather on the difference of them in a certain time that can be saved or turned into funds. The inner part of London consists of two units, one is Westminster on the left bank of the Thames in the central north-south section of the river's S-bend, and the other is the City lying to the north-east from the former, also occupying the left bank. This latter extends today almost to the Tower that was out-of-town not long ago.

During a sole morning you can only have a quick look of the sights, we also did it, although the Westminster-Abbey we visited from the inside, the Parliament building we could simply encircle by foot. At the same time we crossed the City walking, admired all attractions, even the Opera that was no more a market hall. The characteristic figures of the banking world, the clerks in black suits and bowler hats could be seen in the street during lunch-time. We have been impressed by St. Paul's Cathedral. This was the point where we turned back, the Tower could wait for us for another year. The City's main traffic line, the Oxford Street is full of small shops where everything is available. The same road goes further to the west under a different name. There you find the Harrods that was the biggest store in the city at that time. If you go further in the same direction, you find such institutions as the New Scotland Yard, the

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Buckingham Palace and others. St. James's Park is a place for artists and eccentrics. A man drew the attention to himself by a special performance: when he extended his arms, dozens of sparrows alighted on him.

Mr Knight took us to the venue of our conference in his calm mood. I could enjoy this trip all the way. The English countryside is similar to our landscape, especially in good weather as it was then. The annual precipitation is bigger than with us and for the Gulf stream England has an altogether milder weather than Hungary. Almost never occurs colder than a few degrees below freezing point. The same is true to extreme heat. One of the routes leads directly to the west, but Mr. Knight chose the highway that is going west to Bristol, there it turns to the south and via Exeter it arrives to Torquay, resort place on the seaside in Devon. The country lies at about three hundred feet above sea level, the routes to the seashore are rather steep. The small town itself lies at sea level, but its hotels had been built up on the plateau, the view is excellent.

We had a room each in the same hotel where the conference had been held. The numerous participants could not all been accommodated there. There were three Hungarian people from the Csepel Machine Tool Works foundry, they slept in another hotel.

We read through the program quickly and decided, when and which lectures we did not want to hear. We wanted to see the beautiful Devon country instead. First evening there was a dinner of introduction. From every country someone was requested to speak some words. From us it was me. I said only five sentences about the fine quality we could achieve by Meehanite engineers' help.

In the morning our colleagues came late to conference. It became clear that a false fire alarm made them sit on open air half the night. The first lectures were interesting, but towards noon we felt an irresistible desire to leave. We made a long walk, missed even our lunch, but saw the miniature countryside park made in a similar way as those in Denmark and Holland. We have decided,

the cheapest car of the world should have been Rolls-Royce, it valued only two wrist-watches. We saw a Rolls-Royce on sale for 50 thousand pounds. In another shop a wrist-watch has been priced 25 thousand. We also liked the marina. I had to confess that marinas look alike all over the world in spite of national characteristics at Germans, Italians or Englishmen.

The next day we were sitting industriously on our seats, all lectures interested us. The farewell party was also interesting, but it seemed people were more resistant to lectures than whisky.

Mr Knight had promised us on arrival that we would leave through Dartmoor. Alas, because of a dense fog, it could have taken us six hours more. We accepted his judgement to leave by the old route. Our London hotel has waited for us, only we got another room. We did not let out our evening walk, it was refreshing.

I had very little time left to prepare our trip to the Meehanite conference in the next year, 1986, but at last succeeded. This time both my usual companion and I had some bad-luck. We flew to Frankfurt-am-Main first, there changed to a plane directly to Birmingham, venue of the conference. Leslie had dressed informally, jeans, blue checked flannel shirt without tie, jogging shoes. By his bad luck his baggage was sent by mistake to another place. First afternoon's lectures he sat through in those cloths, only a necktie could be found by the amazing helper lady -- for compensation she presented me too with one --. His bag has arrived late night.

As far as I have been concerned, my pocket knife has been seized from me and was given back only in Birmingham. Venue of the conference was a hotel characteristic to the English country. Everything was well organised, the rooms comfortable. Only to find my way to my room has been complicated, in the two days there we could hardly be acquainted with it. Our hotel was about 8 miles out of town, there was no way to go for a walk. Thus all I have seen of Birmingham was the airport, the exhibition centre and the railway station.

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The first day was interesting, the lectures useful. The other foundry from our country has been only represented by one man, for him all this was a waste, as he did not speak English.

I got acquainted with Mr Dale E., sales manager of Meehanite and he told me his plans to come to our capital for a seminar. He had good hopes for new customers with us. He was a very intelligent person and I felt also his appreciation toward me.

There was the usual reception dinner where some of the managers from Meehanite appeared with their spouses.

The second day of conference was actually a visit at the international foundry exhibition in the exhibition centre of the town. As an executive to deal also with our own exhibitions, I was interested in the event. I have been caught by excellency and modesty at the same time at all stands. No waste of money, only what was necessary to achieve their goal.

We had with us our baggage. After visiting all halls we went to the railway station next to the centre. We only had to follow the British Rail sign. It was my first trip with BR and I liked it very much, especially the fine view of the English countryside. Where no towns were to be seen, it reminded me to my own country of my childhood. But English towns, of course, were so unique, I could not find anything like them.

Our accommodation in London has been in the same hotel as last year. Our old partner, Mr Knight, had arranged it. We went to the Tower by foot, walking south to reach Oxford Street and along that past St Paul's Cathedral and Lloyds to our goal. Alas, being past sunset, it has been closed already, but I still had enough light to make my shots about it and the bridge. We returned by Underground.

The next morning we went shopping. On the streets it was interesting to see the great contrast of orderly houses and shops and the trash everywhere. Later I learned, it has been caused by

stray dogs during the night, they tore plastic bags open and the wind spreaded the trash.

I have arranged our return trip via Paris for two reasons. First, a direct flight would have been only the next day. From Paris every day there was one and hotels in Paris have been cheaper. Second, I wanted to see the city. This detour was successful, I will report about it a little later.

In the next year I missed the conference. And another year later, in 1988 some circumstances forced me to change my employer and try my luck on a new field. However, before leaving the company, I wanted to take advantage of my last chance to participate at the Meehanite conference. My former companion has left the foundry so, I arranged the trip for myself. The conference in that year has been organised in Bournemouth. I have been received on the airport by dr. E., the sales manager and he was so extremely kind that I was accommodated with their family. His wife has been pregnant, she had had a daughter of 6 from her former husband, a German, as she had been working with British Army units assigned to Germany. She was an amazing woman and a fine housewife judged by the lunch and dinner served to me, too.

They were living in the small town of Reigate, where also the office of Meehanite was situated. It lies in the territory of the North Downs. In the afternoon we went walking on the popular gathering place of the townsfolk, that is a beautiful hillside with a music pavilion and retail booths.

The next morning dr. E. took me with him to Bournemouth, the seaside resort with an excellent seashore for vacationers. At the shore several fine hotels and an excellent beach was waiting for the holiday-makers. As I looked along the slightly curving line of the seashore I felt myself in an Agatha Christie novel. The conference was to begin in the afternoon, Meehanite people were busy with preparation. I went to discover the environment. After the long walk on the shore I tried the town too, but it was not fine for its industrial character.

Returning to the hotel, I still had time. I was tired from my long walk, but, as the hotel crew was still doing its work in my room, I went down one floor to the library. There were interesting books, generally older ones for the age of the hotel. On one of the shelves there were some copies of the Bible, all a little worn from use. Then I went up to my room, by then it was finished by the cleaners. I lay down on my bed and discovered a brand new volume of the Gideon Holy Bible in my drawer. As I opened it, on the page below the cover a printed line read: "This book is not to be taken away." Well, I did not want to do it at that moment. I began to see the information, how to use it and it began to amaze me. Soon I had to put it down and go to the conference. There we greeted each other with good friends and the opening of the event was followed by various lectures.

What has been evident for me from the beginning was that we enjoyed being together, but we had nothing new to say. All of us knew everything about topics lectured on that first afternoon. And I remembered our trip with Dale (dr. E.) here. I had tried to draw him into discussions many times, but he did not let it happen. The only information I got from him beside the feeling that something was wrong about this common business of ours was, that he had great plans to develop the activities of their branch in the near future.

The session was followed by the usual opening dinner and there our friendly conversation continued. Some of the participants stayed there long after the dinner was over, but I returned to my room. Taking my usual shower, I lay down and took the Bible into my hands. Usually I am an early bed-goer and also go to sleep soon. When I put down the book in the middle of Chapter Genesis, it was 2 a.m. I was astonished to find the Holy Book so interesting.

My father had been a great believer and he had been reading the Bible from time to time. Then I had found the texts boring, perhaps for their ancient language in our tongue. This book has been re-written in the finest modern English. I have to tell the truth, I have never been a true believer, but I have always been a great fan of mythology and I consider the Bible the greatest book of all books.

A quick calculation has led me to a conclusion that I could continue reading it only, if I had taken it with me. In the afternoon I discovered the library one floor below and there I had seen older copies of the same Bible. That time, in the middle of the night, I went down, took one from the shelves and placed it in the drawer. The other one I have hid in my bag. God would forgive me that fault.

Since that time my favourite book has been the Holy Bible in the Gideon edition. I have read it all from the first to the last letter. There were favourite chapters and there were others I read through with less interest. But as a whole it has been my greatest experience ever.

It was my last trip to England to this day. On the second day I informed my friends about my transfer to another employer. Some of them have not forgot me, to this day I get for example the Foundry Trade Journal quarterly. By the way, some years later I tried to get into contact with their office, but the contact lines proved dead.

Chapter 7

France

I have mentioned at the end of my account about the Meehanite conference in Birmingham that we had taken the route via Paris with my colleague. The London-Paris flight took us to De Gaulle airport, we took a train to Gare de Lyon. From there our small hotel was only half a mile by foot. Hotel reservation had also been done by myself. Our hotel was a very narrow house between two other apartment buildings. Its small lobby has been extended virtually by a mirror-wall. During breakfast it has even become smaller, as breakfast tables have been set there.

The afternoon we spent by walking along the river Seine. From our hotel we crossed the river and the canal and at the Bastille we turned left. On route we visited the Notre Dame on the island and continued to the Louvre. To go in we had not enough time. May be, one day. We crossed the park to Concorde Square and followed the Champs Elysées to the Arch. There we turned again left and crossed the river to Chaillot Palace and the Eiffel Tower. There we stopped to rest. It was a long march, at least 10 miles. Dusk fell already and we took a bus to the station. From there we walked to our hotel.

Paris I found very attractive. Only I liked such well organised cities as London more. Paris looked me the opposite. At breakfast the next morning there was a funny event. A German tourist group have been taking their meal and one of them asked the waitress to bring water. She said: "Wasser". The waitress seemed not to understand. She did as Frenchmen often do, she spoke only French. I tried to help the German by saying: "d'eau". The waitress understood that at once. Anyway I could not see how it could happen that she didn't understand water in the language of a neighbour.

We slept well after our long walk, but we had another big walk

before us to go shopping. After breakfast we did it. Neither of us wanted to go home without presents for the family. We went straight to Galleries Lafayette, we passed it the previous day, but then shopping was out-of-program. Although it further backed my impressions about lack of orderliness, we found everything we wanted.

At the Gare de Lyon we caught our train to Orly and flew off. In the evening I have seen in TV news that almost simultaneously with our departure a wave of terrorist bombings began. At the seminar some weeks later in Budapest our old friend joked about our being responsible for it.

Chapter 8

Adriatic Sea

I have been working for the Machine Tool Works in 1982 when the community of employees under our sales manager had been organising a tourist trip to Yugoslavia. These people were doing so every second year, as that time the regulations in our country didn't permit us to go abroad more frequently. The company bus had been given to the group free with driver, only fuel was to be paid for. It had been easy as the chief trade union activist of our general management was one of us, a woman with high ambitions and double-faced behaviour of a black panther.

That year a trip has been organised to the Dalmatian seashore. Per-head fee has been really low, even, when you counted that probably the whole family of that trade-union lady has been taking part free. Although our family have recently bought a house, and our financial situation has not been cloudless, I wanted to see places we had to avoid because of our short time and excess baggage on route home from Ethiopia the previous year.

The trip has been arranged to travel by bus to the town of Opatija in Croatia, a little to the west from Rijeka, a deep-sea harbour and former commercial port of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Opatija, under the name of Abbazia, had been the most frequented seaside resort place of those golden years. The place remained popular even between the two world wars when it belonged to Italy.

We crossed the border at Letenye. The final leg of the route to the sea has been beautiful, it stretched over mountains. Great names of our history -- Croats have been in one country with us for about 800 years, as they had accepted the Hungarian king as their own monarch -- as Zerin for our 16th-century hero of Szigetvár and

his grandson the poet-commander from the 17th century. Or the castle of Frangepan -- it means French ruler in the local Slavic language -- overlooking the Fiume (Rijeka) port. At that time the highway from Karlovac to Rijeka had not been finished yet, the road looked more dangerous sometimes than it was actually.

In Opatija we had our hotel rooms reserved for 4 days. There we had time to try the beaches and to make excursions to the peninsula of Isthria. Our experiences could be divided into two kinds. The country itself was unparalleled in its beauty, the sea was unique, the water excellent both for swimming and watching the undersea world. But there were the other side, the collection of political and human factors. I would rather not speak about it. The peninsula of Isthria could be an unforgettable experience in itself. Towns like Porec, Rovinj, Pula. The land inhabited already before Christ impresses the erudite visitor not only with its beauty, but also with its culture. The land had been originally settled by Illirians, its present population, however, reminds you of the ancient people in nothing, those people had been driven away by history, only Albanians count themselves successors of Illirians. Traces of history are visible, they have been left by Romans, who had built the amphitheatre in Pula and also by Venetian, who left wonderful classic buildings, but don't forget the Monarchy, whose naval port has been Pula (called Pola that time). The beautiful towns and small villages along the shore were all worth visiting.

On the seaside promenade in Opatija we tried to buy something taken from the sea, alas, there were no objects from the Adriatic, at the same time there were treasures from far-away islands as empty shells of the polyp Nautilus. Nature has created few things more excellent than that. The stall-keepers reminded us of Arab and African vendors in their style and aggressiveness and in that they wanted to cheat their buyers at any rate. Only their prices were rather uniform, that would be very rare in Africa.

After our stay in Opatija we turned back to Rijeka and from there drove along the coast past the town of Split, to the settlement of

Canned road dust

Drvenik. There we were taken by ferry to a long east-west-lying island called Hvar, and on its western end, along the northern coast, in the village of Jelsa, we found our place for the remaining four days. During the horrible trip taking a whole day we could continue our lesson on history. First Zara, by its present name Zadar. Our king Bela IV reached the sea here when he was fleeing the Tartars with his family. Split, Spalato in Italian, as it was their naval port. My saying about the road that it was horrible is far from accidental. It led us along the limestone precipice, on our left a steep mountain, on the right the abyss. This formation fortified the wind from the sea. It tore open the door of the bus when one of the children, my son among them, wanted to get fresh air in their nausea. The hinge of the door broke at once. That country is wonderful, but terrible.

We have reached Jelsa only in the evening and all of us were under the impression of the trip. There was something else, a little surprise. The man responsible for our reception and room distribution was not prepared. He asked at once in accented Hungarian: "Is there anybody here, who speaks Serb?" He wanted to make his work easier, but he could not

At room distribution -- rooms were in private houses everywhere in the village -- the number of persons in families has not been taken into account. Even our invalid, an old man with two sticks, has been given the farthest house on the hillside. And the family with two children had to negotiate their accommodation with the remaining members of the group to have a proper housing.

The next day these concerns vanished. The sea at least was wonderful and we enjoyed ourselves. Of course, vendors were the same as in Opatija and offered us ivory bracelets made of plastic actually. They did not like my scraping of the goods and throwing the chips into flame. Real treasures of the sea were worth buying. Experiences have not been all enjoyable. People did not like us actually. They wanted our money, but not us. I have never sensed this lack of hospitality anywhere else.

Our return trip followed the valley of the river Neretva. In Mostar we have seen and admired the old stone bridge, in Sarajevo the bazaar and the old town. They have remained with us on our slides even after their destruction.

Chapter 9

Bulgaria

When I was working on a Danube river tug as a machinist I have been to the country, in the two towns of Lom and Rousse. But such a short landing cannot offer you a whole picture of the place. In the summer of 1982 I had my first opportunity to make a trip to Bulgaria that lasted some days instead of an hour. I had an assignment to go there with the saleswoman of the foreign trade company NIKEX to assist her from our part, as a representative of the producer, in her export talks. She has been a woman of 40 with an ordinary appearance, but she has been a very precise person. Our trip has involved the company's export of spare units that year for the Bulgarian state railways.

It has been a very useful trip to me. I have been in Bulgaria only in Rousse 20 years before, going ashore from a tug. Now I could see the vast difference between their negotiation style and that of ours. In the coming years I would visit that country repeatedly, but completely I would never be accustomed to their ways. During that trip I have had an experience that made me think of Addis Ababa, our first year in a high-rise apartment. About my stay in Ethiopia I am to write in the next section. In our hotel, sitting in my room, I let my thoughts wander and suddenly I felt myself sitting in my Addis Ababa room. When this sense left me, I realised I was in Sofia. Then I guessed the reason: the hotel has been built in the same style, equipped with the same windows and handles as our apartment in Africa. Besides, the end-of-May weather with gathering rain clouds, may be, even an air moisture aroused in me a feeling of the coming monsoon. And the Vitosha mountain outside impressed me as the Entoto next to Addis. It was amazing, how this environment reminded me of Addis Ababa.

In my opinion Sofia is so unique in its own way that I have never

seen anything similar neither in my trip to the eastern nor my ones to the western countries. The only big town that has similarities is Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. But even that is a forced classification. The town is a true feudal capital, everything is there (in quantity) that is needed by the inhabitants, i.e. apartments, water supply, transport, even hotels and theatres. But the areas around government buildings are deserted, everybody knows well that he has nothing to do there, others are arranging things for him, but without him and in place of him. Avenues take you everywhere in the town, but you go a quarter mile in transverse direction and even street lamps disappear, let alone the downgraded state of houses, you doubt that you are in Europe, an African would feel home in that environment. But let's see the kitchen of the country. It is excellent, food is tasteful, only you cannot be sure that would not get something with it that you don't need: an indigestion hard to cure in many weeks. Also in the restaurants of fine hotels yoghurt or sausage can do you harm. Oh, yes, something even more peculiar: I experienced only here, in a four-star hotel, that during night a loudspeaker shouts in the corridor that Mr. So and So should hurry down to the reception. A method sure as death. All hear it, they had better relay the message, unless it would be shouted some more times.

This trip has established good connections between the saleswoman and me. We trusted each other and we could work well together for several years.

Bulgaria had to go without me for a whole year, until I got inquiry for an export offer of brake components to Bulgaria from one of the salesmen of the foreign trade company MOGÜRT. I haven't known him so far, but we made good friends with that young man soon. He suggested me to meet with our customers at the Plovdiv International Fair. My boss, the sales manager of the company nodded to this topic, he even sent with us the manager of our factory in Székesfehérvár. The job was not too complicated, we had time for sightseeing, both in Sofia and Plovdiv.

Plovdiv is situated in a part of the country that belonged to the

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territory of Macedonia two to three thousand years ago. There are historic ruins including a great amphitheatre. The place had been the seat of Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. There are younger monuments, too, as the statue of a Russian soldier. People erected it for the liberator of World War II. It is called Alyosha.

My second visit to that town would not be so easy with an almost hopeless task and a passive company representative. At the beginning of September 1986 I had to visit Bulgaria to take part in talks about machine tools in Sofia and after that to travel to Plovdiv and receive customers at the fair. These have been hard days for me, I had to work together with two heavy smokers. When we finished our meeting, I was to be taken to Plovdiv by our representative. I have never met anybody more unfit for that job. He would not deal with official tasks at all, until his family did not get their bread and milk. He had not even thought about that his wife could do shopping. It was only one day I spent in Plovdiv. For the next afternoon we agreed to meet for my return trip. He was so late that I thought he was not coming at all.

The point followed the next morning. He did not come to my hotel to take me to the airport. When I considered time ripe, I called a taxi and caught the plane.

When we were meeting in our office two months later, he told me he was waiting me at the reception of the hotel "Balkan". I had told him that evening "Bulgaria". And it was a great difference. No ordinary sales engineer would have been allowed to take a suit for 150 dollars, when he had a sum of 70 levas for accommodation (40 dollars). Not an unimportant difference, at least two stars.

My last visit to that beautiful medieval land happened in January 1987, when I took part in a bilateral meeting within the Comecon in the topic of machine tools in Sofia. Well, I think, according to news reports I have seen in the TV, the revolutionary changes during the last decade have altered everything there.

PART II

Chapter 10 Aid-Expert

He who has taken this account into his hands and decided to read it through, might agree with me that of all my experiences the following line of events had been the most deciding for the forming of my present way of thinking. If I were a pious believer I could say that Providence had selected some people to help me in taking this road. But, as I am not, I keep exclusively the accidental sequence of unavoidable chain of the events responsible for making my life richer by the experiences I tell you in the followings.

Towards the end of 1966 I had an encounter in the workshop of the Hungarian Shipping Company where I worked as an engineer that would highly influence my life in the future. One day I went to see, how the assembly of the 250-HP Z-drive (a big outboard engine for the independent propulsion of ordinary river barges), whose plans and calculations had been mainly my work, stood. Manual assembly work has been done by an old man, who had an extremely high authority among his fellow mechanics. He said:

“It is a good design. But I suppose you have not done too much assembly work.”

“Thank you”, I said, “how did you guess it?”

“Some parts are nearly native!” Native parts meant in our slang, they are impossible to be put to place, better to “manufacture them inside”.

“Well”, I said, “you can help us to correct our mistakes.”

He told me then that he was an engineer, but, as he was a good mechanic, by manual work he could get more money than by engineering. He also told me, he had been working all over the world at my age.

“I would catch a train and go where I could to get more money. And seeing the world was a fun, too.”

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“You could do it then”, I answered, “but how to do it now?”

Well, don't forget, it was 1966, it was an exceptional thing to get abroad even to Czechoslovakia by the travel agency IBUSZ. He showed me a newspaper, some weeks old, and an information in it. It stated that a new state foreign trade company had been created. Named TESCO, it was to export mental values, i.e. to sell licences of our inventions and to send educated people to countries in need of them.

“This is your chance”, he said.

Actually, it was. At the next possibility I turned to my acquaintance in the ministry -- he had been the man to make the agreement with me for scholarship in the company four years before --, and asked him about it. He said:

“It is started always by TESCO. They send us letters and ask for our suggestion for skilled people.”

“Could you suggest me next time?”

“You would have to speak English on a high level.”

We agreed, I would study English and come back.

It has happened, at least the first half of it. My coming back became a little late. I had been visiting English lessons and preparing for a high degree examination for four years and then I started to work overtime in translation. It took almost all my energy and the question of my TESCO-assignment had been sent to sleep. After that an accident pushed me return to the topic.

In the spring of 1974 my ankle got twisted, my brother-in-law took me to the emergency and I had to endure two months at home in plaster. Before I took up work following the removal of the plaster from my leg, one day a thought came into my mind: “Actually why did I begin to learn English?” Yes, to be able to apply for a TESCO expert mission somewhere in the world. Why the hell then do I sit here and do not try to get a mission.

I took the telephone register and looked up the phone numbers and address of TESCO. I caught a bus and then limped to the office

building. The gate-keeper showed me to the responsible clerk and she offered me a place to sit down. She was very busy and made me wait. When she finished her typing she asked:

“Are you looking for an assignment?”

“Yes”, I said, “is there a possibility?”

She informed me that she was organising new assignments for two countries, Libya and Iraq. There were others in charge for other countries, but no English-speaking experts were needed that time anywhere else.

She also told me that there were good perspectives for me, only I had to choose between Iraq and Libya. Not long before there was an air raid by Israeli planes that resulted in the damage of an Iraqi nuclear plant in construction. That meant, Iraq was not safe enough for me. I chose Libya.

I had to give in translations and copies about my certificates and my CV. They accepted my application, and permission process -- first by my employer, then by the ministry in charge -- has been launched. In a couple of months I was called to a week-long training course about the unusual conditions. It included also the lecture of an interior official about intelligence and counter-intelligence. In special briefings we have got the necessary every-day information from experts being at home on holiday from Libya.

There remained a waiting period of some months until in 1975 we would be sent to the spot. Anyway, nothing came out of it. At the finish, as our passports would be under issue, Mr Gromyko would visit Libya in the spring of 1975. It would be followed by a refusal from the part of Libya to all our experts' missions. I did not want to let my TESCO mission go asleep forever and went again to the clerk. She was sorry not to be able to help, but she did not stop at that and introduced me to a middle-aged lady -- she has been the wife of a diplomat -- who dealt with Ethiopia.

Ethiopian hopes

First it was a very peculiar conversation. She said after listening to her colleague and scanning me with her sight:

“Recently a man has returned from there, as he had heard somebody speak about shootings. You do not look a die-hard man either.”

This impertinence drove up my blood pressure, but I tried to keep my manner. I said to her all smiles:

“He was one man and I am another. Would you let me try it before judging me?”

“All right, I did not mean to hurt your pride. But there goes a war there, you can know that, if you are following the events.”

It was the spring of 1977 and the time of war between Somalia and Ethiopia.

She became more friendly soon and asked me about the exact practice I had.

“I am an engineer of transport and vehicles, but I have a wide experience, especially in civil engineering.”

“A mechanical engineer has been asked for by the university and there is need for an engineer on automotive field. Also they need a civil engineer in the Ministry of Construction.” She was leafing through her papers. “Do you have a CV with you?”

I gave her my Curriculum Vitae in English.

“Well”, she said, “call me by phone in two days.”

At least I saw a faint hope.

When I called her, she was again her former self.

“You have given me a CV that is good for nothing”, she was shouting, “you have to re-write it and concentrate on what you did and not on where.” My CV really listed my employers and may be, I

did not make my activities clear enough.

I re-formulated it and brought it to her.

“OK”, she said, “it will do.”

“When can I know something?” I asked.

“It is slow work”, she answered, “in two months our offer about the new experts will be in the hands of the Supreme Council.” She meant the military junta around Menghistu. “Be convinced, if you are needed, you would go there.”

She has done a good work and, although I did not know it at that time, I have found a sponsor in the person of the soon-to-be representative of TESCO in Ethiopia. He would go there in a month and would take with him the papers.

Some months had passed. I got a call from the executive at TESCO that the Ethiopian authorities had accepted my person, and the authorisation process at the Ministry of Industry has been launched. The lady also informed me that I was offered on the first place to the university and the offer was accepted. Our ministry would ask the company for my transfer to their personnel and it could take half a year. I had a dilemma then: did I have to advise my bosses about it or wait, until they would be informed by the ministry. I waited and it was good. In a few months I got into a bad situation and would have to leave the company, as during this half year there had happened other things, too. At my employer feudal conditions had been becoming stronger, the closed clique having come into life somewhat earlier was stepping on every potential competitor, either for being afraid of their abilities, or simply, because they wouldn't line up behind the group. I felt a double danger for both reasons. A rejection or disagreement from the part of the employer could have been fatal for my mission.

I informed TESCO about my move. The woman was angry first, but promised me to re-route the transfer documents of the ministry to my new workplace. However, there was a great risk in getting the consent of management in a new place. Anyway, as I was visiting

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my would-be boss once more, I informed him of two points: that I had been given permission from the shipyard to apply for an all-day intensive course of Russian, it would last from the middle of June a whole month, thus being a burden on my working time for two weeks at my new employer, and that I had been selected for the abroad mission and for it there was a certain probability to come true. My boss said OK, he would not block my way. This has happened as he said, I experienced an absolutely honest behaviour both from his part and from the part of the responsible manager.

I had been working for one year for my new employer, the Machine Tool Works, when the official process was finished. In the meantime I had done some short business trips to several countries, about them I have given account. Arriving from Moscow in March 1979 at my workplace, my colleagues received me with mixed remarks. I learned that the Personnel Director had got a letter from the ministry about my transfer.

“Is there any problem?” I asked dr. K.

“Oh, yes”, he said, “that country is very hot, you are not advised to go there.” He said it with an earnest face, but he was joking.

“But, please, tell me, if there is any obstacle.” I have not been assured.

“Well”, he said, “you told me it was not very probable you would succeed.”

“I am waiting for 12 years for this possibility.” It was true and false at the same time.

“You spoke me about it at the beginning. I told the director I would not block your way.”

I began to feel better. He told me, the paper has been sent back to the ministry signed. But he was resenting the business.

I called the lady in TESCO. She was in a good mood.

“You shall come to me and give me the necessary photographs for your passports”, she said, “and you have to take part in a briefing.”

I told her I had taken part already years before. She did not

insist. She said my trip was expected in June.

My wife was very happy from the news that our dreams at last could come true. In two days her humour turned to worse. I had to speak to the executive taking care of experts abroad. She said I would have to travel without my family. Only after I got my housing facilities would they permit my family to follow me. I promised my wife I would do everything to help her follow me as soon as possible.

At the company it was known as a fact that I would leave for Africa. On my place a young man was found, but he would not come until I left. He would be short on my place and then there would be a great transformation in company structure, with six of the seven top managers to retire.

My colleague from the room was to have a business trip to Bangladesh in May. He had to go to take the same vaccinations I was. His arm ached and he had fever. When he returned, he said he would not go to Africa for any sum. As he was arriving there and the door of the plane was opened the heat was so oppressing he almost fainted. Well, he could not drive my courage away.

During my last weeks intrigue has not rested. I have got a call from a man, whom I did not know, but I would. He introduced himself as one of my would-be colleagues at the Addis Ababa University. He wanted to see me. I told him how to get to our home and waited.

He came with his wife. First I had the impression that they would be helpful. Later I realised the opposite. But then they told us all we wanted to hear. We put a lot of questions, they answered patiently. In the meantime he also got what he wanted. It was he on the first place to make my mission last only two years by convincing Ethiopian officials that his colleague from the Budapest Technical University would be a better lecturer than me. As a lecturer I could have got extension to my term automatically. Thus I became an expert for the Ministry of Transport instead of a lecturer. And in the coming years it would be arranged that transport experts would go home after two years, while lecturers would get their extension.

Hope realised

After his visit I went to the TESCO and tried to be informed. I learned that my host company in Ethiopia has been changed for the ministry. (I did not know then about the intrigue mentioned above.) At that moment I did not care about it, I was convinced I could do what was expected of me.

I got my vaccinations and was ready to leave. My flight has been scheduled to June 18, but, as I had arranged my leave from the company and went to take my passport and money, I was told the Ethiopian Airlines cancelled their Frankfurt-Addis Ababa flight that week. The next flight would be one week later. I spent the week in my flat at home. Heat from weather was overwhelming and I did as little physically as I could and tried to get acclimatise to the African heat even more intense (then I didn't know that, because of the high altitude, in Addis Ababa there is only 65 degrees F all the year round). The week of waiting has passed and I went to take my place on the air-plane. For that week's flight another expert has been given the pass. He was selected for the Addis Ababa Ministry of Construction. We first met in the vaccinating station and after that at our "mother", the executive taking care of us in mission.

The first leg of the trip has been to Frankfurt-am-Main. It was undertaken by our national airlines, the last place to hear our own language. The flight was somewhat more than one hour, and we have got our lunch on the plane. The Ethiopian plane was due early afternoon, but something was out-of-order. The information desk forecast it for about midnight, but our time could not have been utilised as we had no visas and on the airport there was no way of securing one. There was another problem. About 150 pounds of baggage has been with me and the cloakrooms have been closed because of the latest terrorist attacks all over the world. There was

only one way: to wait and have an eye on the baggage.

Even the information service was faulty -- or too careful --. First our gate number has been given false, and we had to move with all the baggage a quarter of a mile to the actually right gate. It all went as if we had been in the Soviet Union. The baggage has been taken, but was placed beside the plane, and everyone had to lift his own baggage onto the cart. The plane has been almost empty. As soon as the Ethiopian folk music sounded and the air-conditioning began to work I tried to sleep. The hostess gave me a pillow and a rug to cover my body. The latter has not been needed, it was very hot. My sleep would not come. I had my contact lenses on and also we have got the first dinner. There were also my valuables in my pockets and I was afraid for them.

The hostesses in their national dresses were extremely pretty. Their face have been European, only black. I had learned much about Ethiopia from a book of a compatriot who, as a jobless doctor, accepted the offer of an Ethiopian ras (king) in 1921 to be his own doctor. He stayed in the country 15 years, has been serving other kings, even ras Tafari Makonnen for a time, before he became Haile Selassie I. He left the country after the uprising against the emperor in 1936 followed by the Italian occupation. I knew from his book that the greatest uniform nationality in the country was the Amhara and they had a Semitic origin. This is the reason, why their faces are more European than Negroid. Only their hair is curly from the many centuries of cross-breeding with Negroid people by chance.

On the plane my neighbour was from Addis Ababa and, however we changed addresses, we have never met once more. On the plane he gave me very useful information. Our first stop has been in Rome. We could stay in the plane during refuelling. It was a 40-minute break, after that we flew over the Mediterranean to Cairo. We have been shown how to save ourselves in the case of emergency. The late-night dinner -- or very early breakfast -- has not been omitted. In Cairo it has been already dawn. We could see all the tourist attractions from the town to the Pyramids. The colour of the

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sand was between grey and yellow. Again forty minutes, then take off.

Khartoum. It looked like dry mud. Nothing to attract my eyes. The air began to be hot. The next stop has been Addis Ababa. On the last leg we got our lunch, but it was only a snack. It did not interest me too much, I wanted to look down on the African landscape. For a long time it looked like the Moon. There was no trace of any life, only a stony desert, mountains, valleys, canyons. Only their colour varied from grey, almost black through red, brown to yellow. At last there was a strange announcement in the loud-speaker, repeated in English: we were landing in Addis Ababa in 20 minutes. The land around the capital was fertile. There were meadows with sheep, woods and small squares of cultivated land. We have almost touched a mountain at least five thousand feet higher than the surroundings (at that time I didn't know, but later I could look it up, it was the Entoto) and after that the capital came into view. With a big circle the plane avoided flying over the town and landed.

My legs were numb for not using them so long and first I could hardly make the few steps in the aisle. Slowly they got their life back. Through the window the airport building could be seen. It was a modern white, pretty one. On the sighting terrace there were people. We were led to the entrance and there a big confusion followed. Slowly I could realise directions, places. We went through the passport control with no problem. Then the baggage had to be received, but it was almost an hour, until they have been carried out to us.

With the customs it was much slower. Although there were no goods to declare as we took with us only our personal cloths, the necessary equipment to live here for at least one year, there were the locals arriving from abroad and it took a long time to check all of their items. We could have avoided it, had our representative in Addis Ababa, John S., not received a false telex about the cancelling of our route again. We had to make our way through the

coin or a note. I did not have any smaller piece of money as a five dollar note, I gave it to the porter. I soon learned that he was over-paid ten times.

Outside transit we could go to change money. By local coins I could phone to Alex, the man, who had come to my home. He has not been home, but his wife was and she phoned to John, the representative. About 26 hours after that our plane took off at home, we were met by him. Being young -- I was 38 then -- does not mean you are not tired. Without sleep it was a long trip.

John took us to the hotel where our experts were living, until moving into their flats. That time would be six weeks for me, the shortest that far, and there was somebody for six months in the hotel. It was the "Ras" hotel in the very centre of the city, not far from the circular square with the Ethiopian lion statue, where the north-south running Churchill Road crosses the eastern highway leading to Revolution Square then to the airport. Here the Ethiopian Commercial Bank was situated that could confuse visitors with its circular plan.

We have got our rooms almost next to one another on the first floor. My room had a large bathroom, with a locked door on its other side to the next room. It would cause me trouble later. On the reports of Alex at home I expected a heavy rain in Addis, but it was a clear weather that received me here. That time I did not know the timetable of rainy season. As we were moving into town in John's car it could have been in any town at home. Sometimes I saw people in dark suits with a Girardi hat on their heads. They were ordinary men from my country. My astonishment came only at sighting their black faces. Drawing nearer to the centre we saw people in ordinary Ethiopian dresses, women in shamma, men in gabby. The first can be characterized as a diaper material wound up as a sari in India. The latter is a similar textile, only made by multiple weaving to make it thicker. It is worn as a poncho in South-America.

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John left us with the invitation for lunch the next day. Soon Alex appeared. He took us with him for dinner. The 3 p.m. rain has passed precisely and again there was clear weather, with the sun setting.

Most of the Hungarian aid-experts were living in a closed living estate of 2-story apartment houses. Alex lived there with his family. They had one son, about the age of that of mine. With the invitation Alex was actually doing a mission, his wife instructed him to squeeze all news out of us. During dinner we emptied our brains to them and they gave further help in the form of advice. One of them hit me at once, it was a useful piece. The woman said in the country the venereal diseases represented 120 percent of the population. How it could be? There were multiple diseases in the same individual and also the embryos, not born yet, had their share. It made me forever incapable against a local girl.

We also spoke to them about events seen on TV at home, e.g. the execution of the innocent young American journalist in Nicaragua by a military man when he was lying on the ground. To understand a person living far from home in Africa is hard for someone who hasn't tried it. Life there is determined mainly by a very close circle of people of identical nationality, in my case Hungarian, who are living there, they know only what is happening there. Even international periodicals raise only a limited interest, and news from home come only if somebody brings them. It goes without saying, today there are other possibilities than at that time that I write about. No wonder, expatriates drain off everything of the arriving person.

After that sounding they left us alone. Actually, as we had no-

thing in common after the acquisition of our documents for living in the country, I lived my life alone, or rather in the company of another compatriot. He had been there for three months, to work on the same place as me.

The acquisition of papers took two weeks, to squeeze out an apartment three times that. John helped me in every introduction, but let me alone then. He also helped me to open a PO Box in the post office to have an address. My job was one thing, housing another. I was introduced to the head in the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the minister. He was in plain cloths, anyway, I knew that it was only appearance. The administration under Menghistu placed their own man in the top job of every significant state institution or large company, usually a high rank military officer. They could only trust their own people. This was the only occasion I met the minister, there was no need to do it again, although I spent a whole month in the ministry, and even after that I had to go there often to manage my own business, until I moved into my first apartment. I always arranged everything either with the state secretary -- deputy for the minister, the first one of whom was a pleasant-looking gentleman and, when he went to another place, his successor became a bear-looking serious professional coming from the shipping sector or a related branch of the industry -- or with managers on my direct workplace. It was the state secretary who introduced me to the technical manager of the largest state company of the Ministry of Transport and Communications. He was Ato Bekele B., the first word for Mr., the second his own name and the third his father's name by the local custom. He was of my age, his technical high level education had been completed in a local town, but in English. At that time when I arrived in that country, the language of high education was English all over the country. It has changed up to now, this also one of the methods of making the employment of foreign professionals impossible, only people who speak and read Amharic can get around. His technical education and considerable knowledge, as well as his intelligence predestined a good connection between the two of us. He showed me the premises of the firm and I saw at once the enormity of my task.

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At the beginning I couldn't work independently from the other expert of the ministry, Thomas T., during the first months we had common assignments.

My first month has been spent in the ministry, where I tried to learn everything, to get acquainted with the field. For a time, however, until my papers have got ready, I have got time from the ministry to arrange my own business, one line of which involved them, too, as for the housing and furniture the host would pay. Also for the hotel, where bed-and-breakfast bills have been settled by our hosts -- for food we paid ourselves --, so, it has not been all the same for them when I would find an apartment. The hotel have cost so much in a month as a flat in half a year. Also, it has not been unimportant what kind of flat I was to find, as in case, the expert system would last longer my successor would move into the same one. It hasn't been known that time that I would be the first and last expert in that job.

I went to the executive of the Municipality in charge the second day. I had been introduced also to him by John. He was a small man giving the impression of an insignificant person at the first moment, but you could soon discover in him the official who had realised his own importance and who wanted to make a gain of it. I think he was so rejecting to us Hungarians, because we hadn't had the means to compensate him for the granting of a proper apartment. For this reason he was putting us aside for a time and helped the western experts in spite of the fact that all the ministries concerned, beside ours that of Health, Education and Construction, were pushing their own people into the light, as they wouldn't pay for hotels infinitely. He didn't have too much luck with me, I was very tough. In the coming time I would be such a frequent visitor in his office that he would become bored and would offer me a proper flat after some weeks.

I have mentioned that for the equipment of the flat the beneficiary of the expert mission, i.e. the employer was to pay. To fulfil my task of getting parallel quotations from three shops for the furniture

of the would-be flat, involved a better knowledge of the town. There were some large stores where you could also get furniture, mainly of Italian style or their copies produced by local manufacturers. There was even a plant manufacturing original Ethiopian furniture, perhaps too rustic for European taste. Thomas had ordered a set of them, because he liked that form, and the ministry liked it too, as it was much cheaper than others. When we were visiting them in their apartment we didn't find the pieces very comfortable, although their look we also liked with my wife. I was spending a lot of time to acquire the three offers. Akos, one of the experts still in the hotel knew a mission in the town, a British one, dealing among others with sales of a guide-book compiled by themselves.

There were six experts of ours, including me, living in the hotel. Akos has been senior by time spent there. He had been there for six months. He had a job with the construction, he was an architect. There was a man, Louis, the last one to be allowed to take his family with him without proper housing. He was also the last one who could buy a new Lada car, all the people arriving later had to go with used cars, just as I did. They were living actually not in our hotel, but in a neighbouring one. His field was ceramics. My close colleague, Thomas, had been there for three months, the same as Robert the druggist. Elmer was my mate on the flight here, also an architect as Akos. The guide-books I mentioned were made on a duplication machine and were very cheap. We all bought our copies and it helped us in finding our way better, both in town and in the country.

I mentioned buying our cars, not accidentally, it was causing us the most headache. Earlier it had been easy to purchase cars. Most of the experts living there for at least one year, had purchased theirs from the company Ethso, a joint venture of local and Soviet capital to sell Russian-made cars. That year the company was on the verge of bankruptcy and they were dealing only with spare parts.

Those living in the hotel were depending on the mercy of others to get a lift somewhere. Within the city there existed a kind of public transport, but to get on a bus was out-of-question, even that, as 50

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of the town buses had been exported by a Hungarian manufacturer, IKARUSZ. By taxi you could get anywhere, it was not very expensive, if you kept your eyes open to avoid cheating.

Akos helped me to contact someone, who offered his car to him, but he wanted a bigger one. The man was a West-German sociologist with a 3-door white Fiat 127. He was moving to Lesotho, a much more interesting place for him. He called me and I checked the car. I suspected from the style he drove that the car -- in spite of only 15,000 miles performed -- would be in a bad condition. The clutch and the gear-shift were the main suspects. We agreed in the price and time, four weeks after my arrival. For a week-end before that time he would let me drive it. He prepared the sales-agreement -- it would be one of the necessary documents to get a plate of my own --, and for the time being all was settled.

The first week-end we spent all five in the hotel by visiting the most famous place not far from the capital. About 70 miles to the east it was a hot-spring area in a volcanic valley. Its name is Sodere, it is situated lower than the capital by about 5,000 feet, i.e. at about 3,000 feet above sea level. There are two factors you have to take into consideration because of its altitude. One of them is heat, very unusual for someone accustomed to 65 degrees F, during day 84, nightly around 70 degrees F. The other is both unpleasant and dangerous. In Addis there are no mosquitoes spreading malaria. Even if somebody is taking one within the luggage compartment of the car to the capital, at the high altitude it is incapable of spreading the epidemic. Incapable of living the insect dies. On the other hand in Sodere it lives well and, as people are coming there from everywhere, mosquitoes find enough sources of infected blood. After that nothing can stop the epidemic. It is very bad fashion among Europeans living there to avoid taking drugs that keep malaria on a low level. This sickness is caused by a kind of protozoa, which can only live in the blood, when the level of the chemical substance of the drug is lower than a limit value. The medicine is ensuring this level with only one pill in a week. He who goes frequently to places at lower altitudes where malaria exists can bring the sickness up in his

blood and then he becomes a host with regular fits, if he doesn't take the drug.

I had been there for some months only, when John, the TESCO representative had high fever regularly. I had at once malaria in mind and advised him to take the pill. Of course, he wouldn't, as the Hungarian doctors in his circle were taking it very easy and said why should a technical man interfere in medical things. Even a blood sample turned out to be negative for the pathogen in the hospital, when at last he took my words seriously and so, he could calm down that he didn't have malaria. He mustn't have do that. He had malaria, only the test was done during the period of hiding, when the protozoa couldn't be seen. When the fever came back, he was tested again, and the pathogen found. Then at last he began to take the medicine and his sickness passed. Of course nobody remembered later, who was the one that called their attention to malaria.

The valley of Sodere is a very interesting formation, where the volcanic activity below the earth-crust has a direct effect on the water of the source. The mass of water gets hot from the inside heat of earth, but water temperature at the surface depends on the exact flow of water regulated by the size of precipitation. During dry season the water temperature arises above 200 degrees F, because then the smaller mass of water can be overheated. The rim of the spring is covered with crystals, as in the cooling process water lets its contents crystallise. The valley is covered by mist. That time when I went there first, one month into the rainy season, the water was still very hot, the big quantity of cool rainwater has not got down into the source of hot water to decrease its temperature. When the big rains arrive between June and August the reservoir deep in the earth is flooded by such a big mass of cold rainwater that it cannot take enough heat from volcanic activity. At that time, however, the flow of water grows considerably.

Some years before my assignment, when the emperor still had power in his hands, and the money of English and American invest-

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ors accelerated the development of certain areas in the country, a fine recreation complex had been created here that had been based on natural resources. Also a stone building had been constructed to provide proper accommodation and food for guests demanding higher level, but the majority of guestrooms were found in wooden huts. There were other similar resorts where people with fitting incomes could spend their leisure time. The wonderful African environment and the climate mild all the year round made almost anything possible. Feeding facilities were also on a European level indeed. The water was led to two pools, one of them a small basin with a water temperature of 125 degrees F, the other is somewhat farther, so that the water could be cooled a little more, it had the sizes of an Olympic swimming pool and a temperature of 110 degrees F. In the heat of 85 degrees F even the cooler pool was unbearably hot. The other one I could not use at all.

Europeans visiting the place rarely think about dangers that threaten them beside malaria. One year before my arrival there happened a fatality. A bus expert on a business trip from our country to Ethiopia was taken to the place. He was a passenger in his company representative's car, and in the evening, when most people had left already, the man could not find his passenger. Assured that someone might have taken him back to town he returned. The next morning the dead man was found on the bottom. He had had a weak heart and hot water was fatal for him.

The place is very near to the river Awash. Its source lies to the west from the capital, and the river is circling the town on the south at a 60-mile radius. After that it flows east and north-east to be lost below the sand of the Danakil desert. Two thirds of its route is a sequence of canyons paralleling those of the Colorado river. Later I will have the opportunity to write more about it. The Awash is full of crocodiles, but the guests of the resort are safe from them, on one hand the resort is situated on a high bank, the beasts can't climb up, on the other hand, even if one of them could, there is a high strong fence along the river. It is not the case with the many dozens of vervet monkeys. They are cat-size animals and are living complete-

ly free on the area. There is no bag they could not open in a few minutes. There were also nest-building titmice birds who deserved your attention. They are numerous, and build their nests out of green grass on the high acacia trees over the fence. I liked these pieces of art so much that later, when I would visit the place with my family, I would collect two of the deserted ones.

This first excursion was wonderful, we all enjoyed it, but the trip was very tiring. In my two years in the country I visited the place at most three times. There were more than one reasons, why I wouldn't frequent it more often. For a simple swimming and sun-tanning I wouldn't drive 150 miles. Also, my philosophy is, that you must visit a certain place only so many times that you have time for other places of interest, too. This resort is almost insignificant compared to the wonderful corners of that country. Our next week-end was for Sobota. About 20 miles from the town, it is an orchard owned by a co-operative. It is on the south, and along the road a multitude of vegetables are sold to customers with cars. On the orchard there is a small waterfall and a restaurant for national food. It is also the place near the capital to see a coffee-growth. Here you can find the biggest brewery of the country, it produces Ethiopian beer, but it has been developed on the basis of the Italian St. George beer. The orchard lies very near to a volcanic peak, the Moghlee, one of the highest points of the volcano Wuchacha. You can climb it starting from here, if you are a good walker and, of course, you can bear the heat too, you can make the round-trip in one day. In the woods covering the slopes of volcano several kinds of animals are living, from colobus monkeys to various antelopes. This mountain can also be accessed from the western highway, as near to that road leading to Ambo elevates an ancient historical symbol of the Ethiopian nation's past, the Menagesha mountain, today a national reserve. This had been the holy place until the middle ages, where the monarchs of the country were crowned.

Attractions in Sobota include the not insignificant joy of the restaurant. Ethiopian national food is not very various. Mainly there are two kinds. The first is raw meat from fresh kill. They eat it with

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their extremely hot red pepper called “berberay”. That food I have never tasted, first as I cannot take raw meat and eggs, except smoked ham. Second, all the animals in that country are infested by worms.

The other kind of Ethiopian food is “wat” with “injera”. Wat is a stew made of any kinds of meat or a special leguminous plant they call “shourow”. It is a sort of pea, but it gets dark brown being cooked. Even the “pea soup” made of it is black. Wat is made with a lot of rancid butter melted, and much onion drooped on it. Then berberay is put onto it and made into a sauce. Meat chopped into small pieces is the next and it will be fried a little. Then the proper quantity of water is poured on and it is cooked, until ready. Beside onion and berberay of all spices only salt is needed. When it is ready it looks like a thick stew with red pepper. Berbaray is prepared from very hot red pepper. It is dried on the sun and with its core and seeds is smashed into powder. After it a lot of seasoning is mixed with it to give its special flavour. But its basic taste remains hot paprika.

It is worth saying more about berberay. Its preparation is considered at least such a significant activity as baking bread had been with us some generations ago. Paprika is a perennial plant in that country, as there is no winter, temperature is at the same level the year round. The ripe red paprika, a little even drooped, is picked and dried on big pieces of rough canvas or animal hides spread on the earth. The biggest picking season is the end of the dry season, in May and June, for this reason the often starting rain makes a lot of annoyance to the growers. As rain starts to fall they rush out to the court or even to the street, collect their produce and take inside. After rain stopped drying starts anew. During that period you cannot go through the small streets inhabited by locals in a straight line, you have to slalom among drying covers.

Wat cannot be consumed without injera as it is too hot. Injera is Ethiopians' substitute for bread. Its source is a kind of sorghum called “teff” in Amharic. This kind of corn had been grown only in pre-Columbian America outside Ethiopia. The plant has three vari-

eties, black, white and red. They are called so because of the colour shade in the flour. Ground teff is mixed with water to get a usual dough. It is put aside to ferment for 3 days. It has a characteristic odour from fermentation. Then it is mixed with the same quantity of boiling water to stop fermentation. The dough -- actually a thick fluid like that for pancake -- is fried, or rather dried in a pan about two feet in diameter made of ceramics and having a lid. Heat is so low that originally they used only leaves and little twigs for the fire under the pan. The method is similar to the frying of pancakes, only it is done under the lid and only on one side. The fermented dough will grow to three times its original thickness and is full of bubbles. It is as sour as vinegar. You cannot eat it alone. But together wat and injera is an orgy of taste. He who tasted it -- and have got no indigestion -- doesn't want to go without later.

Wat is always made with red pepper, but it can be prepared of different kinds of meat or of shourow. The latter is the flour of the dried seeds and tastes -- beside hot pepper and rancid butter -- like peanuts. As it is more common and cheaper than meat, shourow wat is the daily staple of poor people. Any time in an Ethiopian restaurant you can order national food. You will get a big plate with five or six different kinds of wat or "alicha" -- the same as wat, but with black pepper instead of red one and made yellow by saffron -- and some rolls of injera. To eat it you use your fingers. Eating is always by fingers all over the country. Before meal water is poured on your hands and clean towels provided. A dear guest is fed by the mistress of the house with her own fingers. It is the greatest honour and is not to be rejected.

During the first days I had to visit a lot of local offices to get my personal documents. When I went somewhere the first time I always had a helping hand in the form of a low-rank employee of the ministry, sometimes I have even been taken there by car. There was an interesting example of that latter, the rain was falling and it found its way into the car at the bad rubber slip in the window. To my surprise, in the car there was no water. When I asked people about it, they showed me the holes in the bottom under the carpet. They

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served for letting water out. When I have got my ID card, I could apply for a local driving licence. International or foreign national licences are valid only for one month after the arrival or in our case until we have got our ID cards.

In about four weeks I was given an apartment on the 6th floor of a 12-story house. It took me about a week to organise maintenance, painting and white-washing. This service has been performed by the same office, only another department, where I had to begin the connection-building once more. The kitchen was complete with furniture, only the two rooms needed any. The floor in the rooms and the long corridor would be covered by carpets.

I was allowed by the ministry to buy the needed furniture from a local carpenter, who made Italian-style modern sofas, arm-chairs and beds. In the store Mosvold in the Piazza Street -- it was called so, because actually that street was the shopping mall of the town, we Hungarians called it Váci Street of Addis after our own similar shopping lane in Budapest -- everything was available and comfortable. Carpets have been another matter. There was a co-operative of blind weavers and they prepared wonderful local carpets from pure wool. Patterns would be created by wool of different colours. The only problem was time. About two months behind schedule, I got them only in October, and, as the rainy season was over that time, nights were quite cold. The apartment with its marble floors was a real ice-pit.

The rainy season was in full at the beginning of August. That month is always awful, as at the height of the season, the once-a-day rain of June and July turns into once-a-day sunshine. All day it is raining. Weather in Addis Ababa is tricky. Lying at a height of more than 8,000 feet above sea level, the average temperature of the air in the afternoon is 65 degrees F all the year round. But during night the temperature falls to 50 degrees F. I was light-minded enough to leave the window open during night and the second week of my stay was hard for me because of the heavy cold I have caught.

As foreigners were leaving for home in the summer season, other experts were getting their apartments and going out of the hotel one by one and for a time I remained alone. My flat was in the hands of construction workers, and it was very easy to check them, as the house was across the road from the hotel. I myself was going over there sometimes, but only during evenings and the weekend, as both I and my colleague Thomas had begun to do our jobs at the biggest company of the ministry. The transport trust itself was called NATRACOR (National Road Transport Corporation), the unit where we were seated was the FTO (Freight Transport Organisation). As it was responsible for the long haul within the country, we could have named it perhaps Ethiocamion.

When the other experts moved out of the hotel and I remained alone there, it was already my fourth Sunday without the family. My lonely meals in the hotel restaurant were boring. Their outward trip has become timely as I had succeeded in getting the apartment, but there remained about ten days until their arrival. I planned a test of my car for that day. I went to the house of the German and got the keys. The car was parked at his building. I checked it quickly and started. Since the time, I got my driving licence, and it was five years earlier, I had not been driving. It was a hot situation for me. I was driving slowly and followed the route I knew well by foot. In half an hour, though, I became sure of my movements, then I drove into the parking lot of the hotel. I planned to drive up to the restaurant "Star" on the last floor of a building well known by an outside glass lift. There was a hind-thought in my decision about the route, as when I was working in the shipyard we always went upriver on running trials of boats, to be able to come back easier in case of a failure. I was right.

The road was steep and suddenly the clutch gave way. I checked the regulator, but it has already been turned to the end. Well, the clutch disc was finished. With its last chips the disc was able to drive the car downward where it was needed. I put it into the parking of the house where I found it, the keys would be returned in the evening. I went by taxi to the restaurant.

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The Addis Ababa taxi was a fine invention. By bribe every taxi driver could pass the technical checking of the car and so, taxis were cars in the town in the worst condition imaginable. Some had no lamps. Others had their doors closed by wire, etc. But they were cheap. At that time for a ride of about two miles you had to pay a quarter of an Ethiopian "birr" -- then 2 birrs equalled one dollar --. This sum ensured you a place in the car. The route has been designed by the passengers. When you got into an empty taxi, you could tell the driver the terminal point of your trip. If it was within the 25 Ethiopian cents, then the driver started. If not, he told you the fare and it was your turn to accept. When someone stopped the car, before you got out, and said a point that was in the same direction, the driver let him in. And so on, and, like a line from the spinning wheel, the route of the taxi was planned.

I was cold, as the rain was falling all day, and in the evening the temperature went down quickly. I ate something and left for the hotel. The same evening I told the German I would take the car only, if he was to have it repaired. Seemingly there was no problem with it, the repair only lasted two days. As it is if you buy a used car, you inherit the repair shop too. I came also this way into contact with Ato Tezera, who had always repaired the car of this German sociologist. My compatriots took their automobiles to other shops. Well, the car has been repaired, but only the clutch. It so happened in spite of the fact that the German knew that the gearbox accepts rear only at repeated attempts. Very soon I would have to go back to Ato Tezera, only it was to be at my own cost to change the broken gear-shift. After the car had been put to place, I succeeded in arranging my number plate too, before my family had arrived. My wife would tell me her preparations for their trip later. During the six weeks we were living separately I have got some letters from her, of course taken to me by arriving people instead of mail.

Having the painting and whitewash finished in my flat, I went to buy furniture and arranged it in the apartment. I called our representative, John, to see my flat and to report home that my family could come. I learned that they would arrive the next week. By the

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same plane new experts would be expected, two doctors, wife and husband, and the third one was the friend of Alex, who would take my originally planned place in the university.

Coming of the family

My son was extremely tired from the trip, and as soon as the sun set, he went to bed. One week before their arrival, when the renovation of the apartment had just been finished, I took on the advice of Thomas's wife for a "mamita" (a local housemaid) to employ her. That day I sent her home early, as food was ready, we didn't need her. I hadn't forget at buying furniture that the boy would need his own retreat. Life abroad always brings frequent visitors to the house and we would have to provide him this possibility of avoiding our guests. The flat had been arranged so that our bedroom became at the same time also the sitting room with a sofa and armchairs, and in his room there was a dining table to sit guests at it, except in the evening.

With my family there arrived also the doctors D., George and Elizabeth. He was a gynaecologist -- specialist for women's diseases --, she a dermatologist, her speciality was leprosy. They had been working as experts in Nigeria for 5 years in the '70s. George was telling stories about their stay there. It was full of their heroic exploits. As our block of apartments was across the road to the hotel, where they stayed, they were frequent guests with us, even they behaved patronisingly to our direction. Their demand was always very high, e.g. they wanted to move into a villa. Among us no one had been given a villa, as villas had been spared for the UNIDO experts with five times the funds as ours. We helped them in many respects, e.g. getting acquainted with the town. Beside them we had no friends-compatriots. Our best friends have been my Ethiopian boss and his family.

The rainy season has ended at the end of August and the weather began to cool down. During night, temperature has not been much above freezing and the last precipitation of the rainy

season has been snow on top of the surrounding mountains. In the clear thin air not only the colour turned blue on slides shot without a UV filter, the semicircle of the Entoto mountains looked 3 miles away, when they were actually in 15 miles. On top of the mountains snow remained for two days visible. In our flat the temperature has always been around 62 degrees F and we were cold all the time. We could be warm only under our covers. Even that was hard for me, as we did not take too much rugs with us. Well, we had been heading for Africa. I gave the majority to my wife. My problem was solved in October, when we at last got our carpets. The eight-foot runner became my cover and at last I stopped being cold.

With the dry season there came another plague, fleas. Although I had heard about insects called “gounichas”, I didn't know what they were, as during the rainy season they moved to a safe hiding place. Twice we have been attacked by a mass of them. First in the starting days of my family's stay, we drove out of town on the Dire Dawa road -- the eastern one -- and saw a small roadside carpet shop. As we went in, a new sensation caught us. Tiny black spots were appearing on our trousers. We didn't pay too much attention to them, we had no idea about the difficulties of getting rid of them. In the car we guessed already the essence of that and at home we had to invent how to eliminate them. As we took off cloths they left us, but the cold marble floor has been too cool for them. They parked along the lower edge of the sun-shade. My son solved it properly: we bought a can of Baygone spray and he killed every one of them. At the first attack we counted more than 40 fleas.

The second of our such adventures has been in connection with our doctor friends. They have not had any car yet, and we took them to the address given them by the Municipality man. It was a ruin, but full of “gounichas” in Amharic. When we left the house, our trousers have been black of them. Fortunately, it has been a mass of very weak fleas, they had not been fed for at least half a year. That is, why they looked black, being empty. In front of the house we could wipe off 90 percent, but the remaining ten was enough. Our new method has been developed that time, to shake them off our cloths

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into the bathtub. From the sides of it they would always fall back at their jumps and then, what was needed, was only a hot shower -- well, this has not always been simple, as water was often missing, about that I am to tell you more later .

The first days after the arrival of my family I spent by looking for a suitable school for my son. Almost all our experts had their children registered in the so-called English school, except two families. One of them was the Ss, a family of two doctors, their children were registered in the Canadian school, a private one. The other was a druggist, R., whose elder child, a boy, was just beginning school, and he did it at the Indian school. That was cheap, but below standard, the Canadian very expensive, but excellent.

The English school had originally been a good school of the British system, with British teachers. It has been a British missionary school. After take-over the Menghistu regime nationalised it and by our time all its teachers were locals. We wanted something better, if possible, something, that could have a continuity at home. The best choice seemed the French school. It has been owned by the French state. Alas, the schoolmaster of the lower section, although he accepted me friendly, convinced me about its senselessness in our case. He told me, as my son did not speak French, he would be pressed to learn the language in one year. By the hard style of his teachers he forecast that the boy would hate the language, and in the second year resistance of my son would make it necessary for me to begin from start somewhere else.

My next try has been the school of the West-German embassy. It fell out because of lack of his understanding German. There remained two -- only, about the American school I did not know that time --, so I went to the Soviet embassy. Its first secretary received me with pleasure and accepted my son. I met his would-be form-master, a fascinating lady, wife of an officer, who had been a teacher for 20 years.

Alas, two circumstances made it impossible to let my son finish

his studies there. First, he was sent into first grade, because he did not speak Russian, instead of third, although in the third grade he could have learned their language as well. Second, after one month, his teacher left with her husband for a two-month holiday. Her replacement was a true Russian girl, conceited, aggressive and nationalist. My son was suffering and after a month, at the autumn school break for the Great October Revolution, I took him out and told both the teacher and the first secretary -- the former was content to have got rid of my son, the latter actually sorry for losing a boy from a country of the Eastern Bloc -- about my decision.

His short stay at that school saw him meet Soviet Prime Minister Mr. Kosygin, who was on an official visit there. It was only one of his encounters of that kind. A year later our Head of State Mr Losonczy would take his wife on the visit there and my son would fall in the four children to hand over flower bunches to the two Hungarian and two Ethiopian celebrities. My son would be selected to hand his flower to the wife of Menghistu. The Ethiopian Head of State wanted to take his flower, but he put it behind himself, and waited, until the lady came near and gave her the bunch.

Later, when his original teacher would come back, we would meet her in a shop, and they would visit us at home. I could see then, how great a pity her leaving had been. To ensure his correct education, my wife took her text-books and began to teach her son every day. At home he would sit for an examination all right.

The first three months after the arrival of my family was a transition period at my work. Both experts, assigned to the state company National Road Transport Corporation (NATRACOR) by the ministry, were a surprise for the firm. The General Manager -- as with all state companies and authorities -- was a military man. The military junta, also called The Supreme Council, would not let the country managed by technocrats, they seated their people to the top positions. The General Manager of NATRACOR was called the Colonel. He had got his education in the U.S.A., but still, he was considered reliable. He interviewed us, and we were given a small

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office in a barrack. If we had had ample tasks, we could have done it. Alas, the management did not know what to do with us. The situation has altered a little, when we visited the director of the biggest branch company of the trust, FTO for Freight Transport Organisation. It was the company to deal with long haul between the largest towns, especially between ports and the capital.

One of the ports, Massawa, has been put out of reach by guerrillas of Eritrea, the region, where the majority of population was Tigre nationality, slightly different from the ruling Amhara. Today Eritrea is a separate country, but at that time, like several times during history, it belonged to Ethiopia. The other port was Assab near the Djibouti border and it was safely in the hands of the government. What Eritrea concerns, that has always been a sensitive question for Ethiopia, or, as it had been called earlier Abessinia. The population can be considered less African than people in the middle of the country, i.e. the Amharic or Oromo people. The cause of this is not only that they crossed the Strait of Aden about a thousand years later than the Amhara, and so they could keep their Arabic, Semitic look, but also that, unlike other areas of the country, their land has been colonized by the Italian. After World War II Ethiopia's five-year-long Italian occupation has been compromised by the English and Americans having a great influence in the region. Eritrea became a part of Ethiopia, as it had been during historical times before the Italian colonisation. The emperor was keeping his eyes anxiously on this setting, so as not to let it change, although a good part of the Eritreans wouldn't want to accept it and there were conflicts. The military governing council, when it came to power in 1974 as a result of the Revolution of the Taxi-drivers, made a right decision -- beside that one about the house arrest of the emperor -- in that they declared that it was the sovereign right of Eritrea to decide, how wide independence the country wants to have. Peace has arrived at once, the reason to fight has vanished. Alas, some months quickly passed and Menghistu eliminated the council members one-by-one -- he could do it, having been the head of the guard he knew the palace better than anyone else -- and he became the supreme man. He abolished the above rule, his first slogan was

that Ethiopia is one and unanimous, and Eritrea is part of the country. As we know the fight has been restarted. So far, Eritreans already liberated Ethiopia from under Menghistu, he had to flee, but it is a real horror, that has happened between the two separate countries since.

The FTO operated about 1,000 trucks and trailers, a small minority of them tractors with semi-trailers. Its maintenance plants at that time were insufficient, and the FIAT company had prepared a project to build a proper site beside the road to Dire Dawa, east of the capital. We with my compatriot Thomas had heard about the project and convinced the director, a well educated technical man, that we could adapt it to the actual needs and possibilities of the company. We did it in three weeks and also fulfilled a NATRACOR-task to prepare the tender for 50 new buses for the capital.

At that time another branch of NATRACOR, the Ambassa Bus Company (ambassa means lion in Amharic) did its job beside a few old FIAT, Mercedes and other buses with 50 Hungarian Ikaruses. The Ikarus company kept a representative at the bus repair shop, and the vehicles were kept in a good condition. The company was keen to buy new Ikarus buses, but had to issue a tender. It was our task with Thomas to prepare it, and we would not cheat our national interests. The tender was written for Ikaruses in all parameters, but alas, in vain. Our embassy's commercial counsellor went to make an excursion during the day, when the applications on the tender were opened. All of them contained a clause about third-country bank guarantee. On request of the Supreme Council, all competitors withdrew that clause, only our person in charge was not available and Ikarus was excluded from tender. Thus, FIAT buses have been selected.

After completion of the above tasks, I went to the technical manager of FTO, Ato Bekele B., and convinced him to accept me for preparation of common maintenance instructions for their trucks of four different makes. He liked my ideas at once, and I set myself on the task. I did it and helped to publish it in a printed form.

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On base of our contribution, construction work on the maintenance plant has been launched. A second repair plant in the port town of Assab came into account, and Bekele wanted me to come with him for a check of the site. It would realise in January. With the technical manager we became good friends, Bekele appreciated me for my human side and helped me to learn historical and geographical data about his country. He helped me to get tourist catalogues, too, some of them published by the National Geographic Society in the U.S. I began to feel even more respect about the people of the country. I have learned about their conversion to Christian religion by two Greeks in the fourth century. Also about the Queen of Sheba, who could have been a monarch of Aksum and could have travelled to meet King Solomon in the territory of today's Yemen. Most fascinating have been stories about the Ethiopian empire, its creator, Menelik II and the story of Haile Selassie. Geography of the country has also been interesting. All this has resulted in that the country became to me something as a home. Incidentally both my wife and me have said at home on our holiday that we were going "home", not back. To tell the truth, sometimes I have homesickness for the town and the country, even today.

Geographic and historic summary about Aida's country

I probably made a mistake by not giving any detailed description about Ethiopia as a country earlier, I trusted in the general knowledge of the reader during this story. Now, I think, I have to correct it. The area of the country is tremendous, it is nearly as large as the territory in the U.S. east of the Mississippi river. That means thirty time the area of Hungary. Its population then, when I was living there, was only three times as high as ours (thirty million people), but since that time, in spite of the war going on for twenty years, it has grown by fifty percent, not so the available food, for the same reason it went down sharply. The Ethiopian economy was counted the fifth bad one in the world twenty years ago, at present they are the last-but-one in that list. In spite of this sad truth, let me say something general about values: the present grade of importance of a country or a nation is not the same as their influence having made on human civilisation in the past.

When I was a child fifty years ago, the oldest ancient ancestor of man used to be considered the pre-hominid creature of Peking with his half a million years. It has become accepted theory since that those regions had meant a dead-end for the ancient man, although he had made a detour to Asia on route from Africa to Europe, but he originated in Africa and his main activities have been performed here. We could say, we have come from Ethiopia, as the finds there are nearly 4 million years old, only Kenya and South-Africa can boast with similar. We have visited one of those archaeological sites, it is not far from the capital at the settlement Melka Konture, on the bank of the river Awash. About a hundred places exist in the country, where you could find stone tools, made of obsidian, lava or quartz, or where you could search for drawings in caves and could photograph, if the infrastructure were satisfactory. During my stay there, there existed something like that, although because of the

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military government only "better people" could move around. Maybe, now anybody is allowed to do that, although I have doubts, but without means it is impossible in a wild country.

Let's make a step forward from ancient times to antiquity and see who the Amhara people are that are representing the core of Ethiopians, and how their language and script sprang into life. Everything began with Sheba, its probable place might have lain within the area of today's Yemen, somewhere around Sanaa. According to legend the King of Israel, who was at that time Solomon, was so famous for his wisdom that the Queen of Sheba went to see him with a large caravan. As the king solved the three riddles the queen put to him, he was considered worth for a nearer contact. The people of Sheba had already been looking across the Straits of Aden, and they crossed it actually, and began to populate the western side of the Red Sea. When the son of the queen was born, with the help of whom the ancient Ethiopian kings traced their origin back to King Solomon, he was one of them to leave the old home country. The ever growing Sheban population built several settlements, as they had had the knowledge to do that, and these had made the ground for the foundation of the Aksum (it isn't spelled Axum) Empire. Their harbour has been Adoulis somewhere between today's Assab and Djibouti. Aksum has been the largest town, the country became an empire only 400 years after its populating, i.e. around 500 B.C. That first king stated to originate from King Solomon took the name of Menelik I. However Aksum today is no more than an archaeological digging site, the remains of buildings discovered there prove the vastness of its culture in its own time. Stelae (characteristic stone obelisks) have been erected, the highest of them is still upright, its height is 70 feet. Besides that ancient people has built churches and palaces with walls of solid stone, even today there are more than ten of them in the town. The place lies to the North-East from Addis Ababa.

People had originally spoken the Shaaba language that was a Semite tongue, the characters of its script are similar to Phoenician. With the passing of time the influence of Alexander the Great has

found its way, the Greek language has also been widely spoken in the empire. The Shaaban language slowly turned into Ghahez, then the present Amharic. The country has not been isolated, they issued coins, traded, they have got as far as India. Aksum coins as recent as the 3rd century AD have been found in Asia. This trade has made its contribution to that Christianity began to spread in the second century already, whereas people has kept their old gods too. Christian belief became dominating only in the 4th century. The empire took only a small part of present day Ethiopia, the mountainous land to North-east of the present capital. At the same time, its influence has covered also the southern inhabitants, the language of those living around the southern lakes can also be traced back to Ghahez. As the Amharic language has been developing, letters having stood for an only consonant earlier fell into variants. Every one of them stands now not only for a sound, but a syllable. For this reason writing is more complicated than with Latin letters.

The fate of empires generally is that there are some people who don't like them, for this reason the two parties start a fight that finally destroys the bare living of their citizens, consequently the empire disintegrates. The monarchs of Aksum, beside fighting and conquering the peoples of territories that make up today's Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, even crossed the Red Sea and ventured into Southern Arabia. That excursion happened during a king named Khaleb in the 6th century. Christianity has been taken to the country by two young Syrians, we know them by the names of Frumentius and Aedesius (Latin script). They were sailing on the Red Sea and their master was killed by locals when landed. The boys have been taken to Aksum, to the king. He must have been a clever man as the talented boys he placed in high offices. Frumentius became the young successor's teacher when his father, the king died, the young monarch has taken Christianity and founded the first Christian church in the country. After some more years later he was sent in mission to the official Coptic patriarch in Egypt, with the job to ask him to send a bishop to his country. The patriarch named him bishop and sent him back. He has become the Bishop of Aksum. The

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young monarch's name was Ezana, he is famous for his coins, the first ones to leave the traditional symbol of sun and moon, and introducing the cross instead.

I have mentioned that empires disintegrate because of wars. It happened with Aksum too. The country has still been able to survive that it took an active role in the creation of the Islam, the king gave refuge to people who were fleeing across the Red Sea from Arabic monarchs not very kind to the new belief that time yet. Among the refugees were the daughter of Muhammad and one of his would-be wives. The prophet sent them to King Armah being Aksum's monarch because Ethiopia "is the land of justice, where nobody is badly treated". The Arabic monarch demanded that the refugees be sent back to him, but the King of Aksum denied it, telling that he would have never gave it out for any price who had run to him. Later, when his principles had become victorious in Mecca, the prophet got back all his one hundred followers as well as his two relatives, and he gave the instruction to his believers that Abessinia they should always leave in peace.

But the empire has not been able to survive that it had to fight all the time the Beghas of Sudan and the Arabs invading its seashore. The country lost all its strength. The last two kings, Gharsem and Hataz corrupted even minting, their coins have not been worth their value. The weakening of the power has been mounted also by the inner discontented. There has lived a princess called Judith, who revolted against the Aksum ruler. She conquered and destroyed not only Aksum, but had the Princes of Aksum killed, although those young nobles had themselves been prisoners in a fortress at Debra Damo for a long time, preventing that way a counter-revolt from their part on their right of origin. The church had been able to take advantage of the downturn during the following period, as people turned to the spiritual world of religion. Wonderful churches have been built in large caves or hewn into facades of rocks. Very few other places of the world can boast with similar relics. But even more unique churches have been created. They have been hewn out of bedrock downward, then tunnels were bored for access.

There are at least thirty places in the country with such churches, the number of churches is even higher.

Following the reign of this fighting amazon usurpers have had their way, who could only have occupied and ruled limited parts of the whole country. One of the families had been the Zagve dynasty, whose members had ruled to the South of Aksum, in Roha, that place is called Lalibela today after King Lalibela, the most famous monarch of them. As legend says, King Lalibela and his men had been helped by angels in his large work of carving out the temples. As much they did during day, the angels hewed twice as much during night. The period of rule of this dynasty had lasted almost three hundred years, its last member had resigned to hand over the rule to a prince that had once again been able to trace back his origin to King Solomon. The following period can be considered a great success from the point of view of religion and books, but just the opposite can be said about economy. Money had ceased to function, salt had taken its place in the trade. Construction of temples and palaces had had no sense, as the king had always been in motion, he hadn't built any capital for himself. Religion had another source of advantage at that time. As Bishop Tekla Haimanot had helped the king to get the throne, the new king had been grateful and had let him everything do. A tremendous religious success had also been, when Sultan Saladin allowed for the Ethiopian Church to build a temple in Jerusalem. However, it could only come true during the reign of Menelik II, about 700 years later, in the 19th century.

Although Ibn Battuta, the well known Arab traveller made a trip to Ethiopia in the 14th century, and also an Italian had happened to get there, he had even seen the inside of the country, the new government moving slowly to the present capital's place could deal with its own matters, it had not been much bothered from abroad. The vacuum of power during the Middle Ages that made it possible even for the smallest European countries, such as Portugal, to grow into a colonising power, had not been unkind also to Abessinia. The problems started later, when the small countries turned into invad-

ers, the country had had clashes with the Portugese. They stepped in the life of Ethiopia during the inside feud in the 16th century. In the 15th century the central kingdom still could deal with the discontented. A hundred years later, however, the eastern Hararghe region with Harar as its seat just like today, had two successive rulers who made the authority of the central kings questionable. Gragn was the first of them, and he occupied the whole country. But the next central king defeated him, and here come the Portuguese in.

At the beginning of the 16th century Ethiopia and Portugal had established a contact, according to the desire of the Ethiopians even a Portuguese embassy had been existing for some years in their country, but it had passed. However, when King Galodewos attacked Gragn, the son of Vasco da Gama, Cristophoro landed in the country, stood beside the king with weapons and soldiers and helped him in defeating the man of Harar around today's Gondar. His victory had not been a lasting one, the successor of Gragn destroyed him too. Nur emir, he was the successor, has made Harar great. The irony of fate is that in the 20th century once more a Harar ras, Tafari Makonnen acquired the leading of the country, I am to tell you more about that. Otherwise the attack of Gragn made again wrong to the country, it became quite poor. The Portuguese wanted to deploy their usual tactic of converting the population to the Catholic religion, but they haven't succeeded, King Galodewos has written his Declaration of Belief, in which he retained the Coptic Christianity. These attempts have been dragging until the second half of 17th century, when at last King Fasciladas ousted the Jeshu-its. Anyway, you can see a lot of traces of the Portugese influence around Lake Tana even now.

Fasciladas has founded Gondar at the north side of Lake Tana. Until the 19th and 20th centuries it has been the most important centre in history. Numerous large stone buildings have been built, a large part of them can be seen today. Gondar has been the capital of the country for more than two hundred years. Its population at that time was over 100,000. But after the middle of the 18th century the central power has again become weak and there followed the

"mesafint" period, the age of the princes. It is a very interesting epoch, and can be compared to the age of civil anarchy in France during Louis XIII. The three most powerful princes had been Ali of Godjam, Wube of Tigrai and Sahle Selassie of Shoa. The latter ruled the territory around the present capital, his seat had been Ancober that is to the North of Addis Ababa at about 60 miles. He made his country strong and accepted the missions of England and France around the middle of the 19th century. He imported firearms. His grandson was Menelik II, who has unified the country at the end of the same century. Of course, Sahle Selassie and his successor, Kassa has done theirs in this respect. Kassa has tried unification mainly by arms, but his results were partial. He has learned from missionaries how to produce guns, and he has sent people abroad with the job to learn everything about the manufacturing of firearms. He has reorganised military, so as soldiers have been able to live without plundering.

Kassa has been able to defeat his greatest competitor, Ali, and with it the age of the princes has ended, and he has been crowned king under the name of Thewodros II, but he lost at last. He made the British angry by the arrest of their consul. The British forces sent against him were led by a general, Sir Robert Napier, and when the British captured the mountain fortress of Maghdala, the monarch committed suicide. His successor became Yohannes IV in the job of uniting the country, who has come from Tigrai, with the seat of Makalle. He had other concerns beside unification too, such as outside enemies like the Mahdists from Sudan, as well as Italians, who put their foot inside Eritrea. As he didn't take part in the fight during his predecessor, the British helped him against the Italians by arms and training his men. The Italians were defeated by one of his commanders, against the Mahdists he fought himself and won, but in the fight he died too.

That was the beginning for the activity of Menelik II. His career hadn't started well, after his father's death he was unable to sit on the throne of Shoa, to that time Thewodros had seized the rule and had Menelik lock away in Magdala. The captive managed to escape

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and he declared himself King of Shoa. He liked the plans of Thewodros to unify the country, he went on the import of arms, and reorganised administration in his own territory. He revived diplomatic relations with the powerful partner countries. His job of keeping his country on the road of independence hasn't been simple, as he had to sign the Treaty of Wuchale with the Italians following his rising to the throne in 1889, after the death of Yohannes, and it also contained a clause about a de facto protectorate. The disputes led to war that ended with the victory of Ethiopians almost one and a half year later. The Italian have been better in artillery, and the Ethiopians have had six times as many people. The deciding battle has been fought at Adwa. Italy let the question of protectorate pass and permanent embassies have been established in the capital by Italy, France, Britain and Russia. These missions are at the same place today, on large sites, amid giant eucalyptus trees.

Rases (local monarchs) taking part in the Battle of Adwa lent their names to the streets and squares of today's Addis Ababa, the battle itself is included in the name of the shopping street. It was Menelik who founded the capital instead of his former seat at Ancober. Addis Ababa means new flower, it has been given by the queen, Taitu. Its first significant building was the Roman Catholic Mission founded in 1868, which had been situated where the hospital can be found at present. The spot had thermal springs at that time. Before finding the final place for his capital Menelik erected a palace and two temples at the height of the Entoto mountain, about six miles to the North. The churches are intact today and can be visited. The Entoto has not been an ideal place in spite of the fine strategic advantages, for this reason he moved to the present site in 1887. The old palace has been constructed on one of the two highest hills inside the capital, Menghistu built his new fortified residence on the place of it. The capital has reached the 100,000 inhabitants soon. In the palace a lot of fine works of foreign masters have been incorporated. The palace soon became surrounded by the mansions of the rases, who kept these residences in the royal court, while they spent most of their time at home

in the provinces. The other hill gave the site for the most important church of the country, the Cathedral of St. George. It is still there in all its beauties, but another big building has been constructed nearby, the Municipality.

Menelik has succeeded in finishing the great job of unifying the country. He extended the territory of Shoa on several present regions already during the reign of his predecessor, Yohannes, to the West and East, as well as to the South. In 1889 he became the Emperor. His empire has reached its maximum size to 1898, but it didn't cover Eritrea being an Italian colony then. It goes without saying, the principal means of unification has been military might, but family connections have also been useful. Thus the vast cultural treasure, varied and different in many ways, which has been created in regions of identical religious and linguistic areas that all the same had so many deviations, has got into the borders of one country. The country, or you can say it was again an empire, became step-by-step the same as it had been before its disintegration: it could keep up with the development of the world. In place of the original forests thinned by people eucalyptus trees have been planted, the first tree have even got a name, it has been Bahar Zaf. A new money has been issued, these coins became known as Menelik dollars. The government has printed its own mail stamps. The first car reached Addis Ababa in 1907. Telegraph machines have been installed. The railway line between Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa has been laid, it has been functioning until now, only its outer end is at Djibouti for a long time. To build that line, it has been necessary to construct several bridges, it was then that the first bridge over the river Awash was built. The National Bank has been founded.

Menelik died in 1913. He was followed by his grandson on the throne, but only for a short time, because he had to resign for general discontent, and the new Emperor (or rather Empress) became princess Zauditu, Menelik's daughter in 1917. The following period is not completely transparent, as the next emperor began already to make his road smooth. Tafari Makonnen has been the

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son of the Harar governor, who was 14 years old in 1906, when he followed his father at his death. Simultaneously with the crowning of princess Zauditu he has got the title Heir to the Throne. As the ras of Harar, he let the world already sense his importance, he developed the diplomatic relations with Europe, and it was he who achieved that Ethiopia joined the League of Nations in 1924. During his European trip he regained the Crown of Thewodros, which had been the booty of the British at Magdala. He signed a treaty with Italy and, although he has been no monarch yet, he has got the title Negus (king). He became emperor in 1930, after the death of Zauditu. What is more widely known is that he became emperor twice, first in 1930, then again during World War II, when he could return with the British-American assistance. But it is less known that in 1936 he was not running before the Italians, but he fled the uprising of his own people, the invading foreign troops reached the capital only 10 days after he left.

Of course, Italians have been no institution of mercy. They had signed the treaty only to have an excuse for the occupation of the country, beside Italian Somalia (the southern part of present Somalia) and Eritrea being already under their domination, they had invaded also Ogaden, even they had been demanding an apology from Ethiopia. The French and the British had only been covering up all this under the name of neutrality. The general prohibition on arms trade had been hard only for Ethiopia, Italy manufactured its own weapons. Even the League of Nations was adapting this practice, as the trade embargo against Italy, after his attack on Ethiopia, was not covering petrol, the only product in Italy's import list. Italians have used all means during their progress to the capital.

After the escape of the emperor people have not been too hostile to Italian occupying troops, but it has only been an unstable peace. During a celebration (that of the Duce's birthday) an assassination attempt has been made against Governor Graziani, it has been revenged on the spot by several thousand dead, mainly from machine-gun fire. From that day on, there has been a state of war

between Italians and Ethiopians, and this guerrilla fight has made the liberation of the country by British and American soldiers from Sudan and Kenya much easier in 1941. Following a five year absence, the emperor has got again to his place. With the help of the two big powers providing conditions to his return he has turned Ethiopia the most important point of Africa. Beside the Organisation of the African Unity other significant international organisations have moved their seats there. For this reason the country, although its structure has remained feudal as before, has shown the signs of development. In the capital both locals and foreigners have found enough food and other necessary goods. At the same time, there have been differences of whole orders of magnitude between the in-comes of different groups in the population. This was the main reason of the uprising that dethroned the emperor second time, and this time finally. Taxi-drivers would not accept a regulation just before the Ethiopian New Year (around September 13) in 1974 that raised the price of fuel, but forbid them to raise tariffs. This Taxi-driver Uprising led to the house arrest of the emperor and power take-over by the Military Council. About events that followed it within some months, namely, the coming of Menghistu, I have already spoken.

Another interesting thing, the Ethiopian calendar. It is known that the basics of the present European calendar had been established by Julius Caesar, but his work needed some adjustment. During the centuries following his era the annual difference of nearly a quarter day -- it is the missing time that should be added to the 365 day year to get the exact orbit time of Earth -- had made up a considerable amount. That is the reason why the notion of leap-year had become necessary that has been introduced by Pope Gregory. The Ethiopians have been late by an even more significant difference until today. Their calendar contains twelve thirty-day months, and for this reason they added a thirteenth month somewhere in the past, which holds five days. Thus they are at the Julian calendar now. The difference to our time is nearly eight years now, because this difference has never been compensated yet. And this deviation is growing by almost a quarter day annually. The

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Ethiopian Tourist Office has used this situation for its ads: "13 months of Sunshine". The only thing missing from posters is that in about four months of the 13 it rains all the time.

The calendar is completed by the peculiarity of daily time counting. Probably, it has been taken here by the ancestors of the present people from the Middle-East, as it is a fashion of that region to begin counting the hours of the day at sunrise. They consider 6 a.m. the zero hour, they say 1 o'clock at 7 a.m. and so on. At noon they tell 6 o'clock, at 6 p.m. 12 o'clock. Of course, the next day starts at 6 a.m. the next morning instead of midnight. It goes without saying, foreigners are unaware of this business, until someone asks them at marvel, why they think it were 7 o'clock, when it is only 1 o'clock. Like any other closed society that has opened its doors to the western civilisation, these people have accepted also the western clock-time in their outside connections, but among themselves, beside their mother tongue, they kept their own traditional time system. Well, any foreigner, who has been waiting for his partner in vain once, would make it clear next time, which time system it is that has been named.

African countryside

After this information about history and else, may I resume the line of my narrative. At the beginning of November I have rejected a suggestion of Louis the ceramist to make a common excursion to the deep south of the country, to the lakes of the Rift Valley. We went to see the Awash National Park in the 3 days of break instead. "Ras" hotel was keeping a caravan camping site there, and we reserved a caravan for us. We made the necessary preparations -- in spite of our lack of co-operation Louis lent us his towing cable -- and early morning on the first day of the three-day holiday we set on the road. We have been some weeks into the dry season, but nature still had reserves, the countryside has been green under a clear blue sky.

The central part of Ethiopia is a plateau of a height about 8,000 feet above sea level. For this reason, the country is called the Switzerland of Africa, and its people, as they have never been colonised and are clever and hard-working, with a hard character, are called the Germans of Africa. This plateau has various hills, and landscape is beautiful. Around the capital and in the northern part of the country, eucalyptus trees introduced from Australia in the 19th century are dominating, but to the south, the more arid climate prefers acacia trees. The country is so vast that its then 30 million inhabitants could not fill it completely, and we were driving dozens of miles without seeing anyone. However, it was only appearance, as soon as we stopped the car to take a walk or our breakfast, a small boy was growing out of the ground and was looking at us. Eucalyptus is a very fast-growing tree. Left alone it can grow to a giant, such are those old-timers that are standing on the embassy sites of (past) great powers. But people need fuel and they won't let the trees grow high. Around settlements only small arm-size new-growth strive to the sky, well, it is true, they are grown so densely, you can hardly make your way through them. The trimmed stumps can be seen

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well, they were also arm-size before someone cut them off. On the road firewood for fireplaces is sold, but it is also such a quality, not really ideal for fireplaces.

That road leaves the town in eastern direction and follows the same course on 200 miles. At about fifty miles from the capital it forks out, here opens the road to the South leading to the Rift Valley lakes, then further on to Kenya. We had to stick to the original course. As you drive that way, during the first dozen miles the proximity of the capital is evident. Not only traffic is more dense, but settlements too. The first bigger settlement has also military importance, the academy of air force of the country is situated there. We haven't frequented this place for this reason, but we visited it very often. Here can you find the nearest lakes for bird watching, in one of them even you can swim, as legend says that the parasite bilharzia cannot live in its water. The name of the town is Debre Zeit, but its original name Bishoftu in the Oromo language is also well known.

The lake to be used for swimming is Lake Hora, you can get a room in the namesake hotel at its shore. It is only in thirty miles from Addis, for this reason its climate is almost the same as that of the capital, but it lies about two thousand feet lower than the capital, and it is worth making a small excursion there during the rainy season to get a little tan, before rain makes you arrested in a room for a long time. African sun-tanning is quite different from traditional lying under the sun all day. African sun is hot like burning gas. You forget it only once and your body becomes red and burning. The lake does not make you desire to have a plunge in it, its edge is even dirty, sometimes also cattle are walking along the shore, but if you are already far from the bank, you can accept it. A true European beach you can only find at lake Langano, I am to write a little about it later.

At the same time, birds are magnificent. They are running in some feet from you, species from such waterfowl that you know only from the movies. On other lakes -- there are in all five crater-lakes around the town -- birds are even more numerous, partly, because they are not so fashionable, and fewer people go there,

otherwise, the roads are much worse, the majority would not risk a broken axle. The town makes the impression that is common with settlements placed directly on a highway, where the main street is the road at the same time. Lots of restaurants and buffets are along the road, where many foreigners wouldn't dare go in, but one of them, from the terrace of which you have a panoramic view of the lake with the richest population of birds, can fulfil all needs. On the highway Debre Zeit taxis are running, these are tumbrels with a single horse and a single axle, on which two automotive wheels are mounted. The small horse takes the vehicle without considerable effort, and sometimes a whole crowd is sitting above.

Over Debre Zeit the road follows the same direction. At the same time the landscape is far from flat, it is full of rises and slopes. Exactly this is the road, by which trucks, loaded with goods to the limit of their capacity, strive to reach the capital. On these steep rises some of them make black Diesel-smoke. Over the fork, where the road to the South starts, the road takes an easterly course. At the fork you find the town Modjo, then another half an hour, and you are in the small town with the biblical name of Nazareth. The hotel built for tourists coming here from the capital has the name of Adama. Its builder must have taken the Garden of Eden as a model, you see nowhere in the country such a care of the flowering plants as here. As there is no wild body of water here, the town itself is only a small agricultural centre, the atrium-like finely designed swimming pool makes a natural part of the hotel. Driving over the town you reach the crossroads, where you can turn right to the South to Sodere. The road itself leads much over Sodere, it is the road to the Bale mountains, where a tourist can find everything for spending his time with fishing, prey-shooting or cave-discovering, if he is wealthy and brave enough for those pass-times.

We kept the same direction as before. Here the line of the road again changes a little, it turns to north-east. It then forks out, the Dire Dawa leg leads to that town and to Harar near the Somali border.

They were cities most fought for in the 1977 war with Somalia.

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That country has been the home of ras Tafari Makonnen, who made himself into the Emperor of Ethiopia. Its other leg turns to north and later to north-east and, rounding Djibouti, it leads to Assab, the port town. We did not drive so far, however, at about 140 miles from the capital we found the place we were looking for, the entrance of the Awash National Park. The park itself is cut into almost equal two parts by the highway, but the majority of tourists knows only the southern half. No wonder, as you cannot drive through the other half without off-road vehicles. And, as the southern section is extremely large itself, people never have enough time to see even that all.

The section of the road from Nazareth to the park is the most beautiful part of the trip. Settlements are so rare that the country is rather a natural reserve area. The line of the road follows the ridge of a long mountain, it is much higher than the surrounding land. Sometimes the road nears the border of the plateau, at that time you can see far away. Nowhere is civilisation to be seen, you usually pray, only not to have any failure with the car here. You would have to walk a lot, even it is not so sure you reach your target, as there are predators in the bush, for this the best proof is the rifle on the shoulders of shepherds coming rarely into view at crossing the road. The road leads mainly in dug-outs and hilltops. When you stop with the car, stop the engine, silence is so complete that you even hear it. But you only wait some minutes, and you hear the signs of life, a bird on a tree or an animal in the bush.

We have made about forty five miles in such conditions. Then a long slope followed, and the country opened out. The way crossed a vast flat area, it has been covered with water from the rain not long before, even the road was covered with water, we had to slalom between puddles. As soon as we left this flat area behind, we have met another interesting phenomenon. On the left side of the road there was deep-ploughing, black as soot. Coming nearer we discovered that it wasn't earth, it was stone, a lava-like rock. I would learn it later that it was actually lava, only some decades old, this is the cause that it was completely dead, life has some thousand years still, before it can settle down on it.

From here you must only drive some miles to the entrance of the park. It lies before the crossroads, where the northerly Assab leg starts. The national park lies before the fork at the deep gorges the river has made in millions of years. The park itself is a stretch of plain, a typical piece of African savanna. At the entrance the guards accept the fee merrily, then you can start to drive southward by the dirt road in the savanna. The road makes big turns, it detours gullies and bigger groups of trees with thick undergrowth. There aren't many of these, just when you reach the large artificial clearing with the museum and caged animals, directly before the river Awash, the forested area begins. We have found a young man at the cages, who has been in a friendly relation with all animals, even the lion has been listening to him. The latter was a handsome male with a large mane. In another cage a cheetah just having reached adulthood was going up and down. The animal came to the bars and the man stroked his head. He offered it to me too, but I did it a little reluctantly.

The river Awash has a small-size waterfall, and on its banks from Grant gazelles to Greater Kudus you can find herbivorous wild beasts. You can drive to the river and on route you see different kinds of birds on the trees, baboons run around and ostriches can be seen in the distance. They look like great balls floating above ground, hot air sometimes eliminates them in its vibration, then shows them clearly. Ostriches are actually large hens and cocks, the colour of the hen is light brown, the male is darker. The company of a cock consists of at least five to six hens. In the thick undergrowth on the riverbank you are prone to disturb any animal living in the park.

Giraffes and other corpulent beasts are not found there, but in the night you could be aroused by the voice of a lion. They live in the other side of the park over the highway, and almost never can be seen. During the night, especially if there was an international holiday, other voices could also be heard: the cries and laughter of East-German experts having drunk their beer quantum. I have to confess that accommodation in that place must be rated excellent by an African system of rating. Although we didn't need the service

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the restaurant created to fulfil the needs of people living in the caravans for a short time, but for the majority taking their dinner there has been a must. In the caravans it was hot in the night, as the climate of the park is nearly tropical.

Our best amusement was in the park to drive slowly by lanes and stop at sighting something, photographing, looking around with binoculars and listen to the almost complete silence. We have seen oryx antelopes, they are my favourite beasts, their beauty represents me the limitless abilities of nature to create wonderful creatures. Once in the hottest period during the afternoon we stopped under an acacia tree. The tree wasn't giving any relief, we thought in a vain that we were in a shade. Acacias are tricky plants, they don't bear any exploitation. They adjust their leaves so that they are turning their borders to the sun, making evaporation minimal, and it doesn't give too much shade. In that case something peculiar must have happened, as there was no trace of life. Maybe a predator was hiding in the five-feet-high grass, the other animals became silent for this reason. There were abandoned ant-hills nearby, we went to them and climbed to their tops, but it didn't help. We took our late lunch on the spot, after that the previous feeling passed, the breeze began to freshen the air and the savanna offered us its usual sight.

We were preparing ourselves for the second, and our last, night in the park and, as we were a little late for the camp, in the quickly promoting darkness after the setting of the sun we switched on our headlights, as we hurried for camp. It seemed, we were not alone to miscalculate time, we had to stop abruptly, as we saw two men in gabby on their shoulders and waving wildly. They surprised us actually, we weren't able to ask them yet what they wanted, they were forcing their way into the car, they were evidently afraid for their life. On route to camp they told us there could be any trouble for people outside after sunset, the predators were not fastidious. In the car they calmed down. Probably, they were to narrate evenings in the future that they had been saved by a "farange" once.

Following these fine experiences, we started home. At sunup

we drove out of the park and turned on the highway. The road was a very good-quality one and driving to the capital you passed quickly a phenomenon resembling black earth behind a giant ploughshare, about that I have written. After that we also passed the flat area that had dried so much in three days that there was no water on the road any more. Here the road began to rise and there were hills and lowlands alternating on the side of the road. I was driving at about 50 miles per hour and the road was level, when suddenly I felt my car raise its right-side wheels into the air. We have been in a right curve, steering wheel slightly turned to the right, but neither speed nor sharpness of the turn would prove this reaction of the vehicle.

I was no experienced driver at that time. Today I would switch back and let it slow down. That time I trot on the brake pedal. The car reacted quite normally: brakes of wheels on the ground seized, the others let it go. The car was putting its wheels of left and right in turn to the ground and every time it came near to one side of the road zig-zagging wildly. It was made worse by the movements of my wife and son sitting on the rear seats without safety belts. Fortunately, no other car was in our vicinity at that instant. To the left the ground was about 30 feet below road level, on the right that difference was 8 feet. I tried to draw the vehicle nearer to the right side in case of a run-down. At last, near the right side of the road, the car hit a big stone with its bumper and stopped. But, as the right wheels ran off, the car turned on its right side, all the glasses on that side went out, and it stopped above 8 feet of nothing, supported only by a bush of wild roses.

We left it climbing through the left door and waited to somebody coming to help us to put the car back on road. Silence was enormous. We examined each-other, what injuries we had, but, fortunately, nothing serious happened. I have still been in a shock, but they were in good humour, the boy was even giggling. Before us the road was rising and running between two hills. This rise ahead and those hills blocked sight, but in some minutes there came a noise to us, the sound of many motor vehicles. The next minute the first trucks emerged above the hump of the road.

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It was a military convoy of at least twenty trucks laden with soldiers and military ware. They were East-Germans and Ethiopians. They stopped opposite us and after greeting they tried to pull the car up by a tow-rope Louis had given me in any case. The rope would not do, it tore at once. Then a couple of men put it up by hand. One of the soldiers sat in, turned the key off and on again, started the engine and said:

“Please, at your service.”

Before we could say a sentence, they sat in their trucks and drove on. We could only wave them off in gratitude. When we remained among us, we could speak at last. My wife and the child were both happy to survive the accident. They have been unhurt, except my wife's leg with a scratch of rose thorn. My forehead was bleeding a little, I hit it in the rear-view mirror.

This accident would slightly change our relationship to driving. My wife would not sit in for about four months. I would have this experience repeated in my dreams for even longer. Later we would drive that stretch of the road again, and I would solve that riddle: the curve has been sloped to the outside. The roadbed might have sunk down and so, geometry of the road has changed. Anyway, my speed never surpassed 40 miles per hour at that road again.

Before I decided to take my son out of the Russian school, our daily routine began with taking him there. It lay well out of town, as the first emperor, Menelik II, had given large lands to the four biggest European powers for their embassies. The Russian embassy site was one of them. Road was busy and, although I developed a route along the old and new administrative buildings and it was a smooth one, I suffered a lot especially from a local, the Aeroflot Soviet Airlines office head, who was taking his son on the same way to the same school by his Volkswagen beetle. He was overtaking me in sharp curves, his pride could not let him allow a “farange” (stranger) to arrive before him to the place. After delivery of the child to school, I drove to my office on the other side of the city. My daily route was 50 miles. It stopped it, when my son began having his lessons at home. The next year it would not be better, then I would

drive twice daily to the International School at the other end of the town.

After the accident our car has been repaired in two weeks. Ato Tezera, the chief of a workshop I inherited with my car from the German sociologist, would always do a prime work. His workshop has been called "Autosilverio" after the former owner, Ato Silverio.

Anyway, the only day that my car spent damaged in the parking at our house, was enough to be seen by my neighbour, another Hungarian expert. Charles, formerly chief architect of our capital at home, was the senior architect in town. Revolution Square, the venue of yearly military celebrations, was nicknamed Polonyi Square after him. He said on sighting the car:

"You are an extremely lucky person. You smash your car in an overturn 200 kilometres from town, and not only nobody is hurt, even the car can come back on its own wheels."

During these two weeks my colleague, Thomas, took me to the office. After that my place has been switched to the nearby office of Bekele, I made only 10 miles a day. This break in driving in the near-Christmas weeks was a great luck. Otherwise, we would have been going somewhere and having troubles. The family of the French schoolmaster has been attacked by gunmen on the road, and both his wife and elder son killed by bullets. It was a revenge for a local child hit on the road by a white car. Any white car could have been an enemy (also mine).

For my family and me this careless period has been a great luck. We have made big walks in town through suburbs other whites would detour far. The town's backbone is Churchill Road. It starts from the railroad station on a smaller height and leads through the centre of the city. It is the lowest point of the road. The square is housing some very important offices and their National Bank. Our block of apartments has lain nearly on that square. Here the road meets the other main highway of the country that is the Dessie Road leading to the namesake town in the East, to the seat of the Region of Wollo. Perhaps this is the only part of the country, where the maj-

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ority of the territory is no high plateau. Even here can be found the Danakil Depression named after the local people, its deepest point lies 370 feet below sea level. The Danakil people have not been much more developed even a few years ago than they had been several thousand years ago. North of Wollo lies the Region of Tigray, where the same Tigre people are living as in Eritrea.

After this crossing the road rises and leads up to hilltop, where the Municipality building has been constructed. On the same hill one of the Coptic Church's most important temples, the St. George's Cathedral is situated. Difference in level on the road is about 1,300 feet. Over Municipality, 15 miles away, rises the semi-circle of Entoto mountains. Their highest point is above 12,000 feet.

From the city centre to Municipality the road was a metropolitan one at that time. Walking on it from south to north you first saw hotels and prospering tourist offices, although there was also an empty site, where in my very first days in town during a torrential rain a few cows perished. Poor creatures had walked down to the low-lying area to browse, but rain arrived, the pasture turned into a ten-foot lake, and they couldn't climb back up on the muddy bank. After hotels there followed the Ministry of Transport, i.e. my workplace, the ground-floor of which was the Main Post Office at the same time, then came big stores, the Banca di Roma, etc. At halfway of the rise there was a giant circus (in the capital there were many similar roundabout traffic circuses, it has been no great joy, as part of the drivers gave priority to those within, the rest did the opposite, you never knew, who would give priority to whom), from where both to the right and to the left important roads started. Here we found the best shop for roasted coffee, or rather the roasting plant itself, where I have always got the best quality.

Somewhat further, at the roadside, we found the favourite small shops of my wife. Here you could buy everything from coffins to bracelets made of hairs of giraffe tails to ivory objects. And on the left side of Churchill Road, when we are facing Municipality, lies the biggest open-air market of Africa, the Mercato. To discover it complete-

ly, you need a month, walking here and there every day. It is a real wonder. There are a multitude of spices in great heaps in bowls on rugs spread on the ground. There is no ware you could not buy there. During our first days in the town my colleague Elmer, who wanted to take cocoa, but there was none in shops, said to a man on the Mercato, offering his guidance for a modest sum, to show him cocoa. The man took him to a small shop and there it was.

During the weeks after our return from the unfortunate excursion, my wife and the child went walking daily. Fruit and basket vendors knew them well, and soon she would earn a status of "hardest customer". She would bargain every price to the ground. Once a grapefruit vendor threw after her his grapefruits in his anger. She really purchased a lot of locally made handicrafts at their true prices. She has always had a good eye for natural beauty, and it was the very last time she could get such things as rings, bracelets and neck-rings made of hairs of giraffe tail. Or ivory carvings, not the kind of Chinese 16-layer balls, but artefacts in their own kind. There were souvenirs from lion claws put in silver or golden settings.

Her favourites were Ethiopian paintings on leather. Their characteristic style showed historic events, folk habits and different types of people of the country. All were inscribed with their Amharic letters. These paintings sold for one birr for every person depicted. My wife took so many -- sometimes so reasonably -- that at home we would be able to give them away as gifts and souvenirs. My son acquired a good knowledge about topography of the town by these walks.

In our block of apartments, where we lived, only two of us have been from our country. There were locals of high society -- as Charles P., my neighbour once said: "It is a pleasant feeling to be privileged in feudalism." -- and Soviet military officers. One of the latter would cause me some troubles yet. The block has been guarded by armed men of the district council, as all big houses, against criminals. Guards earned extra money during their duty time by taking up drinking water from the basement into flats in emergency of water supply.

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We had troubles not only with water. Of the two lifts sometimes both have been out-of-order. It has been the case, when a Sudanese has been looking for a Libyan inhabitant. It happened, when Mr. Kaddhafi sent out his men to execute Libyans living abroad. Some months earlier he had sent his message to all of them and ordered them home, to build their own country instead of foreign lands by their talents. Those who would not listen would be executed on the spot. Well, in our house there had lived a Lybian young man having good contacts with a Sudanese doctor freshly graduated. He took his president seriously and went home. The Sudanese has not found him and, as our lifts were not in order, he was coming down by the stairs. He had graduated in Budapest and he was surprised to hear a Hungarian discussion over the turn. It was my family still waiting for lifts and pressing buttons, when somebody addressed them in their own language. They were very much surprised to see a local man -- Sudanese Arabs are looking almost the same as Ethiopians -- turn from the stairs. They invited him to our home and waited for me. That day I was busy even after work and, when I got home, the stranger left for North-Yemen. Just to that place, because the economic situation in his own home country was very bad at that time, and he needed much money to be able to return to Pécs in Hungary, to his university of graduation, and finish his specialisation -- and also to marry the Hungarian girl, also a doctor, with whom he had already been engaged. From Sanaa he had got a favourable offer. About Dr. Hamid I am going to write more.

As I have mentioned, Ato Bekele, my boss, has taken my suggestions seriously and, beside our partnership at work, we have become good friends. January has come and my boss organised our trip to Assab. He helped to convince his director to permit the participation of my family, too. We travelled by a long-cab Datsun pickup. This trip took us two days there, the same back and one in the town, and it was an experience never to forget. Bekele has been making that trip twice annually as an average. He knew the country along the route as the palms of his own hands. The pickup was being driven also by the same truck driver, who was present this time.

The aim of the trip has been to find a proper place and, if possible, survey the conditions for the installation service for three hundred FIAT trucks ordered not long before and due to arrive in a short time at Assab on board. The trucks were to promote to the capital on their own wheels after that.

Up-to the national park we knew the route, but after it sights were new. That 540-mile distance can be divided to three equal legs. First one is to the fork, where the Dire Dawa and the Assab road divides. Second leg is from the fork leaving north, until mountains near Djibouti are reached. The third leg follows the valleys of those mountains. The second leg starts in some miles after the river Awash, that leaves its north-eastern direction after rounding the national park and flows on in a northerly course, crosses the Harrar main road. After the bridge the road follows the same direction, then the leg going to the land of the Danakil forks out to the left. At both sides of the route the land is almost empty and it is very flat, you see an African savanna with dry grass and occasional bush, only one peak of a mountain, a very special one, comes into view. This is the Ayelouth arising at about the middle of the whole leg. It is so conspicuous that you notice it already 70 miles in advance, it is no accident, the height of the peak is almost seven thousand feet.

Around that place, somewhat to the North, there is a settlement of Afars, named by other people Danakil, meaning nomad ones. The settlement is named Ghewanee. They are naturally beautiful people, but very characteristic, especially men. They were head-hunters until about the Second World War. In the book of doctor M., there is a story, when the author had insulted one of the boy-servants unintentionally, and could avoid being killed by him only by his light sleep. The exceptional pride of these people made the boy to beg him for death, he said he would not be able to remain with the tribe having been defeated.

Fortunately, when we visited the place they were no true nomads any more. This is the reason why their name in their own language, the Afars, were widely known that time already. Since

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their giving up nomad life they occupy some territories in Wollo and Hararghe -- this area is called after its seat, Harrar, this is the land claimed also by Somalia, otherwise it is almost empty, nobody lives there, as it is a dry stony desert -- regions within Ethiopia, but the majority of these people lives in Djibouti, by its old name French Somalia, which had been kept by France also during WW II. The name of this mini-state is The Land of the Afar and Issat. By cloths these people are not very much different from other Ethiopians. They use similar gabby as the Amhara, but they do not need any trousers under it, as their climate is hot because of its low altitude. In their desert land there is a depression 370 feet below sea-level. That arid land is the hottest place on Earth, peak has been measured at about 130 degrees F. Their desert can boast with an endemic beast, the wild ass of Ethiopia. A relative of this animal lives in Afghanistan. Another peculiarity of the Danakil Depression, in the middle of it an active volcano arises.

Our route followed a course south of that depression. But climate has been out-of-order for an unknown reason, as on that land, where rain falls as rare as every second year, we made our trip in a lasting slow rain. Something extraordinary must have happened as once we saw a group of ostriches of more than a hundred individuals, whereas ostriches are seen always not more than five in a group. Before reaching that mountain-cone Ayelou we saw a man in a very dirty rug carrying something. It was an ostrich egg. We stopped and bought it for five birrs (2.50 dollars). Soon there were two more eggs for sale. We bought all. They survived the route and two of them -- only their shells -- are today in our cupboards on show. After return from the trip we gave one to our friends the doctors, and two of them we consumed, one as an omelette of 33 hen-eggs (by weight), of the other, where I took care of blowing out white and yolk to different bowls, my wife baked a fine cake.

At the settlement after the cone we stopped to take lunch. The Afars stood around us and one by one we had to shake their hands. They were very wild figures with their long sword, without sheath, in their belts. Some of them had rifles, too. My boss, Bekele, told us,

these people pay a big respect to men judged earnest by their behaviours and sights. May be, they had seen something in me, too. It is also possible that all happened by the principle "the friend of my friend is my friend too", as they had seen more than once Bekele and the driver in the company car there.

We drove further and spent the night in a very small town called Trena in an awfully unimportant hotel. There was neither water supply nor electric light. Our sleep was short and we drove on in the morning. At sunrise we sighted the Awash last time, after that it flew on the right from us, until, passing through two big lakes, it disappeared under the sand. Soon the mountainous country appeared before us. When we reached that place, we turned on the road leading from Dessie to Assab, the third leg of our route. It looked frightful. Up and down serpentine roads, through salt pans and never to pass another car, except a couple of deserted ones hanging overhead on steep slopes as they ran off the road. One big F-10 red Volvo truck was still OK, only to organise salvage would cost more than the value of the truck. There was a four-wheel-drive vehicle crumpled as a crashed beer can. They were mementoes to care more about our lives. But, anyhow, this last leg of our trip has been beautiful.

In the afternoon the second day we reached our goal. Being January weather was good, temperature only 87 degrees F. During summer it is 125 degrees F with 100 percent relative humidity from the sea. The town was a real Arab one and dirt was plentiful everywhere. It might be different now that it is not part of Ethiopia, it belongs to Eritrea, a separate country, and traffic is reduced. We have been accommodated in a hotel consisting of several bungalows, one of the small houses was exclusively for my disposal with my family. For the heat we could not sleep well and the next day we did all our work to return as soon as possible. I do not think, of my proposal about the planned maintenance site there realised too much. The company did not have money and, when one year later FIAT 363 trucks -- called "addis makina" (new car) -- would begin to pour in by freighter ships, all the maintenance work they would spare for

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the capital, here only necessary checks would be done. There was no possibility to get people of the plateau to work here, only a back-to-back system of three months would do. As Bekele wanted me here only for my proposal, he left us alone on the beach for the afternoon, and he went to arrange his official duties. On the beach we collected as many treasures as possible. My son even caught -- and, as they survived, he took them to the capital in our flat -- some hermit crabs.

Leaving beach my wife asked, if there were turtle shells to buy. We were taken to a fisherman who had five of them. We took them all. Later I would give three of them to the Wildlife Conservation Office to permit my visit to the western part of the country with largest wildlife. One of them is with us in our house until now.

On the backward route in the first leg in one of the small villages we found all in decorations. The son of the local party chief had his wedding. There was an enormous tent for at least a hundred sitting persons with tables and benches. Bekele has been caught by them and seated. He would not let us out of this event, and we had to take place with him under the tent. Ethiopian hospitality is really great. So far I managed to avoid eating from any of their national food. Now it was impossible. When our hosts saw that we were inexperienced, they would help us to fold and eat the food, injera with many kinds of wat.

My wife has been working in health service for more than 30 years. Before she joined me abroad, she collected all information possible. She knew well that in Ethiopia all the infectious diseases of the world existed. Including at least three kinds of intestinal sicknesses. Now it was time to test our immune systems.

It might be funny, but not one us had any troubles from the food. I even liked it so much, that any time after I would have the possibility of eating their national food, I would do it. On our backward route we slept in a relatively luxury place of a hotel for foreign guests in the town of Nazreth. The next day before noon we were in the capital.

Life in Addis Ababa

My relationship with my boss had always been good, but after that trip we became real friends. They visited us in our apartment and we did it at their house.

I could see then how the unique Ethiopian coffee -- bunna in Amharic -- was prepared. Their servant, a young girl, put raw coffee beans on a round metal plate and laid it above embers in a charcoal burning stove. The plate was supported by a ring fastened to the stove four inches above embers. She aired the fire with a fan and stirred the beans by a wooden spoon. In about ten minutes coffee has been roasted ready. All this has been done on the floor of their fireplace and smoke went out through the chimney.

Roasted beans still hot have been smashed in a wooden mortar, ground coffee was poured into a ceramic percolator. It looked like a sampling tube for wines -- without hole on its bottom --, with a ball-shaped lower part of about two pints in volume and a narrow long neck with a pitcher mouth and a handle on its neck. It was made of black ceramics. On top of the ground coffee a needed quantity of water has been poured, and the device was put directly on embers within the metal ring. Soon water came to boil and it let out steam at the top. The percolator was put aside on a textile ring -- similar to those for carrying loads on heads of women in some countries -- and its opening closed by a piece of corn cob core. Coffee has been poured into cups after 15 minutes.

In our country coffee is a culture. We have taken it first from Turks during their 150-year rule here, repeatedly from Italians in modern times. Italians had learned this trade in Ethiopia. I have never tasted better coffee than that in Ethiopia.

Coffee originated in that country. On its western part there is a

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county (better to say kingdom) called Kaffa and the name of coffee comes from “kaffa drink”. Let me tell the story of coffee here. The Ethiopians became Coptic Christians in the 4th century. There were monks living in monasteries. In the western humid country, where even rain forests have survived until now, coffee grows by itself. It is not planted, it is only picked. Monks became aware that, when they stayed at a certain place with their goats, their animals would not sleep all night. They found that a certain bush was responsible. When they needed it for praying all night, they chewed its leaves and it worked. Only it had a very bad taste. Trying first the berries of the bush, its seeds raw and roasted, they invented coffee at last.

The Bekele's had many children, their eldest about the age of my son, the smallest still nursing. She was born after my arrival there. They had two cars, both very old. His wife Woizero (Mrs) Wodere used a mini Morris for purposes of hers and the children's. The husband had a Volkswagen Variant, but as he has never had enough funds to have it repaired properly, now and then it was out-of-order. Then he asked me to take him where it was necessary. For my foreign embassy plate he could not use it himself without risk. He desired to buy my car, when I would leave the country. I promised I would do everything. Of course, it would not be possible to organise, I would have to sell it to a diplomat. Who knows, may be, it was to be better that way. A FIAT cannot work without proper maintenance, either.

Our work routine has been to start at 9 a.m., we were to go to take lunch from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. and leave for home at 6 p.m. When he did not have his car with him, we went to take lunch at my home together or in a small local food restaurant called “Bunna Beit” (Coffee House). There we paid in turn, rather me. When we ate at my home, it has always been a risk. My wife could cook well, but at a changing level of quality. Before my mission we shared the kitchen at home and more complicated meals were prepared together.

Just the first day after her arrival she was doing her cooking, I asked her to prepare mango soup. I showed her the mangoes, also

some papayas, telling her, we would eat papayas after lunch. Eating soup at home I spotted all mangoes in the basket.

“Didn't you use all the mangoes?” I asked her.

“But I did”, she answered.

“I see mangoes there.”

“Are they not papayas?”

Well, she prepared the soup from papayas. That is not all the same, I would compare mango to plum and apricot, but papaya to musk-melon, although it grows on a tree. I myself don't like papaya too much, it is too sweet for me, at the same time it doesn't have a good taste as melon. It has round small seeds that look not to be connected to the fruit at all, they are moving freely within. Papaya trees are not very high, and the fruits grow at the upper end of the stump, directly below the crown, as if the tree had a necklace. Mango is quite the opposite, it is an orgy of taste, but it is finest when not completely ripe. The flat kernel extending to the whole area of the fruit is connected extremely strongly to the fibres. You can eat it easily, when you cut the fruit into two halves directly at the kernel, you slice it out of the other half too, then cut a grid on the inner side and turn out the peel. You should only bite off the small cubes one-by-one.

I could rely on Bekele in all cases. Once our “mother” at home made a mistake and I did not get any salary that month. It was the hardest as I bought something and there was no reserve on my account. I did not get any help from my compatriots. I turned to Bekele at last and he gave me a loan of 200 birrs (100 dollars). For a month we lived on that money and only ate potatoes, just as Ethiopians live on injera and wat.

Our friendship with him did not go unnoticed by Thomas, and the group of our experts were looking on me like on a special animal. It has not been fashionable to keep contact with anybody outside the closed group of national experts and diplomats. The only exceptions have been high society contacts with American, French or British persons, mainly UNIDO experts. But it has never

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been heard of taking on a local! To keep experts occupied within their own circles there were regular events either on the premises of the embassy, moved during my first year from a relatively well available place to a far-away site in completely tin-town surroundings, or at the residence of the ambassador. There were always ample drinks and most of the people were satisfied with these high-society events. At first I enjoyed them, too, but soon learned that they were advantageous only for the snobbish. Our new ambassador was one of those himself, he would break his mission there and his career by being ordered home for a tapering-off cure. His wife was a manager at our airlines and she would not sit by her ambassador husband all the time. On certain events she would be present, but otherwise her man was let to himself. He became a drinker and would not care for duties of his mission. Beside my own knowledge I got information about him later from his brother, general manager of one of the foreign trade companies I worked with during the years after my African mission.

Lake Tana

As time passed my wife was able to sit again into my car, and we would visit all places not far from the capital. Then, when Easter was near, we decided to visit Lake Tana, source of the Blue Nile, and the famous falls on the Nile not far from its outflow, its actual source. We consulted it with John, the TESCO representative, who helped us to get a permission from state authorities -- and probably spread news about our plans.

The hotel in the town Bahr-Dar has also been one of the "Ras" chain, I reserved room on my name. To get enough fuel I had to save two canisters. Weather was rainy, very peculiar as the small rainy season was over. Anyway, this trip has been a great experience.

The route there is north-westerly, although it leaves the town in a northerly direction through a high mountain pass. A section of the road we had known already, as we had done some excursions along it, even we took along the doctors D. -- it could be said rather, they took us with themselves in our own car, as George pushed me out of the driver's seat and took control over the car, in a rather rally-like style -- during the first months of their stay, until they bought a car of their own. The landscape is wonderful and there are other sights besides, some of them historical. One of them is a medieval monastery in Debre Libanos, whose first resident, Tekle Haimanot has been named a saint since. To the monastery you have to drive some miles on a side road. The other such attraction lies almost on the highway farther away from the capital, it is a stone bridge from the 16th century. It is used even this day, as it is on a road parallel to the highway at a distance of about half a mile, it is very useful for pack animals. Its name is Portuguese Bridge. It had been thought to have been built by them during their several attempts to take the country. They haven't managed to do it, as neither have others, be-

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cause this people is not to be colonised. The Portuguese have learned this lesson at Adwa. Well, these two places we had already seen. But now it was not only 60 miles, and at most about half of the 400 miles to the lake was asphalt, the rest an "African" gravel road. It means, trucks push aside gravel and make two furrows by their wheels. For a car it is impossible to use the furrows, wheels on one side have to be led on the ridge between furrows. If you drive with a speed of more than 35 miles per hour, to switch from one side to the other in case of necessity is not possible. Not only wheels, even the whole car can be destroyed. This 400 miles we planned to make in 14 hours.

There were other Hungarian experts with the same goal, as we learned, when they overtook us. And at the hotel our room has been given to them. Receptionists did not check their names, only nationality. Fortunately, an East-German has postponed his trip, we got his room at last. At another time I am trying to give a little addition to this topic, that could have been expressed by our ancient stone age predecessor, has he had an intelligent language, that "everyone for himself".

The road to Bahar Dar crosses the Blue Nile nearly at the end of its first half. About the river I should like to say more later. The river has hewn itself a deep canyon, the bottom of which is at least three thousand feet below the surrounding country. The above mentioned Portuguese bridge is followed by a relatively large town, called Fiche, then by a small settlement, Gohe Tsion, here the serpentine road down to the river valley starts downwards. Here the road is still asphalt, but its quality is bad. The first leg of the route ended on the other side of bridge over the Nile not far from the river. From that point on, it was gravel road. The Blue Nile valley is a sight not to forget. The river (Abai in Amharic) flows on bottom of the gorge and is spanned by a bridge. When we descended the gorge on a serpentine and drove up on the other side, we could see almost as far as to the capital. Subsequent ridges of mountains could be seen as walls behind each other. Being on the highest point we had a view really wonderful. A more unimportant object than this bridge I

have never seen. Anyway, it is significant after all, if I think about what Dr. Mészáros had written about it, namely, that during the twenties high-rank persons were taken over the water full of crocodiles on the back of their servants. And also, the current is very quick.

As we began our descent along the serpentine road into the canyon, I had a feeling that I had never had to drive on such a terrain, where an accident is so easy to happen, and any accident here could have led to a tragedy. I mean, to meet a bigger vehicle that could force me off the road. Or, if the handbrake at a stop would not work properly, the car could come into motion and fall. In one of the turns we have seen a fresh sign of braking, first there was a strong smell of rotten protein, then we sighted the two poor donkeys pressed into the asphalt. All over the country, a lot of these pack animals work, they are generally well guarded by the drivers, and even the animals are not silly at all. This was the only case that I myself have seen that a donkey had been killed in accident. A similar trouble has been caused by my colleague Thomas, his car was almost annihilated when he hit a donkey at high speed. Generally, you are prone to think that a donkey is always more clever than his driver.

When we have succeeded in crawling out of the Nile canyon, at the edge of the plateau on the other side we have found a small town, Dedjen. Along the road we saw children standing and they were offering us round green fruits of the size of tennis balls. We saw these produces earlier, when travelling with Bekele on the Danakil lowland. As camels were picking them off the bushes we named them "camel peach", even Bekele could not identify them. Of course, we didn't buy them from the children, but I know now what they were. They are full of cotton-like fibres, to fill cushions with. More than 10 years later, in Central Asia we got this information. On the route to Bahar Dar we didn't take notice of Dedjen, only passed it. We wanted to make as many miles as possible, until the road was asphalt. The line of the river is a border between two regions, the Ethiopian central land of Shoa and Godjam, which also

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has an Amharic majority, and a historic Abessinian territory. Its seat is Gondar, so far we couldn't get, there would be another hundred miles on road around a part of Lake Tana. The border line gives ground for the strong guard at the bridge.

The asphalt road has ended at Debre Marcos. The town is an important market centre, but it has no tourism. From this place on, the road offered some special features. One of them is that it is a gravel road, I said something about it, and it is not unimportant in itself. The other thing that from the point where the road crosses the river, it takes you, first at a smaller, later at a greater distance, parallel to the canyon. All the tributaries of the Nile has to be crossed over, always by bridges of course. Most of these bridges have no water under them, but they had had to be built because of the gullies that take in the flow during torrential rains. The leading of the road is like a timetable: following a heap there is a turn with a bridge at its centre, then its opposite like a mirror-image. My son was counting bridges, but dropped this activity at 70 pieces.

Our road has been closed at certain points and once, shortly before sunset we have been stopped by soldiers. They would not let us drive on, we would have to sleep somewhere with them. I risked then our lives, because I took my papers from the man and said:

“We have to go on. We are expected to arrive, otherwise we will be considered lost.”

I sat in and started the engine. The man lowered the rifle, as if he had wanted to shoot. But nothing happened and we drove on.

At another point we almost ran into an obstacle, but men quickly cleared it. After 10 p.m. my drive was like in a dream. Fortunately nothing happened and at 11 we arrived. Following misunderstandings about our room, we got another and went to bed.

The next day has been set for the falls to see. Lake Tana is a vast natural sweet water reservoir that is fed by all the small rivers and creeks around it. It has come to being quite another way as the the Great Lakes in America, its coffer-dam is no deposit collected by the ice, but it is the original bedrock that lets water overflow at a

point, and this is the source of the Blue Nile. This drain is at its south-east corner and water finds its way first south-east, then turning in a great U-turn flows to north-west and joins the White Nile at Khartoum. Radius of its turn around the lake is about 200 miles.

Ten miles from its source the river encounters a steep fall in the ground more than 100 feet in height, and there the water falls down in many branches. It is a wonderful sight and its noise is heard from many miles. The local name of the falls is "Tis Issat", that means thundering smoke. The falls actually take one wall of a canyon and the river is turning at right angle into the canyon to follow its route. From the other side of the canyon you are facing the falls, and the sight is unique. The canyon is not wide enough to have all branches of the falls in one shot with an ordinary lens, only wide-angle lenses can take it in completely.

In the nearby there is a small settlement, whose males are employed as guards to save tourists against crime. They are walking with rifles everywhere. They are used to photography -- and tips --. It was a really unusual case, but all behaved very intelligently, I couldn't detect the greed in them that is present everywhere with rich tourists appearing among extremely poor people. My son had the ability to get near to locals, it hasn't been otherwise here, he made friends with the armed guard escorting us.

On route from town to the falls we overtook many people walking in the same direction. They were going to market. They all had with them squashes similar to giant pears with a volume of 3 gallons. We have seen those squashes also hanging from trees, and my wife guessed they were squash-trees. People used them for water containers. We bought a dozen of different sizes and, as a few of them cracked, my wife took their seeds. The next spring, when time would be considered by her proper, she would plant some to get a squash-tree. Alas, our guard would hoe it out. Only at home in Budapest would we discover the true nature of that squash. Its long trailers crept on trees, but the plant itself cannot grow as large as a tree.

Canned road dust

Our overnight stay in Bahar Dar has been very pleasant at last, we have been sleeping in a separate bungalow. As usual, the restaurant has been located in the central building, our bungalow has been an organic part of the lush surrounding park. The park, garden, has been going down to the shore of Lake Tana, we were sitting on the bank and admiring the great stretch of water. It was unlike the Lake Balaton, we couldn't see the other shore at all, only the small isle near to the drain to the Nile. On our backward journey we changed our minds and did not do all the distance in one day. Just before the descend to the river we stopped in a village. It was a 3 birr (1.50 dollar) room in the small "Blue Nile" hotel, but it was clean and safe. We might have been the first foreigners to use it ever.

Rift Valley Lakes

The relatively successful excursion to Lake Tana gave us courage to go further. In a month we decided to go to another trip, this time south to the Rift Valley lakes. One of the lakes, Langano, nearest to the capital has been a favourite place of foreigners being on mission in the country. It could even be used for swimming for the high alkaline content of its water. Clean sweet water cannot be used for that purpose, as bilharzia, a kind of worm, is infesting it, and that infection has been deadly that time. There were bungalows on the lakeshore, operated by the same "Ras" chain.

Our trip has been a solitary one, as trips to the country among whites have been regulated by complicated ceremonies. During dry season nobody would go to that lake. For trips the rainy season was selected for two reasons. First, at that lake you could go sun-tanning even then, whereas in the capital clouds were covering the sky. Second, the lake is surrounded by a sandy territory and sand is hard to drive on in dry weather. Only in the rainy season, when once a day a shower made sand hard, was it possible to get access to the lake by traditional-drive vehicles. We could do it as, first, we did not go to swimming pools of hotels in the town, second, our FIAT 127 has been half a Landrover. A good driver could drive it on sand or clay, only pedals were to be handled by care. Our trip was a success in many senses, but it is better to tell everything about it in order.

The road to the lakes forks out of the Dire Dawa road to the South at about 50 miles from the capital, at Modjo. Soon after the start the southward road passes a great lake, even bridges it over in a short stretch. This lake is a reservoir of the river Awash established for the operation of a hydro-power station in order to provide electrical energy for the capital. This is Lake Koka, a favourite target of the tourists, as the place is kept in the original state, wild animals

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are numerous. Of course, locals don't like it, as their economic activity is limited. The next big lake lies on the left side of the road, but you cannot see it without taking the side road there. That is Lake Zwai. Soon after it the road takes a narrow isthmus between two lakes, to the left lies Langano, to the opposite Abiata. Our goal was Langano, there waited us our room. At the lake we swam and took our tan. The place is really unique. The road from the highway to the lake is the only possible access. Otherwise the lake is surrounded by a high volcanic precipice, similar to an imploded area filled up by water. When you look up from the lakeshore, you only see that precipice all around. From the chemicals dissolved in the water the lake has a special light purple colour. At the same time the water is clean, when you submerge, you can see objects ten feet away. The water temperature makes swimming possible all the year round.

This lake is also rich in fish, he who took along his fishing accessories, didn't have to go without at least some small species of fish. We also took my Russian PE rod with the (seemingly) fit reel. We didn't target big fish, but some small ones we caught and guarded them in a little pool on the shore protected by green twigs from the sun. My poor son began to weep, when we discovered that an East German family made them perish by uncovering them from twigs and leaving the water evaporate. It meant the end of fishing for us, we took our stand at the side of the fish. As the country lies near the Equator, and the lake's altitude is much lower than that of the capital, we could not bear heat too long. We got into the car and went to see other lakes farther south. There we found the landscape truly African. Even people are different, as they belong to the Oromo group of many nationalities with Negroid origin.

I have mentioned that this road is leading to Kenya. We have left behind the third of the distance between the capital and the border, to Lake Awassa. There are still two large lakes to the south, Abaya and Chamo, but there you cannot find any accommodation beside camping in your own tent, and there are no catering facilities either. Also, we had not much time. Reaching the highway we turned left to the South. Lake Shalla has been left behind on the right side, then

for a long time we could enjoy the characteristic sight of the African savannah. We saw cultivated land too, and in a large distance on both sides the blue mountains of the borders of the African Rift Valley. We reached Shashamane, where the North-South road meets the East-West one. The latter leads to Sodo, then in western direction to settlements at the other side of the two great lakes. In the opposite direction, to the East, it leads you to the natural wonders of the Bale mountains.

From this place the town of Awassa, on the shore of the name-sake big lake, is only some miles away. We slept in a small hotel on that lake with infested water, but its waterfowl population was fine. People have not been accustomed to frequent visitors and, as we were on a wooden pier with my son, people surrounding us have not been looking friendly. I sensed danger and said: "Guadanya" (friend). Keeping my son at my side, I found my way back to our room. The next day we went out to see the birds once more and then drove back to the alkaline lake. That night I saw a nightmare, someone was peeping into our room through the window. My wife calmed me by saying there was nothing there. Or was there? I cannot tell it.

The next morning once more we tried to discover another nearby lake, Lake Abiata. It was a little nearer to the capital and on the other side from the highway. To reach it has been necessary to drive through a small forested area and then along a natural canal connecting this lake with Lake Langano. Driving through the forest we saw rare birds as vulture-head guinea-fowl and wild geese. On the dusty road, before we reached the lake, my wife pushed in our small flap-window, but did not lock it. We drove near to shore and, as its soil was too soft, I parked in 100 feet from water. I closed the car, forgetting the flap. People spending their time there did not move near to us, but, as we went farther, they surrounded the car. We did notice it, but we felt no concern.

After shooting some pictures we returned and got into the car. I took my handbag from the glove-compartment and found its contents all mixed up. People have been in, without doubt.

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"I think, they opened the car", I said to my wife, "check your money." I have never had money in my bag, I wore my wallet around my neck since somebody stole my money in my hotel room getting access through the common bathroom.

"Oh, mine was hidden, it is safe", she said. But in a minute she found her money missing.

I got out and people were moving backward. Being angry, I began to shout with them in my native language and moved closer.

"Be careful, there is one with a spear", cried my wife.

But those people turned around and began to run, the spear-carrier at front. I ran after them in my Bavarian leather-hose, a gift from our German friends at their first visit with us. They jumped into the canal, crossed it and stood up in a line on the other bank. Perhaps they knew that foreigners could not go into that dirty water.

"Take pictures of them", shouted my wife after me.

I went back and, with telephoto lens on, I photographed the group. That distance of 300 feet I made in one minute back to the car. When I arrived there, my wife said:

"They are coming."

Turning around I saw two of them, soaking wet, running and they had the money -- also wet -- in their hands.

"Do not be angry", one of them said, "we caught him, he is a stranger."

I thanked and took the money, but gave them a note each. They left us.

"They became afraid of the picture", said my wife, "especially of that gun of your camera."

I agreed.

In the evening we went back to Langano, but the next morning we started back to the capital. Our friends, the doctors, would say on our report:

"Oh, it is widely known that everybody is robbed there. The Ss said it when they heard you were going there."

The Ss were the same who took our room at Lake Tana. To our friends I would answer only: "Thanks for warning us in advance."

Well, I can say that we have not been the only whites to be robbed there, but the only ones to get money back. In the future we would be more careful with our flap-windows.

Following this trip of ours we have remained quiet for a time, my wife went on educating our son by the text-books taken with her from home, and I wanted to make myself as useful as possible. Some months earlier, in February, Alex called me by phone and offered a lecturer's job at the university. One of the local lecturers had been enlisted, and his subject, "Workshop Management", has remained without a host. Alas, it could not be solved by transfer from the Ministry of Transport to Addis Ababa University. John advised me to do it beside my job at FTO. Bekele was consulted and he agreed. My work for him has been ahead of schedule, and he said he would not miss me. My extra job involved me twice a week, for two hours each time.

I did that job for two semesters, until the original lecturer returned. It was purely social work, I did not get a cent for it. My only reward has been a letter of recommendation.

During May I had my second crash in that country -- and, fortunately, the last one. Crossing a two-lane divided road was a routine, when I drove from home to my office. That morning a busy-body policeman took control into his hands. He stopped me in the middle of the road and, when he motioned me on, a driver could not stop and crashed into me from right. The uniformed bandit judged me faulty. My insurance was valid, but my judgement said, he was wrong. Bekele advised me to shut up. I made the insurer pay and went to Ato Tezera to have the car repaired.

Moving and holiday at home

We have got a new neighbour on our floor. He was an architect, the successor of Charles in his job and apartment. They have had a daughter, one year older than my son.

They did not like our house because of lack of water and faulty lifts. Anyway, they remained there longer than us. In the meantime we had a minor problem with our flat too. I also wanted to change something, either water supply or house. I began with the first one. I tried to detect the cause of troubles and found it soon.

The house had been designed by a Bulgarian architect, a luxury house in a country like Kenya, where average temperature is around 75 degrees F. At this climate, however, it has been a deep-freezer. Machinery has been the work of a Finnish civil engineer, a very fine system in a town where water supply is sufficient, but here the situation was quite the opposite. Addis Ababa had an ancient system, supply during daytime has come only by half of atmospheric pressure above normal pressure of the air.

The system of the house has been based on two giant cisterns. One of them in the basement received supply from municipal water utilities by free flow. A level-switch gave signals of "too low" (TL) and "high enough" (HE). The second cistern has been placed on the 13th floor, an otherwise empty hall. It has been the source for taps in the apartments below. A similar TL or HE signal was given by its level-switch. From the basement water has been lifted to the 13th floor by an electric pump. Its circuit has been switched to the mains, when basement level was HE and 13th-floor level TL. When consumption was higher than supply -- determined by municipal supply-pressure and pipe cross-sections --, there were temporary fall-outs. Continuous supply on taps could only be achieved by

throttling the valves in distribution pipes to a flow, that would align consumption with supply.

By this knowledge in my head, I went to the person in charge for the operation of apartment houses. He would see it at once, and gave me access any time to regulate the system. In two days I succeeded, and for two weeks there was no fall-out. After that it occurred once. I checked the valves, both have been opened completely. It meant, someone tampered with it. I regulated them again and put on an extra padlock. The next day the trouble repeated itself. When I saw the second lock damaged and the valves open, I went to the office and gave back keys.

The man was looking sideways, so I asked him what he knew.

“The Russian on the 12th floor has arrived back from his holiday. Water is making a great noise coming into the container. It bothers him much.”

“Lack of water does not?” I asked him.

“Not that much.”

“That is all?”

“Also, “zabanyas” -- the guards in Amharic -- are complaining, their extra money was gone. No water to take up in buckets, no money.”

That settled it. I went to the small man responsible for housing again and asked him for a house.

“So, you want a villa?” he asked, looking sharp on me. I have not been the first Hungarian to ask for a house. Beside the doctors another of our experts, an economist at the university, moved into an independent house.

“It is a word for a luxury house”, I said, “a simple house will do.”

“White people cannot get others than villas”, he corrected me.

He said, he could only help, if I had found a house for myself. Through publishing ads and reading other people's ones, we could find a proper house, one with a wonderful stretch of lawn, at which my son said:

“It will be excellent for the goat and the donkey”. It had been his

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idea, that we were able to alter in the meantime, that those two animals he would need if we got a garden house. I found another one in three weeks through a local agent (I don't know how he managed to get information about my efforts). My partner has been a Yemeni Jew and a gentleman. As he has almost been white, and first he said he was an Englishman we called him only "the old Englishman".

We went to the clerk and he asked my partner first:

"Why do you wish to change your house?"

"It is too big", he answered.

"It is too small", I answered to the same question.

He agreed and we could realise our business.

The company has helped to take my things to my house, of course, I let my partner use the company truck on return trips. Our moving has come only days before our first -- we thought so, but as it would come, also our last -- holiday at home. We arranged only our furniture, checked what would be needed from home and made preparations to leave.

To this house a guard has been supplied. We did not like him too much, but let him stay for 5 weeks of our absence. My car I would not leave there, I gave it to Bekele to keep -- and use if necessary --. Keys to the house I left with him, too. Well, he was my boss, and tenant for the house has been the company. Our trip home took us an unexpected task. Our new neighbours -- our former ones, better to say, from the high-rise -- have come in May, they would not be able to have their holiday before November. They asked us to take their daughter with us home. It has been a big responsibility, but we did not sense it then. Well, at last all went well, but we could have had a lot of troubles with some bad luck. Our flight has been booked through Rome and John agreed to book tickets with a 5-day stay in Italy. Through the airlines I reserved a hotel room. A great help has been to me City Guides of SAS to organise our trips in the world.

At the airport we have been searched for anything prohibited. First our baggage, then, at the end physically. Another of our ex-

perts has been a precise man, he closed his packages, even taped them over. The customs men had him open everything. We left ours open, the man said: "Close it." And went out. If he had looked in, he would have seen our turtle shell at the top. Export of coffee has been prohibited by private persons as it has always been a state monopoly, only specialised companies had permission for it. The same rule applied to protected animals and products made of them. It was prohibited to take out Ethiopian money, to keep weapons, etc., it could be listed to infinity.

Our room in Rome has been OK. Only they could not give us a double room with a spare bed, as it was ordered. There were only single rooms. After a hard discussion solution was born: two spare beds. And who would sleep together? Of course, my wife and me. Both spare beds were taken up by me, after I saved the errand boy from the middle of the mattress twice. I gave him our baggage to take up instead. The hotel has been situated at a very fine place, directly at the central railway station. When we went walking we got into the traffic in a moment. I am ashamed to tell that on my first stay in Rome, as well as on my second one, I did not see tourist attractions of either the city or the Vatican. As I have not been alone, my programs have been influenced by my family. At the same time, I could learn well all the shops and department stores of the city.

Some of the sights of old Rome we have seen. But no gallery or museum saw us. And the same can be said about beaches. It was the beginning of August. Heat at that time is oppressive, on the streets only we were to be seen, no sane person wanted to die from stroke. But my wife's appetite for Italian goods has been bottomless. To tell the truth, if I don't think of the sights not visited, I have to confess that we didn't spend the time in vain. All the goods we bought were very useful, especially the big bag both for the shoulder and the hand, it could be used on our backward route as a hand-baggage. Well, I had to control myself not to let the hostess guess that it contained sixty five pounds instead of the permitted twenty two. Otherwise I would have to pay for the extra weight.

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Coming back to Rome, we were looking for a piece of pizza, so far we knew it only by gossip. When we tasted it, we liked it. Only, we thought it twice before eating another piece, as a pair of summer shoes cost the same sum. It was a very fine experience, this five days in Rome, but it was an even finer one to board the plane of our own national airlines, to hear our language spoken and to see the small “Mackó” (bear) cheese in all snacks packages. For four weeks we would be home.

Our return flight could not be organised as I wanted, through Athens (at least not at that moment), instead of Rome, we had to accept TESCO's regulations and fly through Rome. Arriving at Rome we could not check in at once, as the hostess at the counter informed us it was too early and we would have to come back later. Either she had something on her mind or she did not understand English well. It would be a very unpleasant trip even if someone had dealt with us. But to sit and wait from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. was too much. When at last she was ready to take my papers, it became clear, the plane of the Ethiopian was full and we did not have our places. With OK tickets! The representative of the airlines said, we did not check in at the right time and our seats have been sold out. Even our baggage boarded automatically to the plane have been taken and given out to us. Our next chance would be in two days.

We had to follow the instructions of the representative of Ethiopian Airlines to board a bus on costs of the Ethiopian and take a room in a hotel in Ostia. After a whole night without sleep, we went to bed and fell asleep. We have got up soon because of heat, and went out to walk. Returning for breakfast the receptionist handed us a message from the Ethiopian representative: the management had refused to pay our hotel any longer, we were to ride to the airport and take an Olympic Airlines flight to Athens. That night there would be a plane from there to Addis Ababa. We did as we were told. Flight on the Greek plane was a sauna, and the Athens airport was full of passengers waiting for different flights.

This has been the only time, when I have got unfavourable im-

pressions about Greeks at service. The hostess on duty would not help me. I asked her to keep her eyes on our baggage to be loaded on. Of course, they would be left there, and only after one week would we be able to get them. The Athens-Addis Ababa flight has been a slow one. Beside Cairo and Khartoum the plane landed in Asmara, too. It took off in Athens at 4 p.m. and was in Addis Ababa late afternoon. It goes without saying, nobody waited us. Poor Bekele, he had gone out to the plane we could not board, but in vain. He left the office at once, however, when he got my call and took us home. Even his wife has been in our house to receive us in their traditional way.

The second year

We had to get acquainted with several new circumstances after our return to Addis. It has also been a novelty, to have a house with trees and lawn. With the house we faced tasks unfamiliar that far, e.g. dealing with fruit trees or cutting lawn. I found a good book at home in a bookshop to help me in gardening. We arrived back after rainy season, and the quince-apple trees -- I had two of them -- in the garden began to spring into blossom. I cut back their twigs according to the book. Also there was a plum tree, I had to cut out its barren vertical twigs and cut back fertile ones. In three months all the three would be full of fruit. There was no Hungarian there who wouldn't get of our quince-apple. Plum was stolen by children from the street in a scientific way, with a self-made tool.

There was also the matter of our child's schooling. We discussed it with my wife and we decided to register him in the International School, formerly American School, renamed because of cooling relations between the two governments. We did it right, it would be clear, as the boy would learn the language almost perfectly in six months. He became a pupil in 4th grade as proper. Although the servant, whom the director told to take him to the 4th grade, misunderstood it and led him to the first, in one day it has been corrected. His form-master, Miss Veronica B., was a young lady from California and a kind, patient woman, a true teacher.

At first he has not spent any time in class, for one week he studied only English at Mrs. Savage, another amazing young woman of Puerto Rican origin. My son can be grateful to these ladies for their care. In the second week he spent half of his time in class, half in English lessons. His extra lessons ended at the end of his second month. After three months in the school he was very happy to be there. Thus, I was surprised when one day Miss B. said something was wrong with the boy.

"I think", she said, "he is too calm. He sits in his place and does not walk as the others."

"Does he stay in during breaks?" I asked, as I did not see what she wanted to tell me.

"No", she laughed, "during breaks he goes out. During lessons, I mean." I became assured.

"Oh", I said, "I see. Well, in our country pupils get punished when they walk during lessons. Even they get so for speaking when not addressed."

Her face was a complete criticism of our school system. I agreed with her, although at that time I didn't know what would wait for my son in our country again after return.

There was another case, when she said, she would consult me about him. She complained about his different algorithm at dividing. I informed her that in our schools it is the German method, but results are the same as with the English one. I asked her not to confuse him with theirs. This time it was she who agreed. We invited her once to us to see the boy at home. She could hardly go away as he showed her all his toys and gadgets. The conversation among us has also been pleasant. After our return home we remained in correspondence and she answered our letters many times.

I have mentioned that during my stay in Ethiopia a high delegation of our country was visiting the African country. Visit of these high officials was realised in October 1980. That official has been our head of state himself, Mr Losonczy. He took his wife with him and besides his escort consisted of at least 100 people. At his arrival happened the minor calamity between Mr. Menghistu and my son about the bunch of flower for his wife. There were talks for a week, and before leaving our president let his compatriots in the capital be called together, and informed us about results, or rather about lack of them.

What concerned us mainly was reduction in the number of our experts by six. Of the six, two were going home anyway without suc-

cessors. The other four would be decided mutually, he said. It would actually be decided arbitrarily, the two druggists and the two transport experts would have no extension. Of the latter two one, Thomas, achieved his goal by intrigue so, instead of him another one has been sent home after a shorter mission. Thus my mission has also been terminated after two years in that country.

We had to finish our arrangements in the house when we returned from holiday. I sent the guard away as he couldn't fulfil my expectations, and I took another one, one of the mechanics from our repair workshop, who did his work there ordinarily during the day and he slept on our premises as a guard. The young man was honest and I could learn more about him when he helped me to put my car into order. My son had a good chance to supplement his missing gym lessons, they played football in the garden. He slept on our site in the rear house, built for use of servants. He was living with us, until he left the company and moved to his home town.

My sister-in-law, or rather her husband, had expressed their wish during our holiday at home, when we had visited them and spoken about our experiences, that they would have come to see us in Africa. That would have been impossible for them as tourists, but we were able to invite our relatives. The doctors had done so in the previous year, first their son with his family then their daughter had visited them.

The visit of my sister-in-law and her family was planned around Christmas and the New Year. All preparations have been finished, and we made plans for their program. I would work ordinarily in the office, my family would accompany them to all places worth visiting. Before their arrival a line of unpleasant events started. Every night at about 10 p.m. stones fell on our roof. We could not guess what these obscure volleys mean. When I spoke about it to Bekele, he said either resistance activists did it, or my neighbours wanted me to find another house. Assefa -- our new guard -- was watching with me each night, but the throwers could not be detected. I reported it to the district council and they promised to check it, but disturbance

went on. I could find it out during one of the absence periods of my family, when they were out in the country with our relatives.

One evening there was a full moon and we were both in the garden, when I saw an object fly in the moonlight and hit the roof. Others followed soon. I signalled to Assefa to keep still. I opened my gate silently and went to the neighbours' entrance. There she stood in her white shamma, the mamita of neighbouring families. I took her to the council. In half an hour she came back and there was a farewell volley of stones, but never again.

In that house we had our pets. First we bought a hen to cook, but my son gave her pardon, and she became a family member. She produced eggs, but, when she sat on them as a brooding-hen, there were no results, of course, without a cock. The next time, when she began once more, I bought some one-day-old chickens, and put them under her. She accepted them and they would grow up in some months and would become fine egg-layers.

Bekele took us two kittens -- I asked him to bring one tomcat, but they would prove to be both females -- and by that time they were fine cats. Especially one of them had her trust only in me. Shortly after her delivery to us, she was about five weeks old, my son put her on one of the trees in the garden. It has been a jacaranda mimosa with beautiful marine-blue flowers. But its trunk has been completely barren up to ten feet. The kitten ran up and, when rain began to fall, she shivered and mewed, but did not dare to come down. Even by a wooden beam lent to the tree as a sloping bridge, she would not descend. I had to climb our pomegranate tree and from that the jacaranda to catch her and take her off. I have earned by that her everlasting trust.

We have got a small dog, too. She was brought to us by the doctors D. She would grow into a very intelligent creature, and my only serious dilemma had been to whom to leave her. Actually she has not been our first dog, we had got two others also from the doctors, but they had been too young, at most three weeks old, and

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it had been hopeless to keep them alive. To make things worse, the doctors instructed us to give them minced raw beef -- that had been against my instincts, as by my memories my mother had never given any raw meat to dogs, only to cats --. The small puppies had lived only some days with us and, just some minutes before they died, disgusting long white worms had left them as rats do with the foundering ship. The dog that followed later, could boast with brilliant ancestors. She was a German shepherd, came from the Czechoslovak embassy, that had been taking care of her ancestors for some (dog)generations already.

We had one more pet, but he or she was a special one. One evening, when I got home from the office, my son told me he had spotted something looking like a turtle in the other garden over the stone fence. It was a big closed site with a house, but in wild condition as a forest. Undergrowth between big eucalyptus trees has been original. I went to the neighbour through his open gate and asked him about the turtle. It was a free beast he said, from the river. Sometimes he would come, then would leave again. He allowed to take the creature to our garden. It was easier to say than do. The turtle weighed about 100 pounds. I went over the wall by a ladder, took it over, lifted the animal into my arms and went up the ladder. The animal I placed at top of the wall, put the ladder back in our garden and slowly descended with load.

My son was as happy as he could be. But there was the question of how to feed him. I had always thought, turtles eat meat. This one did not. He was the best lawn-mower of the world. Our lawn has been a meadow when we moved in. I mowed it by a sickle borrowed from Bekele. In dry season there was no need to mow it again. Arrival of our turtle happened at the beginning of the small rainy season, and grass began to grow again, but the turtle did his job well. At first our dog would not accept him, but he would not be disturbed at all.

One day something happened, an interesting mix-up, that originated from the Ethiopian state security organisations. My wife

received me after work with news that there had been an attack during day. Actually it was an attempt to come into the house unauthorised. She heard the lock open by key and she thought it was me. But a black man stepped in through the gate. She ran there and began to shout with him in Hungarian. Our dog backed her up. The man probably did not want any publicity, he stepped out and my wife heard the slam of the door of a car and it was moving away. She went to the street and read the plate number.

The police would not deal with it at first, but then I got a phone to go to a high-rank officer. He apologised and told me, the car had been stolen and they did not know who it was precisely. Bekele smiled hearing about the story and said there was no problem, only the Ethiopian secret service was making a mistake.

His guess was good, I think, as another of our experts experienced a similar adventure. When they moved over to their house from the apartment, they could not find their file of personal documents. Returning to the empty flat in 10 days they found it in the empty wardrobe. He who placed it back after checking was a little late.

In the second week of January our guests left, and soon I would get a negative reply on my application for extension.

I have not introduced our house itself so far. It had been built with good taste on a site 65 by 160 feet in size. From street to house the lawn has been 30 feet wide. It was a single-floor building, its roof was almost flat, with no attic. On the left side from the entrance 3 bed-rooms have been situated, two at front, one at back. About forty percent of its length at right have been occupied by a sitting-dining room that went from front to back on that side. On the back between bedroom and sitting-dining room the kitchen and bathroom have been placed. The kitchen had a back-door to reach the servants' sheds. They have been built right on the back-fence. There was even a separate watered toilet for them. When we moved in, there was only one servant, the guard, he had slept in one of

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the rooms. From street the gate has been on the leftmost, and a straight drive was built to the garage-shed at the left back corner. There was no heating in the house, only a fire-place in the sitting room. The windows all around have been equipped with aluminium shutters. They have been terrible guillotines, sometimes went out-of-order and I had to repair them.

From February I was free of lecturing at the university, the original lecturer returned from the army. When I took his place, he had already finished the first one of the two semesters allocated for the subject. My first one was the last for the students, as they were finishing their studies. From that group there came one day a young man into my office and introduced himself. We would work together on topics I did alone that far. I left to him my technical books that he was able to use in spite of their being in Hungarian. They were tables of conversions and other important technical helps. It was that young man who would take my dog on.

In the spring of 1981 we undertook a trip that needed some courage beside gasoline. During Easter we visited Jima, the seat of Kaffa region. This town lies in the South-West from Addis Ababa, within an area where you can find some of the original rain forests, and where the wet, humid climate enables coffee plants to grow as before. The total quantity of the only significant article of export for Ethiopia, coffee, is picked here. This expression is right, because coffee isn't planted in that country, it grows in the wild, it is only plucked from bushes. As I already spoke about it, coffee has been discovered here, even its name means Kaffa drink.

You leave the capital by the Jima road, it is the same one that you take to Sobota, but you drive straight on at that fork-out. The landscape is the usual hilly country as you see around the capital at first, but soon there come higher mountains. The road takes big turns through them, at least four hairpin turns in a mile, where you must always expect to meet head-on with another vehicle. Well, danger is not really big, partly, as you rarely meet any vehicle, and partly, because in the complete silence of the land the noise of an-

other engine can be heard even over the humming of our own engine.

The Jima road actually serves the access of wildlife reserves in the South-west of the country, not far over Jima the highway comes to an end, to the reserve you can drive on a dirt road. To Jima it is asphalt. From the capital the seat of Kaffa lies at about 190 miles, the road follows the south slope of a mountain ridge extending from north-east to south-west, parallel to it. Although the land doesn't show any towns, of the small settlements there are a lot along the route, that consist of the traditionally built round beehive shaped huts. It is no accident that the road has a very sparse traffic, and this is what meant us the risk: foreigners can visit that region only with special permission, because coffee is one of the few vital export goods, and, as I mentioned, just that paper we didn't have. The gouraghe people, least developed of the population of the country, live in their ancient way on areas giving place for the wildlife reserves. A large part of them still has animism for a religion, they keep natural phenomena their gods. They share their culture with tribes living over the border in Sudan on a similar standard. Bekele told us that these people have such a low esteem in the eyes of others that they do the lowest tasks in society, e.g. this nationality give the executioners.

In the small villages near the road a lush vegetation provide the inhabitants with relatively good food. Masses of banana trees are loaded with ripe fruit. When we appeared, people were running to the road with baskets in their hands, as if they had wanted to be hit by our car, they were offering their produces, especially a kind of small bananas. You can eat them as Magilla gorilla does, you push it and the white is shooting out. We have purchased a lot of them, but for a long time after that we wouldn't want any bananas again, because it was over-ripening so quickly, we had to consume all of them in a few hours. The river Omo (or one of its tributaries as large as itself) carrying its water into Lake Rudolf in the South has its source near Jima, but it flows first in the direction to Addis Ababa almost half the distance there, and suddenly turns in right angle to

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the right, crosses the road under it, then again a right angle turn to the right before it meets the Godjeb to the south-east from Jima. This is the point, where still you cannot decide, which one flows into which one, but after that all tributaries are smaller than the Omo.

At about half of the road we decided not to drive on in the coming darkness, but to look for a room. We left behind a rather short distance, as we didn't want to run over the land, we stopped several times and were watching rare birds, when could, even photographed them. We stopped for the night in a small town of Ghion. This place had had a significant influence on the history and civilisation of the country, but it has become an insignificant point lately, except its hot spring that still makes the town a little known, at least domestically. We have enjoyed the hotel very much, it resembled a country mansion with a fine garden. Our room has been lined with wooden boards on the wall, furniture has been real antique. And its bathroom! The water from the natural hot spring flew into a real swimming pool in the floor of the bathroom through a three-inch size, two feet long tap. As I mentioned, traffic was scarce on the road, the hotel has almost been empty, we have been admired by the personnel. The effect of the rain forests hasn't been felt here, we started anew in a fine weather in the morning.

Arriving at Jima we still had a lot of time to take a room in the hotel and go around to see the town. Even we thought about going out to see a coffee plantation (at that time we didn't know yet that there was nothing like that, as coffee was not planted only plucked there), but by hotel employees we needed a permission from the mayor for that. It was then that the fly fell into the coffee. The mayor wanted to see the special permit we used to come here. When it became clear that there was no such document with us, he met the greatest dilemma of his life so far, he didn't know what to do. At last he solved it in a very intelligent way, he said, I haven't been in his office, better to leave him alone, and go back to the capital as we had come here. He let us stay in the hotel for the night.

The next morning we awoke to see that a dense fog covered the

town. I didn't want to believe my eyes, I had never seen fog in Ethiopia. Anyway, it was fog, or rather a low-flying cloud. Looking into the window we have seen only papaya trees directly at the wall, with the characteristic fruit-necklace at the upper end of the trunk. Until the mist would rise we didn't want to set on road, we took our breakfast comfortably. As soon as the sun rose a little higher the fog began to thin out. It was funny, first we saw the tops of trees in the garden, then with sunlight our view improved. I wanted to take advantage of the rare sight, I shot some pictures about it.

Unusually this trip hasn't caused any trouble to us, except perhaps the lack of permit that could have been hard to correct, if the mayor of Jima had wanted to hurt us. His undecidedness was beneficial for us. Even the backward journey was pleasant and eventless. This excursion has been the last of our trips that we had undertaken to get acquainted with that wonderful country and to see as much as possible of its beauties. There remained only my unsuccessful attempt to visit the virgin wilderness at the river Omo, about which I am going to tell more. But we had no more energy, we had to prepare for the return trip to home.

I could not decide for a long time what to do with my car. It became clear soon that Bekele could not buy it, even if he had had the money, that he had not. I was either to sell it to a foreigner with customs duty privileges as I had been for six months, or to put it on board a ship and take home. This latter had been a reserve solution and fortunately it had not been necessary to turn to it. I published an ad in "Ethiopian Herald" and a Mexican diplomat took it. With the money he paid and a further sum from my account I ordered a Honda Civic from Mr. Sarakakis, the Honda-agent in Athens.

Since their arrival my family have been frequent guests in tourist offices and they collected catalogues. Now the City Guides of SAS did a very good service. Both in Cairo and Athens, as well as in Istanbul and Belgrade I have ordered hotel rooms, in Athens for five days that we would be staying and a sight-seeing tour, too. For our stops in those cities we would need visas. One by one I got all and I also had very interesting conversations.

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A Turkish official informed me we Hungarians were still in the middle of their hearts because of our 150 years we had belonged to the Turkish empire. I bit my tongue and did not say, how much my people like the thought of those times. A Greek clerk, while she was putting the stamps into our passports, said, the best detergent in Ethiopia was the one produced here on a Greek licence.

The Yugoslav secretary gave me a map of his country fit not only for our homeward trip, but a year later for another one.

The last week we spent the evenings by selling out our small things for 1 birr (0.50 cents) each. That money I gave to the man who took my dog.

One of the last days brought me an unpleasant adventure. Without car I was waiting for a taxi. I sensed somebody taking my small purse for coins from the pocket of my sweater. I was too late to catch his hand, but I said some four-letter words in Hungarian. Just as I was trying to push back my anger, a black boy addressed me in my language.

“Here is your purse, sir.” He pointed to it lying on the ground. I picked it up, it has not been opened.

“Who are you?” It was a natural question in that situation.

“I had been learning in one of your universities.”

They caught the thief, a young boy of fifteen. I asked them to release him.

We have experienced some more interesting little adventures before leaving. Our house where we were living during the second year has been near to the shopping street of the city, to the road called Adwa Street officially, otherwise given the Italian name Piazza, and any time when we drove there, we left the car at the side of the road. In those instants everywhere in the town a group of children from 4 to 10 surrounded us and said: “Zabanya” (guard). It meant they wanted to guard the car.

Once, when we still had the car, a boy of 8 said the customary word. I answered him: “Zabapa.” It is a pun. Zabanya means in

Hungarian “the mother of oats” as *anya* means mother and *zab* means oats. So, *zabapa* means “the father of oats”, as *apa* is father and he was a boy. He did not understand, but said: “O.K., *zabapa*.” And every time he saw us, he said: “Mr. *zabapa*.” After I sold of my car the boy saw us walk and said the same. I told him in Ethiopian, there is no car any more: “*Makina yellem*.” But of course, he has got his 25 cents.

Leaving Addis Ababa has been painful. Now I was able to understand a compatriot family, who one year before had to be put on the plane by help. They could not go away from the country.

There were many things to arrange before the foreign ministry would give us exit visas. Our last month I spent by eliminating those obstacles. There was one, however, that looked *Catch 22*. The rules of Municipality regulated that a foreigner cannot get clearance from his housing obligations, before he got his exit visa. At the same time he was not allowed to have his exit visa, until he has been cleared from everything. I could only solve this dissonance by getting a statement from the foreign ministry that I was to get my exit, if I had no obligations. The Municipality 's clerk has been tired of me and accepted it.

About one month before the date of leave I tried to make a trip to the game country of Lake Rudolf and the Omo river. About a hundred years earlier the Hungarian count *Sámuel Teleki* had got so far. He had been exiled by the emperor of the Monarchy for being a close friend of the heir to the throne and an accomplice of him in an (alleged) aborted coup. He was the first European to reach the two lakes, Rudolf and Stephanie. He was entitled thus to name these two bodies of water. The one to the South, the bigger one, had been named after his fiend, Rudolf, the smaller one after his fiend's wife, Princess Stephanie. Those names have worn out, at most they appear in brackets beside the local name. Lake Stephanie is called *Chew Bahir* meaning salt lake in Amharic. Lake Rudolf has got the name of a tribe, the Turkana, living around in a nomadic way. Closed completely for tourists, only that territory of Ethiopia had eleph-

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ants, giraffes and other wild animals extinct everywhere else in the country. During the reign of the emperor wildlife management has been much better, it was prohibited for nomads with large herds of domestic animals to enter the reserve, natural habitats have not been stolen from wild animals. At the same time there were safaris to make possible for hunters to shoot out excess growth. I visited the wildlife reserve specialists and they agreed to let me there, if I had my permits from authorities. It was agreed that I give my remaining three turtle shells to them and give a donation of 300 birr (150 dollars). Air ticket and permissions have been my concern.

My life has been saved only by a conceited, naive deputy minister this time. That year the rainy season came on that plains two weeks earlier than usually. My trip has been planned so that I would fly there to a nearby airstrip in a DC-3 Ethiopian Airlines domestic plane. The game-keeper would take me on his Landrover, together with their food supply carried by the same plane, to his office within the reserve. There I would survive on my own food and drinking water -- my only baggage would have been a canister of drinking water --, and return one week later by the same return flight.

"Life saving" has happened so that our new deputy of the Minister of Transport pushed aside my draft letter to be signed by the minister and to be sent to the Supreme Council for a permission. He said his statement would be enough. It would not. I have not been let board the plane. But it was good, as the plane could not return because of early rains, and for a month -- until we left the country -- there were no other flights. I would have been locked up there and would have died. It means, one of my dreams could not come true again, but I stayed alive.

One of my interesting stories goes around Ethiopian gold. My son has been promised to get a fine ring, before we would leave the country. He has not been an easy customer, he would only accept one with green stone with the Ethiopian Lion of Judah on it, and the stone should have been square, not round or oval. For two months we have not found such a ring. As only one month remained, I went

back to our former block of apartments. There was a jeweller's shop on the ground floor there. I told the owner the characteristics of the ring I wanted to order, even one more condition, that its size should have been adjustable. He said in 10 days it would be ready. The price he stated was reasonable for the agreed ring of 8 grams. I did not tell anything about it to my family. They went on search, but without success. On the day, when it was to be ready, I led them to the shop, as if by chance. As we were entering the shop, the man drew his drawer and lifted the ring high to show it. As if magnetised, my son's eyes followed it and he said:

“Mum, there it is.”

Of course, the intrigue has been unveiled.

My boss, Bekele, helped me in photographing such objects in the town my last day there, otherwise not advisable for crowd or policemen. He took me into his VW Variant and we toured the town.

He promised me to remain in correspondence with us and, in case he would come again to Italy, to visit us. Not one letter I received from him. I wrote at least five, then after a five-year break, I tried again. I tried last time recently. No answer. Either he has not been truly my friend, or something happened to him. I am very sorry for this lack of contact, I have got the impression that he was a good man indeed, such a man who stood beside me under all circumstances. He has proved the saying that Abessinians don't make friends so easily like Africans generally, even smile less, but if one of them became your friend, you cannot make him angry with you any more.

Sights in Egypt and Greece

I have never had worse leaving from any airport as that last day. All our things have been searched through, and at last in the booth we had to take off even our cloths. The crowd was terrible. A lot of Indians have been boarded to our plane and the sight of young mothers with babies in bad condition was moving.

We flew first to Cairo. We flew on the same plane as one of the druggists, Robert, his wife and their two children. They did not order any hotel room, they hoped they would do without. They were caught by an idler taxi-driver who wanted to take them to his acquaintances. We also had somebody, who wanted to cheat us, he even blocked phones from us, so, we couldn't call our hotel, but at last we went out and took a taxi, an old Mercedes with an 007-agent driver. He did not know the hotel I named, but he knew the street and we found it. It has been a very small hotel on the 3rd and 4th floor of an apartment house in the proximity of down-town Cairo.

We had a lucky stay in the Egyptian capital. Heat was oppressive, but for low moisture we did not feel it. Only our thirst has been unbelievable. Temperature reached 110 degrees F in the afternoon. My Soviet movie camera went out-of-order, the glue in its prism in the viewer would not hold. On the first day in the city we wanted to change money and we caught a taxi. It was a Turkish FIAT 131 and its driver has been a copy of my father-in-law. He took us to a bank and offered to drive us during all our stay. We did not need it too much, but for that afternoon we accepted it. We went out to Giza to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx. After that we have been taken back to our hotel. He would not demand too much money from us. We agreed that the next day we would make a big walk, but two days later he would pick us up to make a trip to Sakkara and Memphis.

Our walk in the city included the Egyptian Museum, the Citadel of Saladin -- another taxi-driver helped us in that -- and the big bazaar. As we had a lot of baggage we did not want to buy many things, but my son saw small stuffed camels and he was saying repeatedly: "I want a hairy camel." At last he has got it. We altered our plans and bought leather jackets, too, just to discover, pockets have been placed on holes in the leather to hide those faults. Well, a poor man cannot afford to buy cheap goods.

The next -- and our last -- whole day in Cairo we spent seeing the oldest structures in Egypt, i.e. Memphis and Saccara. The road there has taken us back in time by 100 years when we saw people work in the canals of the Nile-delta and date palms overloaded by their ripe fruit. Arriving at Memphis and Sakkara we flew back some thousand years more. The partly ruinous temple at the border of desert, as well as the ancient -- four and a half thousand years old -- mastabas were my most overwhelming experiences. Desert dominated all, even the colour of clear sky has been grey, not blue. In the distance I have seen three pyramids, I thought they were the famous ones we saw two days before, but my SAS guide corrected me. They had been built much earlier than the Cheops one and its neighbours.

I have been deeply impressed by my stay in Egypt. Twelve years earlier my wife had started a sequence in my brain with her Christmas gift, the book of Tutankhamun, that has been completed that day in Sakkara.

The next morning "our driver" took us to the airport. On route we got out with our faulty jackets to change them in the shop. The traffic jam was so complete that we managed to replace the jackets and then about 300 feet farther we found our taxi inching forward. We have got into the danger of getting late to the airport. Arriving there we ran with our baggage to check in, but the guard would not let us in, and he understood no English. Our flight has been saved only that we spotted the Ethiopian representative and waved to call his attention to us. He sighted us and led us through all gates without

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any checks. The plane was ready for take-off, they were waiting only for us. This leg of our homeward trip took us to Athens. We have been met by the car of Greek tourist office, where I booked the hotel room and sightseeing programs.

My first task has been to call Mr. Sarakakis in his office. His deputy, a lady, received my call and she said it would be two days to arrange all documents for my car. I had transferred the money and had sent a copy of my passport to them from Addis Ababa.

Actually it would take more than two days, as their national holiday would cause a 4-day break. We would even have to move to another hotel in the neighbourhood. But in six days I could get my Honda Civic 5-door hatchback, with a colour of Rhodes red metallic. When I selected this type I had been going through about 40 makes and types and decided for this one to have a car for my taste in case I would not be able to sell it for a good price. To tell the truth I did not buy it to keep. I wanted to do a favour for my family, they both had long dreamed about a house with a garden.

I don't intend to write much about Athens, as there are few people in the world who knows nothing about that place. For me this trip to Greece, the first one, when I could leave the airport and went walking, has actually been a "sentimental journey". In my childhood I became acquainted with Greek mythology, and also with the history of ancient Greece, inseparable from it. Now I could see those places with my own eyes. Beside walking through the centre of the Greek capital with my family, we took advantage of the sight-seeing package ordered from Addis Ababa already that included accommodation and also a visit to the Acropolis. This place was magnificent. Tourist traffic in the citadel was so dense that the limestone rocks making its foundation looked like polished marble. Only admiration can arise in you when you see what could create those ancient people many hundred years before the invention of modern material handling and stone-working machines.

When the day for our leaving Athens arrived, we took the bus to

the Sarakakis garage. It was a Hungarian Ikarus city bus assembled by the same garage, as Mr Sarakakis has also served as an agent for Ikarus beside Honda. Our car was ready. Funny cardboard plate numbers have been mounted both front and rear. It read EXP 0001. It was their first car to sell within the diplomatic duty-free system.

I had got a wonderful two-volume guide at the Addis Ababa Greek embassy. One volume described all in the country precisely, the other one was an atlas. I used it to reach the border at Evzones, you can never wish to have a better guide.

We laid our way north on the seaside route. Before noon we were passing through the Thermopylae straits. An enormous shower got us and washed over all our bags on the luggage rack.

We were driving on historic territories. We took our lunch in the car and spread all packages to dry after the rain. There was a road sign on our route beside a romantic castle ruin showing a beach. We decided to take a swim in the Aegean sea. On the shore bazaars were again to seduce my wife to buy fine woollen sweaters for both of us.

By evening we reached the town of Larissa where we took a room in a small hotel. On way we had bought a big water melon. When I had asked the vendor what it cost he said: "Penta". I did not speak Greek, but understood at once that 1 kilo cost five drachmas. It was cheap as dirt. Not so the fine grapes in Athens. As the vendor realised that we were foreigners he turned the price-tag around: from 40 drachmas to 90 a kilo. We ate the melon, that was our supper. In that hot weather nothing more was needed.

In the small hotel we didn't get breakfast, but there was no problem, we still had enough reserve. Before noon we passed the magnificent cone of Mount Olympos, the myths of my childhood life. The next night we spent in Saloniki. This town has been wonderful, especially the endless embankment with the famous White Tower. We were to turn east the next morning and go to Istanbul. However,

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our courage seemed to reach its end. Driving 500 miles there and back with a vast baggage on top of the car has not been attracting. We would let our visas be lost and turn straight north. We liked Greece very much, all of us. We found it a country not only fascinating with ancient ruins, but its people, although they always cheated us to a certain extent, have also been kind, and we experienced no such thefts, as it was well known about Italy. Their food was excellent, both their main dishes and their sweets.

After taking our last meal in Greece in the form of a breakfast, we started to the frontier. Driving through the checkpoint took us some time because of the long line of cars, but in one hour we have entered Yugoslavia. And we felt soon as if in Ethiopia. When we stopped to have our lunch in the car, a small child in rags rose beside the road and kept his hand out to ask for something. Only he did not say : "Mr. give money", as it happened in Africa, he said something in Macedonian. And it has not been 1991, it has been 1981 still. My idea was to prefer ordinary roads to highways to see more of the country. For this reason we left the highway after the first night in a small motel -- where the water tap has remained in my hand as I wanted to use it -- and turned to Pristina, the seat of the autonomous province of Kosovo.

We found a big jam on the road and policemen were going along the line of cars to inform their drivers about closed roads to Pristina. Anything we said them, they were smiling, but signalled, it was closed. At home we would be informed about disturbances in Kosovo because of decrees eliminating its autonomous status. The same had happened with the once Hungarian autonomous province Vojvodina. By these changes a course has started after the death of Tito that ended in the fall-apart of Yugoslavia, so far, but you never know what future can still bring. We had to turn back and take the highway. I have always heard gossips about the non-existing highway discipline in that country, but now we were feeling it on our own back. The aggression in behaviour of drivers, especially in that of Turkish ones, has been limitless. For the second night in the country we soon turned off road at a sign "Jagodina" hotel. It was in

a small town, Svetozarevo, and we have been lucky to find a room on the highest floor. We have not been disturbed in our sleep, only, when I wanted to shave the next morning, I wondered why the lower edge of the mirror has been placed over my head. I had to step on a chair to shave. Breakfast was delicious and we were discovering only now, that it has been an atrium-type hotel. It had a vast glass-covered inner court with trees, and birds have been flying everywhere.

We reached Belgrade that afternoon, but, although by foot I found our hotel, I was unable to drive there. At last a local driver showed me the way. As I went to the reception desk and showed my telex-copy of the reservation, the man said with a laughter:

“Oh, it is you, who has come from Abessinia. Welcome here!”

We had still enough time to discover the old and new town. The old town with the fortress is a sentimental journey for us Hungarians. It was a Hungarian border fortress until we lost independence in 1526. In 1456 it was here that János Hunyadi defeated sultan Muhammad II and stopped Turkish progress for 50 years. He died there in the same year from the Plague and bells at 12 o'clock commemorate his death.

My wife bought small golden things in every country that far, she would not break that custom here, either. To buy any other goods would have been a waste for high prices.

Our food reserves have been finished, we had to buy some for the next day. About noon the next day we arrived to the border of our country. Checking was almost nothing and the official motioned us off. I did it, only turned back. I would not want to become a smuggler, I had to fill in my declaration for the car. My cardboard plates destroyed by the Thermopylae rain have been taken, and all the way home we were addressed by conscientious drivers that our plates were missing.

PART III

Chapter 11 Soviet and Russian trips

The vast Soviet Union has been a riddle for me since my early childhood and it attracted me the same way as the Wild West did with almost all European people in the middle of the 19th century. Having seen the (manipulated) appearance of ever more Russian and Soviet juvenile books in the bookshops from the end of the '40s on, I have read almost everything from Civil War diaries to Russian folk tales and from the tales of Bazhoff to "Dersu Uzala". No need to prove that a great part of them is real treasure. This world came to ruins by my first trip to the periphery of the empire. This I have narrated to you within the history of my Danube boating. During the following years then my English and German linguistic knowledge helped me to get real information of the topic, as e.g. Pasternak's novel "Doctor Zhivago" that I was lent for a reading in German in a time when most Hungarian knew about this book only from the foreign press. But this happened much later, as following my two disappointing visits, I happened to get to Leningrad at the first opportunity in 1969.

My employer, the Ship Repair Yard of the Hungarian Shipping Lines MAHART was building a self-propelled gravel unloading conveyor for the Gravel Exploiting and Processing Company that year, and I was assigned supervisor for that project. Simultaneously with this assignment I got into contact with another job. Our company had been selected years before to be the partner of a Soviet research institute for shipping in a so-called co-operation in the field of automation on ships. (That time everything happened as I described it in connection with my assignment on Danube boats.) My colleague Steve S. was leaving the company for a job at the university and he handed back his assignment as a representative in this co-operation. The boss in turn named me for new representative. Before I could have done anything, our office was instructed by the

person in charge within the management to delegate the representative for automation to a business trip to Leningrad in July. The machine started to grind. As a man of the field for a long time, my predecessor would have deserved the trip, but as it could involve measures to be taken in the future, he, who was on a departure track, would not have been able to effect those measures.

It has been decided I would be sent on the trip. And so my first ever business trip -- not to mention my practice in the GDR six years before -- began. My wife might have felt the traditional dilemma of wives. She has been happy that I had this opportunity to become one of the important figures of the company and to see more of the world, but she must have sensed envy at the same time for being left alone, left out of something, in which I would take part. She was to get accustomed to this feeling, as I was to repeat it to her many times. Only years after, to my African mission would I be able to take her with me.

My trip-mate was an elderly man, a very simple person, but well known in the trade by his book about ship-modelling. He spoke German and, having been a POW in the last days of World War II, he spoke Russian on a level, most POWs did. He had the ability to become adapted to any type of environment in a short time -- a spiritual chameleon --. But his assimilation has not been internalisation, it has reached only the depth of his skin. As soon as the necessity of it vanished, he became his old self again.

Our trip has not been very well organised. Although there was a direct flight to Leningrad via Warsaw, we had to take the plane to Kiev and there to board a domestic one. Only he who tried it, knows Soviet domestic flights.

It has been my first flight on a big jet -- not very big exactly, as it was a TU-134, Russian alternative of DC-9 --, but to flying I had become accustomed as a teenager in the eight years of my life on the housing estate by the airport of Budaörs as the relative of an airplane mechanic -- my brother-in-law --. As a 16-year-old I slipped

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through the fence frequently -- officially I would not be allowed to step onto military premises --, and once inside, I could see everything from the hangar with World War II fighters through speed-limit breaking jet air-plane models to biplanes for parachute crews. There were light training planes for two -- flying coffins -- of Czechoslovak manufacture. Fortunately, I have tried it only once with an old friend of my brother-in-law, as they have been very prone to fall. They were objects Czechs had been learning plane-building on. There were other Czechoslovak planes called Aero, later their successor, Super Aero, became the first type used by our flying ambulance.

There were also IL-14s, built by licence on DC-3s, they had flown infrequently, as their fuel need was high. The type of plane, I was allowed to ride most times, was AN-2, a biplane designed for high altitudes above the Caucasus mountains. I could go in, if the group of parachuters consisted of less than sixteen people. I have lost any fear of height that had been within me too during those short, twenty to thirty minute, flights.

So, when I had my first opportunity to fly a commercial plane, we took a flight by our national airlines to Kiev. The developed technology impressed me very much, a comfortable airliner is not the same standard as a puritan military aircraft of the thirties or forties. Then came our arrival at Kiev. We landed on the old Zhouliany airport used now for domestic flights only. Our baggage has had to be taken, as we have stepped over the frontier. From now on, all the responsibility for them has been ours. The crowd was enormous at checking in to Leningrad and no queue existed. Every man for himself as on shipwrecks. When at last we managed to fight ourselves inside the plane (just another TU 134, only in a much worse condition), and succeeded to get two seats near to each other, our provision for the route Kiev-Leningrad has been a piece of candy and a glass of water with air bubbles. That was another supplement to my earlier studies of the Soviets.

To my surprise, Leningrad, the people, and even the shops,

have been different from my memories about similar things in the Soviet Union. Leningrad, especially during the earlier weeks of summer, was a beautiful, even you can say, European city. There were clean broad streets with normal road traffic, civilised-looking trams, and the town's underground railway, the METRO, was a marvel to me, accustomed to three hours of daily shuttle on crowded trams and buses. From uncle Ervin, my mate, I learned that the METRO in the Soviet Union had been introduced by an American engineer. I have learned a lot about this topic since. Our first METRO line, built on Soviet design and by their machinery, would open the next year in our capital.

We have been met by our guide for the next two weeks at the airport. He took us to our hotel named "Oktyabrskaya" in the centre and promised to come for us in the next morning. The hotel room was satisfactory, only the excess flow in the toilet could not be repaired by maintenance men in the coming two weeks. Sleep has been a little difficult because of the "white nights" period. For these two months in summer, it had not been worth putting up shutters to the windows. At last we developed an ability to sleep by broad daylight. During that two months in June and July the sun rises at half past one in the morning and sets at half past ten in the night. Of course, there is only a twilight between setting and rising, even street lamps are not lighted.

We had a tight program to go through, and our hosts provided us with everything from transport to food. The latter was usually taken in canteens of the institute's many offices and sites. Sometimes a surprise has not been avoidable. One day we sat at the table waiting for food, and before us there was a glass of coloured fluid for each person. After the morning walk in the hot weather I wished to taste it. As I lifted it to my lips, I sensed a smell of smoke like the inner wall of a chimney. Alas, the fluid has started to flow down my throat. And it went on that, until the glass became empty, as the fluid was a kind of jelly, not to be stopped. It was a jelly cooked of smoke-dried fruit. After that, I would always take a smell check, before trying to gulp anything similar.

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Making long walks together in our leisure time, we could see the city well and could also buy useful things in the numerous “univermags” (general stores). Nylon stockings were a relative novelty at home that time, I wanted to buy some pairs for the women in my family. But, because of his fixed idea, that stockings would be made with different foot sizes for the same length, uncle E. did not want to help me. When I said:

“Please, tell her (the salesgirl) to give me a pair of stockings fit for herself.”, he answered:

“My dear boy, I do not see her feet.”

At the end I explained it in my own broken Russian and, of course, they would fit the owners.

I think more is to be said about univermags. Our hotel was situated at one of the the crossings of the avenue Nevsky prospect, not far from Moskovsky Vokzal (railway station), we have taken our walks mainly on Nevsky. This is the finest avenue of the city, it stretches over some miles long. It crosses some canals, the Little Neva, passes two cathedrals, the Isaac and the Kazan ones, and ends at the river Neva, where the Bronze Horseman stands that Poushkin wrote a poem about. It is the statue of Peter the Great, its three fixed points on the foundation are two hooves of the rearing horse and the tip of its tail. At about the middle of Nevsky you find the department store Gostiny Dvor, a vast three-storied square building with entrances at every corner and in the middle of each side. The three floors and the ground-floor are identical in arrangement, the store is actually made up of endless rows of shops for different goods. These specialised shops are arranged one after the other and they follow in a periodical order. It all makes loosing your way very easy. But all the same, that was the place we bought almost everything, although there were other department stores everywhere, on the Nevsky too, and they would have fitted our needs more.

Living in a multicultural country these people invented a system in these shops that can make it absolutely simple to customers coming from distant places or from abroad -- in case they aren't il-

literate -- to identify different goods and to determine their prices. Entering the shop the visitor faces a counter, behind which the salesperson stands, mostly a young girl. Before the customer would turn to the "devoushka" (young girl, miss), he or she discovers all the goods that are stored on the shelves in uncharacteristic boxes lying under the glass cover of the counter, taken out of carton boxes, assembled for use, even notes are provided with names and definitions for those speaking Russian, also the prices are shown there. The Russian name of the ware is mainly not needed, you can guess without it -- except in odd cases --, what is the gizmo that you see. Such an odd case would come for me in Moscow later, when in a self-service shop of mixed household goods (named by Americans simply a hardware store) I would spot aluminium bells with a maximum diameter of 6 to 8 inches and a height of a foot. At the upper (!) end of each bell there was a hole with a stick in it to be drawn upwards until it stops and it goes down by its own weight. Another two years later I would find their purpose: garden hand-washers. Of course, they were stored in the shop upside-down. You can use it by pushing up the stick with the back of your hand to open the valve, water flows onto your hands, and after scrubbing off dirt with soap, you repeat the same to flush your hands. This device is so popular that in wooden huts in the Ural mountains, where there is no running water, it is used even inside the house.

Our hosts provided us also with tourist and cultural programs. The Hermitage has been my greatest experience of that kind, beside the Louvre and the Zwinger. Even if it had only been an empty building without art treasures, it would have been unforgettable. But the thousands of European paintings -- mainly from Holland -- made our experience even more pleasant. The fine building stands on the bank of the river Neva. It has been built by Italian architects on the order of Peter the Great, it has been his winter residence. Just for this reason it had been called The Winter Palace before the Russian revolution. You can see at once that the person who had it built didn't want to be left behind other monarchs of his time. The collection of the Hermitage contains only foreign works of art. The paint-

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ings and sculptures from Russian artists are exhibited in the Russian Museum that can also be accessed from Nevsky via a small street. The museum is visible from the avenue. As I mentioned Dutch paintings are the most numerous from the collection, it is the largest collection of the world outside Holland. The Russian Museum we visited by our own private interest, it has been worth, there are wonderful paintings and sculptures.

The other fine sight has been Petrodvorets, the Summer Palace of Peter the Great -- as the Hermitage had been his Winter Palace, about 20 miles from the city on the seashore. Access has been for us by hydrofoil on the sea. It has been the first time I saw their bigger type called "Meteor". The weather was windy, but waves did not bother the craft, and that 30 minutes made a very short ride.

The palace itself has been closed on reconstruction, only the statues in the garden and the big fountain in front of the main entrance had been finished. I would see it six years later. To the time of my next visit even the statues of the fountain would get their golden finish.

In the relatively new Musical Theatre we have seen a performance about Johann Strauss JR.'s adventures in St. Petersburg, music has been picked from his works.

There was a private program for us in connection with a Russian colleague at our company. Uncle E's office-mate at home has been a Russian man married to a girl from our country. He sent a package of gifts by uncle E. to his relatives. His brother was an engineer and was living together with his wife and grand-mother. His grand-mother was a precise copy of Frau Holle from the tales of the Grimm-brothers. We met her at the dinner, where we were invited. We have been given Russian national snacks called "pirozhki". They were small fried dough loafs, the size of a bun, and they were stuffed with different smashes as cabbage, meat, sweet cheese. They were extremely tasty. Especially, that we ate them with mushroom salad. For a while there was a fear on me, as they disclosed

mushrooms had been picked by themselves in the forest. We survived the dinner, however, there were no toadstools or deathcaps among them. As a result of this dinner with the mushrooms, there would come my hobby of mushroom picking. Soon in our capital a small restaurant would be opened for the sale of pirozhki, and sometimes we would take home a portion of them.

Another private program served only for my own recreation. I think today I wouldn't do the same with the present knowledge in my mind about things the Soviet authorities committed against foreigners they thought guilty of intelligence activities. But then, in my twenties, I have been naive enough to take risks. I had a desire to get acquainted with the resort places around town. Our host provided us with a day-off two days before our leaving, Uncle Ervin decided to get a long sleep, and I started to my solitary trip. The METRO station at the hotel was Vosstaniya (uprising), I started there and rode to Finnlansky Vokzal (Finland railway station), there was the terminal for electric local trains to resort places on the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland. Well, they are far from being resort places at the Lake Balaton or on the Mediterranean, people go there not for sun-tanning or swimming, as the summer (in spite of the White Nights) "generally falls on the Thursday of one week around that time", but to carry on their usual life, they take sauna, they drink or go fishing.

I have chosen the settlement of Solnechnoye by the map, it was about one hour by train. I had some difficulty with buying my ticket, perhaps I didn't have the necessary documents, only it was not clear to what the problem was. After that all went smoothly, the train was almost empty. I enjoyed the journey in the fine sunny weather, only the sight of settlements in a very poor condition bothered me. After the train left town the forested country was more attractive. At the chosen place I got out, took a big walk along the dirt road in the forest leading to the seashore. The weather turned a little cooler, for this reason I didn't try to swim, only walked on the shore, then sat down on one of the big stones. I saw an island in front of me over the sea, it has not been Russian by character at all, side-by-side

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German-looking houses were crowding so densely that they almost fell into the sea. From the map I discovered that it was Kronstadt, the Russian naval base before the revolution. It must be a closed area as before, as nothing is written in the guides about it, and there are no prospectuses about it. Another discovery from the map afterward: I was very near to Petrodvorets, the summer residence. When I got back to the hotel, Uncle Ervin scolded me for taking such a risk by that trip without any permission. Anyway, I succeeded to overtake this trip the same way as my excursion to Jima in Ethiopia twelve years later, as I have already told you.

With my return trip there occurred a confusion from the part of my wife, who wanted to receive me at the airport. She has been informed by the airlines that our plane was delayed. However, our pilot strove to make our delay as small as possible and, instead of two hours as the information desk announced, we arrived only one hour late.

She started to the airport and there she waited, until it became clear, something went wrong. Well, as I arrived, I did not see her at the airport and started home by ordinary city transport. It did not help that I went to a phone booth and called the airport information desk. She was not to be found there. We were waiting for each other until midnight, and when she came home, I was asleep.

My next visit to the Soviet Union has been a private holiday. I won it as the second prize at a competition organised by my employer in 1973. The second prize was a solo travel bonus to the Soviet Union, the first one the same for two persons. Also there were numerous awards of books. It has not been decided where and when to travel, I could cash it in the travel agency office of IBUSZ and decide the details. My wife shared my joy. I was hoping for a time to be able to convince her to take advantage of the bonus, but she wouldn't leave our three years old son with me alone. And so, it has been decided that I would go on that trip. In the knowledge of this information I chose Yalta. Soon after my return from Poland, where I took part in a conference, I went to enjoy the 8 days of my

tourist trip won on the competition. It has been an economy trip, but as the place I had chosen has not been spoiled even by belonging to the S.U. -- today to Ukraine -- I really enjoyed it.

The Hungarian state travel agency IBUSZ has been true to itself, for this reason the planes we flew were those of the Aeroflot. The flight has been interrupted in Kiev, that time on the new airport far from town. The old one has not been selected for domestic flights yet, both international and domestic flights were handled there.

The old IL-18 four-engine turbo-prop was at the limit of its capacity. It has made such a high noise that speaking on board was impossible. About that noise here is an anecdote. One member of our group was an old lady who had been taking a tourist trip every year, but, as she had said she had been everywhere except the S.U., she had decided to try it once. She fell asleep from noise and vibration. As the pilot decreased the speed of propellers to glide -- IL-18 is said to have landed with only one engine on work --, a sudden silence came over us. She woke up suddenly and asked : "Jesus, why did we stop!".

To Kiev it was only one hour, we consumed our rubber chicken all right. In Kiev we boarded another IL-18, a domestic one for Simferopol, seat of the Crimean peninsula. It was about the same flight time, but too long for the glass of water with air bubbles to gulp down.

In Simferopol we arrived in the evening. As we waited for the bus to take us to Yalta, darkness became full. The route had been used by trolley buses. It is no mistake, the longest trolley line of the world is there between Simferopol and Yalta. The new tourist hotel has been still in construction, we had to be content with the old one, the "Yuzhnaya" (Southern).

The hotel building was typical of its kind, similar to those in former English colonies from colonial times. Our group has been assembled in the lobby and room allocation began. There were

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some women in the group, the majority of them wives with their husbands, but also some singles. The majority of the group was male. The rooms were double ones. As both single women and single men were in odd numbers, it took me only a minute to calculate: if I had not joined anyone, I would have a room alone. Room-mates have been selected by voluntary joining. I did not give consent for any mate, I remained alone, and that spared me a lot of inconveniences.

There were some organised tours, but usually we spent our time on the beach. As the harbour took a large part of the seashore, to go to the beach by foot would need going up a 300-foot precipice and after a walk on high ground to descend again. From the new hotel the beach would have been a simple descent by stairs. Thus we reached the beach by a free ride in a small boat over a bay.

The beach was covered with apple-sized round stones. As I have been informed, the Black Sea shore is stone-covered everywhere, only on its western parts in Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine can you find sands. You had to use the boarded pavements to walk, as the big stones were unbearable for the feet. The water at that time (June) was not very warm yet.

The first day was given us for free will, I went to town after a short swimming. I was able to see the first day that the place was a two-in-one. The harbour, the promenade on the seashore and the beach looked as if in a western-type Mediterranean country. The town, its streets, mainly its stores were true Soviet ones. In the only big department store I saw the goods I wanted to take. They were there until the last day when I wanted to buy them. Then they disappeared. It was another lesson of Russia. I had to buy other goods for substitutes. Thus I had a lot of money left, and I could buy a fine ring to compensate my wife. To tell the truth, when I had selected the trip half a year before, I had forgot that the 10th anniversary of our wedding would be during that time. I had to compensate her somehow, and it would become easier than expected.

Water was cool, but very clean. You could see even a coin

through 20 feet of water on the bottom. The facilities provided all a person on rest wants, swimming, sun-bathing, taking sweets and ice-creams.

The organised programs included a visit of the unique botanical garden, the fine palaces on the south-west of the peninsula, as well as Bakhchisaray, the old seat of the khans up-to 100 years ago.

The palaces provided a historic air. To see the rooms where our fate for a long time has been decided was sending a cold down my spine. I knew that even that time the most important decisions about the Eastern Bloc were made there. These pieces of architecture have been built on the sides of the almost 4,000-foot mountain arising above the town, to come up to them it is necessary to use the serpentine roads through the original old-growth forest. Sometimes the two-way traffic meets each-other face-on, although, by luck, the speed of vehicles is limited by the steepness of the road or, with those downroad, the smoking braking. In the forest there has always lived artists, even during the hardest dictatorship, we have met one of them. He has made wonderful sculptures of dead logs. He left them on the original place. He said the sculptures he made had always been inside those logs, he only removed the superfluous material from them.

Bakhchisaray was a whole day's excursion. The palace itself was deserted, no settlement around it because of the arid area. But the khan's palace was a monument to oppression, in the dark rooms you could feel the enormous asymmetry of power and servitude. Years later in Moscow I would see more than once the wonderful ballet of Khachatouryan, "The Fountain of Bakhchisaray". It is a melancholic story of a Polish noble girl kidnapped from her wedding by Khan Ghirey -- there were more of that name -- and dying slowly of her sorrow. Only the fountain could give her consolation as its drops were like her tears. The original story had been written by Pushkin.

It is known that the Crimean peninsula became a Russian terri-

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tory during the reign of Catherine the Great of Russia, conquered by her general Potemkin and, that two wars have been fought for it in Russian-Turkish conflicts. But it is not very widely known, how the Tatars had come to that land.

It had been almost uninhabited until the 13th century. Then the rogues of Batu Khan, later called the Golden Horde, returning from Europe with robbed treasures and the blood of millions of innocent victims on their weapons, made a detour to the peninsula and a large number of them remained there. They had been the inhabitants for about six centuries, until the dictator of Russia interned them all for their (alleged) sins of collaborating with Germans during World War II. Their repatriation has not been permitted to this day.

Yalta is situated on the southernmost tip of the peninsula. The surrounding country is called Greater Yalta. The town itself lies at the foot of a high precipice, that has been formed in a way, that the plateau has a gentle slope to the north. To the south the land is going higher and higher, until it ends abruptly, similarly to the cliffs of Dover. From the town the high cliffs of that almost vertical wall are majestic. You always spot some mountaineers training on the 1,800-foot wall. The town lies under the wall in a fine protected place, freezing is rare even in winter.

I took experiences and a small package of gifts home from Yalta.

Spring in the next year has passed and the same happened to the first semester at my course in the University of Economics, where I was studying foreign trade as a supplementary trade for engineers. I began my exams. Although being on study holiday, once I had to go into the office, when the secretary-wife of my boss asked me to come in. My boss said, I would get an assignment. It was the project manager post for a new object, a raft-towing tug. Customers, of course, the Soviets. It has come to our office from the other construction bureau of our company on the other side of the river. Originally that other shipyard wanted it for themselves, but

they realised that they had forgot how to build ships, they were only able to produce floating cranes.

What was risky, my boss wanted me to take part in talks in Leningrad that month (June 1975). It meant I would not be able to finish my exams. We argued a lot, and at last he agreed to postpone the talks by a week, and I promised to finish my exams to that time.

Actually, after my exams I had only three days left to study the object. I did not like that business at all. Our team to take part consisted of eight persons. And almost all of them far from experts. My boss was in the team, too, and he could not have been considered any more a shipbuilder than the others. He had been working in our construction bureau for years in the past, and he had been considered a good engineer, and lately he returned from the Technical University and was named chief designer, but the lost years could not have been disregarded.

At last we left for Leningrad. The flight has not been a direct one, we flew to Moscow and there the representative of our company met us. We were taken to the city and the day we spent with walking and sitting in his office in the Commercial Agency. It was my first visit to Moscow, but I knew it well from a tourist guide I purchased at home from a street vendor. Unlike other similar publications, it represented a traditional European level and its contents were easy to handle. More information I got from a six-tome publication of the Hungaro-Soviet Friendship Society two years before, when I took part in the competition and won my Yalta trip. Anyway, it was another experience to be on the spot. Actually my impressions about Moscow have not been bad.

The Commercial Agency was not far from the Kremlin. We walked along the popular route to the Red Square (Kalinin Avenue, but it has got back its old name since, i.e. New Arbat Street) and visited all the main attractions -- except the remains of their great man, that I would be unable to see even during my years as a company representative more than 10 years later --.

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The sight has been magic. In later times I would enjoy it no less, and during my mission in the city, through my sitting room window I would look on the golden domes of the churches in the Kremlin. In the end-of-June weather under a fully cloudless sky, my shots became fine.

Following our stay we took a taxi and went to the domestic airport. It was half past eight and the sun was already low. As we neared the town of Leningrad, in the north-west the sun came higher and higher, until it stood in an afternoon position at half past nine. During the coming ten days we have never seen the sun set. We went to bed in daylight and got up same. It was the second occasion that I could be in Leningrad during White Nights.

Our hotel -- getting rooms have not been easy, although there were lots of vacant ones, as our partner institute had forgotten to book them -- has been built to fulfil the highest needs, but as the restaurant was on reconstruction, and we had to go to the small refreshment booths or buy food in the shops for dinner and breakfast, it succeeded only on the Russian standard. Breakfast was not included in our hotel payments. If it were, we would have got lower allowance, reduced by 10 percent.

Actually we had little time for leisure programs. Our official work could hardly be done in the conditions our hosts provided. The endless munching on unimportant details left us at last only one way out: with the original data we would design a brand new object. Our goal, to get missing information from the original designer, the institute, our host here, would not be achieved. If we wanted the contract from the Moscow-based foreign trade company, we had to create something saleable. The talks ended in a protocol of minutes signed by them and us with a content something like that "if we had wanted to take their advice in the design of the ship we would do as we desired".

This trip abroad has not been different from others in one thing: I had to rack my brain about what kind of souvenirs to buy for different

members of my greater family. At last I bought the same for everyone -- I hoped they would not show it to each other --, the same Matryoshka toy. My wife and my son was another matter, they got the best things possible. To our movie projector I took home from Yalta the previous year, I took a lot of cartoons for my son of the series "You just wait". My wife got an amber necklace, one of numerous taken from the S.U.

In Leningrad my nights have been disturbed not only because of White Nights, but for the snoring of my boss, with whom I shared my room. A Diesel engine would have been more convenient.

He has been first time in that big empire and his impressions always generated strange thoughts in his mind. He had finished his studies, before ideological subjects became oppressing in the university, and as a graduate he concentrated on his work. In his mind now the obvious fought with information from the press.

He had a funny little adventure in the town. As he liked wine he was pleasantly surprised to see a subterranean shop with the signboard "Vino" (wine). He descended and saw a pub similar to those we would call in our country an "upright pub", as there were no seats, everyone took his drinks upright. He has been accustomed to 300 grams of wine -- measured and called 3 decis -- so, he walked to the cashier and showed his three fingers. He has got 3 pieces of paper, which he gave over the counter. He has got 3 glasses, each of them filled with 200 grams of wine. People queued up behind him, as he occupied 3 of the 4 glasses altogether in use. In the relatively cool basement he emptied them one by one. Up on the sunshine and heat, he became drunken of the more than one pint of very fine Malaga wine from the Crimea. As he at last came home we laughed a lot, but he begged me not to say anything to his wife at home.

I also met Yalta wine during my trip there in the previous year. We also had a program that was called visit to a wine tasting cellar. For its climate the region of Yalta is fine wine-growing country, in case irrigation is solved, as grapes cannot grow in a dry weather. In

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the cellar we were offered 14 kinds of wine, 30 cc each, beginning with a totally dry white wine with an alcoholic percent below 10, and it contained no sugar. There followed a little stronger and sweeter wines, and we finished tasting by a red wine (I think it was Malaga) with an equal content of alcohol and sugar at 23 percent. It tasted as a 5-bucket Aszú wine from Tokaj in Northern Hungary. Fortunately we were offered a dish of "konfetty", i.e. Russian bonbons in paper packing, to consume after the alcoholic drinks, and sugar neutralised a large part of spirit. Out-of this cellar, although evening came, still it was hot enough that we could feel the remaining alcohol to go into our heads and feet.

In the protocol from our part mainly my ideas have been incorporated. This, and similarly my activities in the coming months on the raft-towing tug, resulted in a high estimate about me in my boss. A great pity that negative tendencies in the Hungarian economy and a system of closed cliques springing into life within the company would force me in a couple of years to leave this employer and find a brand new field for myself, machine tools. But until that time I would still have a lot to do here and I feel even today that I don't have to be ashamed for objects built according to my drawings.

In December of the next year, 1976, I was selected -- against numerous odds -- into a delegation taking part in talks on final technical topics and price of the same object in Moscow. Well, that business trip has been no easy walk. Let alone that the latest official papers to be taken with us and consigned to my name caused me a trip to the nearest stop 30 miles away on the home train and back, as I mistook a train not stopping at our station, I would feel during that two weeks the forced authority of my boss, and it put a great stress on me. He was kind outside the talks, he helped me with his advice, he recounted their similar trips long before, when they had to ride 36 hours on train. But once at the table, with the partners at the other side, he would be changed completely.

The Soviets have been no Germans. After arrival our salesman had to visit the hosts many times, until he could get a date for the

talks. About four days we could spend on our city sight-seeing. At the beginning there was cool weather, but clear sky. Since the spring of that year I had been wearing hard contact lenses and in dry weather, especially in the evening, when sunglasses could not be on, my eyes were sensitive to dust. I said one day at dusk:

“It is a riddle to me, how in this city this excellent dust-supply is solved.”

“Dust?” asked me our chief engineer astonished, “this is the cleanest city of the world. You can take on a white shirt three times without its collar getting dirty.”

He might have been right about the old times, but to that day the dense road traffic made everything dirty. I would sense it even more 15 years later. And there was another aspect. My eyes have been sensitive to the small-sized quartz grains from the Moscow environment. They could have been clean, but painful under my lenses.

In a few days the weather turned ordinary. Moscow has a weather front of mild moist air coming from the north after the freezing of a great quantity of water in polar regions in December. It is misty all day and drizzle comes frequently. A very unpleasant weather. Heavy colds come in January and last to the middle of February. We could arrange our shopping for Christmas.

Our accommodation was awfully arranged. It was to be thanked to the hotel room distribution system of the city, but also to the attempts of our Commercial Division to economise the funds allocated for trips abroad and take the saved sum as their own reward. We have been placed in the Hotel Yaroslavskaya, actually no hotel, a hostel turned hotel after the 1949 Moscow World Youth Festival. It was on the northern outskirts of the city 40 minutes by METRO to our partners in down-town, and in our rooms there were four beds each, with no bathroom. Only common showers in the corridor. The team leader, our chief engineer, told the company representative to get proper hotel rooms for us, otherwise we would book our tickets back home in two days.

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Bargain has been in the blood of the man, he secured a room in the Hotel Rossiya near Red Square for him and my boss. He said, the “plebs” can stay. Actually our leader was softened after getting a better room for himself. After a fiery discussion with us he agreed, however, to finance our transfer by a bottle of brandy from our gift reserve. We succeeded in bribing the clerk in charge and moved to the Hotel Ukraine opposite the Comecon building across the river Moskva.

At that time the hotel was on a European level with two differences, the “dezurnaya” system and its lifts. The first means women sitting at the entrances of corridors on every floor and keeping the keys -- the reception in the lobby had other obligations, e.g. listening to phone conversations -- and keeping an eye on incoming girls. The lifts were driven by authorised girls. They were slow as death and the staircases closed. A quarter of an hour was nothing to wait. That senseless lifts-only system caused so many deaths during a fire in the Hotel Rossiya the next year.

In our team we had a lady who was a born Russian. She had married a Hungarian student during their studies some decades ago and had followed her husband to his homeland. Her father had been the architect of the northern town Norilsk in the '30s. She was speaking Hungarian well, she has been the ideal translator for our purposes. As soon as we moved into the Hotel Ukraine she went to the service bureau and ordered theatre tickets for all of us. It was my first time to see a performance in Moscow, but not the last. I became a ballet and opera addict, as soon as I would arrive any time in my hotel, my first route would lead to the service bureau to order tickets.

That time it was a ballet, Khachaturyan's “The Fountain of Bakhchisaray”. The place of the performance has been the Assembly Palace in the Kremlin, but the dancers have been from the Bolshoi (Big) Theatre. I began to understand why the Russian ballet had been considered the true classical performing art.

During our stay there was a figure-skating championship in the

city. The East-German skaters lived in our hotel and behaved as East-Germans always do abroad, noisily and with bad manner (except our friends, it goes without saying).

That two days spent in the droughty hotel did wrong to my roommate, head of our electric department. He came with us having cold already and he would have fever soon. I never travel without a proper emergency package, there were anti-fever drugs with me, too. He would survive on my tablets and at home there would be no need for him to go to a doctor.

The first talks gave us a lot of work. An afternoon and half a night we translated the draft-contract of our partners. The company representative was surprised to have the text the next morning. He had to send it by telex. Our high speed resulted in a quick answer, and at the end of our two-week mission, in the signing of the contract. Our return before Christmas was well timed. My family was happy, too, especially for the goods I took home.

In the meantime my duties called me to Moscow again. To fix the delivery of the emergency pump, we had to sign the contract with the Soviet deliverer. The import executive took me for the technical questions with him, and there was a girl colleague with us to see through commercial details of other deliveries with the partners.

It was the beginning of May 1977. Arriving in Moscow, we found a city in a 3-day break for Victory Day holiday. Our hotel "Varshava" was the only exception from "dezhurnaya" system. It stood at the crossing of the inner road-circle -- Sadovoye Koltso -- and Lenin Avenue. In my years as a representative there I would look on the hotel through my bedroom window. That crossing is nowadays the meeting place of the former Communists, as the giant red granite statue of their great man stands there.

We have had a suit of two rooms with the salesman. The girl has got an ordinary room. We had TV and a cupboard, she had to borrow a TV-set for extra money. The salesman was a typical engineer educated in the S.U. His technical knowledge could not earn

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him money, but the foreign language learned in the five or six years of his studies made his road straighter. The girl was hardly more than twenty and had a good heart with no extra brain. They were pleasant people both.

The girl had had a Soviet correspondence partner in the person of a young girl of 19 for years. As she acquired theatre tickets she forgot her long agreed date with her friend. She asked me to meet the girl and apologise in her name.

The date had been arranged in the lobby of the hotel. I asked the receptionist to receive her until I came. As I was descending the stairs, an elementary-school girl appeared from one of the arm-chairs -- she looked like, but she was 19 --. We introduced ourselves and I was aware at once that I could not avoid spending at least a little time with her. She insisted we should go to the Gorki park near the hotel. We did so as I didn't have any excuse to reject her.

Actually it has not been boring to be with this young female Soviet citizen. In our conversation I quickly learned at least 100 new Russian words and, as she would correct any of my mistakes, I began to speak with care on the proper prefix and view of verb.

With the Russian language I was in a special situation at that time. At my own will I began to update my knowledge that I had got in the secondary school and the university, but as a horse performs better driven by a certain pressure, I had to have something like that too. My progress was very slow, until an in-house course at the company made it possible for people of different levels to do their updating. Another phase has come to me when I joined a course with the Hungaro-Soviet Friendship Society, at the end of which I became able to pass my medium-level examination.

Well, we were talking with the small girl, but almost nothing about personal things, only that I was married and she was missing Zhenya, who was far away, probably as a private. We tried different attractions in the park, ate ice-cream, and the afternoon passed quickly. I accompanied her across the Crimean Bridge, but further

she would not let me go. She gave me her address and asked for mine in order to change letters sometimes. This acquaintance has remained completely innocent of course and got to its end quickly.

In 1978 I left my employer and took up job with another. That meant that I had to give up my dream of childhood, shipbuilding, for some personal and other reasons. I went over into another branch of the industry, machine tool production, to a big company, a trust being almost a monopoly in the country. I worked for the general management of the company as a technical salesman for machine tools, although our division has not been authorised to arrange sales independently, we sold our products abroad through a foreign trade company, Technoimpex. Besides I was co-operating with two other foreign trade companies, MOGÜRT and NIKEX, as my employer was the buyer of a licence from the West-German company Knorr-Bremse that allowed us to produce and sell air brake components for road and rail vehicles domestically and in certain countries listed in the licence agreement. Brake components would get into my view only two years later, when I would be coming back from Ethiopia. But my job has been interesting for my knowledge of three languages. Russian predestined me to two topics, one of them was the task of Comecon section meetings, the other a kind of co-operation with a Russian research institute about the development of a large NC (numerical control) lathe. This latter theme (EN lathe) has made it necessary for me to travel to Leningrad. It has been the job of a young married couple technically, the woman working in the designing and manufacturing factory, the man in the research institute of my employer. They were in the team for the trip too. The foreign trade company gave our tradesman, an elderly man with a somewhat one-sided brain, but an enjoyable good humour otherwise.

The November date for the talks has not been a proper one. At that time of the year the river Neva usually has difficulty to deliver its waters into the sea as the north-western wind pushes the current back. A long, narrow gulf originated at the eastern end of the Baltic Sea, the northern shore of it takes Finland, on the southern shore lie

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the former Soviet Baltic states, they are independent today, but not that time. At its innermost corner the gulf makes the mouth of river Neva draining the precipitation of Karelia and its surroundings. At the river mouth has been founded the town by Peter the Great, named about him later (then Lenin, and again about Peter), the Venice of the North, that is not only a European city, but which represents quite another spirit in every respect, than the completely central Russian Moscow. Directly at the mouth you find the port area, numerous monuments make witness about three centuries of history. The town lies on a very low land, only some places are higher than the flood level of the sea. At certain times sea level is lifted by constant westerly winds, the river cannot deliver its flow into the sea, and its level will also rise, the lower-lying areas will be flooded. This a usual phenomenon in the mouth of every river where the ebb and flow is conspicuous. That was the case with us and the city had a great flood. All the canals have been full and the lower-lying streets could not be used.

November was the time of darkness in Leningrad, there was only a short day, night fell at half past one and the sun rose -- probably did, as from the thick clouds it could not be seen -- at half past ten. I was of the opinion as previously that Leningrad was better in the summer.

Time was short and talks long-lasting. We have hardly had time to spend our money. Alas, I spent mine on a Soviet digital watch.

Our hosts managed somehow to take us out of town to Pushkino, formerly Tsarskoye Selo (Czar Village), the residence of the czars during their last two centuries and, as I learned from the book of Maurice Paléologue, it was here that the fate of Hungary was decided in May 1915, when he, the ambassador of the French Republic at the Court of the Czar of Russia, drew the would-be European borders after finishing World War I together with his host, the czar, with crayons on an elementary school atlas, which would become one of the official attachments to the treaty signed in Versailles later. Our trip was so quick that I can hardly remember anything.

Soon there was another multilateral Comecon meeting for me. During March, actually it was a double meeting as these events would last only from Monday to Friday. Flight there on Sunday, back on the next Saturday. But I would not be taken home to fly again the next day, I would have to wait for the next stage in the Soviet capital.

The morning I was to fly to Moscow there was a big snowfall there and our plane has not come -- it was a Soviet plane --. We were herded into the transit. We spent all day there and could board only in the evening.

Just when, after a long starvation, we were called to the restaurant for lunch and I began to appease my hunger, I was called to the information desk. My wife has been on the line and she gave news about the birth of a boy in the family, to my younger sister-in-law. It was my saint's day, March 19.

Our trip to Moscow was better than the previous one to Poland. I found an old acquaintance from our trip to Warsaw and we would spend much time together. He represented the Csepel Machine Tool Factory. March is thought by the Russian to be the first month of spring. They count spring from March 1. The weather was actually fine during day, but the first evening, as we walked along the bridge over the river Moskva from the Comecon -- today Moscow Municipality -- building to the Hotel Ukraine, the sun set and in twelve minutes, until we arrived at the hotel, the temperature fell to 10 degrees F.

The talks in the first week were kept in the Comecon building, our accommodation in the Hotel Mir belonging to the complex. The second week was arranged for the Hotel Moskva opposite Red Square. I had to move over on Saturday. I ordered theatre tickets at once and contacted the girl I met there two years before. I invited her to the theatre. That time it was the Bolshoi, and the performance was an opera of Wagner, "The Gold of the Rhine", a first night.

In the first break we did not go out, remained sitting on our seats, and two men sitting directly behind us, addressed us with a question

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in English. I consulted with her and answered. Our conversation continued and I soon got a praise from one of the Englishmen -- as I learned they were -- that he had never heard a Russian speak so good English as I did. I did not tell him I was no Russian.

Just the opposite would happen to me twelve years later in Moscow. I helped then a truck driver to unload and sent him to the address. Then he called back and wanted me to translate. He gave the receiver to a Russian, the gate-keeper. He did not know about the topic and said he would go and find the boss. I overheard him through the microphone of the receiver say: "No, he is no driver. He speaks Russian, only very poorly." After that comment I would not have any illusions about my Russian pronunciation -- with a high-degree exam at home.

Coming back to 1979, the second week at the Comecon meeting has even been harder than the first one. All that began to bore me, the imperial behaviour of the Soviets, the sheep-like mood of the rest. I hoped, there would be no more of that kind in the near future.

The last evening there was a great banquet with vodka flowing like tap water. I disliked the senseless waste everywhere. Even the fine beef you have got was impossible to eat, as it was almost raw and still bleeding. I will speak about it later, how Russians treat fine raw materials for food, when I am going to inform you about my times in Moscow as the representative of a long-haul carrier. Our trucks and trailers were carrying fresh pork from Germany, that was a compensation for a valuable (equalling 14 billion German Marks) nodding (of Mr. Gorbachev) about re-unification of Germany.

In May I had to make another visit to Moscow. It was again about the same project, the NC lathe designed for Soviet military. Actually it was a Comecon bilateral meeting and there was no responsibility, only to enjoy the hospitality of our Russian partners.

Our partner was a research institute and they did all to ensure we had as much leisure time as possible. One day I went to the pop-

ular beach at the Moskva-Volga canal as it was terribly hot. On the beach a big shower caught me, nothing terrible happened, only my wristwatch bought in Leningrad half a year before went out-of-order because of the rain.

My attempt to have it repaired on the spot has been unsuccessful. The watchmaker -- the only workshop in a city of 7 million inhabitants for the repair of such electronic watches -- believed me that it was still under guarantee, as I had bought it only six months before, but he wanted to see my letter of guarantee, and it had stayed in Budapest. Anyway, he was ready to repair it, and the cost of that would have been only a little above the purchasing price of the watch. So, the repair was postponed, I didn't have enough funds with me, it would have been over my allowance. When at last I managed to do it, the usual thing happened when someone fights against a bureaucratic system: the free repair under guarantee cost me more than buying a new Hong Kong watch on the flea-market.

Our accommodation have been a new apartment house, selected as hotel before and during the Moscow '80 Olympics. After that it would be turned into an ordinary block of apartments, when I would get there as a representative again eleven years later, I would drive frequently nearby. When I returned from that trip, my colleagues received me telling that my long-awaited Ethiopian mission was under way at last. So, for some years we were missing each-other with the company.

When I returned from Ethiopia during the fall of 1981, I found a completely restructured company, where, although my place had been reserved, I soon realised that opportunities for a good career greatly diminished. At least it was true for me like someone to be eager for a manager's job; while the leading clique would permit anyone to develop professionally, to get a place of higher authority was out-of-reach at the same time. It meant the same financially too. At first I was placed back into the same job, which I left two years before, that is co-operation on machine tools and Comecon topics, but the retirement of an older colleague and my automotive

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experience influenced my fate, they together helped my boss to select me for another job, where I was to deal with air brake components, products under a licence agreement with the West-German firm Knorr Bremse.

Before getting my new job, I have been selected for my Russian knowledge to take part with a lecture in a seminar about new NC control units in Moscow. The event has been organised by our Soviet foreign trade partner. I was to complete that task before going over to brakes.

The cold was severe in Moscow in February 1982, when we arrived. My room-mate in the hotel opposite the foreign ministry building has been a very intelligent young man from our lathe factory. He would later become a member of the inner circle of our sales manager for his sheep-like nature to do everything told. We have gone together everywhere, as he did not speak Russian and needed me.

The exhibition and seminar was a success, only it was engagement for a bad marriage. All the customers here worked for the military complex and products to be ordered by them would go to far-away places in closed army bases. Technical products go out-of-order, they have to be maintained and repaired. Our servicemen in the Soviet Union would not be allowed to go there and repair. Service would be done through phone by local personnel trained in our factories. The enormous cost of guarantee repairs, the parts for those repairs and replacement of recalled machine tools would be deducted from the income of the company. And such contracts would follow to deliver our products by the same way to other parts of the world.

I would not deceive my habit of going in the theatre when in Moscow. That time I could get tickets to a performance of the Leningrad Kirov Opera in the Bolshoi. It was Prokofyev's "Romeo and Juliet". It has been a traditional scene and the experience would have been fine, had we not been seated 7 people in a 3-seat box.

From my seat I have seen only a large column, I had to lean sideways to enjoy the performance.

There was a traditional free week-end during the program with less leisure time than usual because of the exhibition. This business trip made me feel something new in that city. They were past the Olympics and everything has been exhausted. It looked as an elderly woman would, when decorated for her late wedding by make-up and after that in the morning light she would be seen clearly. The reserves of the empire began to go out. This was the time of political jokes, for example: the Americans sent a message to the Soviets, if they were not to alter their policy in Afghanistan, the supply of spare parts for their Party Chairman would be stopped. Well, he was to pass the next spring.

Anyway, food supply and that of expired ORWO films was ample. Drinks have been everywhere and relatively cheap. Tariffs on METRO and trams were 5 and 4 kopeks respectively. Something has changed, however. Our hotel allowance has been barely enough for the bill. And everywhere you were stopped by youths asking for chewing gum or money change. Africa came nearer.

My new job reduced the importance of Big Brother within my activity, I hadn't seen Moscow for three years. At the end of that time, the year 1985 started for me with a Moscow trip about the use of rear brake cylinders of our make on KB licence within a co-operation agreement between the Ikarus company and a Russian factory in Likino near to Moscow.

My technical helper was an engineer from the construction bureau of our Székesfehérvár factory. We had a KB technical expert on our side. Talks have been held in the Moscow office building of the Hungarian Automotive Society, formerly, at the time of my raft-towing-tug negotiations, part of the Commercial Agency of our embassy in Moscow. Our talks ended with complete acceptance of the offered brake cylinder by our partner for use in their buses on Ikarus licence. Well, I am not sure if the remaining six years for the

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Soviet Union had been enough for the introduction of the devices, I don't know what kind of brake components those buses are running on.

That trip was short and successful, and at the same time a preparation for my Moscow-mission some years later. When we flew off from Budapest, the previous night's forecast about Moscow has been 28 degrees F. When our plane was to land the pilot announced minus 10 degrees F. During night a polar front arrived.

We have been received at the airport by the representative of the foreign trade company, Joseph T. I found him an ordinary man from the country, willing to help. I would have contacts with him, both pleasant and unpleasant years later. He took us to our hotel, the "Rossiya" near Red Square and left us alone.

We moved to society office by METRO and there we found our acquaintances. They were from the foreign trade company and different automotive factories of our country. In the basement -- canteen in earlier times -- there was a big standing exhibition, including our own units.

Our talks have been organised for the next day. We met our would-be translator to help us with his perfect Russian speech. He was from the Csepel Auto Factory. There was a Soviet guest in the exhibition room and we have made a long conversation. He was a Ukrainian from the Lvov bus factory, our old customer.

My companion was an engineer and an artist at the same time. He was making perfect copies of masterworks -- oil mainly -- on order of private customers. On my question if it was legal he said, of course, even his copies have been included in catalogues as authentic duplicates.

We went walking. Temperature was minus 20 degrees F, as the evening fell. There was snow, but on the pavements it has been pushed aside. As we walked over a small side-street we left behind the shield of houses against chilly wind. Under the down-turned

flaps of my fur cap my right ear froze during that minute time. For two days it was painful to sleep on that side.

The next day it was our match with the customer. We met the German in the office, he took along a Russian-German translator. Our guests quickly arrived and we informed them about characteristics of the brake cylinder. Our KB man said additional words and then the Russians put their questions. Talks took about three hours and they were glad to accept our proposal at the end. The German left at once, he wanted to be at home that evening. We had our protocol typed and both partners signed it.

We spent that evening in our hotel and the next morning, being free till the afternoon flight, went to shop and to see the Tretyakoff gallery. There he played his role as my guide and I have learned much more about art in those two hours, than in all my life before. He even opened my eyes for such techniques as back-ground painting. It was good that we rushed there to see the gallery. In a month it would be closed and for more than 10 years it would remain so.

Some months later in the same year I had another trip to Moscow. The foreign trade company for railway brake units NIKEX selected our products to be exhibited in Moscow at a special exhibition named "40th Anniversary of Hungary's Liberation." It has been the last time that event in 1945 has been named liberation. Even Russians considered it conquering.

Well, the place has been the VDNH exhibition centre in Moscow, the Exhibition of the Achievements in the National Economy, one of its greatest pavilions. As the date to be celebrated would be April 4, the exhibition opened one week before and has been open for two weeks. Our Easter has cut the period into two.

Shortly before this time Mr. Chernenko was succeeded by Mr Gorbachev at the top of the Empire. As it is known to people dealing with politics or history of the 20th century, after Stalin it was Brezhnev who spent the longest time at the helm of the Soviet Union of the

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69 years it existed under that name. His death ended an eighteen-year period of his time as Secretary General. That period has been so long actually that in countries of the Camp, just as with us Hungarians, nobody knew exactly what to do in such a situation, e.g. the state Hungarian TV having only six days of broadcast time in a week -- only about eight hours daily -- that time changed its program completely that day; people unaware of the event of the Great Man's passing, coming home from work and falling into an armchair to have a little recreation by the late afternoon junk-programs, could only hear music of mourning. Only by the evening TV-news at half past seven was it made clear what happened, when stone-faced announcers read through the obituary. The successor of Brezhnev has not been unknown for us Hungarians. Andropov and Souslov have done everything together to deserve the highest score of disgust (the latter even at home, in 1991 his namesake street got another name). Andropov's two years in power remains far behind those of Brezhnev also in importance, although the calamity with the South-Korean airliner in September 1983 will be remembered forever. It became clear at that time how easy it is for an obstinate, hare-brained partocrat to start a global conflict. Then the world was very near to WW III. Andropov's second year was already the "period of support", I mean, when he appeared in TV, he was supported by a KGB man at each side.

He was followed by Chernenko, his a completely unknown name. His election has been commented by political humorists in Hungary:

"Question: Why has he been named Secretary General?

Answer Nr1: Because his son would not accept the post.

Answer Nr2: Because of all the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union he had the worst records by electro-cardiograph."

This joke had a morale to communicate, as he would also been buried within a year. About fifteen years later I would get into my hands the book of former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher about her own life, which would also form the notion maybe it had

been no accident to elect such shaky people to the top, and create an annual meeting opportunity for the leading political persons of the world at the burials, in order to help to proceed the thawing process between East and West. Chernenko has been followed by Gorbachev, and he really changed the image of the Empire.

I have been sent to be present at the commemorating exhibition during its first half. At the exhibition a brake cylinder has been put on show, but our company has another item in the hall, a machining centre with a 5-axis control. The Soviet Ministry of Shipbuilding has been a great potential customer to produce propulsion screws for ships with it (may be, on my drawings from the shipyard).

It has been a wonderful early-spring weather, clear, the sun shining, no wind, and everywhere snow-melt was trickling its way down the drains. Every day in the morning I went to the exhibition and there I was available for customers. I have been accommodated in the "Rossiya" hotel.

At the exhibition there were constant events, seminars, film shows, visits of Russian celebrities and their Hungarian counterparts. There was rumour that during the second week my former boss in the shipyard, who went back to the shipping company, would be present. Alas, it would occur in my absence.

The Gorbachev prohibition has started. A day before I bought a bottle of vodka for my colleagues at home. We drank the spirit with an acquaintance in the evening. The next day I wanted to buy another bottle, but there were none in the shops.

Chapter 12

Assignment Moscow

My further fate was decided by something in 1990, and that was my long-term Moscow assignment starting that year. Two years before, when I met my new boss the very first time, I asked her about my chances to get into the staff of one of the representative offices of the company abroad. She told me frankly that there were more candidates than jobs, but she promised me her help. She did not cheat me. Being also a social activist for our employees under the technical manager she helped to put my name for two offices as possible nominee, for Munich and for Moscow.

Near the end of 1989 I was called by John from the personnel manager's staff. He told me:

"I have a piece of good and a piece of bad news."

"Tell me the bad one first." I did not know what to think of.

"It is impossible."

"Why?"

"Good news first: you are selected for an office-head abroad."

"And what is the bad one?"

"It is Moscow. And besides, you are only one of three candidates."

It has not been a very fine statement, true. My family has not been very fond of Russians -- remember Addis Ababa -- and I did not know how I could serve it to them. After a short pause I told him:

"I can wait a little, if it means another place."

His smile has vanished and he said:

"It is not so simple. You can wait, but it does not mean another place. Take it as an offer for fiancées. There is a rich one, a beautiful one and this third one that can be taken at once."

I understood. The rich one has been the Middle East, in our

case Istanbul, Tehran or Baghdad. There were unlimited possibilities there. They were all promised to other people much nearer to the fire. It has been the same with pretty ones, London, Paris, Munich, Hamburg, they all have been on others' plates. It is pretty to live there compared to the Soviet Union. It was Moscow I could take or leave. But leaving it might have meant I would stay a bachelor.

"I accept Moscow", I answered.

"Do not be unreasonable. See Veronica (my boss), she had never regretted having accepted it." He began to count things I would be able to buy and take home. My mind went in advance of him. I was sure my family would reject coming with me, unless I could offer something in compensation, e.g. avoiding military service that was hanging above my son.

In a month I remained alone in candidacy, my competitors fell out. The first one rejected it, as he expected a GDR mission. The other, Louis R., had lost his wife not long before and his children about 12 to 14 have been too young either to be left home or to be taken abroad without a mother.

Then John called me again and told me the news.

"I am sorry, I do not see how I could convince my family to accept this chance", I answered.

"Good God, do not tell me you are to reject it, too. We would have to find somebody in the same way as last time."

He made my picture whole about it. Veronica had taken the mission in 1981 and her successor had been selected in the person of a girl from one of the traffic departments. She had been replacing Veronica once during her one-month summer holiday. But she found it too long to wait for her turn and she took a job in the Ministry of Transport. Later I will mention this girl also in connection with myself. When Veronica's mission had been completed, there was no successor. From the competitor company a man was bribed to take the place. He has not been fluent in Russian, he had only the knowledge from school. It took him more than a year to catch up with obligations.

Well, my situation has been delicate. I wanted to have a chance for a financially advantageous job, promoting at the same time my career. But I had to accept the probability that my family would not come with me and they would alienate from me in a long time. To make my son come with me at 19 has also been risky. Although he could have learned a foreign language, even he would have the possibility to get a diploma, the most sensitive years of his youth he would spend abroad either to marry a foreigner or to postpone his chances of a well-timed relationship. My attempts to get my family to come with me to Moscow had been a failure. I had to accept the situation. The arrangements have been made for a single man and the company would only gain on it.

Before my move to the place of assignment I had much to do, especially in order to make life for my family easier at home. After that I could concentrate on my mission. In June I flew out to Moscow to survey conditions and to measure the apartment. I have been allowed to replace the 9-year-old furniture, but later this permission has been cancelled. It had been purchased and transported there by Veronica, who acquired the apartment at the beginning of her term. My predecessor, Joe B., has met me at the airport and taken me both to our office and to the flat, but helped me nothing otherwise. The office had been shared with another firm, actually our only competitor. Each firm had a representative in the office. It has been situated just outside the inner road-ring, on the avenue leading to the Foreign Ministry building. That area has been called Dorogomilovsky Rayon (district), for this reason the street is Bolshaya Dorogomilovskaya Ulitsa. It is only a mile long, it connects the inner road-ring with the Kutuzovsky Prospekt (avenue). Its middle section gives place for the Kievsky Vokzal (railway station). The office had been rented to us by the agency of our Ministry of Foreign Trade having in Moscow an independent status, unlike in other countries, where commercial units are only departments of the embassies. Actually our office has been an apartment in a building for foreigners, on the ground floor there had been a shop in the hands of a Hungarian retailer. Our office had two telephone lines -- both inter-

national in the Soviet sense, i.e. western countries could not have been available -- and a telex connection with a rented telex machine, a truly international line.

A small Moscow guide

It is worth to make some explanation about the character of settlement of Moscow and about roads in the town. It is an interesting mixture of instinctive and planned city development, instinctive its growth has been during the middle ages, for its wooden structures it has been completely wiped out sometimes in big fires, then a little differently rebuilt. Stone has been used for building only more recently, first at the walls of fortresses like the Kremlin. That has also been the fortified permanent living place of the monarchs, for this reason it has been changed to stone centuries ago. This is also the explanation, why its look has not been altered significantly. The Kremlin takes the form of an irregular pentagon, one of its sides is parallel to the riverside. The river Moskva enters the city at its western limits, it makes big turns, then leaves the town in a south-eastern direction to bring its water into the river Oka. In the centre of the city the river flows from south-west to north-east, with the Kremlin lying at its north-western bank on top of a small hill. Outside the north-eastern wall of the fortress you find Red Square, originally "Beautiful Square", as the meaning of the word *krasnaya* has gone through a little modification in the recent centuries. The square is made up by four buildings, one of them is the Kremlin at the longer side, as I mentioned, with the Mausoleum of Lenin near the wall, and in the wall itself there is the burial place of important statesmen with their urns walled up. On the opposite side of the square you find the department store GUM, but recently it has become more of a commercial centre with a lot of independent shops. On the south-eastern end of the long square the Vasily Blazhenny Cathedral has been built, that is a very important building, but doesn't look like one. It is not bigger than a small village church. And its walls that look very fine on colour slides, are only covered with colourful plaster, resembling mostly to coloured dry mud. The fourth side of the

square is made by a really Russian style building of unified red colour. At that time it has been used commonly by the Museum of History and Lenin Museum. The latter has recently given its place to a fashion institution.

The geometrical centre of the town is Red Square, or rather some old houses near the square left intact at the construction of the hotel "Rossiya". One of them is the House of Envoys. Here Ivan the Terrible made envoys from foreign countries wait, until they became so soft that they were ready to accept any conditions, even if they were quite different from those included in their letters of mission. At that time when Mongols were still at large and there were fears of attacks, the enlargement and development of the town happened always behind closed walls, in a limited space. Outside the walls any settlement would be impossible to defend from attacks, there were only fortified complexes out-of-town, as monasteries for monks and convents for nuns. Such a convent is Novodyevichi, today functioning only to a certain extent, but it can be visited as a tourist attraction. It was out-of-town, and had to suffer some sieges. The fortified wall around the town has made an almost perfect circle with a length of seven miles. After the disappearance of the wall it became a circle of road, today it is known as the Inner Circle, an endless highway of twice six lanes. In Russian it is called Sadovoye Koltso, i.e. Garden Ring. Its name comes from the time of Peter the Great, the town became an open one at that time, people dared to settle outside the wall. On the outer side of today's Inner Ring large mansions have been built by nobles having money and the consent of the Czar for it. But the monarch was very strict in forbidding construction at the street front, the owners had to create large gardens in front of their mansions. This way, garden beside garden has been created and the road got its name. Some of these estates that were lucky enough after the Revolution to get into the ownership of a public institution, can be seen today and they are really fine 18th century treasures.

History repeated itself once more, when the town grew out the outer highway ring. That time the length of the perimeter was a-

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round seventy miles. From this you can estimate the size of the city, its diameter is nearly 20 miles. The outer circle is a little oval, its north-south axis is longer. Inside this circle the nearly eight million inhabitants of Moscow (*Moskvichi* in Russian), and, of course, the many million employees and visitors try to get their places. About ten years ago the city grew out this circle too, the highway ring is not equal to the city limit any more, there are protrusions outside, like bubbles. Until these places were called *zagorod* (out-of-town) there were mainly recreation sites here, as there were so many brooks dammed in order to get water and fishing ponds, that people could find places to swim, to boat or simply to make a picnic. Nowadays you must drive a lot of miles out-of-town to find a place really far from civilisation. About Moscow I am going to give more information, but let's now return to my trip of reconnaissance.

My apartment has been in an ordinary apartment house, i.e. all my neighbours have been locals. It has been situated next to the French embassy, behind the Ministry of Interior and the National Bank of the S.U. A typical Soviet apartment house, it has been comfortable in the local sense -- 62 degrees F during heating season in the flat, as I would learn in my first winter -- with 3 rooms, a kitchen -- no store for food reserve --, a bathroom and a tiny toilet. The L-shaped corridor led from the biggest room to the kitchen, all the other rooms had their doors on it, except the balcony-room being over the biggest one. I checked all and found that all the furniture were ripe for replacement, except one cupboard of GDR make, bought two years before. I took the approximate measurements and drank tea offered by the hostess. As I understood they have been up to their ears with Russians.

My boss has not been happy with my report. Freshly returning from his second 4-year mission from Tehran -- one of the rich fiancées -- he has been named head of the group managing domestic and abroad offices. I did not want to ask him how old furniture in his Tehran flat had been when he changed it and to whom the old one had been sold out. He would not let me buy a complete set of furniture. He instructed me to move in and, in case of complete failure

with single items, I would be allowed to change them. He has also been negative in the question of wallpapers -- I have been informed that there was a shortage of it in Moscow -- to take it with me for maintenance, as well as a TV-set.

My last weeks home have been spent on various departments all over the company to get enough experience. It has been useful as, after my arrival in the Moscow office, those people would be my partners. I had to take all my money from the bank for a TV-set and a VCR. Together with their original packing I gave it into our duty-free transit store. Also a couple of wooden chests with my belongings have been given there, all to be sent out by truck to Moscow.

On August 1 1990 I collected my baggage -- about 150 pounds, I had a ticket for excess weight -- and hired the former husband of Margaret, our neighbour, a private taxi driver, to transport me to the airport with his ancient Polish FIAT 125.

At the land of shortages and privileges

My flight has not been bad, but the arrival was hard. First I had to queue up -- earlier there was nothing like that -- before passport check, then wait for my baggage to come out of the tunnel. When I left Budapest, it was hot, I have been dressed accordingly. In Moscow there was a weather not cool, but my suit has been too thin. At last all my baggage was together. Looking for a carriage I discovered that to get one you had to pay 1 rouble. I had no Soviet currency with me, I was to get my money from Joe B., my predecessor. With my seven pieces of baggage I crept through customs first and then through the exit gate. There Joe met me and took half my load. He took my case easily, he had very little empathy, it was just a funny story to recount later to his friends, how it happened when I arrived.

We had an overlapping time of two weeks, he would leave on August 15. His family had already flew home, he was left to arrange his moving home alone. This was one of the reasons why so little of the planned practical training about office issues has realized, he has spent all his time managing his own matters.

I was to sleep in the office, one of the rooms was a bureau with two desks, a telex table, a file locker and a kitchen table with a typewriter. The other room was for night guests. An out-of-order sofa, two armchairs, a coffee table, a conference table with chairs and a set of wardrobes along the wall. All have been old, but still working, except the sofa.

The office had another guest, Louis R., my would-be successor, who had been one of my competitors, only he stepped back for family troubles. He has been there to have a practice in Russian language after his course and to help Joe in managing the business for both companies, as the representative of the other one has been on

holiday, and the one having been sent to do all for the other company has been doing his own business. During daytime he was supposed to be in the office, he was the former representative of the co-tenant company, but, as I mentioned already, he was more absent than present, doing his own business. The man on holiday had been serving for one year, he has generally been perfect in Russian issues, as he had been studying in Moscow, he has had a lot of acquaintances all over the empire. From my arrival the sofa would be mine, Louis would sleep on a foldable bed.

Following my arrival that was a kind of Odyssey, my first visit has not been to the office, but the agency building to take our lunch. I have not been in a big need of that, as our airlines gave us a hot meal for lunch, but Joe left the office early to meet me and he had to eat something. I utilised this time to visit the husband of my niece in his office. I also met by chance one of my former companions on my trips, the import executive from the commercial division of ship-yards. He was on a replacement trip for their representative. Our country is not a large one, circles of a certain language and field of business can make a group of acquaintances very little indeed. Almost all of the people I met on business all over the world had come from the same team and had been familiar to me. It was the same here in Moscow.

Arriving in the office from the agency I wanted to change my suit and shoes. In my suitcases I only carried as much as I considered necessary for the couple of weeks, until my chests would arrive. I found the suit, but my shoes and necktie have been stolen. Plundering on Soviet airports had been a concern for a time. On domestic flights suitcases have even been packed in wrapping paper. My colleagues standing around me were laughing at me heartily. They advised me to go at once to the Kutuzov Avenue -- behind the office building -- and buy a pair of shoes, if I found any. Fortunately I found one pair suitable and bought it. It was an over-light pair of moccasins made in Azerbaijan. A tie I would buy only the next day.

In a week Veronica would come to arrange the office take-over

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from my predecessor. A check of inventory would also happen. I have known Moscow by foot well, Louis has been amazed by my talent. As he had to step back from this mission, he had been promised he would be my successor and was also promised a month of stay in the office for his language skills every summer. As I would write about it later, this gentlemen's agreement has been forgot quickly -- sure, where have been gentlemen? At last the two weeks passed, Joe B. went to the airport, the car has been handed over to me and it was my first trip with it to take it back to town. Soon I would have another trip, not very pleasant. Louis went with Joe and Veronica home.

In the office it was my first evening alone, as after working time Joe S., who has come back in the meantime from holiday, also went home. I remained alone. At late afternoon an early dusk came. It was a great thunderstorm with hailstones. I have seen vast rains in Africa, once there remained about two tons of hails under the gutter of our house on the ground, that melted away in two days, but that day it was different. Flood was flowing on the street, people were pushing there cars as they went out-of-order for the flood. In half an hour it all has passed, but in the TV evening news -- I have not seen, but Joe said the next morning -- and the next day's newspapers all have been reported. About 300 feet from us there was the Kiev Railway Station, with a junction of 3 METRO lines. The flood has gone into the uppermost line, stopping trains and flowed further downward, until all the three lines have been lamed.

My second trip with the service car happened some days after that big storm. Until that day I didn't have any desire to use it, as I was alone for all the issues to learn them profoundly. I was glad to be able to go out shopping in the evening. On those walks I bought food for my dinner and next lunch. After that I chew myself through the daily paper "Izvestiya". But let's come back to the car, there was another big rain expected again, when Misha Bezsmertny arrived in our office with a friend. I had to take them to Misha's home in the very down-town of the city after my working time. Actually he has not been my acquaintance, but that of Veronica, but Russian friends

connect their relationship to official position, this was the reason, why he wanted me to become the same middleman for his as Veronica had been during her term. I had met him in Budapest, even we had made friends. He was a painter, his surname meant immortal, very good for an artist. Vera called him simply Misha. For his look he could have been a character from any novel of Tolstoy.

They moved to Hungary in 1989. Main cause of this has been that his wife became too famous at home, she couldn't practise in her field as an oculist. She had made a revolution with her ideas with short-sightedness some years before, her colleagues hadn't hinder her, only sat back and watched. As soon as it had become clear that her method is all but healing, they had begun to air their criticisms. What she had actually done had been the following in essence: if the patient had needed a spectacle of minus four, she prescribed him plus four, as she had said, "to let nature overcome itself". The poor eyes had had to get accustomed to that twice as foreign surroundings as before. Virtually there had been results, but, as soon as the patient had been declared healed, his eyes went back to their original condition, only the finance of the former patient had become worse by the not very small sum of treatment. The woman had a very good sense for business, it didn't matter that everybody could be cheated only once, there were fresh birds more than enough. She only decided to go abroad when the whole trade turned against her. She carried on the same practice in Hungary, and a pair of years later she would go on to Germany. Her success must prove that everyone can only learn on his or her own loss (I mean the patients). In Hungary Misha was doing his own art, painted his canvases, and Valentina did her own business.

That evening, when Misha visited me, it has been no unselfish call, he needed to send something to Hungary, and it was me who had to make it transported to Veronica, using the opportunities of our company. When we finished business, I was to take them to the apartment of Misha and Valentina in the inner city of Moscow.

Rain has started to fall, soon it became another cloudburst. I

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could find the way only by their guidance. The place was somewhere behind Kirov Street in a narrow alley on the 2nd or 3rd floor. Being in an old-time house, their flat has been divided by a ceiling into two stories, both with a height of ten feet. Upstairs they had their traditional Russian sauna. I would not take part in their enjoyment, but they both went into the hot bath to sweat. Afterwards they were walking up and down in the flat covered only in bathing-wraps, when the woman, the oculist arrived.

As long as they enjoyed their sauna they left me with the TV switched on, but the program didn't attract me, I looked around in the room. I have been amazed to see all their properties from real works of art to electronic wonders from abroad. They have not been ordinary poor Soviets living on 100 to 120 roubles in a month. As long as I would be living in that town, I wouldn't want to find them, but they would always find me as they would always have a desire at me and my company. It would be impossible to hide from them.

My living in the office has lasted, until maintenance activities in the apartment -- painting, wallpapering, repairs of taps -- have been finished. I had bought two cartons of Czech beer, and every day the workers have got their share. Work has been started only after the departure of Joe. I began with pushing furniture to the middle of the rooms and covering them. People finished it in three weeks, after that one more week of intermittent period followed, during which I transformed the flat to my taste.

The biggest room I wanted to use as a sitting room. I left there the big foldable double-sofa and both arm-chairs of the same set with a small rolling seat. Also the TV-video chest remained in the corner at the window. The relatively new wardrobe I took from the neighbouring room and put it up in the sitting room. It had a recess in the middle for the sofa. The opposite long wall I relieved from the line of wardrobes which one by one were taken to the other side of the same wall in the neighbouring room. That I wanted to arrange as a dining room with dining table and chairs in the middle. To the window in that room I put one of the desks in the flat. I have never

used it as a desk, but my aquarium has been sitting on it.

The third room has got both single sofas from the dining room, and I left there the other desk. It has been a long room, at one end the balcony-door, at the other end the door to the sitting room. I made it my bedroom. At one of the walls along I put both sofas and made the one at the door my bed. The other long wall had only the desk at its middle. Shelves that I wanted to put near the desk took one year at home to buy and send out. The old sofas in the bedroom have been lent to the wall and they waited for permission to be sold. It is unnecessary to say, they found their buyer much before the arrival of the permission, but in this place it has been the practice.

During that final week of mine accommodated in the office my things have come by a truck. The driver helped me to place my things in the office, but to take them home I had no help. Only Joe S. helped me once in pushing the furniture, but his back has been overloaded and I would not expect him to do more. He helped me anyway to sell the sofas.

I took everything over to my home from the office myself with my service car and in the middle of September I have been settled in my new home. During my first weeks in Moscow I called my wife as frequently as possible. It has not been easy, as the line have always been engaged and there was a two-hour time difference between the two cities. Our calls had become more scarce and we called each-other only when we had something particular. My job had become busier after the relative ease of the first weeks, it was partly my fault, as I wasn't driving customers away as it had been happening earlier, but caught them when I could, I even tried to open up new areas. Well, it has not been an easy work, an empire is always hard to reshape, thus my job was similar to that of chewing myself through a mountain of porridge in a folk tale. In the evening I have been busy with reading my newspapers -- the company subscribed for two dailies and a weekly for me --, watching TV-news and putting my things into order.

Lunch I took in the canteen of the Hungarian Foreign Trade Of-

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office with the representative of Volán, our co-tenant. With Joe we sometimes made detours at our return from the agency after lunch. In those cases I bought necessary things, instruments, room-antennas for TV-sets, etc. You always had to buy things you saw, otherwise you would have to go without, when you needed. It was the S.U., after all, with its suppliers' market and shortages. I bought the small antennas, as my cable from central network brought me nothing. With that small one to look out of the window I could pre-program 6 different stations.

Baku

In the last days of September I got a circular about an international conference and exhibition in Baku. It was organised by the government of Azerbaijan for all private and state entrepreneurs from all over the world. For those who applied before deadline, travel and accommodation has been free. The circular has come to me late so, alas, only the accommodation in Baku would be free of charge for me. I telexed at once home and got permission to participate. I gave in my application and arranged air ticket.

That is very simple to say, but its organisation has been strictly determined. Foreigners could take any service only through the appropriate service company (UPDK from the abbreviation of the Russian name), and they had to go through the official labyrinth to get access. The first step was made when the councillor in the Facility Manager job of our Foreign Trade Office (actually he represented the Hungarian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Moscow) wrote an application letter to UPDK. I had to deliver it personally to the responsible executive in the department specialised to the proper service. Air ticket was to be ordered in the ticket bureau, where about ten young women and men were sitting behind a semicircular counter. There was no classification according to countries, I got first time to a young lady called Valentina (Valya in popular), in later cases I would find her always, she would always be very kind, even she would accept a phone call from me for reservation, the letter would be delivered only at payment time. It goes without saying, I would always bring her a small gift in order to maintain good will, either some sweets or a deodorant spray, even theatre tickets for the performance of the Bolshoi.

The Baku conference lasted for one week. In Moscow it was already cold weather, in the morning temperature fell to 20 degrees F.

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Joe S. took me to the airport Domodedovo in his own car -- our co-tenant did not provide a service car for their representative, but refunded his travel costs -- and helped me through the checks. It was my first domestic flight during this mission.

I really needed his help that time. Soviet domestic air traffic was different from domestic checking orders in any other countries. Although there was no passport control, average citizens of the country were thoroughly checked, as movement in the country wasn't completely free. I was exempt from that procedure, when I presented my *sluzhebnyaya kartochnka* (ID) equal to an ID for diplomatic persons. This small card would even help me to register my car in Kiev three years later, although Ukraine would become an independent country to that time. Luggage was checked only for particular things, e.g. weapons, but diplomatic persons were free from that too.

Getting through the airport checking I said good-bye to Joe and took a look around the "Soviet transit room". It was a room sized about 20 feet square and I noticed a strange thing: most people carried their suitcases to a table, behind which two women were standing and packing them up in rough paper and paper strings for 50 kopeks each. I didn't have any suitcase with me, took only my attaché case along, well stuffed. Later I would learn that it was against airport magpies.

After a short time there came a hostess and the door was unlocked. The soldier guarding it let us pass. We descended by the stairs and on the concrete followed the hostess to the air-plane. The flight was event-less, that time it was still Aeroflot that operated the planes, the company has not been divided yet, there were enough funds to maintain the equipment. All through the two-hour flight the weather was fine. The Caucasus made an excellent sight through the window, it is a wonderful land. Alas, since that time it has become one of the least safe places in the world, mainly because of the Chechens.

In Baku weather was fine, temperature about 70 degrees F, no clouds. From the airport transport for foreigners has been organised centrally and also it was the case with room distribution in the hotel. I have been selected from the lists by my data to be a partner of the Ministry of Transport. There was another Hungarian specialist, he was directly from home. We were both cared for by one of the deputy ministers and a factory manager excellently.

Every evening we were taken to some restaurants and were offered fine dishes and fresh fruit. The interesting conversation during dinner opened us a world similar to Arabian Nights. Of course, I have got other impressions during that time too. Both our hosts found their places in the empire excellently, but, at the same time, something inside them was revolting against Russian hegemony. They understood Russian better than their own mother tongue, one of them even mentioned that he always dreamed in Russian. What made them happy was that their children resisted the attraction of Soviet way of life, the young people tried to use the institutions of high education in their home country, Azerbaijan. It goes without saying, they were more at home with their mother tongue than their parents. Also, they hadn't forgot the operation of infantry spades, when, around the end of the '80s, not completely in the sense of Mr. Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness), a large crowd in Baku demonstrating for their independence were dissolved by Russian military. The spades caused the death of 93 demonstrators, those victims has been buried in the National Pantheon, our hosts took us there too. Although the republic would join the CIS after the dissolving of the Soviet Union (out of cautiousness) in spite of their independence, at last they would choose their own road. Leaving their Azeri alphabet of mainly Cyrillic characters created after the 1917 revolution, they would return -- or rather switch, as before the revolution they used Arabic writing -- to the Turkish script. Well, Azeri means only a nationality within Turkish peoples, their language is almost pure Turkish.

Coming back to my narrative, the ministry also prepared an agreement for future co-operation possibilities. They were full of ener-

gy, but, to tell the truth, nothing will have been realised from their side. The dissolve of the Soviet Union and, even before that, strict bureaucracy in the government hindered their arrangement to carry on what has been started. There were cultural performances of Azeri folk music and dance, as well as session meetings to bring local and foreign participants together. An enormous dinner ended the program.

My private impressions have been awfully mixed. Most of the participants, especially from the Moscow offices of Eastern-Bloc countries, have been idlers from the type of party activists. On the airport in Baku I met a GDR “businessman”, who had a lot of Azeri partners. During the whole week I have not seen him in a sober state. Goods in the shops have either been out-of-date or of poor quality. I wanted to buy a small piece of carpet for souvenir, in Moscow I had seen one that had got my attention. In Baku I couldn't find anything similar, there were only poor quality cotton covers with dyed patterns. At the same time, I discovered an accessory for my Practica camera that has been forgotten at its place. I bought it, because it made my equipment complete.

Their landscape is beautiful. The town had been built in an environment similar to that of Naples. It is situated on the shore of a giant bay surrounded by steep hills. Houses are built on the slopes above each other, up to the wooded top of the hills. The sea is clean as drinking water, although the presence of oil mining is sensed by smell coming from the sea. The breeze takes it to your nostrils from rigs over the horizon. The city centre is on the seaside in a unique way. A whole line of government buildings are seen on the seashore in a gentle curve following the waterline.

The country and the town has its history and myths. There is the Maiden Tower about 200 feet from the sea with a legend that a girl, daughter of a monarch, had been locked in to prevent her escape with her lover. She had committed suicide by jumping into the sea. It had been at the seashore at that time. Years later on the Kazakh side of the Caspian I would see other proofs of the decreased water-

level. More than fifty miles on that side is utilised for oil exploitation which is a former sea-bottom.

There were attractions in the town. There was the fine fortress, now open to tourists with granite walls and round bastions. Besides in one of its cellar rooms a fine national restaurant was open that we visited with our two hosts. I walked up one hill beside the fortress and saw a suburb similar to poor quarters of Addis Ababa.

From Baku I could not call my office, phone lines have been terrible. Such was Soviet technical standard in communication that time. On the other hand, you had to slot in only 25 kopeks for an inter-urban call. For the local 2 kopeks it looked much, but for the same sum I couldn't have called someone locally abroad. Well, this way I couldn't notice Joe about my coming, when I arrived at Moscow, I caught a taxi to the city.

Weather has been similar in Moscow than one week before. I found my car opened the next morning, the thief might have had the wrong moment for his attempt, as he was certainly disturbed. He wanted to take the radio, but could not finish his work. My first drive led me to the workshop of the Automotive Society's head office. There they repaired the damaged lock and took the radio out of the car. I placed it on the shelf in my apartment. In the car it would have been only a further temptation for other thieves. Otherwise Joe B., my predecessor, also changed his head when he had the radio mounted in the car: the antenna was broken off the top, so he left it in that state without replacement. Locals would not bear the better financial situation of foreigners.

Winter days in Moscow with meat-schedule

It is worth to outline peculiarities of every-day Moscow-life. The end of 1990 has brought changes in our conditions. By an agreement the two countries switched from the old fixed idea of transferable roubles to US dollars in international settlements. It meant all our payments had to be made in dollars from January 1 1991. We have received our salary in dollars, but we would have accounts in the bank both in roubles and dollars. To pay for lunch in the agency we had to have dollars. This was the factor that changed completely my habits -- both in meal and work ethics --. Under rouble conditions we closed the office at two o'clock and hurried to get into the canteen open only to two-fifteen. We did it to avoid the jam in the canteen around noon.

As I mentioned, in the new situation I would have to pay in dollars for my lunch. Only I didn't have any as that far my dollars had been sent onto my account in Budapest, I haven't needed it in Moscow. I could take my salary in dollars from the company safe first time on February 1. That way for a whole month I had to go without shopping in the agency café, i.e. the main status symbol for the Hungarians assigned to Moscow. The shop in our office building has been abandoned by the Hungarian retailer, they would not want to risk their dollars in a country like that. Funny, others would start their businesses exactly after the conversion time. There remained Russian shops with their fixed prices and shortage of goods as before. Of the food purchased in week-days I prepared meals for myself enough for the next week. Evenings I took some from the refrigerator and warmed it. And in place of earlier hot lunch I consumed my sandwich around noon with tea boiled in the office. As for my work ethics, I didn't need two hours for my lunch, I lost only some minutes to eat my sandwich. It looked all confused with this new environment, but in a short time it would be plain.

The shop in our office building has been abandoned as I mentioned. Others had good results in dealing with Russians, the best proof for that was the new company to operate the shop. An invitation for tender was issued through the Hungarian Ministry of Trade, and the small Hungarian company to be awarded with it made a good profit of it, and acquired new customers for the Hungarian export goods. Those buyers were unknown before that as they were not registered in the official lists. They were small Russian trading and producing firms in the country. Trading could be done with them either on dollar base or in barter. The turnover was considerable. Maybe, I can write more of it later.

From the first days of my term something started to change in respect of orderliness in the office. First, as I didn't like the careless style my predecessor handled important information, I established a precise register for traffic data on the territory of the office -- it meant the whole Soviet Union. The other change has been partly a consequence of this precision, partly the result of our switching over to a dollar-based settlement with the S.U. The number of trucks began to increase. At the end of the year 1990 it reached a monthly 180 to 200 trucks, the majority of those with a consignee within the S.U. -- called loco --, but there were some in transit to Finland. There was an excellent advisory-system by our agreement with Sovinter. Every border station reported us by telex plate numbers, exporters, goods and consignees for all trucks entering or leaving the S.U. every day. When the S.U. fell apart, avisoes became unreliable and I had to force our own traffic departments to send us regular avisoes to be able to do my job.

The third change has been caused by Mr. Gorbachev's series of nods, the first of which was the agreement in Stavropol (nicknamed by the press Stavrapallo) with Mr. Kohl of Germany, and which led at last to the re-unification of Germany. That nod of his cost Germany 14 billion marks in humanitarian aid, mainly raw pork carried by our refrigerator trucks from the GDR to Moscow, and later to other towns. During my nearly 10-year-long employment with Hungarocamion I have never seen such a well-organised project. The

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German slaughter-houses -- first from the GDR, but later also from the Western part of the country -- organised their activity in a just-in-time way, our company has been given the schedule for sending the needed number of trucks to the right place precisely in the right hour. The reason in it was to let pork get to the right temperature for loading into the truck, and there in a suspended state further cool down to 36 degrees F. The driver was to keep this temperature all along the route, until the ware reached the Soviet store. There was no hitch in sight in the early autumn weather, when the project was to start, but its launching was delayed until January, and at below zero ambient temperatures the inside of the truck had to be heated considerably to avoid freezing of the meat that could have been caused partly by severe cold seeping through the insulated walls, partly by outside air through ventilation. Freezing techniques would have prescribed basically different treating. Goods should have been loaded in at zero F. Problem generally occurred, when an engine in winter began to falter (to stop with no restart), there was nothing to do against cold, there followed forced freezing by opening every holes and gaps on the frigo truck. Some details I can mention later at the appropriate place.

This has been a big project won by our company from below the noses of many competitors. At the same time it has almost damaged my first chance to see my family after five months. From reports of the office in previous years I could see that the end of December and beginning of January was a dead season usually. As Joe S. promised me to be on duty, I sent a telex to Louis D. asking for a leave during Christmas on my own expenses. The answer was a rejection with the argument that before Christmas the above project would start carrying pork to Moscow. This annoyed me and I called Veronica to get details of the truth. She said it was a practical joke prepared for me exclusively.

I decided to take the risk. I asked Joe S. to cover me, bought the air ticket at the Aeroflot and went home. The three days of Christmas and the next day I spent at home and then flew back. On the last day of the year I called Louis D. and wished him a happy New

Year. Silence in the receiver revealed that he was surprised. It could mean either that he thought I was home -- that would also mean, Veronica betrayed me, too -- or that he thought I was angry with him for the rejection. He did not know that I saw through him as if he had been of glass. Or, as our popular saying goes: I saw through him as blind man sees through sieve.

With the new year the project has started. Before that I have seen only two frigoes carrying medicine, but then their equipment was working on the opposite: in cold weather they heated air to prevent freezing of the cargo. Now every week about 30 to 50 came with fresh pork meat. It has been really well organised. My work became multiplied by numerous avises sent to traffic departments and at the same time to the deliverer that his goods have arrived. It was then that we decided with Joe to move our telex machine from the office room to the other. Its constant noise made conversations by phone impossible on the poor lines.

But the transfer of the machine also confused us sometimes. When somebody called us to the telex by bell sound, we had to go over and see who it was. Once a call drove me to the machine and it was Mr. Bartók, a young man in charge with frigoes. As he tried to type something with untrained hands, I cut into his typing and began to write the answer with my experienced fingers. He read it and typed back:

“How did you know what I wanted?”

I answered: “I guessed that a composer plays only the frigo.”

The big quantity of meat coming for the Gorbachev nod began to cause problems. In classical Soviet times no goods, least of all food, were numerous. Always there was a shortage and this was the normal situation. Meat in the butcher's went for 2 roubles a kilo, tenderloin for 7 roubles. Only, you could not buy them because of the shortage. On the market their price was about 5 to 6 times higher. And there was enough as customers had not much money. As the fine German fresh meat began to flow in by the thousand tonnes a month, the old meat from freezing stores came to the market and a

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little more frequently also to the butcher's, and fresh one was frozen. It would not make any big confusion. But after two months stores became full and the "organised dealers" would not bring more to the market for fear of a price fall.

Every day there were trucks stopped instead of unloaded. When we phoned to the spot -- Joe was doing part of my work for no extra salary -- the girls available told us there were many trucks, they were to wait for their turn. By whole trains meat began to creep to far-away places even to Siberia, but supply was bigger than place. It could have been not so hard with frozen meat, but fresh meat was strictly programmed as for time, temperature, etc. Real problem would come with mild weather and at last the project would have to be delayed. You can guess the excuse from consignees: Russian veterinarian doctors were not content with the hygiene of German slaughter-houses. Just for illustration: I got my first information on the matter from the Russian TV, the announcer lady was reading the communiqué with an earnest face; the next piece of news was about transport of the meat to Siberia in frigo railway carriages, the halved pigs were drawn along in the mud before loaded into the cars. As if the two reports had been made deliberately after one-another.

In January I had my first chance to try real Russian winter. My first experience was glossy ice. There was a rainy evening and until morning the temperature fell below freezing point. An inch of snow fell on the ice. I knew I had to refuel the car. It had to be done on route to the office. I drove through the Crimean Bridge and a quarter of a mile later I wanted to make a U-turn to find the route to the embankment. Here the river is flowing to the South, it is not far from the Novodevichi Convent, outside the wall of which you could find one of the filling stations set apart for foreigners. Instead of a U-turn I made a full O-turn and had to try again. Fortunately I was alone on the inner ring, otherwise I could have had trouble. The same evening on my homeward route -- generally I took a different one by the Ministry of Defence home -- I found my car swinging from left to right and vice versa. This phenomenon has been caused by the same

two factors as the early morning event. One of them was the slippery road, the other my summer tires. When the wheel slips, the car can take any position on the road. It was a very narrow situation as on both sides there were hundreds of cars running in the same direction as me. It would be very easy to make a bump on one of them. With much difficulty I brought it into a straight run and the next morning I called the man at home in charge of service cars and asked for a set of winter tires.

The second lesson has been cold. First it was only around 0 degrees F. It could not cause any trouble. Then air temperature went lower and the car started with difficulty. At minus 10 degrees F the battery was not able to turn the engine and, at the same time, give enough voltage on the ignition. It was a Wednesday. I went to the office by METRO, in the evening Joe helped me to try to jump it, but we did not manage. Even I have got some chilblains on my hand from metallic parts. I phoned in vain to the workshop of the Hungarian Trade Agency, they "tele-diagnosed" the problem as failure of my starter and wouldn't come to help. I would have to wait till the weather warmed.

Cold made the car fool-proof against thieves, and also against me. The lock froze and sprays did not work. I learned quickly from my local neighbour how to solve that problem. With the side of my hand I rubbed the lock and the key was in my other hand in a warm place. After 20 seconds of rubbing the key went in easily and the lock turned. I didn't have to use any magic sprays after that, it was a completely safe method, even I myself got warmer from rubbing

My tucks have not been exempt from the practical jokes of cold, either. Some of them had not been properly prepared for the winter, their brake systems seized, inexperienced drivers did not know that Soviet Diesel fuel needs a certain percentage of petrol as additive in winter. About 10 trucks have been grounded. Sovinter has been in trouble with their own vehicles, they could not come to our service. In Finland, however, there were excess return loads and I had been instructed to send some of my empty trucks over. I called the drivers

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of three trucks into the office and showed them their Finnish traffic road licences:

“You are to make for Finland, but these papers you will get only, when you have put the grounded frigoes into motion.”

Drivers hated coming to Moscow -- it would change in a couple of months --, but liked the Finland route. They did a good job and all my trucks became mobile in a day. One of the frigo drivers, a man not much before his retirement, had spent two nights and a day between in his unheated cabin in minus 33 degrees F during night and 0 degree F in daytime.

On Friday evening I took my battery out of the car and in my flat put it on a charger. It needed five hours on full current. In the morning, in spite of minus 20 degrees F the engine started at once. I went to see my people on the parking place, all were right. The Sovinter was still working on their own trucks, I couldn't rely on them then as before.

This cold wave has not lasted more than a week. As usually in Moscow during winter, temperature remained between 20 degrees F and freezing point. The air was usually very dry, my Russian device measuring temperature and relative humidity showed me in my room 62 degrees F and 25 percent of humidity, 5 percent below the lower limit of comfort field. As the upholstery of the sofa in the my sitting room was made of synthetics, when I stood up charged, the few steps to the bathroom were not enough for discharging through the air, the water-tap gave me large static shocks. In summer humidity is generally very high, then discharge through the air is quick.

As soon as I settled down in my flat my hobby of going to theatre surfaced. Some months earlier, when Veronica was there to arrange my take-over, she went to the hotel built for the 1980 Olympic Games. It was the latest one of the city, named Mezhdunarodnaya, meaning International. She had had a habit of swimming and going to sauna during her term. Her acquaintance was still there and let her in, a big deed as it was only for hotel guests. She introduced me to him and I asked him how to get into contact with somebody from

the Service Bureau to get theatre tickets. He promised me to call back later.

I have already lost my hope he would, when he did at last. He said, the lady had left the hotel for the municipal ticket office and it took time for him to find her traces. I called the lady, Olga, on the given number and she said, she would call us, when she got something. She did it and offered tickets for all of us, I mean, the family of Joe and me. It was an uninteresting opera performance, an extremely long one. It has been Prokofyev's "Engagement in the Monastery", on the play of a 19th-century English playwright. Anyway, from that time on, every month at least twice I had the possibility to see good performances. I esteemed highest classic Russian ballet and opera, such as "Swan Lake" from Chaikovsky, or the similarly staged French ballet "Giselle". It has also been a fine experience to sit through the performance "Don Quixote" from Minkus. That I saw in the Stanislavsky Musical Theatre, but the ensemble was that of the Bolshoi. Minkus had been an Austrian of Czech origin, who had been the musical director of Bolshoi for many years in the 19th century. Well, I don't want to list all that I had the possibility to visit, I don't even remember every one of them.

In the spring of that year (1991) an English-language weekly sprang to life about topics of the city involving foreigners. Places where they appeared, such as hotels, banks, blocks for foreigners to live or having an office, a large package of the paper was laid down as free prey. I read it through if I had time, as theatre programs were included and, besides, it has not been censored, there were pieces of information in it, absent from the Russian language press, e.g. I was reading first time in that paper about a policemen nicknamed "The Needle", who was stopping cars with yellow plates -- for foreigners who didn't have diplomatic status, i.e. company representatives coming from Western countries -- late in the evening, and was demanding 50 dollars, otherwise, he said, he would draw a blood sample from the driver for an alcoholic test. Just to make his menace more real, he was keeping a syringe in his hand and another policeman behind him kept his aim at the stopped driver with a

submachine gun. Nobody thought at that time that it was only the very beginning to the limitless corruption spreading everywhere after the dissolve of the Soviet Union and experienced today. Well, in the English language weekly, there was a piece of news in one of the issues that CNN could be received by an ordinary UHF antenna. I tried it and could program it into my set. To tell the truth, I didn't watch the TV so much that I could have become significantly more informed. If I had time, I went out and looked for sights in and around the city.

This way it happened that at the beginning of June I visited the Botanical Garden with an acquaintance. It lies at the northern limit of Moscow and had been the property of the counts Sheremetev. The goal of our walk has been suggested by my companion. She knew Moscow fairly well. Before she accepted the offer of a private company for this term to represent them and manage the Hungarian grocery, she had been working with the largest, earlier even the only, tourist agency of our country. She had been travelling all over the world and had a good talent for organising events. She was properly prepared for the walk as a guide, with prospectuses, even when we had to catch a tram she had tickets with her to punch. First we walked through the Botanical Garden.

I have always been fond of forests and this garden is more a woods than a park. At the limit of the park there was a lake separating it from VDNH (exhibition) premises that had belonged to the same estate before the Great Revolution. From the park we went over to see the palace of the former estate, still closed, alas, only its direct surroundings and one big room could be surveyed. She taught me some details about the building, structure and function. I have always been a great fan of cultural tourism. In towns visited I have left out only in Rome -- as I told it in its place -- the visit of museums, galleries or other sights worth its fee. With her I have got a private guide who knew a lot of those details unknown generally even for locals.

Excursions

Already during spring I decided to have a look on the Central Asian Republics of the S.U., being always out of reach for me earlier. I went to see Samarkand and Bokhara. Around May 1 there was a break of 3 days because of May-Day holiday. I bought a ticket to Samarkand, another from there to Bokhara and a third one to the return trip from there to Moscow. I wanted to have two days in Bokhara and one in Samarkand, but the time-table of flights between the Uzbekistani towns turned it the opposite. Through DiplService I could arrange all.

Joe has taken me to the airport and fetched me at arrival. Flights on all three legs have been event-less, I have experienced the well known conditions of Soviet domestic flights. Uzbeks were sitting around me, except a Tajik resembling one of my former colleagues, he talked all the time, didn't give up, until everybody was listening to him. The Uzbeks could have been sun-tanned Hungarians from our Great Plain. In Samarkand a bus took me to the town, I found the hotel easily. There I bought all maps needed for my walks. I have never dreamt it could be so marvellous. The town lies in a basin among great mountains. In clear weather you can see the Pamir over Tajikistan. The town has a history of two and a half thousand years, Alexander the Great had been here and he found a great town even at his time. The hordes of Genghis Khan devastated not only this town, but the whole country, killing or taking into slavery millions of peaceful people. All has been survived by this tough people. It became the seat of Timur Lenk and his successors. His tomb is in the centre of the town. His grandson, Ulugbek, also a monarch, but at the same time a brilliant mind of his time, had built the oldest observatory in the world. It is still in an excellent state after 6 centuries.

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In the centre of the town there is the greatest complex of still working Muslim religious buildings I have seen. It occupies a square almost regular with sides of one thousand feet. Anyway, the four sides are far from identical. They differ not only in shape, but in function, too. You find everything from operational religious institutions to museums to a bazaar of small shops there. At the main entrance of the ensemble there are benches well arranged, where spectators can watch dance performances and listen to the music at given times. Passing through gates in the outer walls you get into the inner court, there the original arrangement of the garden is preserved, it looks very well cared for. The small shops operate in the inner court, where you find really valuable carpets and miniature statuettes near each-other. The small statuettes are very varied, there are caricature-like humorous folk figures, and also little copies of buildings. Architecture of that ancient people has been wonderful. The town has at least a dozen famous ruins or buildings still utilised. All were under reconstruction at my first visit after a long pause in such activities.

From the ensemble of buildings mentioned on route to the airport there was a great bazaar and I walked through it with a feeling I had been there already. I realised, I felt the similarity of it with Mercato in Addis Ababa. It is worth spending some time there. There are rows of shops along the route, where mainly women find goods for themselves, as I haven't seen any stores of technical equipment. I probably haven't found it only. At the same time women cannot get away from them. Beside local cloths there are heaps of different silks, oriental scarves -- if you want scarf, the saleswoman cuts one of the roll, as the whole roll is made up of the same scarves --, here you can find silks with all the patterns of the world. As you walk on the road, you sometimes have to jump aside, as a horse-drawn open omnibus is coming, sometimes more than twenty people on it. Otherwise it has not been the only thing in Samarkand to remind me of the Ethiopian capital.

I took neither buses nor taxis to see the town. Although it was tiring, I went by foot to all places. Weather has not been hot, rain fell

sometimes, but my interest has been limitless. Samarkand is very similar to Addis Ababa both in its location and architecture. People are white, but sun-tanned, with a look to be mistaken for a Hungarian peasant. Their hospitality is enormous, they speak to the stranger as if he were from their own family. It was interesting to see the great sofas of tea-houses made of sheer wood, the size of 7 by 7 feet. Their height is about 3 feet and they have a wooden railing around. People, usually old Uzbeks in their national caps called tubeteyka, are sitting on it in lotus style, drinking tea. Tea-houses are called chaikhanas. Of course, it is not necessary to sit down (or up) to those stages, there are tables in the room, only that more resembles Russian tea-rooms.

I walked through all the time I spent there. You find the tomb of Timur Lenk directly at the Intourist Samarkand hotel. That time I visited it only casually, actually there is not too much to see, if you are not allowed to enter the grave itself. I would manage to do so only two years later, visiting the town with my family. Also there are some churches in ruins at the outskirts of the town, I think, they will be further spoiled, I haven't seen too much efforts to save them. At the same time, some others are cared for, renovated, they will get back their former shapes sooner or later. Some of these latter are so huge, I could see them through the windows of the hotel from many miles. It is very important for these religious structures to have proper maintenance. They are made of earth in some forms of brick, they have a beautiful blue dome covered with ceramic tiles, but in the gaps grass seeds settle soon, some domes look as if they had grown a beard, weeds are so dense. And where plants grow, the raw materials will be spoiled, if not stopped in time.

The small plane of AN-24 took me to Bokhara. Altitude of the flight was about 10,000 feet, the fine sight made me forget the extreme noise of the two turboprops, from which the small plane almost fell into pieces in the air. The country, Uzbekistan is large, especially compared to Hungary, its western border is made by the shore of the Aral Sea, and its other end goes to the Pamir Mountains. Here lies Samarkand and the capital, Tashkent. On the East

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the country is mountainous, on the West there is a great dry desert. Here Bokhara is found, about 200 miles from Samarkand. When the Mongols began their expansion at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, the country was called Khorezm, and its capital had been Bokhara. After breaking in his own tribes, Genghis Khan was looking for new preys, and this land was the first of them.

After my arrival in Bokhara I found a guide on the airport in the person of a taxi driver. He offered to take me all over the town that afternoon for 7 dollars. We agreed, but, when in the afternoon we met, he told me, he had other passengers, too. It became clear that they were my neighbours in Moscow, Frenchmen, working next to my block of apartments in their embassy. We became friends and changed cards, but I have never seen them again, as it is customary with accidental acquaintances.

There was only one memorable detail in the sightseeing by car, the summer palace of the emir a couple of miles from the town. As the driver took us around the town in a short time, so, when I became free, I went myself by foot once more. It was worth much more. I had only a primitive map, but could find my way. One of the funny things: when I wanted to go by a route shown on the map as Communism Street, I found that somebody built a fence across it. Imagine the road to communism a dead end in Bokhara!

The settlement shows the clear signs of being situated within a very dry area. Buildings are covered with a thick layer of dust, that makes all look like an old yellowish black-and-white photograph. The structures of adobe can last to the end of eternity, as they are exposed to no humidity. Even the fortress has been built of the same material. Hard-top streets you find only at places of denser traffic, or, where they have been built recently, all the others are original dirt roads. That is not completely true that they were the original streets, only their direction has remained, the roads are very deep, as the wind has always taken away the loose upper layer. As I walked the dirt streets of the town I found mulberry trees with ripe fruit. I ate them from the tree and remembered the cold

weather in Moscow -- snow was falling as Joe took me to the airport.

If Samarkand was similar to Addis Ababa, Bokhara was even more similar to Assab, the Red Sea harbour town. All streets in the old town were dirt roads, some of them so worn out that ground floor of the houses were level with my shoulder. There were amazing buildings. Most of them within the complex around the former mosque turned tourist hotel turned retail centre of small shops. The complex formed a square with booths, refreshment stands and a tea-house. The popular Uzbek folk hero Nasreddin has a statue in the middle.

From the complex I threaded my route down to the fortress. It was here that the last of the emirs lived, until revolution took his property and drove him away. As I have mentioned, during morning the taxi driver had taken me to the summer palace of the emir and there almost all remained intact, even a museum has been made of it. In a souvenir shop at the entrance to the palace building I bought a funny thing looking like a cap, but it actually was a heat preserving equipment. It had to be put over a tea-pot full of tea and it remained hot for four hours. At the same place I bought a silver bracelet of typical Uzbek make for my wife, with a large turquoise in its middle. Later I realised it has been actually glued together of small pieces and polished to look one. Prices I paid would have seemed astronomical even some months ago, when I arrived to Moscow on my mission, but to that date conditions had changed profoundly. The sum of 3,000 roubles I paid for the bracelet could have bought a second-hand car in good condition half a year before.

At that time, although the Soviet Union still existed, rouble began to erode away. Its first step has been around March, when the transferable rouble, that had been always mysteriously confused by cashiers with Soviet roubles, became distinct from it: 1 US dollar was equal to 0.60 transferable rouble -- just as before --, but to 6 Soviet roubles. In a short time that previous phenomenon vanished, only Soviet rouble remained, with always decreasing rate. When I visited Bokhara, one dollar was equal to 13 roubles. It would

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soon change to 27, then 40. After my holiday, in September, the daily rate would be determined by the Central Bank, which would appear generally as an average in the currency tables.

There were other numerical modifications. From the beginning of the year 1991 in shops there appeared "agreed prices". Agreed between the retailer and the manufacturer above the heads of customers, who did not get "agreed salaries". It was the time of about 1,000 percent decrease in living conditions of Soviet people. There were news in papers that you did not understand with clear mind, e.g. the county of Tula -- to the south from Moscow -- decided to stop "export of goods to the capital". What? Export to the capital? Well, they wanted to keep some of their own production in their home town. I was living in a world where backward children had been right with their slogan.

Well, to come back to my trip to Central Asia, Uzbekistan has caught me so much that I would come back twice together with my family.

I had to visit another part of Russia by plane around that time. My set of hard contact lenses began to wear away for dry air and small crystals of quartz in it. I could not bear them all day. I decided to react to an ad in the local paper about soft lenses of English make from Leningrad. I called the firm and we agreed in a Saturday morning date. I bought the air ticket and flew there. I went to the town by METRO and found the shop.

There were two doctors, husband and wife, dealing with eyeglasses and contact lenses. I was offered a pair of Russian lenses, but I wanted the English ones rather, which I am sure I haven't got at last. The woman, who cared for me, was awfully sorry for my decision, as she said even one of the American astronauts -- mysteriously his name she forgot -- found the proper soft lenses only with them. These lenses were very good at the beginning, but one of them would become soon figured like a mosquito net. The other would crack in two at the middle.

I wouldn't become too distressed from that, I began to use my hard lenses again, during the healing period of some weeks my eyes had calmed down and were able to bear hard lenses. Soft ones I haven't tried again since. That had not been the first occasion for me to wear soft lenses, before I got out to Moscow, my right eye was reacting the same way to the hard one, I made a shock to the doctor in the optical shop by asking her to prescribe a soft one only for my right eye. She had not been able to accept that something new could come from an outsider, and not from her or her colleagues. At last I argued that those with one healthy eye were carrying lens on the other eye only. This mixed solution was fine for a time, but at last I would return to hard ones during my holiday.

After this small detour I go on my story with the morning after my visit to the Botanical Garden. Early morning on Sunday (it was around the middle of June) there was a phone call from the parking that a driver of one of our frigoes were taken to hospital because of an accident. On my questions they told me that the man was falling off the top of the cabin, when he took a can of beer from the small compartment of the cooler set for the drivers' use. He fell very unfortunately with his head on the concrete ground. I asked them which hospital he was taken in and drove there at once.

It was too early -- about 7 a.m. --, there were no doctors, I had to wait. But the man was conscious after a long period of unconsciousness. He came against me on the corridor. As I have not met him yet, I asked the man if it was he. Yes, it was. He was very slow in every sense. It might have been from some medicine, but also from the fall. We agreed to wait until he would get some strength and also to speak with his doctor. In about an hour the doctor arrived. He checked his patient and then told me, he would have to wait some days, before he would let him go. I asked him about documents and cloths of the driver and he said, they were in the store until his departure.

I went to the parking place and talked with drivers who had been present at the accident. I told them I hoped there would be no com-

plication. In the afternoon I visited the man again and then he was completely normal in behaviour. His stunned manner has passed. He complained about food -- I have never been in a Russian hospital, but I know that in a hospital food is worse than usual in the country -- and wanted to go home as soon as possible. On his head there was a bandage, but he had no open wound. I consulted with the doctor and he was of the opinion not to let him drive and not to transport him in the cabin of a truck, either. I told the driver to wait, until I could speak to our doctor at home. The next morning my first action -- taking into account the two-hour difference between Moscow and Budapest -- has been to call our health centre and speak to the chief medical officer.

He listened to my report and said he would come for the man by plane.

“Well, I suppose you speak Russian well”, I said.

“Not a word.”

“Then let me propose something else. You organise his reception in Budapest from the airport to the hospital and I would do my duty here and accompany him on the plane.”

He agreed, he promised to inform our executive in charge for passports and tickets. Anyway, I called her and that afternoon I could already get the prepaid tickets at the Aeroflot office. The next day -- Tuesday -- we went to the hospital with Joe, he took my car back to the office, and I went with the patient in the ambulance. The nurse or assistant in the ambulance praised us for taking so much care about our drivers. I took it seriously, as I wanted to be sure about the safety of the sick man. To tell the truth, I wanted to stay one day at home, but the man responsible for my return ticket, Frank, was waiting for me at the airport and my place has been booked on the next day's plane. I had only a night at home. The man came back a year later and said he did not feel heat or cold since his accident.

When I arrived in Moscow in August 1990, I could experience the greatest goods shortage in that city ever. Earlier when I had

been to that city, shortage involved only individual wares, mainly those looked for by foreigners. Such as samovar, jewels of amber, certain kinds of tools or machines as machine tools for wood that had been much cheaper there than elsewhere (at the same time we had had fine machine tools in our stores, only they had cost much more). Food had always been ample, shops were full. People who had gone farther into the country had said that situation there had been quite different, the capital had been only a window for foreigners. In short, I had never had any problem to spend my allowance (no big sum compared to that of people coming from the West).

But at that time I am writing about, in the sixth year of Mr. Gorbachev's reign, shops were empty, even for food there were long queues, especially for milk products. Processors even tried to sell milk made of powder as fresh milk, at first nothing hinted at such a thing, I only guessed the situation, when I wanted to make cottage of it, milk didn't want to curdle. You can imagine my stand, when I wanted to buy basic equipment for my household. My employer provided for the refrigerator and furniture in the apartment, but washing machine was the employee's own concern, either he bought it there or took it with him from home. With me this latter fell out, for this reason I tried to get one, when I occupied the flat in Moscow.

It is worth remembering how I got my washing machine. For that I have to go back in time again. My first all-night service on the agency -- it was to be given by company representatives for Saturdays and Sundays -- coincided with my encounter with the institution's managing director, who said me he was leaving for good at the end of the year 1990. We were somewhere in November. I asked him to sell me his things he would not take home. He promised me his washing machine, his microwave oven and a complete China set. I led his name into my agenda not to forget to give him a truck for his moving. The transaction happened in order and I became the lucky owner of the mentioned three items. But I have an additional story in connection with one of them.

Some weeks after the time, when he left, I met a woman, whom I

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held in high respect for her intelligence, who said I got my microwave oven because of psychological reasons. I did not catch the meaning of her words.

“How do you know at all about it?” I put her the question.

“Oh, you know that I was his secretary.” I knew, but still did not understand her statement.

“You know”, she continued, “he was a great admirer of girls and a despot. He tried it with me, too, but as he could not be successful, he did not sell me the oven.” Now I understood. That man wanted to turn the general shortage to his advantage, even with methods nearing prostitution.

“How much did you want to give him for the oven?” I asked her the most important thing.

She said the same sum I paid for it.

“Well, it is yours at that price”, I told her. She would not believe her ears, she was so happy.

Well, I liked the device, it was a sophisticated oven for a Russian one. Anyway, I have always hated blackmail, especially when it was for getting someone's favours.

After my trip to Budapest for taking home the driver involved in the accident I had my opportunity to visit one of the top attractions around Moscow. Joe S. had visitors from home -- they arrived during my homeward trip and, as Joe thought I would stay long enough, he moved them into my flat in my absence, which I acknowledged with resentment --, and he went with them to show the sights of Moscow. It was they, who needed me, actually my car, as Joe's one was somehow out-of-order, to make the sixty miles to Zagorsk and back. The place is the orthodox Vatican. The town and the monastery has been renamed since, it has got back the old name, Sergiev Posad.

It was a fine experience, I did not resent to have visited it. Only I would have chosen other companions, if it had been possible. The institution called *lavra* (holy monastery) has originally been only a fortified monastery for monks, but, when Bizantium, the centre of or-

thodox Christianity became lost for believers around the end of the Middle Ages, as it was made into the capital of the Turkish Empire, the bigger churches of the orthodox Christian religion as the Greek, the Russian, and even that of Kiev originally the seat of Russian Christianity, found their own individual holy places. The seat of the Russian Church became this monastery, only 30 miles from Moscow. Here those institutions have been built that are the counterparts of Vatican in Rome for the Catholic Church.

The monastery lies at the out-skirts of the town facing Moscow, you notice the blue and golden domes as soon as you get the first sight of the ensemble at a distance of about six miles. At the parking place around the entrance to the area encircled by walls there are hundreds of vendors, some of them offer traditional Russian handicrafts with a good taste. I liked most the lacquer boxes resembling Chinese technique. They are made of simple papier maché, but the pictures or scenes painted onto them are wonderful, and as exaggerated as Russian folk tales that has always been very far from reality. Vendors know that it is not the poor folk that visits the monastery, or if they do, they would go out of their way to avoid them, for this reason their prices are appropriate.

The entrance at the eastern side reminds you of the novel from Gárdonyi "The Stars of Eger" about a two-month-long unsuccessful siege of the Eger fortress by Turks in 1552. Passing the gate you get into a dark tunnel, having been the post of the guard, but housing souvenir shops today. However, they are no private shops, but the Church sells there holy tid-bits from photographs to books to copies of icons. The tunnel has been built under the fortress wall, it leads to the court of the monastery. On the left you find the functioning churches, in the largest of them ceremony is going on almost all the time. According to the rules of orthodox tradition there are no benches to sit down, people don't stand in the same place, they always move around within the church as particles of a dense fluid. As you enter the temple, there are candles near the entrance, you can buy one or more, they are cheap, and you can light them for your loved ones and erect them among the forest of candles. As the tremendous

quantity of candles give much heat, they collapse from that soon. You can feel the heat on your face. At the farther end of the large inside room of the church you find the shrine, but it is guessed only, as it is separated from the main hall by a floor-to-ceiling wall, and that is the *iconostaz*. Before that on both sides you find the two altars that are richly decorated. Usually there is a third altar in the middle in front of the ikonostaz, it is guarded by a rail. The iconostaz is always the finest part of a church. It is made up of pictures about holy persons, those are of various sizes, they are called icons, all of them are true pieces of art. I have seen the finest iconostaz in the great temple of the ensemble inside the Kremlin in Moscow, but in the Church of Ivan the Warrior near my apartment I have also seen a remarkable one. Ivan has been one of the heroes in the Poltava Battle against the Swedes.

On the territory of the monastery there are other functioning churches, but I didn't have time to see them all. And I haven't been lucky enough to find them open when I was there. On the other side you can find the religious educational institutions, such as the seminar. It lies opposite the great temple, almost symmetrically to it, and it is separated from the rest of the area by natural objects as flower beds or trees. Along paths there are benches, where you can enjoy both the silence and the song of birds in fine weather. Sometimes there appears a respected old black-robed clergyman with white beard. Other times students of religion come by, they go generally in two. At five in the afternoon every day a wonderful music of bells can be heard from the bell tower in the middle of the monastery. This building is just in line with the entrance, at the rear third of the garden. It is a baroque-style building as most of them from the 18th century. Bells are placed at the highest level of the tower directly under the roof, the many dozens of big and small bells are operated by one or two men. With the complicated system of ropes they produce -- of course, by considerable physical effort -- a wonderful music of bells. This loud music usually lasts about twenty minutes, you cannot speak then, its noise is overwhelming.

Between the entrance and the bell-tower there is a well covered

by an open pavilion, a kind of water is sold there, maybe with some healing (or holy) effect. That is already pure moneymaking done by the Church. Just as the museum, but that is unique in its kind. When I first visited it with Joe and his guests in 1991, a member of our group was missing when we left the museum and, when we found her, she was standing in the room of porcelains and looking at them with awe. Well, we could have guessed it, she was an addict of "sherds". The collection of the museum is not only extensive, but also valuable. Only in Kiev would I see comparable years later.

The rear wall of the monastery, to which also the museum has been built, has remained in its fortified form. When I visited it first time, its renovation has just been finished, we could go up into the bastion tower, the sight from there has been wonderful. Also these architectural parts, the stone fortress wall, the wooden connecting corridor, the wooden stairs of nearly one hundred steps reminded me of the favourite book of my childhood.

An excursion is nothing without the return trip. This time it was a nightmare. The road has been closed, we had to make a detour. A heavy traffic jam occurred, we have made about 30 extra miles. And we had another experience to remember. There is a restaurant along the road called "Russkaya Skazka" (Russian tale). With a special talent it isn't situated on the outward side, but on the road to the capital. We also wanted to take our dinner there, it was due because of the long drive. But, by Russian logic, reservation has only been possible by phone from the town, on the spot only guests with valid reservation were allowed to enter. Although Soviet times were almost up, traditions were preserved. Thus we took no dinner, we drove home directly. To tell the truth I had enough of having a meal with these guests two days before in the Chinese restaurant "Peking" in Moscow.

He who tried to do service abroad knows that it resembles an illness, from the side of psychology it has its own foreseeable timetable. After the first three months home-sickness becomes almost unbearable. For me the trip home at the end of the year was a good

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solution to ease the pressure. At the same time, I was waiting for my annual holiday of one month to be able to "recreate" my energy by gardening at home.

Joe S. was making preparations for his holiday due at the beginning of July. Soon I would remain alone in the office. Beside official tasks I also had other things on my mind. One of my partners from the Soviet Republics, a Hungarian man, the representative of bus-maker Ikarus in Tbilisi, Georgia, had long tried to convince me to visit him in his place. I have never been afraid of visiting a place so I had organised it. It was a proper time, as for his move home for good he needed a truck and, as I had none in that region, I sent it from Moscow. The selected young driver seemed a good partner for the job.

I planned the trip for a weekend to avoid any loss of official time. Frank received me at the airport in Tbilisi. He was nervous, as the driver had not reported yet, but I told him, he would be there the next day. I flew there on Saturday and my return flight would be the next afternoon. The driver arrived toward evening. My host has showed me his reign to be lost, as he would not have any successors. His company got into troubles for narrowing markets in the Soviet Union and their management has not been prepared to rule it out of that situation. He took me for a walk in the town, a fine mixture of historic and Soviet buildings. The previous caught my eyes, but the latter only for a crystal glass bowl that I bought for my wife. My son would have no excuse for any resentment, either, as for him I bought a *kindjaal*, a Georgian dagger with a fine sheath.

Tbilisi has been founded in a very convenient place, the Caucasian mountains protect the town from the heavy northerly winds in winter. Its situation is very beneficial for fruit-growing, although it would be a hard work and Georgians do not like it very much. Perhaps the only exception is grapes, they make very fine wines.

I was introduced to another Hungarian company representative. He had recently come from Kiev, Ukraine and represented a for-

eign trade company. His wife has been pregnant, but she prepared us fine dishes. The man counted on my assistance in the future for his transports, but it would not come true, as Georgia turned much worse, both in economy and safety. His information about Kiev and Ukrainian conditions would be useful to me later.

We have slept in Frank's flat, mainly prepared for the move, but still usable. The truck arrived at sunset, Frank offered the same opportunity for the driver too, but he was anxious about the safety of his truck, so, he slept there. I found I would like living here as it was all on the level of Ethiopia. Frank installed an ingenious equipment against the everyday -- or better to say "every-hour" -- water shortage. As I mentioned, I had had experience on that field in Ethiopia.

In the morning the driver called on him in person and we could discuss the details. After that Frank took us with him with his 15-year-old Lada, it was his business car, but it held a special surprise for a couple of Georgian drivers, who were left motionless in their brand new Moskwiches by the humble-looking car, an old shaky 1200 body with a nearly new engine of 1600 cc. Frank took us up to the edge of the Caucasian to show us some popular tourist sights and to look down on the town. It was worth coming up there. This trip of mine has been short, but a fine experience. I would be sorry forever not visiting also Yerevan during that last time of the Soviet Union, when still there was some safety.

When I returned from Tbilisi Joe has gone home with his car -- not a small deed almost 1,200 miles on Soviet roads -- and the office remained mine. It was a calm period, the number of incoming trucks decreased partly for summer, partly for the manipulations of "organised meat dealers". I also prepared for my own holiday. It is worth reviewing some secondary conditions. Months before, when the "agreed prices" came into fashion, gold again appeared in the shops. First only gossips came about sightings -- similarly as sightings of Nessie would come --, but soon I myself saw items of gold in jewellers. The prices have been prohibitive for locals, thus I could buy a pair of earrings for my wife with three small brilliants each.

Intrigues

My holiday I spent in an active way, I was even visiting archives to collect data for a lecture of doctorate, but at last it ended. I returned to Moscow in September, this way I could avoid the coup against (or for) Mr. Gorbachev at the end of August, I left it to my backup person. It has not been my best time. At arrival in Moscow nobody waited me, at least it looked that way. The airport information has cheated my acquaintance, who waited me on one side, while I came out on the other. We met when I took my things and went over to that side.

It was autumn in Budapest, when I resumed my work in the Moscow office, in Moscow it was even more so. The big heaps of water-melons from the southern republics was in hard contrast with the near-freezing temperature. The economy of the country began to change to capitalism, there were joint ventures for food and automobiles. As a result the newest wonders of the automotive industry appeared on the roads and traffic became deadly.

We both damaged our cars in a short time. First Joe met a Georgian truck driver who made a U-turn from the second left lane over continuous line. Joe was on his left and the truck damaged his car almost completely. However, it has been repaired. Then a bus pushed me to the left in a divided road and the central lane was too high for the front suspension. For two weeks I used my trucks to get lifts when I had to go somewhere far from METRO-lines, as the office was without any car.

The end of the year drew nearer. I remained in the town that time, it was Joe who went home with his family for a couple of days. I had a lot of work and it had been lasting for a long time. The Russian rouble's last rate has been 63 for one dollar, but, as it has been in

September, and from that time no fix rate has been established, its rate has reached 100 by year's end. Anyway, these were only quantitative changes, qualitative ones come below.

During the last days of 1991 there was a coup by the heads of states of the three Slavic republics. They met in Minsk and established the Commonwealth of Independent States, eliminating the chair of Mr Gorbachev. There was no Soviet Union any more. In a couple of months even the Kremlin would be given to Mr Yeltsin, the Russian President.

It is funny, but no obvious changes could be seen. Only the expression Soviet changed to Russian everywhere and our documents became temporary, but still valid. My Soviet ID card has even been good two years later in Kiev to acquire my Ukrainian personal documents. Former republics became independent states, they established embassies in Moscow. But it took about one and a half year to turn these changes from theoretical to real.

Once I had to visit the town of Vladimir about 110 miles to the north. It was the beginning of December and it was a terrible trip that I'll never forget. In winter dirt on the roads of Russia is terrible, you have to fill up your washing fluid container every 100 miles. Mine has gone empty on the return trip and there was water nowhere to fill it up. It was a nightmare. It was only one thing that that helped me survive the journey without a hitch and it was to thank to my good sight only, at least that time still. To see the sights of the city I had only minutes. But I did walk around in any case and shot some pictures in spite of the misty weather. I had some plans for excursions, for example to St Petersburg after it had got its old name back. It was before my trip to Vladimir, but it was already snowing. Again I had to establish that this town is to be visited during summer, in the cold season the short days are made even shorter by bad weather.

In the coming weeks, as the year 1992 has arrived, and early-spring weather was less inconvenient, I tried to see as many places around Moscow as possible during week-ends. First I tried to see

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the monastery of New Jerusalem, but I was mistaken at a fork and went to the forbidden new Riga-road. The guards have turned me back.

Then I went on the Dmitrov road and there visited the ancient town of Dmitrov to the north from Moscow. The town has its 12th-century stockades almost intact and besides there were two fine churches, also many centuries old. In one of them I have got information about a village called Orudevo -- meaning the village of military equipment other than weapons --, where a fine iconostaz could be seen. I went there and the monk of the church showed me all. From him I got advice to see a monastery in my neighbourhood, where his former teacher in the seminar has been in a high rank. Alas, for that I wouldn't have time at all.

Korea

The year 1992 has brought a very high rise in the traffic of our company's trucks. This was to thank partly to the fine performance of our salesmen, you cannot neglect the other side either, i.e. their job has been done much easier by the development of capitalist conditions in our country and in the surrounding countries after 1990. Import of a tremendous size began to come into Russia, there was no excise law that time, a large business has been the "washing" of spirit and tobacco. We have been two persons for the office, but the majority of the work was making profit to my company. For this reason Joe S. became much less prone to help me.

My ever-growing work in the office -- sometimes I remained there half the night -- and various other troubles, as well as my frequent peculiar dreams made me decide I had to have a rest soon, if I did not want to collapse. I decided I would visit Japan the same way my predecessors did it. I went to the Japanese consulate and was informed that I needed an air ticket or a reservation receipt to get visa. O.K., I went to the airlines -- to more than one -- to make the reservation, but I would have to have a visa for it.

Again Catch 22. I became angry and found another solution. I would go to South-Korea. Hungary had signed a no-visa agreement with that country two years before. I did not tell it anybody, only to Joe. I ordered my round ticket to Khabarovsk. Through small gifts I established a good relationship with a lady at Aeroflot to get the diplomatic discount of 50 percent on the Khabarovsk-Seoul flight. Alas, the Far-East Aeroflot branch had become independent and I would have to risk flying to Khabarovsk before I would know I would get it or would not. I agreed with Joe that at home nobody was to know my whereabouts. I have been ill, on the agency, out-of-town to help a driver, but nothing of the truth. He undertook to replace me

completely in that time.

I did not need his assistance to take me to the airport, I discovered that Aeroflot buses to the airports are reliable, if only slow. I went to the Domodedovo airport with only a handbag and a shoulder bag. The latter contained my photographic equipment. To Khabarovsk I had a pleasant 8-hour flight. After take off and rubber-chicken I swallowed my pill and had a good sleep till about Irkutsk. There the sun shone already and we soon landed. The airport was a typical domestic one, but I had to find the international side. It was not very difficult. On the plane my neighbour has been a young girl flying home for her summer holiday from the university. She insisted to meet me at the airport on my return trip. It goes without saying, she would not, but it did not matter.

I had about three hours to get my ticket and I wanted it by getting my discount. I went to the ticket office to a typical blond Russian girl and told her my intention. I gave her my diplomatic ID card, too. She said the obvious answer at once that it was impossible. I took the bottle of whisky brought along for this purpose and put it in front of her. She pretended not to notice it. Anyway, she went out of her booth after a 10-minute pause, placing the bottle under the counter. Half success. She returned and said she had not found her boss, I was to wait. I did and, after two more walks the girl gave me my round ticket on discount.

Check-in has not been hard, only I had to convince the frontier guard that I, a Hungarian, did not need a visa. From Khabarovsk to Seoul the flight has been only two hours. Arriving at the airport I went to the information desk to get a hotel address. They offered me a room for 160 dollars a night. I asked for something cheaper. They motioned me to the right. There tourist agents were offering rooms for 50 a night. When I wanted even cheaper they showed me to a newspaper booth. There the woman was all smiles and said, OK, she had one for about 15 dollars a night. That would do.

She called to somewhere by phone and gave me a visiting card

of a hotel owner. At the back there was a map of the surroundings, it was in the very centre of the city. I took a bus indicated on the map and began to study the information material collected. The folded map of A3 size was a marvel. Every month it has been freshly edited and old copies replaced by new ones. I have got my June edition. Even road blocks and reconstruction sites have been valid, as I had to establish later on my walks.

The bus took me to the centre and after a 300-foot walk I found the "hotel". It was a 3-story building about 15 feet in width. But it was a very fine place fit for my needs. I have got a room on the 3rd floor. It had a hall of 3 by 5 feet with a wardrobe -- not necessary as I had but one jacket --, a bathroom of 5 by 4 feet and a "bedroom" of 5 by 8 feet. There was no bed, only a bundle of bed-sheets and covers, a small shelf of 1 by 2 feet and a clothes-rack on the wall above it.

The mattress-bed-sheet-cover sandwich had to be unrolled for use and rolled in again in the morning. There was a low table -- about 6 inches in height -- in the lobby that could be taken for breakfast and put out again after. On the shelf a phone-set and a TV-set have been placed.

I spent all my time discovering the city and the country. The city was vast, but by foot it could be reached, if not, I would take the underground. In the city centre there were wonderful underground shopping malls, where everything on earth could be found.

I soon discovered the big marketplace near the hotel and a small restaurant on the second floor of a narrow building. I made it into my usual place for lunch, the extremely high intelligence of the owner and his people has astonished me first, but to the time of my departure I learned, they have all been similar in that respect. I had to establish that I had never been in such a country, where people are exotic and intelligent at the same time.

The first day I spent in the city. Of the many former royal palaces I have seen one, but I also went to the technical market, where whole streets are involved in the sale of one kind of ware. I found

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what I wanted to buy, an 8-mm Sony camcorder. I also bought a lens for my Practica still camera, as the original lens went out-of-order, I could use it only for manual shots.

The next morning I went back to the shop, as during the night I had realised, my camcorder was of the NTSC standard and my VCR and TV were of PAL/SECAM. The salesman seemed not to understand my problem, he said I had to buy a multiple-system TV and video. I have to confess, it was me who did not see it clear. From him I went to find the Sony agent, but he said the same. Actually, they were right, I will have been able to solve that problem only with the replacement of my VCR and TV by multiple ones.

I decided to see the country, too. My first trip has been to the south to Suwan by the suburban train. My goal has been the Korean Folk Village standing exhibition. I liked it very much and decided to go to other parts of the country. Back to town I went to the airlines and bought an air ticket to the island of Chaeju, about 55 miles from the southern tip of the country. I got my ticket on Thursday.

Wednesday I went to Inchon, where the Korean War had begun. It was a vast harbour town, but it also had an artificial beach made by dredging. It was empty for me and a woman, we left each other alone. I enjoyed swimming and sun-bathing, but it soon became boring and I went back to Seoul. The afternoon I spent discovering Seoul Tower and the botanical garden around it. Sight from the tower has been dim for the moist air, I could not see the North-Korean side at all.

My finest experience has been my trip to Chaeju. From the airport at the northern shore I rode a bus to the greatest hotel complexes in the south. The island had an extinct volcano in the middle of it and -- it has been written in the info, but I did not ascend it -- there was a lake on top of it. All cliffs were black as coal, I guessed it must have been a very young place in a geological sense.

I tried my new camcorder first time. That far I had to learn its functions, not an easy task on a Japanese-language instruction for a

device of Japanese inscriptions.

The remaining two and a half days I spent all in the capital. I even tried to ascend one of the two steep hills, but I lost my way and almost fell into panic. I could come down only, when I went back almost to top and found the fork, where I had been mistaken.

This week of rest served me well. Not only would I become sun-tanned, my soap opera dreams have been finished. I think I came back from the brink of collapse. One week after my arrival to Seoul, my plane has taken off. I had a conversation with an elderly Australian married couple going to a place called Birobijan not far from Khabarovsk. In Khabarovsk I didn't see a trace of the school-girl, realised quickly, it had been a Russian promise. I took a tram to the town. My room has been ready in the hotel, only I found it a little expensive, but as it was only for one night, it did not matter.

My last year in Moscow

I took my camcorder and went to the bank of the river Amur to see all and to record some of my experiences. From my competitions two decades before I still knew all, only in the monuments have been some changes. After the Korean villages and towns it looked a little too Asian. I made a long walk and went back to the hotel to find that there was no hot water. I took a cold shower and went to have dinner. Better to say, I attempted only, as there was no place. When I went to the reception to complain, I soon have been seated and offered a menu card. I ordered a steak. The vegetables I could consume, but the steak itself was unpalatable. Remembering dishes in Seoul made of almost nothing and being as fine as anyone could wish, I saw how a fine raw material could be wasted to turn into a meal for pets.

My backward flight has not begun too well. When I tried to sit on my seat, it was occupied. Fortunately, the family from Magadan going to take their annual holiday on a Black Sea resort let me retake it. They had a dog with them, a Scotch shepherd. She was an intelligent creature, at the end she became friendly with me.

The return flight involved a route from east to west, only one hour in virtual time, but eight really. Weather was fine all the way and the landscape beautiful. I found the Sayan mountain from above similar to a cake with white cream on top, one slice already taken. It has been very tiring for my organism to be cheated by 7 hours. I slept very well after listening to more than 100 messages on my phone answering machine.

I decided soon after my far-eastern trip that I make my old dream come true and see Borodino, I went there on a Sunday. It was a fine excursion, although my car has almost let me down.

There was a faulty connection somewhere and sometimes it would not start. I recorded Borodino on my camcorder.

During my holiday at home in 1992 I tried to convince my wife to come with me at last to Moscow, in that I took advantage of the help from the younger generation -- my son got a fiancée in the meantime --. As she wouldn't let the boy alone as before, I agreed to accommodate all the three of them. That would be a financial disaster for me, but I wanted to commit anything to bring my family together again.

The result of her hesitating so long became among others that I forgot to ask for my boss's consent to their moving to Moscow. Well, my holiday expired and I flew back to Russia. My family promised me a quick decision. When they decided to come I forgot to consult my boss, I sent my wife to the executive responsible for arrangements about passports and air tickets.

Several circumstances showed me and supported my conviction that my place was wanted. It was no wonder, I had remembered John and the three fiancées. At that time Moscow was available for me only, because the Soviet currency wasn't convertible. But, as I narrated it more than once, it became a place of hard currency from January 1 1991.

Returning to Moscow I tried to establish the status of my family's young people. My son has been blocked from doing a useful job at the agency and without Russian he would not register in the high schools. I decided to employ him in the office on my pocket. Clare has got a job as a secretary at the agency. She was quite good, she updated her Russian quickly and her bosses were satisfied with her work. Soon my son became a company employee and at least it relieved my pocket.

Well, everything became more complicated. The frigo department signed a contract that almost destroyed the company's finances in a short time. It was only my hard work, sometimes up to 9 p.m. in the office, no week-ends, and my son's help to take various tasks

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from my shoulder, that saved the project from complete failure.

The project has been about transport of Italian champagne from Italy to Moscow. I have to cite the joke of one of my West-German partners with Machine Tool Works, who said the most important export ware from Hungary to West-Germany was Russian champagne, as he had always taken two bottles with him on his return trip. And to Russia we have transported more than 2,000 tons of champagne from Italy.

Anyway, real problem has not been quality, but addresses. Many of the consignees did not have any offices. They had established their limited companies for a single case and soon after they would dissolve them. The addresses given have been small shops of other firms with their man seated there to get the message about arrival of trucks. Off-loading has been made from trucks to trucks. The conspiracy has been so well organised that many times I would have the call of the driver only after unloading.

The fly in the coffee emerged, when different consignees gave the same address and one took the goods of the other. Of the 120 truckloads about 15 has gone the wrong way. With hard negotiations 11 has been turned back or corrected by redirecting subsequent transports. But as far as I know, four of the customers would have had to be refunded.

By these damned assignments I have met my long lost cousin, Louis. The lion's share of the project has been over before Christmas, when one evening a driver called me. He said, he was Louis so-and-so. I did not understand his surname.

“Hello, Louis”, I said, “would you repeat your surname?”

“Komáromi”, he said, this time articulated.

“Louis, is it you?” I asked surprised.

“Of course, it is me, but who the devil are you?”

“I am Joe, your cousin.”

It was a great joy for both of us.

In January 1993 I was instructed by the sales manager to fly

home for a briefing. Before that I had to receive the man selected originally for the Ukrainian office at the airport, take him to my office and train him to be able to take my work during my stay at home. On my question why here and not in Ukraine, he told me to do as he said.

In Budapest he informed me the situation has changed and the man would take my place, while I was to go to Ukraine. It would take me long conversations with the man to see clearly what had happened. He was the relative of one of the managers in my company. At a funeral in the country town, where he had lived, they met and he was promised to have a mission in Russia.

Chapter 13

Kiev

As the topic of his mission emerged, the sales manager had not been agitated against me yet, he said he would not be against an office in Ukraine, where that man would be placed. He thought it was settled. He briefed me in that sense during my holiday. But, in the autumn of 1992, when the state of Ukraine regulated use of Russian language and made Ukrainian compulsory in schools, the man convinced my boss through his relative to send me to Ukraine instead of him. He had a son of 14 and did not want to register him in a Ukrainian-language school. Of course, the above true reason I had to learn from him, when he was a little less sober -- he liked vodka too much --, but it has not been very hard.

I went to Kiev to arrange my new office and housing there. Before that I handed over responsibility of the office -- in paper I have remained the office chief until my final return home -- and the car. I arranged all in Kiev and made a list of necessary furniture. The Aeroflot and Air Ukraine still made their flights as domestic ones. Next time I would face a makeshift international airport's checks. I had to fly to Budapest to organise purchase of the furniture for the Kiev apartment. Louis D. had been succeeded by a clever young man, Zoltán B., and it was a pleasure to work with him. Through all my persecutions that followed, I could always feel his presence on my side. I have got a truck to take things to Kiev. Then I flew to Moscow to prepare the move of my things to Budapest and to Kiev.

My family left before the Budapest-bound truck, I did after it. I flew to Kiev to unload my truck. I discovered with a pleasant surprise that another familiar driver was there to be off-loaded. He came and helped. We were in a hurry. The next afternoon I had to fly home to organise clearance of my things from Moscow. But before departure I helped both drivers to find their unloading or loading places.

When all was ready I wanted to take my holiday, but my boss said:

“You have to open the Kiev office on July 1.” As it was June 23 I had only time for 4 days. After that short rest I flew to Kiev and began to assemble my furniture delivered in boards. Also I had to drill 24 holes in the granite-hard concrete to put up curtains and shades. It took me 6 weeks to bring everything into order. During daytime I have been in the office and evenings, as well as on week-ends, I worked in the flat. In the middle of August my wife flew to me, she has been followed soon by the juniors.

But before that, in July, I flew to Moscow to take my service car back from my successor and drove it to Kiev. Until that time I used my private car, an old BMW in a terrible condition. I had had to buy it in Moscow, when my successor took the service car. After repair in Kiev I drove it and my family used the service car.

My Kiev career has been short, but until that time, when it became public the office would be closed, I have been successful. The presence factor made traffic grow 3 times that of before. Technical assistance for transit vehicles has itself paid the costs of the office, let alone return loads, mainly raw hides to Italy and prefabricated furniture to Sweden. Unfortunately, my new boss could not read between the lines, he saw only direct income numbers from tariffs of return loads. My holiday from the previous year I could take in May.

In July, after a year of unfulfilled promises, my son became an employee again. It has not been by chance, as my Moscow successor went on holiday, and nobody could be found to replace him. I was instructed to do that and my son replaced me. First it seemed to last four weeks, but it became six, as he did not come back on time.

I took my wife with me and we lived in the hotel of the agency. One evening in the second week I had a cramp in my leg and a vein has blown up. I had pains at walking and had to use bandage all the time left. Fortunately driving has not caused me pain. Work in the office has been much. There were also problems during my time in Moscow. One evening a sick driver has been found in one of the ca-

bins. I had to organize his transport home by plane.

Very slowly that six weeks have passed and we could leave back for Kiev. During that period, however, I met again Louis, my cousin. I took him to Zagorsk, there were two other drivers with us. One has been a man with southern Slavic origin and name. He was the most intelligent of all our drivers.

Actually I consider my years as office chief in Moscow and Kiev as a very good training in human affairs. During that time I became acquainted with excellent people and, alas, on the opposite. To begin with the latter I can mention someone, who, although he once cheated me, I couldn't get angry with him, and whom I appreciate since. In the spring of 1991 the transport of consumer electronics began on direct routes from Western-Europe to Moscow. There were thefts on the parking place and thus drivers parked more willingly in our street in front of the office building. The only trouble has been toilet. The nearest one they could find in the building of Kiev Railway Station about a thousand feet away, when we were closed. March 15 has been our national holiday and two drivers asked me to leave my key with them for making the toilet available. In the next month I found an item in our phone bill very high. The telegraph company informed us it was a call of 30 minutes to the U.S.

There were two drivers on frigo trucks, who saved my face once, when one of their colleagues would not load the food assigned to him. They remained reliable people over all my term.

That man to help me to take my things to the 18th floor in Kiev had been grounded in Moscow once for two weeks. His extreme cold blood with aggressive people and his intelligence had helped us with Joe to solve a lot of hard tasks.

The man, who was with us in Zagorsk, I met in the autumn of 1991. Then it happened that he performed a private mission of mine with his usual conscientiousness, and we remained in good connection after that. It was he, who in Kiev once, when I had to send a convoy of trucks to take load, took his colleagues to visit me. My

wife has offered them dinner, which they accepted, but they brought raw material for it because of the general food shortage. It was in October 1993. When he learned, during the afternoon we were going to the holy monastery of the Ukrainians, he gathered all drivers and in his tractor he took all to the place. We met them there. He would visit me even after my return from Kiev in my new office.

A driver, whose wife has been a saleswoman on one of our departments, has been beaten and robbed before Easter 1991. I had given him the job to take a truckload of vodka and carry it to the west of Hungary. He was happy for the job, he was to spend the Easter with his family, but it happened otherwise. He had to wait for a temporary passport issued by the consul in that territory, as he forgot to take his passport, when he was reporting the robbery to the police. When he came to Moscow any time later, he would be a welcome guest, as my son made friendship with him.

By the way, I think, my son helped me to get a lot of friends among drivers.

I spent another month at home in September 1994. I came with my wife by train that time. From the behaviour of my new boss I felt that I was destined to finish my term. I was right. He decided it and it was final. It was a pity to take farewell from my partners, whom I acquired only one year before. Preceding my leaving the place I organised a meeting between my partners in Kiev and their customers, my colleagues in charge. I wanted to offer a continuation to my activities after me. Alas, neither side has been too keen to carry on. And there was another factor against my will.

The organised underground crime has become so strong in Russia that the state had to form special authorities against them. One of their businesses represents unloading customs goods without clearance. It can be found all over the world, but nowhere is it done in a way so sophisticated as in Russia.

The deliverer of goods prepares the accompanying documents, and one set is given to the driver to show them to the authorities at

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every point, where necessary. On the border of Russia the truck is met by the consignee's representative. Goods coming with international documents can enter the country, on the documents it is indicated, where to go for clearance. The consignee takes it to his store instead of the customs office and false stamps are placed on the documents' return sheets. The truck can leave the country by these stamps, but, as clearance has not happened, the border customs office where the goods entered, will send an inquiry to the indicated customs office. The answer will be negative, as the goods have not been delivered to the office. Three months have elapsed, the consignee -- if there was a real name and address at all -- has been dissolved. Joint liability of the carrier with the consignee makes it possible for the authorities to claim everything on the carrier.

Chapter 14

Tenghiz

After leaving the company of trucks in 1997, where I have been working for more than nine years I got an offer to take a back-to-back job abroad. I was to work four weeks in one last and be at home for another four weeks. I accepted it.

The place has been in Kazakhstan, not far from the northern end of the Caspian Sea. It was an oil-mining site in use for about 10 years, but some difficulties made exploitation only even, without profit. The camps, where the several thousand people of the crew has been housed, as well as the working places, had been built by our compatriots in an agreement with the then Soviet government. In 1994 Chevron has overtaken the enterprise from the once Soviet, then Kazakh state company. A new joint venture has been established with the name of Tenghizchevroil.

The place Tenghiz itself is a terrible location. Some decades ago it has been part of the Caspian Sea, but overuse of water of rivers supplying the Caspian caused the level of the isolated salt-water body to decrease. As a former sea-bottom, it is as level as anything can be. Soil is a fine mixture of sand with salty mud. Precipitation is almost nothing, wind is never absent. The fine dust finds its way to eyes, lungs, everywhere. After my first month I left with the determination to finish that employment as soon as possible.

My assignment on paper has been supervisor and chief mechanic of the personal car repair workshop. The person invited in the ad for job had to speak English and Russian on a high level, be an engineer of the automotive or electrical field and have some experiences in the repair of cars. From CVs of several applicants mine has been selected by the Head of Transport Department, Michael

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After my arrival he was the boss who received and informed me about my would-be tasks. My direct boss, head of the two repair workshops for buses and cars, Michael G. -- Mike 2 --, has been on his normal monthly one-week leave. Mike 1 said I was to take into my hands the supervision of car repair workshops, both for Soviet-built and American, Japanese and German cars and pickup trucks. My compatriot, one of the back-to-back supervisors for the bus workshop, has been present at the conversation, but he soon seemed to have heard something different there.

Mike 2 thought it otherwise. As the conditions for the invitation of my place have not been determined by him, he has not been too keen to accept anybody found on them. In a short time he decided not to accept me, but he had the manner not to stop my working there, he even let me go back after my first month-off. Alas, he has not been intelligent enough in his way to inform the representative of my host company. Also, he let intrigue do its work. On one hand he asked for another one in my place with the excuse, he had not been looking for a scientific assistant but a mechanic. On the other hand he disclosed his decision to my back-to-back, who was trying to displace me by his friend from home (he could not manage to do this as Mike 2 was of different mind).

Simultaneously, Mike 2 launched a different search for someone to my place and found his man in someone, who had been fired from the same place in the previous year. By this action he made reliability troubles to my host company with their new candidate, who left his employee in the belief that his place was secure.

All in all, I left that job with only a letter of recommendation to anyone whom it may concern.

Anyway for me, as usual, this place has not been an all negative one either. Although I wouldn't be keen to select it for my home my eyes saw natural wonders also there. Once I forced myself to spend my precious little leisure time (during my month in service the daily working time came up to 12 hours from Mondays to Saturdays, on Sundays they were 6 hours only, this way in one month we could

perform double time and the next month we could spend at home) on the participation in a free excursion by bus that was organised every Sunday to the sea. Others on the bus were mainly American employees, their majority young technical professionals, who came to Kazakhstan more for the sake of adventure than for money, although their pay was higher than mine by about one order of magnitude. At the sea we had two hours time for free occupation that I used for photography and a very short dip in the water as, being October it wasn't ideal for swimming. During the homeward trip the program was singing, American popular songs were repeated endlessly. It was a very instructive excursion.

Nature is hard to be beaten, even in civilised circumstances. In the vast repair hall a lot of frogs moved around, even the only endemic creature of Tenghiz could be met. It is the jerboa (in Hungarian jumping mouse), I mostly saw them in the mouth of the local cat on route as food for the kittens. It is rather an understatement to call them mice, their size is equal to that of a rat.

So much I can tell you with good conscience. I hope, there were some among my Readers that could keep up so long. The proverbial advertisement should sit here, he who reached this line can go to a given place and ask for his mug of beer. I hope, if I had written it here I would be bankrupt financially. Thanks for your patience.

The End

