

## BRATISLAVA PRIMARY SCHOOL MY FIRST SKIING HOLIDAY 1925 - 1927

In the late summer of 1925 the family moved to Bratislava. The principal reason for the move was the schooling of us children. Private tuition has its disadvantages of which one is lack of contact with other children. Piestany had no German schools and my parents preferred us to have a German education. The German language was far more important for ones future job chances and for general cultural reasons than Slovak or Hungarian. Bratislava had not only German primary schools but also a good realgymnasium. Other families also moved into the Slovak capital. The Munks came to live opposite us; the Lichtensteins came and lived almost next to the Munks.

Sándor László had just a house built consisting of two flats. They lived on the ground floor and we on the floor above. It was on the corner of Moyziso<sup>va</sup> street. The Scheibners had moved and their cousins the Glasers lived not far away. Leslie Eggerton<sup>'''A</sup> his sister Piroska lived with their father and Micka only 5 minutes away. Sandor's brother Joczó and his wife Alice, who became a friend of Mother's, lived near too. When Frida had her children at school age they moved to a flat only minutes away. We also met new friends. Next door lived Peter Valko, cousin of the Munks. Jenó Rees and his family lived in a large house behind ours and I could see him on his terrace from our dining room. Anni Frankl and her family lived in the same street just a few houses away. Katka Fughe née Graber lived with her family quite near. They moved later to a house about  $\frac{1}{2}$  m away but nearer to our second flat. Judy and Andris Fejer lived almost next to the Glasers and later Henry Brandon lived in the same area. There were others too who lived in the same corner of the town such as Peter Lax, Feri Roth, the Eleks, Henry Brompton (then Buxbaum) and many others. I grew up amongst a circle of neighbours and friends and many of their parents were friends of my parents. The primary and the secondary schools we went to, were next to each other and almost in the middle of our sector of the town which added to the feeling of "togetherness" as almost all of us attended these schools.

The houses were mostly new and of the then fashionable "modern" design. Our flat was spacious and comfortable and had central heating. Its plan is shown in exhibit 51.

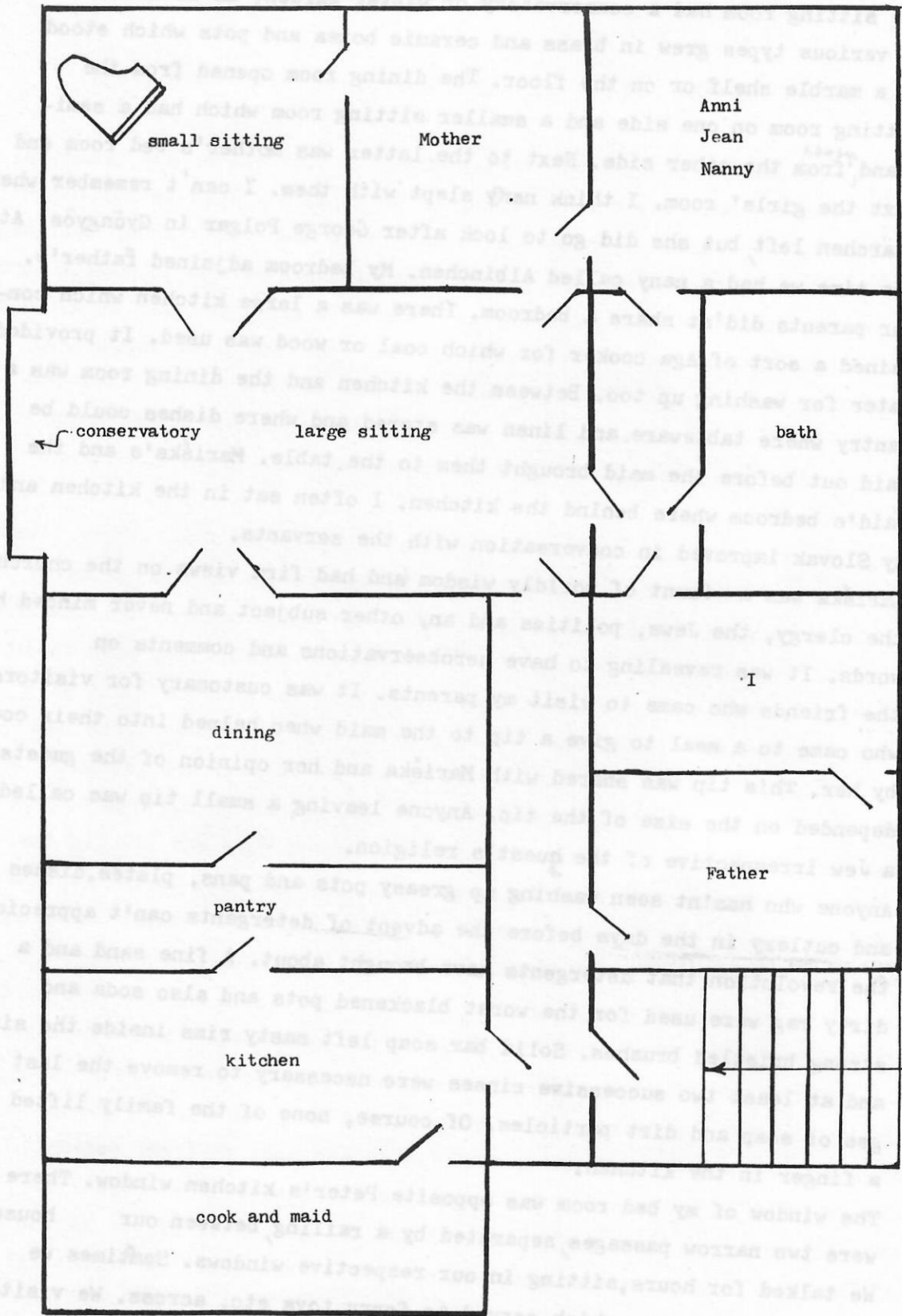
The sitting room had a conservatory or winter garden, as we called it. Plants of various types grew in brass and ceramic boxes and pots which stood on a marble shelf or on the floor. The dining room opened from the sitting room on one side and a smaller sitting room which had a semi-grand<sup>opined</sup> from the other side. Next to the latter was Mother's bed room and next the girls' room. I think nary slept with them. I can't remember when Klärchen left, but she did go to look after George Polgar in Gyöngyös. At one time we had a nany called Albinchen. My bedroom adjoined father's. Our parents did'nt share a bedroom. There was a large kitchen which contained a sort of Aga cooker for which coal or wood was used. It provided water for washing up too. Between the kitchen and the dining room was a pantry where tableware and linen was stored and where dishes could be laid out before the maid brought them to the table. Mariška's and the maid's bedroom were behind the kitchen. I often sat in the kitchen and my Slovak improved in conversation with the servants.

Mariška was a fount of worldly wisdom and had firm views on the church, the clergy, the Jews, politics and any other subject and never minced her words. It was revealing to have her observations and comments on the friends who came to visit my parents. It was customary for visitors who came to a meal to give a tip to the maid when helped into their coats by her. This tip was shared with Mariška and her opinion of the guests depended on the size of the tip. Anyone leaving a small tip was called a Jew irrespective of the guest's religion.

Anyone who has'nt seen washing up greasy pots and pans, plates, dishes and cutlery in the days before the advent of detergents can't appreciate the revolution that detergents have brought about. A fine sand and a dirty rag were used for the worst blackened pots and also soda and strong bristled brushes. Solid bar soap left nasty rims inside the sink and at least two successive rinses were necessary to remove the last vestiges of soap and dirt particles. Of course, none of the family lifted a finger in the kitchen.

The window of my bed room was opposite Peter's kitchen window. There were two narrow passages, separated by a railing, between our houses. We talked for hours, sitting in our respective windows. Somtimes we slung a rope across which served to ferry toys etc. across. We visited each other on most days and became great friends. Later we shared a room in Prague.

Father had his offices in the semi-basement of the house where he employed a book keeper and a secretary.



51. Our first flat in Bratislava, in Moyzišova st.  
Not to scale and as I remember it.

The car was kept in a garage about  $\frac{1}{2}$  m away. When we came to Bratislava a new chauffeur was engaged of the name Josef Goldberger. He lived in a room next to the garage. He was tall and jovial and when he smiled he exhibited gold teeth which went well with his name. We used to send Christmas cards to each other until 1983 or 1984 and I guess that he has died.

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Going to school was a new experience for me. I was  $8\frac{1}{2}$  years old then. School started at 8 am. It was only about 5 minutes' walk and several from the neighbourhood walked together. Breakfast consisted of weak coffee and a piece of bread or a roll with either jam or butter, rarely both and devoured in the shortest possible time. We were home for lunch and had another two hours at school in the afternoon. Lunch was the principal meal consisting of meat, potatoes, vegetables and usually fruit for afters. After we had returned home at about 4 pm there was home work to be done but there was also time for playing and reading. In the summer we went cycling and later swimming - or we just stood in front of each others' houses and talked. In the winter we went skating in the school yard.

The school was called the Evangelische Volksschule or Protestant Primary School. It was a state school, like most others. Virtually no school fees had to be paid. The ethnic German Protestant community had a say in <sup>the</sup> running of the school. It was open to all denominations. Most of my fellow pupils came from the ethnic German community. They <sup>parents</sup> were hard working artisans, small shopkeepers, wine-growers and proud of their traditions and morality. A few of them were Catholics. There were few Jews. In our form only Peter, Katka and Hans Strebinger, who lived near us and was even fatter than me.

I cannot remember too much about the curriculum: reading, writing, drawing and painting, arithmetics, geography and Heimatskunde. A bell rang at 8 am and lessons lasted almost a whole hour. At the beginning of each day there was a roll-call and absentees were marked in a book. There was a mid-morning break of 15 - 20 minutes announced by a bell. The whole school poured out into the yard. It was surrounded by high wrought-iron railings and there were trees all along the edge. In the summer the yard was dusty and pebbly. There was a lot of noise and chasing and running around. We consumed an apple or buttered roll which we had brought with us in our satchels.

in the warm months the yard was used for sports and games. It had a goal gate at each end and we played hand ball which has rules similar to football but instead of kicking the ball it was held in the hands. I was not keen on these games and mostly played back or goal keeper so I didn't have to run too much. The other game we played also consisted of two teams of eleven players and was called Schlagball. It resembled cricket and baseball. One side was fielding and the other side batted one after the other and one had to make runs. The main difference from cricket was that a hard ball was thrown at the player who was making the run and when hit this could be quite painful.

Sports included running, distance and high jumping and the like. I never made a great effort in these contests.

In the winter, water was sprayed onto the yard surface which froze and provided a skating rink. The yard was then open after school hours and illuminated and on weekends too. Skating was popular and the rink was always packed. From the yard one could see the yard of the Realgymnasium and we watched wistfully our older friends there but they took no notice of us small fry.

Exhibit 52 was taken in the last year at the primary school in Tolstoj street 1. There are 25 boys and 22 girls. This was a typical form size. In the centre is our teacher Mr. Wurm (literally worm), who took us virtually in all subjects. He was competent, kind and fair. After I left he became headmaster in the same school. I cannot remember many of the faces. Peter is on the left of Mr. Wurm and I am standing next to Peter. On his other side is the other fatty Hans Strebinger. The boy on top left was called Golla. His parents had a picture framing shop. He was a cheeky little fellow and later became an expert ski jumper doing 20 meters on our local ski jump. The tall boy in the middle, <sup>in the</sup> back row, is Franz Havel who now lives in Vienna and is a Hofrat. The second from left in the second row was called Fuchsberger, a serious and studious character. Katka sits on the right of the teacher in a white dress. Many of us on the photo transferred to the Realgymnasium in the autumn of 1927 when we were 10 years old.

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It was in the winter of 1926/27 that I was introduced to the art of skiing, partly as a therapeutic exercise to lose weight. We went to the Semmering which is about 3 hours by train from Vienna on the main line to Venice. In part, the gradient of the track is so steep that the train had two locomotives: one in front and one in the back. I can't remember who went



52. Primary school 1926/27. Peter is standing on the right of the teacher. I am on his right.



53. Our cattle at the Nitra river



54. A home made bridge over the Nitra. I am standing next to father.

but I think Mother, Anni and I. It was my first sight of high mountains and I was greatly impressed. We stayed in the largest hotel, the Panhans. (Many years later I stayed there with Dr. Frank Bradley of ICI for a weekend between a congress in Vienna and another in Italy; in the evening we saw the Fledermaus performed in the hotel's restaurant). It was a palatial and luxurious hotel. Near it were the nursery slopes and I seem to have been a reasonably good pupil. I can still see our ski teacher but forgot his name. He had a big, red face, thinning hair and a ready smile. There were pine-trees sugared with snow, footpaths from the hotel to the little village, horse-drawn sleighs and snow a-plenty. It was the beginning of my love of mountains and skiing.

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At the end of my last year at the primary school I sat the entrance exam. of the Realgymnasium and passed.

I can't remember what I did that summer but I must have spent most of it on the farm.