

## FIVE

### MOTHER

Mother was born on 22nd October 1893 about a year after her parents' marriage. A second daughter (whose birthday I don't know) died in 1897 and could have been 3 years old at the most. Next came Boris and on 1st March 1901 István-György, always called Pista, the only son, was born. Exhibits 15 and 16 were taken when mother was perhaps 3 years old. One in Bratislava, the other one in Budapest. As on most other photos, mother looks rather serious. She has always been basically a serious person in contrast to Boris who was nearly always jolly, sometimes to the point of hilarity.

Mother was studious and helped her mother to look after her younger siblings. She was very good-looking, had big dark eyes and long chestnut hair. She had it cut for the first time in the 1920s when the fashion changed from a bun to short hair. She dressed with a great deal of taste and wore jewellery to her good advantage.

I don't know anything about her formal education and I suspect that she was partly self-educated. She was well read. Hungarian was her mother tongue but she spoke and wrote German fluently, though she only spoke a "kitchen-Slovak". She played the piano well and she had taken dancing/ballet lessons as a young girl. She was good at ballroom dancing, at the Csárdás and the Viennese waltzes. She was also adept at the modern dances of the 1920s and 1930s such as the shimmy, charleston, foxtrot and tango. When young she participated in amateur dramatics and remained all her life a devotee of the stage. She played good tennis which she kept up when we were already teenagers. She was fond of swimming and particularly of walking, later when she had no opportunity to do sports, she walked a great deal and mentions this several times in her Red Cross messages during the war. She loved nature and was happiest walking in hilly country, summer or winter. She became an expert and sensitive student of the fine arts but never took to painting as Boris did. In our second flat in Bratislava she had an exquisite collection of china and glassware. It was displayed in an all-glass cabinet which stood at right angles to the dining room wall i.e. the narrow side was against the wall. One could thus see the figurines and other exhibits from all sides and even from underneath as the shelves were of glass. When <sup>World</sup>war broke out she was 21 and this must have restricted her social life and perhaps her further education or travels. Like all middleclass girls then



15. Mother about 3 years old.  
Studio photo in Bratislava.



16. Mother about 3 years old.  
Studio photo in Budapest.

she was kept on a tight rein. There was little amusement in a small town like Hlohovec but there were amateur shows and probably private dances. She may also have attended social functions in Budapest. I know little about her friends. She knew the sons of local farmers such as the brothers Sándor and Jozso László with whom she kept contact. Jozso's wife Alice, became a friend of Mother's when they lived in Bratislava. Our first flat in Bratislava was in Sándor's house. Mother had a passion for letter writing with a beautiful rounded hand and she always used a particular mauve coloured Stephens' ink. She was practical, methodical and well organised. She was an expert housewife. Her linen and personal belongings were neatly stacked on shelves in cupboards. The piles of sheets etc. were held together with pale silk ribbons.

She was also an excellent hostess and her parties were much appreciated by those invited.

I don't know how my parents met. Father was certainly an eligible young farmer. Perhaps they met at a dance or fête. They got married in Hlohovec on 23rd February, 1916, a leap year. My Mother was then just 22 years and four months old, my father a little over 31 years and 1 month. Their age difference was just over 9 years.

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31 was a relatively young age for a man to run his own farm and this may have made a particularly good impression on Mother's parents. One of the witnesses who signed the marriage certificate was Salamun Weinberger from Hlohovec. It is probable that he was a cousin of Father's ( see family tree ). The Other witness was Samuel Steiner from Kynek. Steiner was the name of my great - grandmother Schwitzer. Kynek was once a farm belonging to Grandfather Simon Schwitzer. It seems probable that the Kynek farm had been transferred to the Steiner family and that the second witness was a relative of Father's too. Both witnesses have Jewish - sounding names but the wedding certificate shows both parents as Catholics. I don't know whether they were then already Christians or not. If they were not, then the entry about their religion could have been a later amendment. Grandfather Schwitzer became a Catholic in 1919 and may be the amendment took place in that year when Father and Mother would have converted - but I just don't know. Nor do I know whether my parents went away on a honeymoon journey but because of the war situation it would have been of

short duration and not far away. If they did not go on a honeymoon, then I imagine that Father brought his wife to Madunice, after the wedding party. This was a distance of about 12 m or about an hour's drive in a two-horse light carriage. Perhaps Karol the coachman sat up in front. It would have been cold and my parents would have been wrapped in a fur foot muff and heavy blankets. There would be servants welcoming them at the front door and a wood fire burning in the stove. Perhaps some refreshments were offered to them. They would sit by the light of a paraffin lamp or candles. The lamp would be smoking a little, the candles dripping. But they wouldn't care. They were happy, and alone for the first time in their lives.