

SEVEN

FATHER

Father was born on 16th January 1885 in Madunice when grandfather was 34. Father was the second child of the second marriage. He never had close relations with his half-brother Josef, though they looked alike and were similar in character. There was considerable professional rivalry between them and both might have been jealous of their father's affection. He had helped them both generously to set up as farmers, but father became more successful. We met uncle Josef and my cousins on family occasions but did not meet otherwise very often. Father's relations with his sisters were good and I think he was particularly fond of Frida. He also liked the Szörenyi cousins.

Father was of a good height and slim in his youth. See exhibit 17, taken in 1915 at the beginning of the first world war when he was already farming in Madunice. This is how father looked when mother became his bride in 1916. He had a moustache ever since I remember, a small bristly one which later was grey. He dressed formally with stiff white collar and waistcoat and liked to don a wide-brimmed hat. He had brown eyes, the round family face, relatively short arms and legs and his hands were small like mine. I don't know anything about his schooling except that he had little of it. In contrast to mother he hardly read books and was not interested in the fine arts and music, though he was a good dancer. He was a true farmer, happiest in the fields and stables. Farming became his consuming passion. I know nothing about his social life as a young man but he was not keen on parties and the like. His friends in later years were almost exclusively other farmers. Like the whole of the Schwitzer clan, he was no intellectual.

He was shy and a little awkward in both male and female company. Later, when mother gave parties, he preferred to sit in a corner and talk shop with other farmers and withdraw with them to a game of cards. Shopping and restaurants he disliked and also any public functions. I think he never delivered a speech. The only shopping he enjoyed was suits which he had made in Vienna at the most expensive tailor on the Graben in Vienna, called Knize. He also had a tailor in Nitra, Kovács, whom I met later in London and who tailored one suit for me at a reduced price.

Father was not interested in physical exercise. I don't think he ever mounted a horse. Nor was he interested in games and never learned to drive a car - though that would not have been unusual then. He always had a chauffeur. He intensely disliked the sight of a car crash victim or a threshing machine casualty or any accident involving suffering and violence to man or beast. He had a shot gun but only on the rarest occasions did he try to shoot a partridge, pheasant or hare and usually missed anyway. I don't think he ever went out shooting by himself. There used to be some shooting parties in the winter in Velky Lapaš to which he invited friends and though he walked with them with a gun, he rarely used it. I think he arranged for these shoots because he felt that as the "squire" he had a duty to do so but did not enjoy them particularly. Paul Veró who lived in the same village as Teri and Magda, told me that he used to participate at some of these shooting parties.

One physical exercise he did enjoy - and this he shared with Mother - was walking. We often walked 1 - 2 hours around the fields, inspecting the crops. Even on a hot day he wore a tie but no waistcoat. Against the sun he wore a light pale grey wide-rimmed hat. He stopped from time to time to take off the hat and wipe the inside rim with a big white handkerchief. We talked little when we walked but he taught me a great deal about crops and a thousand other farming matters.

Sometimes he lost his temper, particularly with our chief bailiff Mr. Orvan and would shout at him, but these explosions never lasted long. He never shouted at us children and never hit us. Nor did he use swear words except for instance calling out "ox" to a jaywalker who had nearly run into our car.

In general he was courteous with people whom he had dealings with but must have felt a little inferior in the presence of intellectuals. He had no great opinion of peasants and labourers. For years he was suspicious of the new régime and civil service, especially the gendarmerie and tax collectors but later accepted them. He never became reconciled to the fact that the Czechs had the upperhand and called them the "circus people". He was essentially a practical man and not interested in religious matters, nor in history and certainly not in philosophy. His dealings with people was direct, straightforward and without rhetoric.

In many ways Mother and Father were quite unsuited to each other. But they were complementary and it was perhaps this which attracted them

to each other. Father was well-to-do, Mother came from a poorer family. Father was uneducated and unpretentious, Mother came from an intellectual milieu and was keenly interested in literature and the fine arts. Father worked hard and enjoyed his reputation as a successful farmer. Mother's ambition was to create an elegant home and imbue us children with a sense of beauty and intellectual values. Mother was a reputed beauty and must have been a coveted prize for a young farmer who wanted to make his way in life. Father became the richest farmer in the area, Mother a hostess much sought after by "society". Their incompatibility seemed to be the cause which led to their divorce.