

WTC042. Typed Letter from Béla Szemző in Budapest to Mat Schwitzer in London, carried by Hungarian diplomat. Reports the fate of his immediate family and other Hungarian relatives. Writes that Béla and his son were both "called up". Discusses the loss of his farm and his work in the Hungarian Sugar Beet Association, and asks for contacts in Britain, hoping to travel to London through his work.

Dear Matyi, my nephew!

We know your address from Pali, however I only have an opportunity to write to you now, as I had wished, because Dr. Szabó will take the letter. He is the First Secretary at the Embassy, and a good friend of mine, with whom we lived through the hardships of the siege. I do hope that you will meet with him in person, and then you will receive direct news about us, although he does not know our family's circumstances.

You must have probably heard through Pali, your brother-in-law, about the tragic losses suffered by our closer and more distant family members, so I will refer only to the ones close to me here. As you probably know, your poor Aunt Fridi is also amongst the victims. After the German invasion I sent Erika to Slovakia. Jancsi and I were called up, thus Fridi was left alone and since she did not want to flee, she was captured. The Szörényi family is well, except for Gyuri and his family who have disappeared without a trace. From the Polgár's it seems that only Gyuri is alive, you should have heard from him because I gave him your address.

Given the fact that the Slovaks took my Füss estate, I am now using my 25 years of experience to rebuild the Hungarian agriculture, and I am the Director of the Sugar Beet Statewide Association. I have undertaken an almost impossible task, and hope that I can still achieve great deeds. I am sending you the first two issues of our newspaper and also my English language business card, that I have already prepared for my future foreign trips. I hope to participate in the peace negotiations and thus travel to London, then we can talk further.

I am happy to hear that you have found a good job, and Zsuzsi is a happy mother. I hope that God helps at least you to reach a harmonious life, which fate did not allow us to have.

Yes please, whenever you can, please collect all information about the latest research in the production of sugar beets and send them to me. In 1935 I was the guest of the British Sugar Beet Growers Association, I don't remember their exact title. It is possible that you will find their name from their publications, since I would like to establish contact with the international association, but I do not know whether they are active at present or where. I assume that the British Association will be able to answer all these questions.

I would be very happy to receive a detailed account from you as soon as possible.

Until we meet again, I embrace you

Your uncle,

(signed) Béla

WPS notes 20/2/2021 with help from Ilona Szemzo and Zsofi Szemzo

Nephew. The Hungarian *öcsém* is not specific, it usually translates as younger brother, but (in those days) it could also mean (younger) cousin or nephew, or even a younger friend or close colleague. We have used **nephew**, as this is what MKS was to Béla.

Pali. Béla qualifies the second mention of Pali as 'your brother-in-law', as if it is a different person. Probably the first Pali is Béla's brother, **Pali Szemzo**, whereas the second is **Pali Adler**.

Ones close to me here. The Hungarian is not specific, it literally means people from nearby (vicinity), but it could also be understood as close relatives. In any event, Béla goes on to relate what happened to his wife and two children, and to the Szorenyi family (his relatives by marriage to Frieda) and Polgar family (not his relatives) living in Hungary.

The **Szorenyi's** are the four children of MKS's aunt, Berta Szorenyi née Schwitzer (1883–1919) who married Dr Tivadar Szorenyi. Her four children were first cousins of MKS, and Béla's nephews and nieces through his wife Frieda. They are Bozsi b. 1904 (WPS met in Budapest in 1979), Imre b. 1905, Gyuri b. 1906 (whom Béla is reporting as having died along with his wife and one daughter), and Pista b. 1907 (who stayed twice with MKS and family in Highgate in the late 1970s).

The **Polgar's** are relatives of MKS on his mother's side, so were not relatives of Béla. They lived in Gyöngyös, about 80km north-east of Budapest, evidently [but surprisingly] Béla was in contact with them. MKS's aunt Boris Polgar née Hajos (b. 1898) married Pista Polgar (b. 1885), their only son Gyuri (George) Polgar (b.1919) later emigrated to the U.S. Béla is reporting that of these three, only George Polgar survived. Boris Polgar is the writer of items 104 and 105, written while forced from her home, and from inside Gyöngyös ghetto, from where the occupants were deported to Auschwitz.

Called Up. The Hungarian *behívtak* is not specific, it normally would mean military service, but here Béla is referring to the fact that **he was called up for forced labour service under the command of the military.** Probably Béla was deliberately being slightly vague, using a phrase that could include him having done full military service, in case the letter fell into the wrong hands. Béla writes more specifically in his memoirs that both his son János and himself did *munkaszolgálat* (labour service) in various labour camps, including in *Ruszinszko* (the Carpatho-Ukraine), an area annexed by Hungary in 1938 and 1939, later to become part of the Ukraine. Many people never came back from these labour camps; Bela used all his contacts to get both himself and his son out of this forced labour. There is considerable background to understand here, see extract (in English) from Béla's memoirs.

Fridi (affectionate form of Frieda) b. 1894 is Béla's wife and MKS's aunt (sister of MKS's father Stefan Schwitzer).

Erika is Béla's daughter (1925–1952). She later went to Switzerland and then the U.S.

Jancsi (affectionate form of János) is Béla's son (1924–1958) who later emigrated to Uruguay.

Gyuri Polgár is George Polgar, father of Barbara Polgar.

Zsuzsi is Susi Schwitzer, MKS's youngest sister, later Jean Bolton.

Ilona Szemzo and **Zsofi Szemzo** (the translators) are both granddaughters of the writer.