

Bella Steinmetz



I think this is my first passport photo. After my father my name was Bacher, that's why it is written Bacher Berta on it. This must have been taken in Marosvasarhely. There wasn't any photographer in Toplica. They didn't take photos in Toplica. I made my hair wavy here. One can see that I had a thick hair, but it was even, so we made it wavy. I know that all the photographers asked me to show my hand somehow, as I had such beautiful hands. I had very nice hands, and they were slim, long! One can see it. The photographer already knew me, and always asked me to put it here, put it there, so that my hand showed.

I went to Pest for the first time when I was 17 years old, and since then every year. I stayed at one of the sister-in-laws of my uncle from Torokszenmiklos, as I wasn't old enough at the age of 17. I was at my uncle for three or four days, I picked up the money, then I went to Pest, and I was enjoying myself. My uncle had a sister-in-law, the sister of his wife, she had a student son, he was studying law, and I made friends from his society in Budapest. His [the student's] parents lived in Pest, his father was a teacher. Thus I got more education too if I needed. But I didn't. I think I learnt home everything, I could eat with knife and fork... He introduced me to a lot of his colleagues, so I had partners to go with to museums, to theatre, to balls. How could I have got otherwise my society? I had so many suitors. I learnt a lot from them, since they all were cultured kids. They took me to performances. I heard there for the first time what a reciting choir was, and I heard the famous reader of Hungary - I don't remember his name. But they took me not only to gaffs, but we went in the after-noon to elegant hotels for a five o'clock tea. A piano and a violin, soft music. We ate a cake or a chocolate, and we set there for two hours. I went out with them, they were suggesting: let's go here or there in the after-noon.

In the theatre I watched operettas with Hanna Honty, Kalman Latabar, I watched all [the repertoire] every autumn, I was in the theatre every evening. No matter if the boys came or not - but usually they did. For four weeks performances went on from seven until nine, by the time one came out from the theatre it was half past nine. Sometimes one or two waited for me after the show, and we went together to a café, we drank a simple coffee or a champagne-and-soda. And we were listening to a performer who sang couples, poems set to music with piano accompaniment and bass drum. There were famous performers, for example Vilma Medgyaszai, she was like Edith Piaf. Her performance was magnificent. And there were Gypsy children bands with hundred members. I remember the Emke café, but they didn't play there, there was a café next to it, and the Gypsy children played there. The Emke was more commercial-like, I used to have breakfast there and read the newspaper to find out what they would be playing that night in the theatre.

In the morning I wandered alone. That's how I got in the armchair of Ferenc Deak, alone. I walked and I walked. The Parliament is like this and like that - I heard so much about it. Well, but I want to see the Parliament from the inside! I kept on hanging around until I entered at the back entrance. I saw a small door, a man was standing there, he wore some sort of hat. I tell him: 'I would like so much to see how the Parliament looks like from the inside!' 'Well, my child, it's forbidden to enter here.' And I answer him: 'Please mister, I come from Transylvania... - this was a password - and I'm so curious. Just for a second...' I begged him so long, that finally he got touched, well, a young girl is so interested, and he came with me, and entered the great hall... He showed me great things: 'Quickly, quickly...' The platform was enclosed, and there was a big armchair and a big table, this was the largest room in the Parliament. And he said: 'You see, my child, that's the chair of Ferenc Deak, he used to sit there, in that armchair.' It was surrounded by a thick cord, as they usually enclose such things. I jumped over it, and got inside, and I sat down...! 'What are you doing?' 'Nothing. Now I can tell that I was sitting in the chair of Ferenc Deak!' I came out quickly, and I apologized. He caressed me. Of course I went home and told this to my relatives, and they waved their hands saying it was a lie. They wouldn't believe it: 'Such a lie, etc...' At the end I related them how it happened: 'Come with me..., I'm not lying!' When I told this to my father, he liked it a lot, and praised me. He said: 'You were interested in such things too!' And I was interested in so many other things!

When I was 19 years old, I stayed in a pension-house, there were two of them, but I stayed mainly in one, on the Nagykorut [one of the main roads in Budapest], I don't remember its name. On the sixth floor. But it had an elevator. And a famous actress lived there too, she had a permanent room there. I wondered at the fact that she was the actress of the National Theatre and so she... So I stayed in a pension-house at the age of 18-19. I traveled, got down in Torokszentmiklos, I stayed there for 3-4 days, picked up what I had to: my uncle gave me a lot of money, and I went to Pest. I already knew my way around, better than in Marosvasarhely.