

Andy Alföldy

We left Hungary in 1945 and wound up in Germany via Austria. My grandfather and father were both medical doctors, My father was a surgeon with the Hungarian Red Cross. In Germany, at the end of the war, he became officially a prisoner of war, though the Americans found his skills and abilities very useful. He spoke fairly adequate English, which he learned at university in Budapest. He was employed in administrative positions at various hospitals as well as tending to his patients, who were mostly wounded Hungarian soldiers. Being a prisoner of war he was paid virtually nothing and we subsisted on care packages. These were extremely lean times. My grandfather, who was nearing seventy by then, spoke no English and never did return to practice. In Hungary he had been a member of the Federal parliament for a quarter century as well as a medical specialist in a number of disciplines. He, in fact, brought in the first X-ray machine to Hungary for use in his practice.

Reflections on the General Blatchford and Crossing the North Atlantic

It was the last week of October 1950 when I first saw the General Blatchford. She was tied up at dockside in Bremerhaven, Germany. Through my nine-year-old eyes the General was like a huge city topped by the volcano of its gently smoking stack reaching toward the sky. A gangway snaked up her side and a slow moving line of human ants carrying every description of make shift baggage was wending its way aboard. Our little group of five, grandfather, mother, father, sister and I, were in the middle of this steadily ascending chain of displaced souls. It was mid afternoon of a mostly sunny autumn day and the shadows were distinct. I remember certain details of my first impression of this great gray ship: the metronomic pace of the rotating radar antenna; the smell of fresh paint that covered everything, numbly from the texture of the many underlying coats making it like the skin of an elephant; a great circular light with its lens shutters, [I later learned it was for sending Morse code]; the life boats row on row and the air scoop funnels everywhere.

Later in the day when the sun was approaching the rooftops of Bremen and everyone was crowded against the railings the crew started to pull the gangway aboard. On the dock a shore gang unbent the ropes from the capstans and they also were drawn aboard. With this the umbilical cord that had tied us to Europe, our homes, and our lives up to this point, was severed. There were surprisingly few people to wave farewell to the three thousand or so of us on board. I'm sure we all had loved ones our hearts ached for who were left behind but each of those is a story unto itself. My grandfather watched the activity misty eyed, knowing that he was unlikely to ever see his home again but excited none the less about what lay ahead. My sister and I, with the exuberance of the young, saw mostly the adventure of it all. We had been given a stick of chewing gum for the voyage by someone. We decided that halving it made for too small a piece each to properly enjoy so instead opted to chew the entire stick each on alternate days. She was happily chewing as I watched a swirl of inky, oily water appear between the side of the ship and the wharf. By sundown we were in the estuary and turning southward into the English Channel. It was a beautiful evening with countless seagulls diving over the glassy water as it reflected a perfect sunset.

We were called below to the mess hall and dined on wieners and cabbage and boiled potatoes. Every bench was packed with hungry people but the food was plentiful and good and we all ate heartily. As a nine year old I was assigned to the women's quarters with my mother and sister. This was roughly one half of the ship's hold, one cavernous room with about fifteen hundred occupants. The beds were double wide and double tiered, each unit slept four people. My sister and I had the bottom bed of one unit with our mother sharing the top with a Polish lady whom she didn't know. We knew no one on board. As I tried to sleep I became aware of a booming noise that would come at intervals. The ship's motion became more and more noticeable and the booming came more frequently and virtually shook the ship. The motion was relentless and the booming noise, which was actually caused by the prow of the ship striking the waves, made sleep impossible. The hold was like a giant resonator and soon there were the sounds of people in distress. The lady above us started to get sick, then our mother got sick, then vomit dripped into our bed and we got sick. Soon the hold was a Bedlam of vomiting and moaning. I prayed for morning to come. When it came the scene was something out of a Hieronymus Bosch painting. The multi-stalled washroom was even worse.

That first morning at breakfast there was no line up for the food. A few people straggled in and were seated sparsely about. I took a couple of boiled eggs and toast and orange topside and found that once in the fresh air I felt much better and could eat. My mother stayed dreadfully sick for the entire passage and lost a lot of weight, even though she was thin to start with. My grandfather and dad never were sick. My sister and I were sick at times but endured reasonably well. It was the ubiquitous smell of vomit that kept us queasy. I think the majority of the passengers were susceptible for most of the trip.

During the course of that first full day out of port we rounded the southern tip of England and the General's cold gray nose turned into the cold gray waters of the northern Atlantic. For the next six days we encountered a number of storms, some bringing waves much taller than the ship itself. When she slid to the bottom of the troughs there was a wall of water towering above the sight line in every direction. I always felt anxious at those moments, as I'm sure did many others. On quieter evenings the ship came alive with activity. There was a small room that was opened after dinner and people would line up to be given a couple of chocolate Orio cookies. My sister and I would receive the cookies and line up again while we munched them down. On a good night we might get six or eight cookies. Oh we loved them. After dark, if it was reasonably calm, people would stay on deck as long as possible. Everyone felt healthier in the fresh air and no one was eager to face the horrors of the hold. On one particularly clear night with the stars in the sky by their millions I sneaked past the rope barrier that cordoned off the very front section of the main deck. There were oddly shaped masses of gears and funnels and cable drums but I made my way to the nose of the ship and looked over the rail. The sea swished by below as we sliced through it and parted it to either side. While I watched a school of dolphins swam along with us. It was a magical moment but didn't last long as the P.A. system announced the end of evening. Very few of us spoke or understood English but the announcements were obeyed instantly. We even had lifeboat drills with a minimum of chaos. I know not how many nationalities were represented on board but definitely many.

One afternoon the sea was quite calm. We had been away from land and all signs of human life, other than that contained on board, for many days when on the very edge of the horizon we saw a

puff of smoke. It slowly became the barely discernable stack of a ship. A crew of sailors manned the Morris code light and I saw the brilliant flashes from it as they snapped its shutters open and closed. In due time from the distant ship came replying flashes. They signaled back and forth for quite a while but never did get close to each other before we lost sight. I felt lonely and the vastness of the Atlantic was accentuated by the experience. Another afternoon of a very stormy day the waves built in size and the wind became bitter cold. Eventually the P.A. system asked everyone to go below but my dad, who was born with a strong sense of adventure, sat me down on a bench against the leeward side bulkhead. In the gloomy darkening light with the waves pounding the ship with such fury that they washed over top of her and waters from the wave tops cascaded onto the deck on our side I heard the story of Christopher Columbus and his first crossing of the Atlantic.

It was the afternoon of the seventh day when the General Blatchford steamed into Halifax harbor and was tied up to Pier 21. Standing in line and waiting was a way of life for us by now and it seemed no time at all that we were leaving her ever undulating decks and taking our first step on the terra firma of our new home Canada. It might have been symbolic but everyone's motion sickness vanished instantly. It was right about here that the gum hit the water, a bit lumpy and sour with every vestige of flavor long gone.

There were large net slings in which our luggage was off loaded. I remember the crane hoisting them ashore. In the sorting/receiving area of Pier 21 we were assigned a spot against one of the walls and reunited with our possessions. Eventually the Customs and Immigration people were done processing us and we were free to leave the area. In a concession within the complex we bought and ate our first meal in our new home. I will never forget it, a glass bottle of milk, a loaf of white Wonder bread in the wax paper package with the big dots on it and a can of Spork. I loved it.

And so we arrived in this wonderful country called Canada. Now of the five of us who the General Blatchford so graciously delivered to these blessed shores only my mother and I are still alive. We all became duly sworn in Canadian citizens and my grandfather, father and sister are buried in Canadian soil. The family has grown and expanded and now this journey of renewal and hope for a better life is fading into the realm of folklore but for me the "General" will always be something special.

Anna Spaunburg

Departed Dec 19-1926, arrived Pier 21 Halifax, December 28 1926.

Our 9 day voyage - Mother with 3 children ages 6, 4, 2, I was the oldest - Anna (Wohl) Wahl, 6 years old, born October 18 1920 in Nemetker, Hungary.

Very rough seas, I was sick the entire trip. Christmas on board the ship, have memories of a tree and gifts for all the children. One trip to the dining area, we were unable to eat as our plates got away from us. Good thing the tables had ledges on them. Remember mother and friends playing cards outside the cabin, and chairs, tables and people going from one side of passageway to the other, but we all survived.

When we arrived in Halifax we had to go down a rope ladder to a barge along side. There were steamer trunks around the outside to keep us from falling overboard, then we were taken to Pier 21 onshore.

We were welcomed by the Red Cross or Salvation Army, I recall the uniforms. We were a family of four: mother, two daughters, one son, accompanied by a family friend whose husband was in Manitoba working at the same place as our dad. Then by train to Winnipeg to be met by our father.

We went to school in Winnipeg, we were very fortunate as the Sisters (nuns) spoke both German and English and made it easier for us. I lived in Winnipeg area from 1926 to 1929, Windsor 1929 to 1946, and Leamington, Ontario from 1946 to present. I retired from H.J. Heinz after thirty years of service at Christmas time 1977 and am enjoying my retirement. I do volunteer work with church, and the legion and enjoy golfing, reading, traveling, etc.

Irene Gadja

My dad spoke very little of his family. Few facts are known to me, he lived in a village in Hungary close to the Romanian border, his home was a thatched house with dirt floor that he shared with his six siblings. He never mentioned his father, all I knew of his mother that she was very stern woman, a very religious Catholic.

When he was nine years old he learned of the Great Lakes in Canada. He was fascinated. He decided when he grew up he would go to Canada to see these great inland lakes. He never gave up that dream. When he was 27 years old, married and had a baby girl (me), he borrowed money from his mother and set off to Canada. His brothers and sisters thought he had gone mad. My mother and I were left to live with his mother. He sailed from Antwerp on March 15, 1929 on the S.S. Pennland. Winnipeg was his destination, on arrival he would receive \$25.00 from the Department of Colonization, Agriculture and Natural Resources. He was to work on a farm. When the train stopped in Montreal he got off and disappeared into the crowd. He knew no one and didn't speak English or French, never received his \$25.00 incentive. It was during the depression and he found work-digging ditches for the gas company (he was a tailor back home). In a year and a half he was able to send our fare to join him. Mom and I left from Port Bremen on the Stuttgart, arriving at Pier 21 November 1, 1930.

My parents worked very hard and had tough times; they prospered and lived very comfortably in their old age. The rest of his family stayed in Europe. When I was younger it never bothered me that I did not know about my grandparents. I truly regret not questioning about family. My parents have both died – it is too late, I often wonder about their youth, their life and the village they grew up in.

Kucha Family

Country of origin - Hungary,

Ship - Minnedosa (Steven F. Kucha)

Ship - Bremen (for Margaret S. Kucha nee Toth

Arrival: July 23, 1926 for Steven F. / Feb. 11/1934 for Margaret S.

Age: 5 years 8 mos for Steven F / 8 years for Margaret S (left Hungary on her birthday) January 26, 1934

Steven F. Kucha (Istvan Kuksa, Jr.) sailed from his homeland of Hungary, with his mother, on the ship called the Minnedosa and arrived in Halifax July 23, 1926. He was just over five years old when he arrived in Canada. Steve married his wife, Margaret S. (nee) Toth on August 14, 1943. They recently celebrated their 61st wedding anniversary. They have 3 children and two grandchildren - daughter Sharon (and husband Bill), son Steven (and wife Teresa), and son Larry and his two daughters, Marisa and Vanessa. He is so proud to be a Canadian. He calls this the best place in the world.

Margaret S. (nee Toth) Kucha left her homeland of Hungary with her Mother, and older brother on her 8th birthday, January 26, 1934, on the ship called the Bremen. They arrived through New York, U.S.A. and went on to Niagara Falls, Ontario on Feb. 11, 1934. She is married to Steven F. Kucha, Jr. (Istvan Kuksa, Jr.). They were married in Niagara Falls, Ontario on August 14, 1943 and just celebrated their 61st anniversary. They have 3 children and two grandchildren - Daughter Sharon (husband Bill), Son Steven (wife Teresa), and Son Larry and his two daughters, Vanessa and Marisa.

Margaret adores her Canada. She is so very proud to be a Canadian.

Tajti Family

The TAJTI family of Matramindszent, Hungary

Welland City Directories show that the surname was changed to TAYTI in 1937.

The earliest ancestor known to this family was Janos Tajti of Matramindszent. He was the grandfather of Istvan Tajti, who sailed from Antwerp aboard the ship Minnedosa, arriving in Quebec City on August 21, 1925, and went to Welland, ON. He had left behind his wife, Anna Katona and sons Pal and Zoltan. Anna and the boys sailed from Antwerp aboard the Cunard White Star Lines ship Montcalm, arriving in Quebec City on October 24, 1930. They traveled by train to meet Istvan. The ship's manifest said Istvan lived at 446 South Main St., in Welland. A daughter, Anne, was born the next year in Canada. The Tajti family was Roman Catholic. As adults, Zoltan and Anne converted to Protestantism.

Istvan b. May 04, 1899 in Matramindszent d. summer 1970 in Welland, ON. Anna Katona b. 1901 in Doroghaza, Hungary, d. spring 1976 in Welland. Pal b. May 03, 1921 in Hungary d. September 2000 in Welland. Zoltan b. April 09, 1924 in Hungary d. August 05, 2001 in Welland. Anne b. August 15, 1931 in Welland d. September 2000 in Welland. NOTE: All three siblings died within an 11-month period. Anna Katona's father was Janos Katona. Her mother died when she was ten years old and father remarried. Istvan's father was Pal Tajti who was a farmer with cattle, sheep, and bees. Pal also raised corn for making brooms.

Istvan went to Norway to work in early 1920s, returned to Hungary for a short time and built a new home for the family in Matramindszent. In Welland, Istvan became known as Steve. He worked for Electro-Metals and retired from that company. After moving to Welland, he made several trips to Hungary. Wife Anna returned only once. He was a great singer and made his own wine. He was a member of the Independent Mutual Benefit Federation and an affiliate of the IMBF Hall (Munkas) on Park Street, Welland. IMBF organization was formed as an insurance company in the 1930s, to cover funeral expenses of members. The IMBF hall (Munkas) was sometimes referred to as the Hungarian Labour Temple. It was a place for social gatherings, allowing the people to retain their culture and language.

In the early years the family moved around in rental homes, then purchased a farm about 1939, later selling that and buying a house in 1943 at 254 Niagara Street, Welland. Istvan quickly learned to speak English. Anna did not learn much English, although she could understand some bits of conversations. She still took her Hungarian prayer book when attending Mass. There was no need for her to learn English. She spent most of her time with fellow Hungarians and they spoke Hungarian in the home. Welland had a large farmers' market where the Hungarian women would meet on Saturday.

Zoltan's widow Elizabeth, has the family history for 7 generations beginning with JANOS, including information on names, where the people located (some went to Beckley, West Va.) etc.

The following is about Zoltan and his life in Canada.

Zoltan Tayti is the fourth generation of the Tajti family, beginning with his great grandfather Janos Tajti from Matramindszent, Hungary. He was born Zoltan Tajti in Matramindszent. Traveled here on Cunard White Star Line ship Montcalm arriving at Quebec City, October 24, 1930, then traveling to Welland, Ontario by train. While in Cdn. Army (WWII) he legally changed spelling to Tayti and legally took the name Chester as his middle name. The surname had been changed when he and his brother were in elementary school in Canada. Chester was a name he adopted, taken from the comic strip Chester Gump. He was known as Chester at General Motors. When he retired in 1981, he again used Zoltan Chester. Family and Hungarian friends called him Zoly. When Zoltan was born Hungarians often had but one name, with no middle name.

In teen years he belonged to the IMBF orchestra under Henry Stahl. They played over CKTB radio station Sundays, a program called Hungarian Homeland Memories. They also played for dances and picnics at Kossuth Park and at Hungarian Labour Temple. He was member of IMBF cultural dance troupe and Drama Club that traveled to Tillsonburg, Hamilton, Brantford, etc. performing in Hungarian Halls.

Employment:

- Worked in tobacco fields when young, then for various employers in Welland over years, including Electro Metals, Atlas, Canada Forge, etc.
- Canadian Army 1943-46
- During 1946-47 sold insurance for Toronto Mutual; then had a crew under him selling Street & Smith magazines in different cities.
- Employed full time at General Motors 1949 - 1981 except for one year. In 1953-54, he operated his own restaurant, called Argyle Coffee Shop in Preston, ON. He was a Union Shop Steward for 3 years. He took early retirement at age 56 after arterial by-pass

He was married twice and had two children, Mark and Michael Tayti, three stepchildren Nancy, David and Stephen Sherwood.

While living in St. Catharines, he attended West St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, later going to St. Giles Presbyterian. While at St. Giles ran a Scout troop, cooked for the Men's Club; purchased and sold Christmas trees to help the church.

After moving to Welland he transferred his membership to Knox Presbyterian in 1976. Was member of Board of Managers, later a Trustee. Member of Men's Breakfast Club and Friendship Club.

Hobbies:

- Played football in High School
- Taught ballroom dancing with Paul Barta School of Dancing. Paul Barta was owner of Budapest Restaurant of King Street, Welland.
- At one time rode an old Indian motorcycle to B.C.

- Held pilot's license. Flying 1949-60. Owned in 5-way partnership a Cornell, call letters CFFUM; later owned personally a Piper Super Cruiser, 3 places.
- Held black belt in Judo and was instructor for same. Was member of Judo Club at GM
- Sang barbershop in St. Catharines
- Played golf for about 15 years,
- Member Pioneer Square Dancers, St. Catharines, from about 1979-84. Went ballroom dancing at the many ethnic halls in Niagara area 1976-90 with wife Elizabeth.
- From 1960s until 2000 collected militaria, handguns and long guns. Was a member of the Welland and Handgun Club for 20 years until end of 2000. He and buddy, Paul Eros showed and sold at many gun shows around Ontario.
- Operated a DJ business called PLATTER CHATTER from about 1979 to 1984.
- Very musical, a good singer and enjoyed playing harmonica
- Zoltan made two trips to Hungary. One with Elizabeth, when he was 52, after being away 45 years. He remembered exactly where his Aunt Erszebet lived and went directly to the house. The other trip was 9 years later, with David Sherwood. He was still speaking Hungarian.

He went to Ghana three times with Elizabeth. They were instrumental in helping establish a Girls Vocational School in Dormaa-Ahenkro, Ghana in 1990. The school was later offered help by the Presbyterian World Service and Development, Canada, and as of 2005 is still operational.

They lived with the local Presbyterian minister, Rev. Ohemeng Boakye (OB) and his family. When there in 1990 he became the Godfather of Kwadwo. In 1991 the second son was born and given the name Kwasi Zoltan. Kwasi was called Papa Zoly by the villagers when he was very young. Kwasi later requested some of the ashes of Zoltan, who had been cremated at death, and the request was granted.

Zoltan and Elizabeth traveled extensively from 1976-1999, in Europe, Canada, USA and Caribbean Islands. They spent many summers at their cottage in Nova Scotia. He never regretted his father had brought the family to Canada, and maintained his Hungarian connections until his death. One of his early Hungarian memories was driving the horse and wagon home, by himself, when his grandfather stopped at the local tavern. He was age five. At that time the grandparents were living with Zoltan's family.

All the early information, about ancestors, and from 1930-1975 was given to Elizabeth Tayti by Zoltan Tayti.