

A HUNGARIAN WOMAN'S LIFE



*My Life's Miracles, War, Life Under
Communism, Love, Revolution, Escape,
and Emigration to America*

BY ERZSEBET KERTESZ DOBOSI CROLL

*A Hungarian
Woman's Life*

Erzsebet Kertesz Dobosi Croll



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Photo Credit—the cover photo is from my collection. It was taken shortly after I arrived as a refugee at the Dominion Gardens apartment complex in Alexandria, Virginia.

I am wearing a much-appreciated dress donated to me by a charity in U.S. Army Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, in route to Virginia.

To my loving husband, Dr. Donald L. Croll, who supported me in writing this book and helped me translate the book from Magyar (Hungarian) to English.

To my good friend, Barbara Lightner, who encouraged me to write this book and helped me to get started.

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Chapter 1

1940: Peace

On a beautiful April morning in 1940, Mother got our family a baked Easter ham, sausage, and hard boiled eggs that were painted red and placed in a basket. I remember how beautiful they looked in the basket with the white cloth. Mother said she was taking all the food to the church so the priest could bless it and then she would hurry home so we could have it for lunch. I have to tell you how excited we were. The three of us looked out the window as Mother left. Snow covered the ground. Big icicles were hanging from the gutter. In the meanwhile, Uncle Steve arrived. He was my mother's younger brother. We were very happy to see him. He always brought us writing paper, erasers, pencils, and little blackboards. The rest of the relatives came.

Mother returned from the church. The table was beautifully set with white table cloth and holiday china on it. The fire was burning in the fireplace. Julie was sitting in her playpen and the three of us were sitting at the table next to the grownups. I remember how it was a very special holiday. That's how Easter was celebrated in our house.

Finally, it was summer. We could go outside to play. I talked my twin sister into throwing rocks up to the roof to see who could throw them the furthest. Of course, we were only five years old. My rock landed in the middle of the big picture window. Wow! *That will be big trouble*, I thought. I ran right into the house to tell Mother that Anna's rock went through the window.

She was right at my heel, yelling, "It's not true! Mother, it's not true!"

My poor mother didn't know what to do. She said, "Just wait until your father gets home."

Well, I thought, that's the time he usually gets home. I had better go to bed and act like I am sleeping. I am sure he is not going to wake me up to spank me. The window got fixed. I got away without being spanked.

It looked like we are going to have a new baby. In May 1942, the stork arrived. He brought us a little girl—Maria. Now there were five of us, one boy and four girls.

Father was working for the government. October 1942, after dinner, Father said he had big news. We were going to move. He got a new job. Mother wasn't happy for the news. That meant we were not going to be seeing the relatives, because we would live in a new city that was quite far away.

The time came when Father had to take over the new job. Mother dressed us very warmly since it was October and very cold in Transylvania. My uncle took us to the train station. Wow! When I saw that train for the first time in my life, I was only six years old. I was amazed that something like that was in existence. Right away, I fell in love with it. Goodbyes were said. We sat down in the cabin. It had big, beautiful, comfortable seats, and it was nice and warm. I thought, *It is not just beautiful outside, but inside, too.* When it started to pull out of the train station, the sound was unbelievably strong.

From the cabin window, we watched the Transylvanian forest. I said to Ann, "We should count them. See how many trees there are." But the excitement of the day got us tired. We decided the train was going too fast for us to count the many trees. We put ourselves in a comfortable position.

Right away, a new miracle happened. We never saw such darkness in our whole life. It was darker than dark. Of course, we started crying because we couldn't see our parents. I thought, *Why is that train running so fast into the darkness? Probably, it is going to fall straight down a ravine.*

By the time I was finished with that thought, we looked at our parents, shocked. They explained to us that it was a tunnel and nothing to worry about. We really didn't understand the whole thing, but we hoped there wouldn't be any more tunnels. But, there were several more. We were very happy every time there was light again.

In the early afternoon, we arrived at the town of Oradna. Mr. Varga was waiting for us with a big snow sled. We were twenty kilometers from our new home. The train only came that far. Beautiful red horses pulled the snow sled. An oil coach lantern hung next to Mr. Varga. I was wondering why he needed that lamp. Pretty soon, it got dark and the lamp gave light, and the wolves were afraid of that sort of light. The Transylvanian forest had a lot of wolves in it. I hoped Mr. Varga was prepared for them. The two beautiful horses traveled in the quiet, snow-covered forest. Only the snow sled runners broke the quiet of that snow-covered forest. To me, the forest covered with snow was like a story book world. Finally, we arrived at Lajosfalva, our new home. Of course, we didn't see much of it because it was dark.

But in the morning, we awoke and we very much wanted to know where we had come to. Father went to take over his new job. Mother took the three of us to sign us in at the school. John went to the second grade, and Anna and I were in the first grade. I remember we had a pretty lady teacher. During the day, we found the river, not too far behind our house. The name of it was Aranyosbeszterce. We said we were going to swim there in the summer.

This was not a bad place we had moved to! From our house, not too far, was a big bridge. On that bridge, you were able to go to Romania. There were Hungarian soldiers guarding the Hungarian side. On the Romanian side, there were Romanian soldiers on guard..

One day in the summer of 1942, we went swimming in the river. That was wonderful! You can't ask for anything better than that. Here, all of the town's children enjoyed the swimming immensely. Only Mother was sad, as she missed the relatives.

In January 1944, we got a new baby. Her name was Rozsa. Mother was getting used to our new home. We had good neighbors. School was going well. The priest had heard that Mother baked very delicious bread. He asked her if she would be kind enough to bake his bread, too. She said she would be glad to. That went on until the priest beat John because he didn't know the homework. John ran home from school. His shirt was bloody. As

soon as Mother found out what happened, she went and beat up the priest. The priest was so much ashamed of himself that he decided not to report Mother to the authorities.

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