

My Hometown Arad

Excerpts from **Heinzi Tausk's** Memoirs

Arad, the city I was born in, on February the 18th, 1929, lies at the edge of the great Hungarian plain. It is on the eastbound margin of that fertile Pannonic basin that extends from the Carpathian Mountains to the Austrian Alps and is delimited to the North by the Tatra Mountains and to the South by the western fringes of the Balkan Mountains. Looking eastwards from Arad, one can see the low hills of the wine country, which will rise farther east to a gold-rich mountain range, dividing Transylvania (the area cradled within the crook of the Carpathian Mountain range) from the Hungarian "Puszta". The River Maros (called Mures by the Romanians who presently rule the country) which runs east-to-west from the heartland of southern Transylvania, describes an almost complete loop at Arad, with the city located on the northern shore of that peninsula. A short distance westwards, the Maros will flow into the Tisza and their joined waters will end up in the majestic Danube. The area is in the midst of Eastern Europe, at least from the geographical point of view. Political definitions are far more difficult to pinpoint. Count Metternich once said that whatever is east of Vienna is in fact Asia, while the Hungarians always considered their homeland to be a bulwark of the civilized West, facing the wild, barbaric East. The writer George Mikes (a Hungarian transplanted into England) defined the area as Central Europe - and his designation recognizes that it has very little to do with geography; it is rooted in background, education, culture and mostly in state of mind. Becoming part of the Romanian kingdom after the first World War, definitively contributed to the Balkanization of the area.



Arad County 2020

The vicinity of Arad is a rich agricultural domain, probably settled as far back in known history as the first attempts to cultivate grain. The name of the city - Arad (or perhaps Orod) - appears repeatedly in Hungarian history. The first important reference dates back to the 12th century, when Arad was the locale of a National Assembly under the king Béla the II-d, the Blind one. That assemblage may have been the unsuccessful predecessor to the "Golden Bulla", which enunciated the rights of the people, exalting the will of the nobility against the monarch. It was proclaimed in 1222, only 7 years after the Magna Charta was originated in England.

From the 16th century on, the area was under Turkish rule, and the hamlet of Arad was overshadowed by the far more important fortress of Lipova, the seat of the Turkish pasha. At the end of the 17th century the Austrian armies drove out the Turks, and a small fortress was set up in Arad, which became a border fortification - the area south of the Maros continued for a while to be ruled by the Ottomans. By the end of the 18th century the township had almost 8000 inhabitants, and the first Jewish settlers were - grudgingly - admitted. In 1834 the township became a "Free Royal City" and from than on development was fast.

The next important event that took place in the neighborhood of Arad was the capitulation of the rebellious Hungarian army in 1849. It marked the defeat of the insurrection against the Austrian Empire, and the Russian Tsar had to lend a hand to his "brother", the young Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph, in order to defeat the mutinous Magyars. The main reason for this unlike collaboration was the fact, that the Hungarians had not only risen against their God-appointed ruler, but they had proclaimed a republic as their form of government. This had set a dangerous and intolerable specter of precedents in Eastern Europe. The capitulation of the rebels took place at Világos, a wine-producing village in the vicinity of Arad. Világos was renamed Siria under the Romanian rule, and we often made day-trips to the ruins of the fortress on a hilltop, as well as to a family friend's vineyard on the slopes.

After capitulating to the Russian army, the leaders of the rebellion were extradited to the Austrian authorities, notwithstanding the previously laid out agreements. Those leaders who had earlier served in the Austrian army, were court-martialed and summarily hanged in the courtyard of the fortress of Arad, on October the 6th, 1849. The fact that one of them, the count Leiningen was a distant cousin of Queen Victoria, did not do any good to him. The memory of these 13 martyrs remained for a long time a rallying cry for Hungarian nationalists. Streets were named after those heroes and a granite monument was erected at the site. In my childhood we occasionally picnicked in that grove in the back of the fortress, on October 6. With the passage of time, while I was growing, Romanian nationalism intensified and people were reluctant to identify themselves with such an exhibit of Hungarian emotion. I forgot

completely about the site, until I saw on a 1976 map of Arad a mention of the memorial to the 13 martyrs, erected in remembrance of the commanders of the revolutionary troops of 1848, who were executed on orders from the Hapsburg authorities. This positive reference is the more astounding, because Avram Jancu, a Romanian peasant leader, was fighting in 1848 on the side of the imperial forces, against the rebellious Magyars. The main square of the city was, and is still named after him.



The Monument of the 13 Martyrs of Arad, killed in 1848

At the end of World War I, Arad became part of the enlarged Romanian kingdom. This produced deep-felt bitterness in the Hungarian people. After the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, those people hoped that Wilson's principles of self-determination will keep Arad integrated in the new, diminished Hungary. It did not happen so, because Romania was on the winner's side, and requested as a reward the entire Transylvania. Hungarians claimed Arad to be a pure Hungarian city, and until recently I have never doubted the validity of that assertion. Lately it occurred to me that Arad was the seat of a Greek-orthodox bishopric, with a Cathedral built in the second half of the last century, while still under Hungarian rule. Furthermore a significant segment of the population belonged to the Greek-Catholic creed, and as such must have been by definition Romanians. The first village to the east of Arad, Mindruloc, was for sure a Romanian settlement. Romanians also made up a significant portion of the population in other communities. Furthermore, villages close to Arad were inhabited by many other than Hungarian nationalities too: New-Arad was almost completely German, Vinga was mostly Bulgarian (it was a center of vegetable-gardening), Ortisoara and Mertisoara had a populace of Walloon descent (settled there under the Empress Maria Theresa). So in retrospect, it seems to me that the "pure Hungarian" character of Arad must have been a fiction, propagated mostly to support the Hungarian national sentiment.

Be it as it may, the truth was that during my childhood, Hungarian was spoken widely in Arad, and the streets were known mostly by their old

Hungarian names. There was a Hungarian language high school, called the Catholic Lyceum, probably because it was run by the Church. The language I am still speaking is old fashioned, unadulterated Hungarian, and I learned it at home and on the streets of Arad.

In my childhood, in the 1930s, Arad may have had a population of about 80 thousand. There was some industry, mills, a big textile factory and a major plant for building and repairing railway wagons. Agriculture and business related to it was one of the major constituents of the economic life.

Arad was a railway hub: a primary east-west line intersected an important north-south line. There was a direct link from Bucharest, the capital of Romania, running through southern Transylvania along the river Maros to our city and the express train took about 10 hours for that trip. From Arad one could continue westward, for the about one hour train ride to Curtici (Kürtös), the major frontier-crossing to Hungary. To the north one could travel by express train in less than 2 hours to Oradea-Mare (Nagyvárad), and continue for another 3 and 1/2 hours to Cluj (Kolozsvár). Both cities were centers of Hungarian cultural life. To the South it was less than one hour by express train to Timisoara (Temesvár), a multilingual (German, Romanian, Hungarian, with bits of Serbian) cultural and economic center.



Arad, The City Hall

There were no features of outstanding urbanistic architecture displayed in my hometown. In Hungarian language the expression for such an urban agglomeration was "city of the plains", indicating the agricultural roots and foundations. From the railroad station a long (perhaps a mile and a half) and broad boulevard stretched to the city hall, and from there another two blocks

further south to the square building of the theater, straddling the main street. Behind the theater there was a large plaza and that was already the end of the city center. The City Hall, built under the reign of mayor Salacz towards the end of the 19-th century, was a yellow, one-story high structure. It was a quadrangular building with an inner courtyard. There was a plaza with some lawn and flower-beds in front of it and a tall clock-tower. At the time of the erection of the tower, the facade of the clock fronting east was blank: that was the direction of the fortress, and the City Council was miffed with the use of the fortress as barracks for a regiment. They may have felt that denying to the military information on the exact time, is a subtle and strong statement of displeasure. There was a story about how years later a child was run over by a carriage: she was running from the park in the back of the city hall, to its side in order to look at the clock. Maybe this story is fictional, at any rate shortly before World War I, a fourth face was installed on the clock, and citizens customarily adjusted their watches to it.

In the back of the city hall there was a large park, with a twin park farther south. In-between the parks stood the imposing Cultural Palace, built in the years just before the First World War. It had a pyramidal gray cupola, a grand staircase flanked by two turreted spiral stairs and mixed features of Renaissance and Romanesque architectural styles. The large hall was used often for concerts, and it is proudly chronicled that Béla Bartok, Richard Strauss, Huberman, George Enescu and many others had on occasion displayed their talents there. In his memoirs Leo Schlezak, the famous Austrian tenor, emphasized that it was one of the best concert halls he ever sang in. The palace housed the local museum, a library and in the basement there was an elementary school which in due time became my first alma mater.

Opposite the City Hall there was a one-story nondescript corner-building, housing the Police headquarters. The building next to it was more prominent: the home of the "Csanádi" Bank, with a large "fer forge" portal, flanked by impressive marble (?) columns and a sculptured tympanum. It housed amongst other commercial spaces the carpet business of the Domán family, and the best pastryshop in town "Málka". In the courtyard there was the "A.T.E." a sport club. In summer the enclosure was used for tennis, in winter it became a skating rink. In the evenings it was illuminated, and there was a cozy and pleasant warm-up house. While we tried our prowess on ice, Wiener waltzes were played over the old-fashioned megaphones, and the real skaters were dancing on the ice.

Of the many churches of the city, the most impressive was the pseudo-Renaissance Catholic cathedral of the Minorite brothers. It was located on the west side of the main boulevard, close to the theater. It had a cupola, and wide stairs leading to the entrance hidden behind a row of classic columns. Above the columns golden letters displayed in Hungarian language that: "My

house is the house of prayers". On the ledge below that text, pigeons were roosting, and the majestic steps were constantly littered with their droppings.

The theater, erected in 1894, was housed in a big square block, positioned like a plug to occlude the main boulevard. Its general aspect was like that of an apartment building, with a restaurant and its terrace facing to the North the main boulevard. The front of the theater, with the entrances and the foyer was facing west.



Neologue Synagogue in Arad

There was a large Lutheran church, slightly to the north of city hall, built at the beginning of the 20th century, in neo-Gothic style. It was called the "red church" on behalf of its brick walls. The Baroque Greek Orthodox Cathedral, stood on one of the secondary plazas, where a daily market existed in my childhood. Other churches of different denominations were sprinkled all over the city. There were two synagogues. The orthodox one was a relatively small one, close to the big complex of the Jewish elementary school; it was located in the area where a Jewish Quarter used to be. Close to it on the Fish Square was the "neologue" synagogue. It was in the courtyard of a large building, all erected in 1834, with the purpose to house not only the synagogue, but also other communal institutions. There is a story about how the building was erected. The gentile city fathers constantly denied permission for the construction and finally the rabbi had an idea: he traveled to Vienna, obtained an audience with the emperor and offered the synagogue as a gift to the emperor. The emperor accepted, and the city council could not any more deny a building permit. The "neologue" congregation was a form of Jewish community existing mostly in Central Europe. It consisted of people emancipated from the strict conservative tradition, it emerged first in

Hamburg, and was introduced to Arad in the middle of the last century. One of the proponents of the modernization of Jewish life in the last century was the chief rabbi of Arad, Aaron Chorin, who fought lasting battles with the conservatives inside and outside his congregation. The neologues were called also "occidental rites" and may be considered similar to the present day conservatives: they were clad like ordinary citizen, wore no skullcaps, most of them did not pray with "Tefillin", they were quite relaxed in observing the laws of "kashrut" and the Sabbath, or they did not observe them at all. Inside the synagogue the men wore hats, hatted women were separated on the balcony but not hidden from view, the services were held in Hebrew with the sermon in the national language, there was an organ, a choir, and customarily the cantor had the manners of an operatic tenor. In the first decades of the 20th century Zionism was often an important tenet. The rabbis themselves were usually graduates of the theological seminary in Budapest, well-educated men, often sporting doctorates in philosophy, philology, history, etc.

In Arad most of the major public buildings were erected during the last half of the 19th century and the first fifteen years of the 20th. In my childhood the new Romanian regime had barely marked its presence architecturally: among the few exceptions was the building of the new telephone exchange center in the middle of the 1930-s.

The main market was behind the theater on the large plaza with a big monument to freedom (it was never spelled out what kind of freedom it was and for whom). In the last decade of communist rule, that obelisk was replaced with a monument in the memory of the Romanian soldiers who died while liberating Transylvania from fascism. I never knew anything about Romanians fighting against fascism, but monuments can be erected to any fictional saga. Presently that monument may have been replaced with any other memorial - stones do not blush bashfully when lies are engraved on them.

The market was at a short walking distance from our home. Mother did the shopping either alone or accompanied by the cook. I loved to go too, even volunteered to carry the shopping basket if it was not heavily loaded. The market was neat, every produce had its own area and the competing sellers laid out their wares either on wooden stalls or on homespun towels on the blacktop ground. The best milk products were sold by the "Schwab" (German) women from the neighboring villages. Thick sweet or sour cream was measured out in one or 2 deciliter (3.5 - 7 ounces) tin cups, yellowish white butter (called tea-butter) was presented in small slabs on green vine-leaves, and clumps of farmer cheese were heaped on larger leaves. We never bought milk on the market, it was delivered daily by the milkmen who drove their carriages from house to house. The vegetables and fruit were available according to the season, and even butchers had their stalls. We never bought meat on the market, only an occasional live goose or pair of chicken. The

vendors had their customary locations, and had to pay a small fee for the site. Additional market plazas existed on other sites in the city and there were also the seasonal markets, usually four times a year. These fairs were major undertakings, all kinds of entertainment were added for those interested and more often than not, even the Medrano Circus was at hand for a week or so. The fall fair was the occasion to buy the winter apples, potatoes, onions, cabbage for the sauerkraut barrel, carrots, etc. For us children the added attractions were the vendors of gingerbread and other sweetmeats.



The Neumann Palace

Arad was a city sprawling out horizontally. The tallest structure was a three stories high apartment building. Due to this and to the fact that there was an elevator within, it was called the "Bohus" (this was the name of the owners - a long-established gentile family) palace. Most "tall" buildings had only two stories, and there were not too many of those either. The Neumann palace on the main street, got its name not because its height (only two stories), but because it was large and had two main entrances. At the time of my debut in the world, my parents had a rental flat there and as such I was born in a "palace". I was told that later the police headquarters moved into that building.

Amongst the few interesting structures, mention should be made of the "house with the lock". It was an old building, beyond the marketplace, displaying in a niche a tree-trunk covered with metal-plate and protruding nail heads, secured with a huge rusty lock. According to local lore, in the old days, every wandering rookie, arriving into town for apprenticeship in the smith's guild, had to strike a nail into the trunk. Close to our home there was a Baroque

chapel, St. Florian's, built in the middle of the 18th century. Nearby was the Baroque statue of St. Nepomuk, the oldest monument in town, built in the year 1729.

The main boulevard connecting the city hall to the theater was wide, in fact there were three parallel streets divided by two narrow stripes of greenery in-between. This resulted in the two lateral lanes being unidirectional, and the middle lane, paved with yellow flagstones being used mostly for commercial traffic (mainly horse-drawn carriages). During the warm season the green stripes were endowed with seats made of metallic frames with wooden planks, all painted in white. In order to sit undisturbed during the afternoon and evening hours, as well as on Sundays, one had to pay a small fee to a uniformed park ranger, who kept walking along the stretch of the two blocks. Such a "ticket" may have cost just pennies, but the mere fact that you paid for the seat, made it exclusive. It was chic to sit there and watch the people walking along the main boulevard. The fashionable western side was called the "Corso" and it was a magnet for the trendy set. Dandies and their young ladies were walking up and down on sunny Sunday noon hours, or in the late fair-weather afternoons. Introductions were made, acquaintances renewed, intrigues woven, gossip exchanged and friendships cemented. We children tried to ape our elders and crowded the "Corso".

Along the two blocks of the western side of this main boulevard one could find the most important and fashionable businesses. The Szentgyörgyi textile mart was close to its northern end. Close-by were two exclusive and expensive pastry-shops, where the fashionable people sat for a "torte", coffee or ice-cream in season. One of the premier buildings was called after its former owner: the Fischer Eliz palace. She bequeathed it in her will to the Jewish community with the purpose to set up an orphanage for girls. Further south there was the major bookstore, Kerpel Isidor's (his name in the Hungarian version was "Izso") emporium. It was a treasure trove of all printed things, as well as writing materials and musical stuff. Scores, recordings, musical instruments and all accessories could be purchased and ordered. In the back, there was a huge private lending library, from where one could take home any book (and the catalogue was multilingual and quite comprehensive) for a modest fee. If I close my eyes I could almost feel the familiar smell of the books, bound in tan wrapping paper, and could almost hear the voice of miss Ilonka, the small, light brown-haired, sharp-featured lady who was the chief employee of the lending-library. Miss Paula was sitting in the cashier's box just before the exit door. Mera Paula was a soft-faced, well-rounded, middle-aged blonde, who was far sharper than the mild look from behind her gold-rimmed spectacles. It was rumored that she is the mistress of old man Izso, and when during the war, Jews were not allowed to own any business, she became the nominal owner of the store. After the war, with Kerpel dead, she seemingly

inherited everything and managed the business skillfully until the communist takeover.

The southern segment of the Corso, contained among others two major stores: the big porcelain and glass department store owned by the Szabo family, with Miklos Szabo and his family living above the store. Next to it was the big toy emporium of the Hegedüs family. I could have stayed glued to those display windows for hours, had I not been prodded to move on by the adult I was with. Smaller businesses were the Manea haberdashery, the textile store of Mr. Kabos (father of a classmate of mine), the toiletry store of Vojtek & Weiss, owned by Mr. Ordelt, the Meinel coffee store, etc. My interest in those was heightened by the fact that the last two ones were located in the building of the bank managed by Father. As such I almost had proprietary feelings toward their wares, and it is more than possible that the kindness of the owners was influenced by this relationship. The Cook travel agency located further south in the building of the Catholic Cathedral, was managed by "uncle" Künstler, related to us in a complex and oblique manner.

The opposite, east side of the main street was less fashionable for strolling. The northern block was taken by up by two massive white buildings, housing the administrative facilities of the county offices. The garden in-between was a nice park, presently occupied by a new hotel. The block to the South was occupied with commercial settings: on the corner was the textile store managed by the father of my classmate Maxi. Furthermore prominent in my memory is the Dacia restaurant, with its dark and cavernous back-rooms where pool and chess were played. Next to it was the jute and sackcloth store of "uncle" Armin with the store sign A.S.A. (standing for Armin Schwartz Arad). His own private rowboat at the club proudly bore the same name on its prow. Nearby was the ironware and tool emporium of the Andrényi's. Successful gentile entrepreneurs, they received the baron title around the turn of the century, and although Hungarian nobility titles were not acknowledged by the Romanian authorities, everybody in town knew the owner as baron Andrényi. Of his two children the elder was one year my senior, the other one three years younger than me. I knew them from the rowing club and feared the older one - a brusque, curt lad, physically far stronger than me. He was a mediocre student, was persecuted under communism, and when he finally managed to go abroad he settled in Germany as a driver. Another baronial family were the Jewish Neumanns. They got their title at the end of the last century, with a title of nobility "de Végvár". The Neumann baronial family were the richest people in Arad, owners of a mill, a spirit and yeast factory, as well as the big textile plant. Baron Feri, who may have been in his thirties in my childhood, was a bachelor, and he was linked by gossip to a number of ladies. The family gave a lot to Jewish charities and baron Feri was a patron of the local soccer team. Apparently they had money on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean too:

when the communist take-over was imminent in 1948, baron Feri escaped to the West and presumably joined the money and the family in America. In the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, amongst the benefactors one can find the name of Neuman de Végvár.



Francisc (Feri) Neumann

Beyond the main street, the second parallel street toward the river was flanked by the aforementioned park, just south of the Cultural palace. The street was called Boulevard Drăgălina, after some valiant Romanian general, but could have been called as well the Boulevard of Education. At the northern end, facing the Cultural palace, the City Hall and the county office building was the stately pale-yellow structure of the High School of Commerce. Farther south, just opposite to one of the main entrances to the park was the Ghiba Birta Lyceum, the high school for girls. At the southern end of the boulevard, near the ascent to the fortress bridge, stood the imposing building of the Moise Nicoara, the high school for boys. Majestic steps were leading to the big entrance door, which used to be off limits to the pupils. While I was enrolled at that school, we had to use the side entrance. Further down to the South were the far less loftier edifice of the technical high school and the teacher's seminary.

The elegant manor of the National Bank was located on the short street connecting the main boulevard with the "education" street. Close-by the new Telephone Exchange was installed in 1935, in a modern yellow building, ushering in the new era of the automatic phone. Instead of desperately turning the crankshaft and repeatedly and impatiently yelling to catch the attention of the phone operator, one had to select the four numbers on the rotating dial and talk to the party. Long distance calls were still effected with the assistance of the operator, and our phone number, 26-67 became indelibly etched in my memory.

The restaurant located in the theater building facing North had a terrace, toward the main boulevard. On warm days people used to sit there for hours with a coffee, a drink and the newspapers. On both sides of the theater the streets were the southward continuation of the main boulevard, and they were busy commercial thoroughfares. On one of the corners stood the White Cross Hotel, the only good hostelry in town. In the old days the ballroom of the hotel was used for musical events, and the names of Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms and Johann Strauss occasionally showed up on the program. Behind the theater was the Liberty Square (called Avram Jancu Square under the Romanian rule), where the previously mentioned market was located. The southeast corner of the theater building was home to the Moskovitz tailor shop: his two sons, Fritzi and Ernstie were classmates and pals of my brother Ed and myself.

Two blocks northwest from city hall was another plaza occasionally used for markets, flanked by the big Municipal Hospital. This institution was never used by middle-class people. If any of my parents acquaintances or friends was sick, and the family physician believed that hospitalization is necessary, the patient was admitted to a private sanitarium. One of such establishments was the "Therapia", owned and managed by a friend of my parents Dr. Béla Windholz. He was an ob-gyn. specialist, and thus the facility had an operating room, kept busy by him and other private surgeons in Arad. If the medical problem was deemed to be serious or even life-threatening, every effort was made to get the patient to a Budapest clinic, less than 5 hours by train. Close to the general hospital there was a Children's Hospital and an Infectious Diseases Hospital. All of these institutions served mostly the indigent or people who had coverage by one of the major health care plans: a factory, a government agency, a union of white-collar employees, etc.

Public transportation consisted of a number of buses running mostly along the north-south axis of the town, from the train station towards the other end. The loop of the river Maros set a natural limit to the expansion of the city towards the East. Beyond the big marketplace, the main boulevard continued as a wide street with a southeast curvature to a bridge over the Maros into the neighboring township of New-Arad (about a mile from the marketplace). Other bus-lines fanned out into the suburbs, mostly to the North and the West. During the war there was talk about developing a tram line. Jewish men, who were called up for forced labor, worked on the grading, prepared the tracks and suddenly, towards the end of 1942, electrical tram-cars were running from the railway station to the marketplace. The tracks were laid out in the middle lane of the broad boulevard, and we had great fun in riding the new toy. Soon the rumor emerged, that the rolling stock has been lifted and taken as war booty from Odessa, and if my memory serves me properly, the Romanian State had to pay dearly for this theft at the end of the war.



As far as I can recall, during my childhood years there were no taxicabs on the streets of Arad. The transportation conveyance used by middle-class people was the horse-drawn carriage called "fiakker". The driver was sitting high on the coach-box and behind him was the cab: a large and comfortable seat for two, facing ahead, and opposite a narrow ledge-like low bench, almost under the back of the cabby. A retractable awning was protecting the main seat from rain and sun, but the cabby himself was exposed to the elements. On both sides of the coach-box there were the glass enclosed lamps where candles burned at night, and a hurricane lamp was hung on the undercarriage, to warn the other vehicles. A fiakker was pulled by one horse, usually an old nag, its best speed a slow trot, and even that one provoked only by constant prodding with the whip. The carriages available around Central Park for tourists in New York, are luxurious transports compared to the fiakkers of my childhood. The horses pulling them are splendid equines, and if a contemporary citizen of New York were to see the whipping my childhood carriage horses had to endure, he for sure would have had the cabby hauled to court for cruelty against animals. In wintertime the snow covered streets brought out the sleds. The same horses were pulling the smoothly gliding sleds, wherein passengers sat on thick layers of straw, all bundled up in warm coverlets. The bells were tinkling and we considered a sleight-ride to be the pinnacle of winter-fun.

There were occasional private cars in the streets, and I remember the thrill whenever I joined with my parents for a ride in "Uncle" Lipi's car. In my early childhood it was one of those antiquated contraptions, open (with a retractable cover) and riding on big yellow-spoke wheels. The horn was a black rubber bulb with a yellow copper funnel, and in order to honk you had to

squeeze the bulb. In later years uncle Lipi purchased an Opel Olympia, dark-blue in color, sleek and elegant but far less romantic.

Merchandise and goods were transported mostly on horse-drawn platforms, large open carriages, occasionally covered cubicles with the owner's trade and name painted on the sides. These horses were usually in far better shape than the fiakker-horses, golden, powerful and heavysset animals called Mecklenburger's. Street urchins had lots of fun when they hopped on the end of the platform for a free ride. We middle-class children tried to emulate this feat, and everybody had to jump off fast when the coachman realized that he is carrying freeloaders. Lashing back with his whip, he seldom managed to hit any of us, because after the first exposure to the sting of the leather tongue of the whip, our vigilance became extreme.

Bicycle-riding was frequently a means of personal transportation for younger people. Motorcycles were quite rare and were considered a sporty extravaganza. There were no traffic lights, and occasionally a brown-uniformed policeman stood in the middle of a busy intersection, waving his arms to direct the "flow" of the traffic. I do not think those fiakker-rides were expensive. My parents were living reasonably, avoiding unnecessary expenses, and still on a real hot summer noon, we often rode home from the beach in a fiakker (it was less than half an hour walk). Father had no qualms engaging a fiakker when coming home from the office in bad weather, and the same was true when my parents went out in the evening or drove to the railway station for a trip.

The loop of the River Maros, was an important feature of the city. There must have been flooding in the distant past, because there was a protecting embankment all along the river front. It may have been perhaps seven feet high, and it was an effective shield. I have recollections of a high tide in my childhood, when the Mikelaka borough, unprotected by the dam, was flooded. The land between the dike and the river was only about 30 feet wide at the center of the loop, and it widened to about half a mile on both sides toward the neck of the loop. At the eastern end of the loop was the railway bridge crossing to the southern counties. At the western end of the loop was the aforementioned bridge, leading to New-Arad. This bridge carried the traffic of the main highway towards south, to Timisoara. There was an additional, third bridge, close to the center of town. It was a beautiful bridge, designed by the same architect who had laid out the plans for the famous Elisabeth bridge in Budapest. This bridge saw very little traffic, connecting the city to the fortress, which sat on the peninsula of the loop. Military formations crossed the bridge routinely, the soldiers marching from their barracks in the fortress to the exercise fields west of the city. Strollers and lovers who wanted to enjoy the peace and quiet of the huge park surrounding the fortress, were additional walkers across that bridge. Amazingly that was the only bridge totally demolished during the war. The other two bridges (the railway, and the

highway ones) suffered some damage, but were easily repaired in the fall of 1944.



In the unprotected area in-between the river and the dam stood a number of sport clubs. There were 3 rowing clubs, and in my recollection they stand as the Jewish one, the Hungarian one and the one we belonged to. The most northward was the "Hajosház" (boathouse), a regatta-club, where the well-to-do Jewish businessmen and their families congregated. The younger ones were active in sports, their elders played cards and had a busy social life. As I learned later, amorous and illicit affairs often occurred, maybe because of the closeness of people in the summer season. The Hungarian club was called "Maros"; I knew nobody from that boathouse and believed that they are all anti-Semitic gentiles. Our club was located immediately to the South from the ascent to the fortress bridge, and proudly bore the name of "Hellas", undoubtedly a reference to the spirit of classical Greece. Gentiles and Jews, Hungarians, Romanians and Germans mingled freely, and as a child I did not notice any religious, racial or national antagonism, though it probably existed. I loved the club and its summer activities.

There was a municipal beach too, set again between the dyke and the river, sandwiched between the Hajosház and the Maros clubs, called the Neptun. The Neptun was roughly behind the city hall, separated from it by northern park. It was a large enclosure, with all kind of facilities. Amongst them was a ferry to the opposite riverbank where a sandy stretch expanded just below the greenery of the fortress park. There were delineated basins, one was not supposed to swim in the river itself. In my childhood those who were qualified swimmers could obtain a small insignia from the municipality, designating them as "free swimmers", able to swim outside the beach area. One paid a small amount of money for that token that was sewn onto the swimming trunks. The river was dangerous, in the deep areas there were

eddies and whirls, and every year a number of people were known to have drowned. It was possible to swim along the loop, climb out of the water at the neck of the loop, walk about half a mile to the other arm of the loop and swim back to your point of departure. It was called the "big circle", a circuit of some 4-5 kilometers, made easier by the fact that one swam with the current. Children were not allowed, and even grown-ups joined in groups, supervising each others. When as teenagers we were allowed to join such a swimmer's group, it was like a rite of passage to adulthood.

Farther northeast on the fortress side, there was another stretch of sandy beach. It was called the military beach, it was free and there were few facilities. One had to pay for the ferryboat passage from and to the city-side. It seems to me that this may have been the beach used before the above mentioned municipal one was established. In my early childhood, we occasionally went there. The military beach gained indelible notoriety in my imagination when sometimes in the late thirties a terrible accident took place there. On a hot summer day a group of young people exuberantly climbed one of the high-voltage pylons. Felicia Trimbiteoiu, the 18 year-old beautiful daughter of a prominent lawyer-politician, accidentally touched the wire, got electrocuted and plunged to her death.

On the stretch between the Hajoshàz and the fortress-bridge, (maybe a mile long), the top of the dike was asphalt-covered and festooned on both sides with chairs painted in white. The seats were removed in late fall and reappeared by the end of the spring. It was a location where in nice weather nannies walked their wards, before or after playtime in the nearby parks. Adjacent to the cultural palace, there was an open gazebo, where a military band was playing on summer evenings. This loud attraction induced extreme crowding on Thursday and Sunday afternoons; maids had their off-hours at that time. For "better" people it was not chic to mingle there on those days. We children loved the place on any day. At the southern end of the park, close to the ascent to the fortress bridge, was the "Gloria" club. Eight lighted tennis courts, a large clubhouse with a terrace and a restaurant contributed to make it a lively place. The smooth surface of the courts made for excellent ice-skating rinks in winter. During the war years the club was closed and the facilities deteriorated. I have been told that a hotel stands now on that location.

There was one small indoor swimming pool in the "Simay" bathhouse, close to the Moise Nicoara Lyceum. We did frequent it during the war when Jews were excluded from the municipal facilities. Another bathhouse was called the "Vas" (iron) baths and I do not know if it had anything to do with the iron-content of the waters or such was the name of the owner. At any rate even as children we knew that it had a evil reputation, although we did not know the reason.

On the main boulevard, close to the Railway Station, there was a small lake with a boathouse and some woods surrounding it. It was not usable for swimming, but in winter it became a skating rink. I have been told that lately a new municipal beach came up in that area.

Two blocks west from our home was a street called originally in Hungarian "the Dividing Street". It was a telling name: the broad, dusty road, paved with yellow cobblestones, indeed divided the better half of the city from the western outskirts. There both the houses and streets were more rustic: no bathrooms, often only an outhouse, big farm-like backyards used for vegetable gardens, livestock raised behind the house, etc. Crossing this area westwards one arrived to the outer limits of the city, where the airfield was visible. The field had a single tarmac landing-strip and a small adjacent building. Despite this insignificant aspect we were proud of the fact that one could arrive to our city by plane, although I do not think that during my childhood years there were any commercial flights to and from Arad. In fact the only wonderful flying machines I do remember from my early years were most probably vintage First World War biplanes, flown by the Romanian Air Force. On the rare occasion when such a contraption was airborne we children gaped and marveled at it.

In summertime one often made trips to the Ciala Forest, west of the city. The dusty and unpaved road went by the airport. The forest itself was pleasant for a walk, and more often than not it was a conduit to the Triple Islands. Located about 4 kilometers west of the city, these islets on the Maros were frequent objectives of a day trip. The knapsacks were packed with food, a water bottle was hung on the straps (if it was a thermos, by the end of the day the double-glass insulation was usually shattered), and we started out early morning, before the heat of the day was on. The group of children was usually escorted by an enterprising adult, and I do remember that "Uncle" Neulander, an active boy-scout leader, was our most reliable mentor. Once arrived to the Triple Islands (a trip of about one and a half hour) we played on the sandy beach, swam and in the afternoon made a big bonfire. It kept the mosquitoes away and was handy for roasting the bacon on spits. I never liked bacon and contended myself with the smell of it. We shared the beach and the river with livestock from nearby peasant houses. I remember vividly overhearing the mutterings of uncle Neulander, about what my parents would say, if they knew that we are swimming amongst horse-manure. At that time it did not bother us, we fancied those outings to be marvelous.



Solymos Fort

Other favorite daytime outings were into the wine-yard covered hills. The ruins of the Világos fortress in Siria, the ruins of the Solymos fort near Radna, the flowery valley of Cladova, all these places were easily accessible with the electric train running eastwards, parallel to the Maros. I do not remember how those trips were planned, but we children were always enthusiastic participants. Father was not a great nature-walker, and Mother rarely ventured on such a trip with only her children as company, but there were always parental friends and relatives whom we joined for such outings. All of the above places had small springs, hidden in the forest. We knew the locations, and up to this day, my taste-buds do remember the cold, clear water which we gulped down, straight from its subterranean emergence.

We moved to Timisoara in the summer of 1946, and I have been back to Arad only three times since. In 1951 I went for a short trip, in order to obtain a birth certificate from City Hall, in 1956 I accompanied a friend for a short visit, and in 1961, on our way to emigrate, we stopped in Arad for a couple of hours, waiting for our train connection. I have almost no recollection of those visits, it is, as if my memory selectively tried to extinguish those images that may have gotten superimposed on the landscape of my early years.

My brother Ed visited Arad in September of 1997. It was a short visit, he went to the cemetery, had lunch at a restaurant on the site of the former Neptun on the shores of the Maros, and walked briefly on the main boulevards. He was saddened by what he saw: a city that did not evolve with the time, everything grimy, forlorn and decaying. I have no desire to go to Arad. The locale of my childhood is long gone. What I would see is an alien city. The buildings may bear a resemblance to what I remember from my childhood, but this would almost be coincidental. It would look like a caricature of my mental images, void of the people and reflections I knew during the first 17 years of my life. The old Arad, which belongs to me, is alive in my memory and dreams and it will stay with me as long as I live and remember.