

## Family Background III

Excerpts from **Heinzi Tausk's** Memoirs

*"Deep is the well of the past"*

Thomas Mann, *Joseph and his brethren*

**Hermann Hirschl** lost a significant part of his holdings after the Hungarian revolution of 1848-49. On orders of the commanding officer of the rebels, General Perczel, he had to sell all his merchandise accepting the currency of the revolutionary government. This money, the so-called Kossuth notes, became worthless after the defeat of the rebellion. Later he recouped part of his fortune, expanded into farming (with an associate) and continued to be a respected citizen of Petervaradin. At the end of the 1850s the fortress-town got a new mayor. This man, a former officer, often borrowed the carriage of the Jewish merchant. When Hirschl on one occasion refused the loan of his coach, the mayor got annoyed and wanted revenge. Hermann Hirschl was notified that as a Jew, he is not entitled to own real-estate inside the fortress-town, he has to sell his business and has to move away. The spat led to legal proceedings, a lengthy process which entailed among other things even an audience with the Emperor Franz Joseph in 1866. By 1867, the law of the land changed, former restrictions against Jews were lifted, and the chicanery against Hirschl stopped. The Hirschl's had no children of their own, and Charlotte adopted early on Johanna (Hanni) Singer, the daughter of her sister Henrietta, a child born in 1834. Hanni passed away in 1935, at the age of 101 years. I do remember her vaguely, my great-great-grandmother, a shriveled, quiet old lady, wearing a black lace bonnet. There is a family photograph from 1926, when Ed was born, featuring the five generations: Hanni Herzog (born Singer, adopted in her childhood by the Hirschl's), her daughter Ida Németh (born Herzog), our grandmother Charlotte Jelinek (born Németh), and Mother, proudly cuddling her newborn, Ed Tauszk (at that time our name was still spelled in the old Hungarian way).

Johanna Singer was lucky to grow up in the well-to do home of her aunt, she was educated, probably well beyond the usual superficial polish given at that time to Jewish girls, who were intended to become good housewives. In 1855 she was engaged to, and soon afterwards married Dr. Sigmund Herzog, a physician. Mother showed me a bunch of letters, exchanged between bride and groom during the courtship. They both wrote in educated, literary German, using the then current Gothic alphabet. In one of the letters, the young physician, uses the term "passionate love", being rebuked for it by the shy bride. For the prevalent Victorian mores this was an unbecoming expression. Great-grandmother Ida, told that her physician father

was often called over to Belgrade (capital city of Serbia), to treat a member of the royal family, and his fee was always a gold coin. I have the printed death notice of Dr. Sigmund Herzog from the year 1885.



After the marriage, the young couple settled first in Zimony (now called Zemun) and later in Eszék (Essek), both in present day Serbia. They had six daughters and one boy. The male offspring, Joseph Herzog, (Uncle Pepi) was one of the youngest. In his youth he studied engineering in Graz, and with the advent of electricity, became specialized in installation of that innovation. He worked for the Ganz, the Electrical Company of Budapest, and had a number of patents registered in his name. He was delegated to tasks like supervising the installation of electricity in the Castle of Budapest, the summer palace of the Tsars in St. Petersburg and in the royal palace of the Dutch monarchs. Mother does recall well both him, and his wife Ernestine. They were childless and passed away sometimes in the second decade of the 20-th century.

Amongst the six daughters of the Herzogs two had no issue: Auntie Jenny who got married to Julius (Gyula) Blau, and Aunt Rosa who married Uncle Deutsch. In my early childhood, aunt Rosa was still around, she was another shriveled old lady in the entourage of granny Shari.

Aunt Minna married a gentleman by the name of Türk, who had a daughter from a former marriage. The common children were Metta and Hella. The former was slightly retarded and never married. Hella married a man by the name of Grossman and had a daughter Dora. The Grossmans were sent by his company somewhere in Montenegro, Hella could not stand the primitive conditions and divorced. It produced a big uproar: "divorce should never happen in our family!" nevertheless her mother and aunts were supportive, they sent her to Budapest to learn a handicraft. I do

remember Hella and her daughter Dora, as well, they both made embroideries for sale. Dora may be still alive in Timișoara, an unpleasant, hypochondriac spinster.

Aunt Laura married a gentleman by the name of Schwarz. Their offsprings changed the name to Szanto. I knew Felix Szanto, cousin to Granny Shary. A daughter, Ella, got married to a man by the name of Izsák, their son Zsiga (Sigismund) was a bespectacled, quiet gentleman called by the improbable nickname of Fawn. Another daughter got married to a Mr. Schwimmer, one of her many offsprings is Octavian (Tavi) Mocanu, supposedly a gifted mathematician, studying presently in Barcelona. I had some e-mail contact with him and mailed him a detailed family-tree as well as some copies of family-photos.

Aunt Sidonie got married to Julius Brummer. They had three children: Lajos, Lonki and Anny. Lajos Brummer was an engineer, he was in charge of a section of the big steel foundry in Resitza (present-day Romania), married late and died childless. Lonki got married to a man by the name of Palterer, he was an odd fellow, a good provider for his family but unloved by the rest of the relatives. Their son Robert, was well known to me, a serious young man, a loner, a brilliant chess-player, he was for a short time even national champion in Romania. Married to a niece of our family friend Dr. Goldschmidt, he lives in Israel, and has a son and a daughter. We did not have had contact with him there. Anny, the youngest Brummer child, married a very gifted engineer by the name of Herz. He was an entrepreneur, built bridges and factories and became a rich man. They lived in Bucharest and had two daughters: Eva and Manne. Eva moved to Timișoara with her husband, an engineer by the name of Przybram. After the war, he set up the Timișoara branch of the British Council in his apartment. Following the communist takeover, he was branded a British spy, and was jailed for many years. The Przybrams live presently in France, retired, they are childless. Manne Herz studied engineering, she got married to a Romanian man. The marriage did not last, she lives in Munich with Mihai, her grown son from that marriage, I have no contact whatsoever with her.

From my point of view the most important child of the Herzog's was their first daughter, Ida, born 1856. I was already grown up when she passed away in 1950, and she lived the last ten years of her life in our home. I do recall her as a quiet, wrinkled, small lady, with sparse gray hair knotted in a small bun on the back of her head. She spoke Hungarian well, but seemingly preferred German, it was the language we usually spoke to her. She knew French too, but I do not know how well did she converse. From this, and from the fact that she played the piano I have to infer that she got a superior education. The average middle-class Jewish girl in the second half of the 19-th century was taught only things necessary to manage a household and raise children. Omama Ida (that was the way we called her) did read good books in three languages, followed the events from newspapers and radio, commented on the news, and often wondered why the world is such a bad place. She had a small widow's pension (the Romanian state took over the pension obligations of the previous Austro-Hungarian Empire) and in my childhood I often accompanied her on the visit to the City Hall, where she was handed the funds. She repeatedly

exclaimed that she must be the one person who is getting such income for the greatest length of time. We were in the 1940's and her husband became a recipient of retirement compensation in 1894. She did some knitting and sock-mending, but her forte was crocheting. Many of our small and larger lace-like handiwork came from her patient and skilled hands. I also remember how she washed and cleaned them. The crocheted lace-pieces were hand-washed, starched and smoothed on the dinner table on a felt cover. Patiently she stretched the laces with the help of a multitude of pins until the felt looked like a flat porcupine. When dry, the laces were stiff and displayed eminently their intricate patterns. She once crocheted a mauve tie for me, which I could wear also as an artist's bow tie. She wore old-fashioned clothing, long skirts and long-sleeve blouses, even during the hot summer days. She favored dark colors, her foremost concession to the heat was a light gray color or white on gray patterns. She wore white linen undershirts and white linen long-john pants. We were in awe of her, I do remember when I started smoking at the age of 18, it took me a while to let my parents know that I acquired the habit, but I would not, for a long time, light a cigarette in front of Omama Ida. She left some autobiographical notes, where she recalls that she had spent her early childhood in the home of her great-aunt Charlotte Hirschl in Petrovaradin. It seems that after Hanni got married, the Hirschl's got lonely and managed to convince the Herzogs to lend them temporarily their first born daughter.

Ida Herzog married Phoebus Németh in 1876, and they lived first in Orsova, and later in Lugos. Charlotte (Charne) Hirschl, the adoptive mother of Hanni, and at least temporarily of Ida, stayed with the Némeths after becoming a widow. It is alluded in family lore, that in her old age Grandma Hirschl, as she was called, became completely senile, difficult to manage and occasionally aggressive. In those days there were no nursing-homes and the younger people had no choice but to cope with the Alzheimer of family members. In some of the written recollections of Omama Ida there are data on the life in Orsova. The family residence was adjacent to the courthouse and the jail - her husband was the local magistrate. On one occasion a famous brigand by the name of Cucurescu escaped from the jail. Phoebus Nemeth was away on an inspection trip and Grandma Hirschl kept a hammer close to her bed, in case the outlaw showed up.

The Németh's had two sons and three daughters. The first-born son Arnold, died as a toddler of meningitis. Mother recalls that Omama Ida mourned her entire life for that lost child. The other son, born in 1883, Karl, studied engineering and at the time of his graduation was discovered to suffer from tuberculosis. At that time this disease was treated in the mountain sanatoriums of Switzerland and Karl was sent there. He seemingly liked it in the Berner Oberland, because after being cured, he settled in Bern. He worked for the Pulver construction company, building bridges. He must have been held in high esteem: he obtained the citizenship of Bern. I do remember in my childhood home, the photograph of a bridge over the river Aare, where repair-works were planned by Karl Németh. Before the First World War, he did occasionally visit his parents in Lugos. A photograph taken sometimes around 1914 displays an earnest young man, with a receding hairline, bespectacled, with a wise

and mild facial expression. Mother clung to her uncle Karl, it seems that on his last visit home, in 1920, he promised her that after her graduation from high school, he will make possible for her to continue her studies. In 1921 he contracted a terrible skin infection, pemphigus, and succumbed after a short suffering. Omama Ida, because of the difficult times, was unable to travel to Bern to be at the bedside of her dying son.

Another daughter, Theresa, died in infancy. The youngest daughter of the Némeths was Ilka, born in 1882. She got married to a prominent lawyer in Lugos, Edmund Neumann, uncle Duczi. The Neumanns were well-to do local patricians. I knew many of them, their history does not belong to the present narrative, the only thing I want to dwell on, is that they seemed to be destined to cease as a family. Of the multitude of Neumanns, the only descendant in my generation is Frantzi Ürményi. He lives in Bucharest and although his daughter has a baby, his son had to adopt a child. All the Neumanns were gifted and odd people.

Aunt Ilka had a lovely oval face, small brown eyes, sparse brown hair and a pale complexion. She had a happy disposition, laughed a lot and often exclaimed in a high-pitched, squealing, peculiar voice. Conversation was mostly in German, although she often mixed Hungarian words into it. After she became a widow in 1935, she wore mostly black or dark, old-fashioned dresses. The Neumanns lived in a big family house in Lugos, a yellow one-storied "mansion", on Main street, opposite the church. The upper-floor apartment consisted of many rooms, furnished with dark, somber furniture, filled with many interesting objects, books, a gem-collection, etc. Aunt Ilka lived all her married life with her mother-in-law, old Mrs. Neumann, who was a strict and demanding lady. After both her husband and mother-in-law passed away, aunt Ilka rented out the family apartment and in 1938 moved to Timisoara, to stay with her daughter, Marika. In a course befitting Ilka's character, they did not take an apartment of their own, however moved in with another authoritarian Neumann, the sister-in-law of aunt Ilka, Mrs. Celestine László (Czöli). The trio: Auntie Czöli, Aunt Ilka and Marika Neumann, stayed together for the next decades, until first Czöli and later Ilka died. I often visited that old-fashioned dwelling on the fourth floor of a big apartment house. We, the younger generation, disrespectfully dubbed the place "owl citadel" - a Hungarian expression for an odd place. Aunt Ilka was a cheerful resident of that residence, subdued and terrorized with tender, loving care by her daughter. For the last decades of her life, Aunt Ilka was not allowed to go down on the street: the elevator was not reliable and safe enough, as such she must not expose herself to any possible danger. She accepted this, and the many other restrictions - mostly dietary, no eggs, no fat - with good humor and a smile. Aunt Ilka passed away in 1978, proof of the good genes in the female line of my ancestry.

The marriage of Duczi Neumann and Ilka Németh was blessed with two children: Marika (called Baaby by her mother), born in 1905 and Joseph (Burshi) born in 1907. Marika grew up in extreme closeness with her cousin Anna Jellinek - they were like sisters according to Mother. She studied mathematics and graduated from the Faculty of Sciences in Cluj in 1928. She taught in high schools first in a remote

Romanian town (Râmnicul Vilcea), and from 1935 in Timișoara. In 1945 with the establishment of a University in Timișoara, she became first a lecturer, and later a professor, acquiring on the way a doctorate in mathematics. Retired in 1970, she continued to teach gifted young people on a private and voluntary basis. Auntie Marika was always a strong presence in my life. While we lived in Arad she often visited with us, and we spent many summer vacations in Lugos, where she stayed for the school furlough in the paternal house. Marika was, and I presume still is, an intense person, stubborn, imperious and extremely intelligent. She has a natural inquisitiveness about many aspects of nature, society and culture. A born educator, she always surrounded herself with smart young men and women and to this day she is treated with awe and respect by her former students. All of the above make her an extremely difficult person to live with. As a teenager student, Ed had spent the 1940-41 school year in the home of the Neumans, and it was an extremely traumatic period of his life.

Marika was always shy in personal relations, Mother repeatedly tried to introduce her to prospective gentlemen, but Marika always refused to even think of getting close to a man. She had no vanity concerning her appearance, was always dressed in plain and unattractive garb, wore her thin hair in a small bun, never used any make-up. She has a strong, squeaky voice, with a thin and rare laughter. She was in her forties when she developed a male friendship, with one of her professor colleagues at the Israelite High School, a certain Adam Frucht. He was teaching philosophy, he was not too smart, a well-educated intellectual, during communism he wrote ideologically acceptable poetry, under the pen-name of Anavi. I don't think that their relationship, which lasted a couple of years, advanced further than intellectual kinship, the gossip was definitively adverse to their friendship. I last saw Marika in 1961 when we emigrated from Timișoara to Israel, Mother visited her once in 1974, and Marika visited Israel twice, staying with Mother and with former students of hers. Presently she lives in her book-cluttered apartment in Timișoara, she maintained a lively correspondence with Mother and a number of devoted younger friends. She is under the tender and not disinterested care of the above mentioned Frantzi Ürmenyi. As a distant nephew and the only direct Neumann descendant at the age of 75, he keeps an eye on the significant inheritance, which will go his way if and when Marika closes her eyes.

Joseph (Burschi) Neumann graduated high school in 1925 and went to study medicine in Besançon, France. He developed a close friendship with a colleague of his, Lavollee. After graduating, both started to work in the biochemistry laboratory of the Ecole Nationale des Arts et Métiers in Paris. This is a place of high scientific prestige, their work in histo-chemistry was rewarded with professional advancement and Lavollee (the Frenchman) became professor, while Neumann (the naturalized one), stayed on as his associate. Joseph fell in love and lived together with Helene, an attractive divorcee, eight years his senior, who had a son by her first husband. During the war, when French Jews were rounded up and deported, Helene shielded Joseph and got him into a "maquis" hiding place. After the war they got married and lived happily until old age separated them: Helene passed away in 1991, Joseph died

in 1995. I do remember Burshi (Joseph) vaguely, when during my childhood he visited his parents on summer vacations: he called me Riri, a French nickname derived from Henry. He was tall, reddish-blond, balding and had a compulsive manner. I met him next on our first visit to Paris in 1966. He was very forthcoming, we were invited to dinner in their home, he took us out to see a big department store, he invited us to the Comédie Française. He was thoroughly assimilated to Frenchdom, some episodes from that visit created a lasting impression. In their home there was another dinner guest, and I listened with amazement to those two eminent scientists, discussing at length the cut and quality of meat, that they were buying at the butcher for a meal. There was a cheese plate on the table with three kinds of cheese, and I made the gaffe of cutting the brie the wrong way - I was promptly reprimanded by Burshi. A couple of days later, we were to meet the Neumann's for a light meal before going to the theater. Being a Tuesday, the museums were closed, and we visited beforehand the Galleries Lafayette, to stock up with classical records and some small gifts. When Burshi spotted me with the shopping bag, he became indignant, exclaiming: "you can't go to the Comédie Française with a shopping bag". Helene tried to calm him down, telling that we will deposit the bag at the coat-check. It was of no avail, he made me run home by subway to deposit the bag in the hotel and join them after that in a bistro for a light meal. There too, he did not let me drink a glass of wine: "one does not drink alcohol before a performance of Molière". All this notwithstanding I found him interesting, friendly, highly intelligent, a caring relative, however strange.

Charlotte, the oldest surviving daughter of the Némeths' was born in 1879. She must have gotten a superior education, besides speaking German and Hungarian she was fluent in French and even read English books. I do not think that she got a formal high-school education, in her hometown of Lugoj there was no school for girls. I saw photographs of her as a young girl and in my opinion she was rather plain. The elongated face, the strong nose and the narrow mouth, inherited from Phoebus, her father, looked far better on a man than on a young girl. She had dark hair and was deaf on one ear, stemming from a childhood infection. Charlotte, called Shari, grew up as an ardent Hungarian patriot, her heroes were Kossuth, the protagonist of the 1848 revolution, as well as the leaders of that uprising who were executed in 1849 - the Hungarian martyrs of freedom. Mother even to-day holds on to an album with a selection of Hungarian patriotic poetry, with the name Charlotte Nemeth, printed in gilded letters on the front. She got married to Dr. Henrik Jellinek in 1902 and moved to Arad. After the birth of their daughter, Anna, in 1903, the Jellinek's lived a comfortable middle-class life. Charlotte managed the household with the help of two maids and benefited of the cultural and social life of that mid-size city on the edge of the Hungarian Plain. There was a Cultural Palace, built in those years, with a concert hall, a museum and a library. The Jellinek's were active in the tennis club too. They are on a photograph from around 1910, a group of men and women standing with the racquets: the women have big hats, white blouses and long skirts, the men sport Girardi hats and white cotton jackets. As a child I remember the swimming-suit my grandmother used - it must have been the one from her days as a young woman: black cloth with red trimmings, the short skirt covering her knees, the sleeves

reaching almost to her elbows. She had a red parasol, to protect her from the sun. The Jellinek's had a piano, but I don't think Charlotte played it. On the other hand many of the books I saw in our bookcases in my childhood, were inherited from the Jellinek's bibliotheca. There were yearly vacations to Budapest, Munich, Vienna, etc. It was not given to Charlotte to have the comfortable bourgeois life she may have expected as the consort of a prosperous lawyer, as Henrik died young.

After the demise of her husband in 1915, Charlotte moved to Lugoj to her parents, Phoebus and Ida Németh. As an ardent patriot she invested most of her funds in the aforementioned War Bonds, with the result that at the end of the war, she too became indigent. The land changed too, the Versailles Treaty transferred that corner of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy into the new Romanian kingdom. Living with her daughter Anna, in the small apartment of her father Phoebus Németh, Charlotte had to comply with his old-fashioned character. My grandmother was skillful and made exquisite lacework, embroidery and other decorative handiwork. Her output was sold in one of the local boutiques, and she was offered partial ownership. Her father vetoed it indignantly, "you will by no means become a tradesperson". Charlotte was an exacting mother, despite her reduced financial situation, she managed to give her daughter, Anna, the best possible education. She did her utmost to make sure her daughter excelled in her studies, prodding and helping her. Enlisting the help of her well-to-do brother-in-law Jozsi Jellinek, she succeeded to bridge some of the financial hurdles. Anna graduated with honors from high-school, quite an accomplishment, considering the difficulties of the war-years. Charlotte was successful in finding a good husband for her daughter.

My grandmother Shari probably relished - vicariously - the happy family life and middle-class standards my parents enjoyed. Nevertheless, the long years of scarcity did leave their mark. I do remember as a child that Granny Shari was always tight-fisted in pecuniary matters. She was always stingy in affairs concerning her own household, and expanded this parsimoniousness to our whole family. During my childhood she lived in Lugoj, in a household comprised only of old ladies: great-great-grandma Hanni (until 1935), Auntie Rosa (deceased sometimes around 1936) Omama Ida and herself. Ed and myself, we spent many summer vacations in her home, I remember the loving strictness with which she tried to discipline us. In retrospect, it must have been difficult for those four old ladies to have in their midst two lively and often unruly children. Love, as well as a sense of discipline and duty probably overrode the unease.

After Hanni and Rosa died, Omama Ida and Granny Shari moved into an apartment in the Neumann house. It was a small dwelling, the windows looked onto the garden, a huge affair, my mother's childhood paradise. When Ilka moved to her daughter to Timisoara, my Granny and my Omama moved to Arad, first to a small apartment in the house of the bank managed by Father, and in 1940, into our home. They moved in with their used furniture, old stuff which I did not appreciate at that time. In later years my parents had that furniture repaired and we used it until our emigration to Israel in 1961. On that occasion we had to sell it for peanuts. I wish I



could have now here with me, those handsome Biedermeier bedroom and dining-room pieces. Granny Shari and Omama Ida stayed with us, till the end of their days. They were integral part of the family, taking part of the household chores, shopping, cooking, mending, etc. In the evening most of the family sat around the living-room table, each one with a book, reading: Ida mostly in German, Shari in German or Hungarian.

In the spring of 1944 Granny Shari started complaining of back pains. She was repeatedly seen by our family physician and given medications. At the beginning it was helpful, but by the advent of summer the pain was almost constant, except when she was lying on her back. There were frequent air raid warnings and one major aerial Allied bombing of our city. On every such occasion we were running down to the basement, but Granny was not able to descend the two flights. It was a terrible thought to leave her behind, while we scrambled to "safety". As such my parents negotiated with Mr. Talpai, a former janitor of the bank to move Granny Shari to their home, far out in the suburbs. It was a ground floor house, far away from every possible military objective (railway station, factories). Omama Ida moved with her, and was taking care of the nursing. The Talpai's were handsomely paid for the rented room, and either Mother or myself, we visited daily the old ladies, bringing a warm meal. After Romania broke with the Axis, and before the Russian troops arrived to our area, the Hungarian and German troops invaded our town on Sept. 10, 1944. We were forewarned and fled, just hours before the advancing troops arrived. Mother to this day cannot forgive herself, that she abandoned her mother and grandmother, despite the fact that the old ladies were well provided and taken care by the Talpai's. Our absence lasted for two weeks, by the time the Russians occupied Arad, we were back and found Omama Ida and Granny Shari unharmed. We brought them back to our apartment. Granny Shari took a turn for the worse, she was in constant pain, even while lying flat. Finally a portable Roentgen machine was brought to our home, an X-ray was taken and a plaster cast was made for her to immobilize her spine. I do not remember if the physicians knew what is wrong with her or whether they told Mother. In retrospect I presume that she had a tumor of her spine, most probably a secondary one, possibly from lung or breast. Her situation deteriorated further, she had to get constantly morphine. Father went to the local Russian military hospital, got to speak to the chief orthopedic surgeon (he must have been Jewish, he spoke some broken Yiddish-like German) who refused to come and see a civilian patient. By the beginning of November 1944, Granny Shari lapsed into a coma and died. She is buried in the Jewish cemetery of Arad, near the only man in her life, her husband Henrik. Being a steadfast and loyal person she refused during her long widowhood even the thought of remarrying, despite the fact that it would have been a definite improvement in her situation. I do remember her as a proud, energetic and strict person. As a child I probably never appreciated the love and concern she bore toward her grandchildren, who were growing up so differently from the standards she had set for herself.

In this narrative I am using the spellings customary in the Hungarian language. I am also using the terms of "Uncle" (*bácsi* in Hungarian) and "Auntie" (*néni*): in

Hungarian the expression is applied for siblings of parents, as well as for adults whom one addresses respectfully, be they members of the family or not.