

# My Father: Eugen TAUSK (1894-1962)

## Excerpts from **Heinzi Tausk's** Memoirs

My father was born on January 24, 1894 in Lugos (in present-day Romania it is called Lugoj). He started his schooling early on, before his 6th birthday, at the Jewish elementary grade school, run by his father Ede Tauszk. At that time it was the customary 4 year-course, followed by 8 years of high school, all in the same locality. I have little information on the school years of my father, but I know that he must have always been a diligent pupil. In those days every school edited a yearbook, and the names of the honor students were always printed in block letters and underlined. As a child I was repeatedly shown Father's school listings, and he never failed to make the honor roll. I have no information on the degree of closeness he had with his classmates. In later life he kept friendly relations with at least two of his class-mates: the previously mentioned György Szánto as well as Samuel (Táti) Ligeti (who as a child was still called Lichtenstein). Another of my father's close friends was André (Bandi) Steinbach, who was one class below him. Musical life must have been intense, one of his classmates, Traian Grozăvescu became a famous tenor at the Cluj opera; he was shot to death in his prime by a jealous woman. Father's other musically gifted childhood colleague, Oszkár Kirschner, became famed as a leading bass-baritone of the Budapest Opera, under the name of Kálmán Oszkár. Father himself was musically gifted, but I do not know how and when did he study the piano. There was an upright piano at his parents' house, and in my childhood he often played our big piano for his and the family's enjoyment. He also was an active chamber music player, in my youth it was violin and piano sonatas, before my birth it was trios and quartets.

There is one family photo of his family, where my father aged 7 is shown with his parents Ede and Josephine (Jozsa) Tauszk. From such an old photograph it is difficult to find out the character of a child: Eugen is a good-looking child with a serious appearance, short-cropped blondish hair, ostensibly seeking confidence in the closeness of his severe father. The next picture I have is already taken in 1909, with an inscription to his father's 50th birthday. Again a serious-looking blond young man, still slender at that age. Nothing betrays the tendency to corpulence, which made its appearance in his mid-twenties. Father never spoke spontaneously about his early years and I, mindlessly, did not ask about it. At the present time there is no more information available, and I have to reconstruct an image from small and brittle fragments.



*My father at the age of 15, then at the age of 26, in 1920*

After graduating from high school (with honors, as expected) Father had spent one year in Vienna, at the "Handelsakademie". This school of economic and commercial sciences was the most important one in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and its graduates were as sought after, as to-day's Harvard Business School. The meagerly paid elementary school teacher could not afford to let his only son have an all-out education at that prestigious institution, and as a compromise Father took the one-year special course which dealt mostly with book-keeping and financial transactions. His year in Vienna must have been difficult: he lived in meager lodgings, possibly sharing them with a friend. Father skimmed on food too: one of the few stories he told us was that dinner often was the trimmings of the fat from the Prager ham with bread. One of the few luxuries he indulged in, was an occasional visit to the Opera. It was in the standing-gallery, and he joined in with other young people, following the musical action from the score.

Subsequent to graduation from the Handels-Akademie, Father started with an entry-level job at the prestigious Budapest General Commercial Bank. A starting job was remunerated with 110 crowns, and Father used to tell us how on the first of the month he was handed out five 20 crown gold coins and the change. He and his friends immediately asked the teller to exchange the gold coins into banknotes: a gold coin was too easily lost. Father was lodging together with his childhood friend Bandi Steinbach from Lugoj, who was starting his engineering studies. I know nothing about other friendships or amorous stories which may

have occurred to an aspiring young bank-clerk in the heady days of pre-war Budapest; it was one of the liveliest and most cosmopolitan cities of eastern Europe. Father must have been good at his job, he advanced steadily, and by the time World War I broke out he had already signature rights at the Bank. This, and a (luckily minor) pulmonary TB infection, kept him out of uniform. More and more senior people got drafted and by 1918 (at the age of 24) Father rose to become a procurist (in those days an important function and title). He even was once sent to Sofia (capital of Bulgaria), to straighten out a troublesome matter.

The year 1918 brought the end of the war and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In Hungary a socialist government was formed - soon degenerating into a short-lived communist dictatorship. All institutions were directed to create a self-governing inner structure, an employees committee. Father was a quiet man, liked by his co-workers and superiors alike, he became a member of this committee, which survived into communism. The short-lived communism was smashed by the forces of the "White Terror", fascist troops led by the admiral Horthy. Everybody linked in whatever fashion to the "Red Terror" was suspicious. The innocuous membership of Father in the employees committee was compounded by him being Jewish. The "White" regime was openly Anti-Semitic because many Jewish people had figured prominently in the communist dictatorship. Soon Father was called into the office of the manager of the Bank and told that he has no future in the institution, he should look for another job. Well-meaning friends helped him to get a position at another major bank in Bratislava. That city used to be the second Hungarian metropolis and was suddenly ceded to the new Czechoslovak Republic. His career in Bratislava was cut short by the bad news from home: his father fell ill in Lugoj and died. His mother was a widow, she was alone in a new world (Lugoj suddenly became part of the new Romanian kingdom) and received only a minimal pension after her spouse. Father hastened home to Lugoj, and joined the Lugoj Popular Bank as a procurist. By 1922, he was 28 years old, had a promising career in banking and it was time to get married. He was already starting to gain weight - the Raschofsky legacy - photos from that time show an earnest looking, bespectacled, slightly overweight, balding young man. One of the photographs caught him in an oblique angle, he looks like the Viennese composer Schubert. In fact his friend György Szántó had described in a book Father as personifying the fictional figure of Pierre Bezuchij in Tolstoy's War and Peace; I always considered this comparison a great compliment.

Lugoj was a small place, perhaps 30 thousand inhabitants. At a charity tea of the Jewish Women's Benevolent Society, my father met a shy young lady. He liked her, they talked, and he asked for permission to visit her. Presumably he also got some information (his mother was for sure sounding out the gossip circuit) on the family and background of that girl. Orphaned at a tender age, she was raised by her grandfather (who at the time was quite impoverished) but there was a rich uncle in Arad. The visits created a closer relationship, and in the fall of 1922 my father asked for the hand of Anna Jellinek. The wedding was held on April 10, 1923, very quietly, due to the fact that the bride's family was in mourning: she had recently lost her

grandfather and also the wife of her uncle in Arad, who was quite close to her. The wedding photo displays a smiling bride and a mild-looking serious young man, who starts to show the first signs of being overweight.



*Eugen Tauszk and Anna Jelinek, wedding photo, 1923*

The newlyweds lived for a while in a small rented apartment, Father soon became vice-manager of the bank, but did not want to stay put in the backwater of such a minor-league bank of a provincial town. Within a year and a half Anna (called Annushka by her spouse) had a spontaneous abortion and shortly afterwards they did move to the neighboring Timisoara. This was a thriving commercial and industrial city of about 100 thousand inhabitants, and Father became a procurist at the largest local banking institute, the Credit Bank of Timisoara. My parents had a good life in Timisoara, Father renewed his old friendship ties with Táti Ligeti and Bandi Steinbach. They also got close to other people, the Borgida brothers became lifelong friends. On 13 July 1926 a baby boy made its appearance, called Edward (Eddy for us, Ed for his American family and friends) after his paternal grandfather.

Mother's uncle Jozsi Jellinek, became a rich man after the war, sometimes in the mid-twenties he acquired a local banking institution in Arad, and now he invited my father to join the management. In 1928, my parents moved to Arad, and Father became the acting manager of the Savings Bank of the Arad County. For a year or so they stayed in a rental apartment, and



the second child, Henry Carol (called after the maternal grandfather and the maternal great-uncle) was born on February 18, 1929 (that was me). Soon after, the dowry of my mother was put to good use, they purchased the house on No. 1 Stroescu Street, the house which was to become for the next 13 years our much loved home.



*The family House, Stroescu St. no. 1, Arad*

At the bank Father worked closely with the general manager, Mr. Gyula Fodor, and upon his retirement in 1935, he became the CEO. The 1930ies were difficult times, there was a world-wide recession and stagnation in business. At my father's bank this was compounded with an agrarian moratorium: farmers were forgiven numerous loans. The Saving Bank of Arad County was primordially an agrarian bank, and had my father not wisely expanded into other business, it would have gone under. As such the bank not only stayed afloat, but managed to be profitable. Father was a respected member of the local citizenry, he was a member of the Scottish Freemason lodge, he was active in the Jewish Community and had friendly and business ties with numerous individuals. He had to travel occasionally, the bank had branches in some neighboring communities, and one even in Battonya, in Hungary. It behooved for such an institution to have friends in high places and the chief of staff of the Romanian king Carol II, Mr. Urdareanu, was on the board of the bank. I am not sure if he was very busy with royal ceremony, but he was a kind of right-handed assistant to the king and as such, sheltering different business affairs was one of his main concerns. At any rate at least once a year Father had to travel to Bucharest for an audience with Mr. Urdareanu.

Father renewed the bonds with György Szántó, the former class-mate who, now blind, was a budding writer. His wife Adél, had a sister who was married to the lawyer Géza Juhász, and they became the nucleus of a circle of friends. My parents lived an active social life, they

travelled occasionally to Budapest for theatrical events or a medical consultation. Father by this time was definitively overweight, more often than not he was well over 100 kilos, and the dieting was a constant, losing fight. He contracted diphtheria and consequentially had myocarditis, believed to have weakened his heart. In addition he was a heavy smoker, who did not do any kind of physical exercise. My parents enjoyed summer vacations on the Adriatic Sea and one cruise on the Mediterranean. Three times they took us children too on their summer vacation.