

# The Daughter of the Revolution\*

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I was born in November 1956. I was taken to a children's home when I was two months old. I have an older sister and I had an older brother, who also grew up in a boarding school. My brother died at the age of 27, he allegedly committed suicide. He hung himself on a door handle. I can't believe he did it himself. I think somebody helped him do it. Back then, the police were looking into the case, but they closed it saying my brother had committed suicide. But before that, he wanted to go abroad. Until I was ten, I was unable to even grasp what was happening to me. Then one time, in the summer of 1966 I went to spend the vacation with my grandma, my father's mother. She pointed to a photograph on the wall and asked me if I knew who that man was. I told her I had no idea. So that's when I learnt that the man in the picture was none other but my daddy. And then we talked the whole day and we both cried a lot. I distinctly remember this. And later on, as I was growing up, I somehow doubted my father's death. I always thought he might be alive somewhere. At other times I thought maybe he wasn't alive any more, and I doubted everything, the entire universe.

At the boarding school festivals celebrating November 7 I somehow always misbehaved. I remember the custom was that naughty kids were not allowed to put on the pioneers' red necktie, and I was really proud of that, how great it was that I didn't have to put on the pioneer necktie. I was quite interested in history, and in classes I kept asking why we were studying the history of the Russians, the great Aurora battle-cruiser and the siege of the Winter Palace, and not Hungarian history. I found this so strange, somehow. Nobody came to visit me until I was ten, by the way, and from 1966, my dad's sister came with her son, during the prescribed time, every first Sunday of the month. But my mother had never visited me. When I turned sixteen and I was in another boarding school, they allowed us to go home every second weekend. The teachers never even asked who was going where, everyone got their permits to leave and could go wherever they wanted to. I usually went to my grandma's. Once or twice I went to see my mother, but I wish I hadn't done that.

I met my mother for the first time when I was in first grade. Once, when I was sixteen, I went to see her, but I didn't know how to greet her, how to address her. And she didn't help me at all. That's why up to this day I'm unable to address her, I can't really greet her either, so I don't even greet her at all. Once when I visited her during the weekend, that must have been around the time when I was sixteen too, I wasn't able to tell yet when my period would arrive, and it arrived on the weekend I was spending at her place, and my mother lashed such a terrible storm of abuse on me that just I cried and cried. I couldn't understand why

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\* The original interview was made by Mária Hoyer in 1998.

she scolded me. Because at the time when it first arrived, I had no idea what was happening to me, what was going on. Nobody told me what to do in a situation like this. So I was a dumb little thing in that respect.

I remember I was in first grade when I was transferred to another boarding school with my brother and sister, and they took us on a two-week vacation to Zamárdi at Lake Balaton. It happened in Zamárdi, that a lady appeared and took my older sister and brother home for good. That's when I learnt that she was my mother. And then I cried a lot and asked her why she wouldn't take me home. My mother replied, I remember it well, that if I was a good girl, I'd go home too. I didn't understand then what being a good girl meant. I truly did not understand, and I was unable to judge even later on whether I was bad or not. I had started school a year late and I also repeated one grade, therefore I always looked over-age. So there, in Zamárdi, when just I cried and cried, a friend of my older sister helped me to make the vacation pass in some way. She bought me ice-cream every day, she eased my pain. There was no correspondence between the siblings, they never wrote letters to me while they were at home, neither did my mother, I only rarely got letters from my grandma and my aunt.

My first admirer was a man four years older than me. He could visit me on Sundays, but I did not look upon him as a boyfriend, I rather took him for my patron who lives outside and comes in to visit me, bringing me this and that. And when he was in there with me, I was always wishing he would leave. Though during the weekdays when he wasn't there, I was always looking forward to Sunday, for Béla to arrive and bring me something. One Sunday the director called to see us. The director at that boarding school was called Lajos something. He wasn't a very good director, I remember that. He made us sit down in his office and told me I could escape life at the boarding school if I married Béla then. Because this Béla loved me, and so on. I said no to this, because I was only sixteen or seventeen then, and I had no idea how these things worked. So I was way too young to get married, I was unable to comprehend things and I said we'd better wait with this step because it would be better if I was released from the boarding school first and then I could say yes freely, based on my own decision, not under pressure, only to escape the boarding school. I remember this happened on a Sunday afternoon, and the next day they woke me up at dawn and took me to Esztergom, to a semi-closed boarding school where the bad kids ended up. And now, looking back, I don't believe that I was taken to Esztergom because I was bad but because my choice was not what the director wanted.

So I ended up in the Esztergom boarding school. There was a director lady there who helped me. On Sundays, she took me out to her own flat, I had lunch at her place. I was a very skinny girl and for some reason she felt sorry for me. I used to be her darling, I don't know why. She had a sick husband, and while I was studying at her place, the director lady treated me as some kind of a privileged kid. The others found this strange, they bullied me because of that, but it disturbed me a bit too. Especially when we had our common lunch at the dining hall and this director lady came up to me and asked me, "Margit, how's lunch?" I felt really ashamed then, and I couldn't duck my head down quick enough after she left. At the previous boarding school, if we misbehaved, we were not given meat, and as a punishment they took us down to the park and we were made to build the sports tracks. OK, this is a nice touch, but we girls were given, I forget what sort of tool, and we had to cut away a tree above its roots. I'm not saying that a girl is unable to chop down a tree, and I remember there were at least ten of us there, but it's a bit over the top that they meant this to be our punishment. It had also happened, and to me it felt horribly cruel even though it was a minor punishment, that I was made to pick all the plums from a plum tree. As a kid it seemed especially cruel to me because I was disgusted by all sorts of worms and insects and everyone knew that the plum tree was swarming with

worms. This was a horrible punishment. Instead of picking the plums, I hid. The director beat me because I hid.

He beat me on other occasions too, by the way, I was even counting at the time how many times he did that, and I still remember he beat me badly ten times. Once because I was very sick and my classmates dared to call a doctor. They called the village doctor because I had such a high fever that I nearly died. At other times I got beaten because they took us out to work on the fields but we were not getting paid for it, but our teacher told us that we would get the sum as pocket money, and he would keep track of how much money each of us had in this striped notebook, and if we wanted sweets, we could spend from that and it would be deducted from our pay in the notebook. Once I wanted to buy candy and they told me I had no money left while I knew that I had spent practically nothing. Then I went hysterical. The director beat me badly then too, and told me that I had been raised here and this money ended up in the boarding school's budget in return for that. Once even a journalist showed up, he did some interviews, I told him everything and the others did too, but the director had probably bribed him because it wasn't the truth that was eventually published, but what he had told him. What's more, this boarding school was right next to the Russian army barracks, I disliked it very much. When they took us out to the movies, for example, we had to march through the city in line, wearing a uniform. This was terribly humiliating because everyone was staring at us as if we were criminals.

I finally got out of there because my teacher found me a job and a place to stay. We came up to Budapest to have a look around. We went to see my grandma too, we had lunch there, that's when the teacher met my grandma and her entire family, then we went back to the boarding school and I finally was freed July 3, 1974. I was terribly happy when I was released. I was like a little bird, and I simply didn't care what would happen to me in the great wide world. I felt free, it was so good, and I ended up at a workers' hostel on Dózsa György road, but I couldn't stay there long, the place somehow wasn't comfortable for me. I somehow didn't feel at home there. And I fled and went to live in a sublease soon because I thought a flat at least looks cozier than a room at a workers hostel. I was released with 200 forints, which I immediately had to pay as a hostel fee. I had one set of clothes. I wore that to work until August. I went to work in that, I wore that in the street and at the hostel, and when the weekend came, I had to stay in until I washed it. When I go to bed at home at night and when I get up I still think of these times, because all this is so sad. If I'm watching a movie in the evening that I feel affects me, a sad-kid-movie, let's say, or an adaptation of a family story centered around some tragic event, I cry. I take things in a very emotional way, and I can only calm down by calling one of my neighbours who has lived abroad, and I can discuss these things with him. But I have no idea what would happen if he wasn't around at times like this. Maybe I'd have a nervous breakdown or something like that. Because I can only calm down by talking about these things, by telling him how I felt, and then that calms me. It's an interesting thing.

It was horrible at my first workplace, the clothing factory. I still remember it as if it had happened yesterday. I was defenseless. We were paid twice a month at that time, there was an advance and a final account. I started working at the beginning of the month, and one of the paydays was on the 15th, the other one around the 26th. Of course I wasn't paid on the 15th because I only started working there at the beginning of the month. My two hundred forints that I had when I was released from the boarding school had already been taken from me at the workers' hostel, so I was absolutely penniless. Even if at that time it was possible to buy breakfast from five forints, a bun cost 40 fillérs, liver paste cost a few forints, half a litre or a glass of milk cost two forints ten or even less. And when the others saw that I had no money, they started collecting change for me in a plastic bag and gave it to me as some

sort of charity. They were so pleased with their own generosity: “Here, Margit, you’re a little boarder but still, you should have some money because we can see that you’re not eating anything.” I cried terribly, I felt so ashamed, I wasn’t happy about it, but still, I accepted it. What else could I have done? Everything was so unusual for me, was simply beyond me, I didn’t understand a thing, that bag of change seemed to be an enormous amount, and I just cried and cried, and felt ashamed. I remember going to see my grandma in Újpest, saying, “here, Granny, look what they have done for me, they’ve collected money so that I don’t starve to death.” Deep down I knew that it was nice of them, but I felt ashamed. So I just cried and cried.

I even put together a little chart with grandma, I forget how much money was in the bag, but we calculated how much I could spend on breakfast, what I should take to the factory and how much my dinner would cost. I ate at my grandma’s at the weekends at that time, so I could make ends meet from that bag of money until payday. But until then, I had to hear every day that the little boarder was this and that. And when I started eating at the factory, everyone was watching to see how the little boarder was eating. It was horrible. I would hide and go outside to have my little breakfast. It wasn’t too pleasant a situation. And when I got my first salary, I overslept and I did not dare to go to work at the factory afterwards. I wasn’t raised in a system where you get up in the morning and head straight for work. Nobody told me at the boarding school what to do if you have to be at work at six but oversleep and when you wake up it’s half past seven. So what happens now? Then I just put my hands together and I did not dare to leave the room. I did not dare to go anywhere because I was afraid, so I stayed home on the second day too. I didn’t go to work on the third day because I hadn’t gone the previous day either. And then, as if she had felt that I had a problem, one of my former classmates came to see me. I was very happy to see her and I told her what had happened, that I hadn’t been to work for a week already and I could not justify it in any way, so what was I to do? And she told me not to worry, she had an acquaintance who would fill out a doctor’s certificate for me and I’d only have to lie, saying I had been hospitalized. And she did get me a certificate, I even got sick pay because of that. So that was how I escaped. It was very embarrassing, and I left the clothing factory afterwards. I couldn’t stay there, it wasn’t right somehow. Even today, I still can’t explain what my problem was.

I tried another job afterwards, then a third one, but I couldn’t fit in anywhere. The way I felt getting paid was that I finally had money I could spend. The way I did it at first was a little cinema, a little breakfast, a little lunch. I used the money quite sparingly. Later, I realized that a lot of people had nice clothes and all, and I really wanted to have nice clothes too, because I’d been wearing the same clothes for months already. When I washed them, I had to stay at home, and until they dried, I wrapped myself in a sheet. Sometimes I put them on while they were still half wet, and I went to my grandma’s to iron them there. My aunt felt sorry for me, so we went into my old boarding school to tell them how the state had released me. She told them what had happened and I received a clothing coupon that could be used for purchasing at the Pioneer Department Store of the time. It was worth 2,500 forints, I remember very well that it was big money at the time, but it still wasn’t enough for a winter coat. I got my first winter coat from my older sister. Well, that looked so bad that now my face would burn with shame if I had to walk down the street in that. But I put it on then, as there was nothing else. Yet at the boarding school, I had always said that when I was free, I’d wear the clothes that I liked, and I’d be the best dressed of all. So maybe that was part of it too, and maybe that’s why I wanted to pick and choose to have really nice clothes, cool stuff, to have the trendiest of everything. Maybe I also felt that I wanted a new look, one that I could see no one else was wearing because of the tailoring workshop. That’s why I was striving to dress in a way that didn’t look shabby.

Then came the apartments. I thought everything would be cozier. Well, at that time my life really wasn't perfect at all. My first more serious admirer also appeared when I had no place to live, that was when I met him. That's why I didn't think of him as my partner, or as if I had any kind of relationship with him. I thought of him as a well-meaning landlord instead. Because looking back now, the way it worked was that I lived at his place during the winter, and when good weather came, Margit flew out of these surroundings and went to stay with her girlfriend, or looked for a new sublease. Then she looked for a new job to go with that new sublease as she had to pay for it. But there were times when one cancelled the other. Then a new sublease, and yet another one. So I kept moving all the time. Then a new job, and again a newer one. It happened that I had to get a new i.d. because the temporary domicile section was full. There were times when that was the reason why I didn't get a job, at other times I could get no sublease because I had no work. So it was a vicious circle.

Now, looking back, I'm gloating over this, I admit, because I can't really say that I was much of a builder of the Kádarian system, "big socialism." It might sound strange, but I've been thinking of this often: my daddy had been fighting against this system, and it was this system that killed him. Though I did not die, my goal was the same as my daddy's had been. I've always been on the other side, and I always wanted that "big socialism" to end. That's why I was so happy when Kádár died. And I could fight by taking up a job one month and quitting it the next. Of course there were problems everywhere, too. It just came all by itself, I didn't have to particularly wish for it. There was either some problem with the coworkers, so I was unable to fit into the company, or I had problems with my boss. It had also happened that I quit after payday because I saw how much they paid and I was unwilling to work for so little, so I went to work at another place. I was always careful to get a new job within thirty days, because if I had no work for longer than a month, that was a criminal act and counted as "vagrancy endangering the community." It was also set down that after having the third job in a year, one must go to the employment office to get a new job. I've been to all of these places at the time. Not everyone knows of these things, only the ones who have really had many jobs at that time.

Once I remember I wanted to run away. I took the first train carrying a little luggage, without a ticket. I took a job where the conductor kicked me off the train, I forget which countryside town it was. I was a hand at some cartography company. I rented a room in a housing block apartment, I lived there for a month or two, or maybe for a shorter period. I don't know why I left there, for some reason I didn't feel good there, but I have no idea what the problem was. I told myself, Margit, come back to Pest! Oh, now I remember what the trouble was. Those people at the cartography company all thought that I might have left Pest because I was banned from there. Because people were like that at the time. So I had to leave quickly, before they had me taken to the police. I remember I left so suddenly that I didn't even take my last salary. Then I had to look for a sublease again. There were times when I slept in stairways for weeks, at other times I was looking for a girlfriend to be able to spend a day or two in her apartment, but then her parents kicked out both of us because she had let me into their apartment. I sometimes ended up at the police station exactly for this reason, that I had no place to sleep. So I had a very miserable life.

Once I even wanted to move back home to my mother's. My brother was at home too, but my mother didn't even let me into her apartment, only to the gate, and she told me I couldn't stay there, and I should go back to wherever I came from. And I was standing there at the gate crying, I had no place to go, so I eventually ended up at the police again. Of course, there they took my data. Who I was, where and when was I born, parents and all, and then they asked me where my father was. I told them that my father disappeared in 1956, and as far as I know, he disappeared when I was taken to the boarding school, and I

thought I ended up there because he had disappeared. Then the police went to see my mother, and she defended herself by telling them that they wouldn't let me go home because I steal, I'm bad, I'm a tramp and things like that. Then the policemen came back and told me there was nothing they could do because her apartment was small. But they didn't put me out on the street that night, I slept there and was given dinner. They let me go in the morning but didn't care where I went. I had a job then, I think I was on the afternoon shift, so I went to work, but I don't remember where I was working. Some factory, for sure.

There were always problems with the boyfriends too. My relationships in my private life didn't work out. I don't know how to explain this... I was always scared of these relationships, of the commitment. I was afraid that the man would boss me around, that I would have to do this and have to do that. I was also scared that if I got married, I'd have to be all domestic, to cook and clean and the like. I am unable to do the grocery shopping up to this day. If I'm given a list of things to buy, I can't find where things are on the shelves. I still can't ever find anything, and I know I won't be able to until the end of my life. I'm unable to. I can still do the shopping by going into the store not knowing what I want to buy, but if I see it I can pick what I need and sometimes what I don't. But it takes a very long time, because if I enter a store, I can't leave.

It happened to me that I got pregnant from my partner in 1982. I always lived at his place during the winter because it was cold, and in better weather I flew out of there, I couldn't stay with him. He's the father of my only child. This man wanted to marry me, he said he was the father of my child, he even begged me to, but I simply got scared even at the word marriage and I always said no, even though he wanted to marry me for years. So I was on the run, I don't really know where to. There were a lot of problems there too. Once I ran away from there with my daughter, I went to stay with a former classmate of mine. When I started, I had no idea where we were going, it occurred to me on the way where we should go. Now, looking back, being pregnant with her was something, too. At that time I was living in Gyál, subleasing a room from a Gypsy family. Back then I thought what I was doing was a brave and audacious thing because throughout my pregnancy, not a single doctor had seen me, I had no maternity booklet, and at the catering company where I worked, nobody knew I was pregnant because I was afraid to tell them. When they noticed that my tummy was growing, they asked me about it and I told them I was in the seventh month. Then my colleagues wanted to pamper me a bit, but it disturbed me a lot, I did not want to be pampered. I did not let them, and I still kept on lifting the full beer crates because I wanted to show them that I could do it.

I remember my belly was already aching very often but I was still working, and my boss gave me hell and told me not to lie that the pains were coming every second minute, I should rather say that I was too lazy to work. My boss and me were yelling at each other when my daughter's father came to see me. I told him that there was a problem and we should go to the hospital. I wasn't even prepared. I had no baby clothes or stuff like that because I thought I still had a month, and the baby would be arriving around new year's eve. When I was admitted to the hospital, the doctor who received me nearly fainted when she saw me wearing jeans. "Isn't your belly squeezed?" she asked. I told her it wasn't, couldn't she see that there were no rubber band marks on my belly? It's true that I hadn't been unable to pull up the zipper for a while, but I still fitted into my jeans. Then the doctor told me I'd have the baby by the morning. I can't even explain how I felt, the whole thing seemed to be so unbelievable to me. And the child did arrive by the morning. I gave birth to a baby girl after eight months, weighing 2.2 kilograms. Her name is Éva.

Next morning when I woke up I saw that my daughter wasn't there with me. They took her to another hospital as she was premature and her weight was too small. When they

brought her back, I didn't dare to take out my breasts, I was so bashful. I had no idea what was happening, the other young mothers told me everything. Looking back now, in my judgment, I must have been a fool, a horribly ignorant person. I was simply immature for the entire thing. My baby daughter was in the hospital for two months. I visited her almost every day. At that time I happened to be together with her father. When they let the child out of the hospital, we took her to her father's parents, her grandmother and grandfather. She was there for a while, that's where I ran away from with her.

Then came hell: I advertised in a newspaper that I was seeking a sublease with a baby. The addresses came to me, so I didn't have to walk to all these places. There was an opportunity to move in with another young mother. She was working at night while I was at home taking care of her child, too. I didn't even have to pay rent. But of course I wasn't working and I don't even know how much money I had in a month. I only received maternity aid, and that wasn't more than a few hundred forints, I remember well. My daughter was on my name then and the public guardianship department launched this paternity lawsuit just for bureaucratic reasons. Of course I won the lawsuit, why not, and the child stayed with me. I think the legal expenses that the child's father had to pay amounted to fifteen thousand forints. He was very angry because of this and told me I shouldn't have done it. Then I told him maybe I shouldn't have, but it wasn't me who had done it, it was the public guardianship office, and how was I to know why they had done it? Meanwhile, the owner of the apartment kicked us out of the rented room because she shacked up with some guy and moved to Balaton. So I ended up on the street with the child once again, and I went to the police to report that we'd been kicked out. But the police didn't help us at all, they just said the owner can do whatever they want to.

Then I ended up at the place of a male acquaintance of mine with the child, and I'm really surprised I didn't get into bad ways. Then there came an opportunity and this acquaintance had an acquaintance, another man, who took us in. We lived there for a while, and there was a relationship about to form between us. But I always got scared of such relationships and I was unable to think of my daughter at least having a better life there, us having a roof above our heads and the like. I was unable to understand this and I couldn't enter this deal to give something in return for something else. At the same time, I was very emotional and once something happened, I don't exactly remember what. This man was always jealous, I'm not saying that it was always unfounded, but still... and then I got this huge slap in the face from him. I immediately took my stuff and ran away from the apartment with the child. I could not tolerate a man hitting me. I went to my brother's partner's place, and me and my daughter lived at my sister-in-law's for a while. That's where we started organizing getting the child into a day nursery, but I had to go back to work for the catering company.

Meanwhile, my daughter fell ill, I'm not surprised because I can't even count how many times we had moved during this time. We have also lived at my sister's place, but she was unwilling to have us there longer than a week and threw us out, she didn't even tell us what opportunities were out there, what could be done. She didn't help at all, though now I know that it would have been easy to get hold of an apartment back at that time. With the child, I could have received temporary accommodation before my turn. And then it turned out that my daughter had a swollen ear. I had always seen this little red line behind her ear. I thought it was because of the bathing, as it remained wet, and I even tried to treat it with baby powder, but the powder wasn't good, it always became clotted. So I don't know what happened, but it's a fact that she had an ear inflammation. They operated on both her ears. I was supposed to be able to bring her back, but she had to remain in the hospital because she had pneumonia afterwards. She recovered but later it turned out that she also had asthma of the bronchial tube. I think it was probably because I kept moving all the time from this

and to that apartment. One had mildew in it, another was in a cellar, now that I look back. It does no good to anybody, you can get asthma from that easily. It's a miracle I didn't get it.

When it turned out that there's a more serious problem, my daughter ended up on Szabadság hill, at the lung sanatorium, where they had her stay for a year and a half. I was to hand in a study of living conditions to show how we were living at home. But I couldn't hand in such a study as one day I lived here, the other day there, and then I told her father that we should stick together for the child's sake. "Don't consider me," I told him, "But your daughter, at least she should not suffer the same fate I did, don't let her end up in a boarding school." So he handed in a study of living conditions and we even went to visit her together afterwards. I was somehow afraid to go up there on my own, I don't know why. Then I was unable to visit her for a while, and then one time when I went up there and looked for my daughter, they told me that her father had taken her the previous month. She was almost three years old then. After that I went to visit her at her father's for some time, but I always broke down and cried. It's very bad to remember this. I wasn't crying when I was there with them but when I left. I always had such a fit of crying and I felt so bad that I didn't have the nerve to go there any more. I haven't seen them for a good many years now, and I don't really know what's up with my daughter. And now, looking back I see that whenever I had some kind of a problem, or if I was in a difficult situation, I started crying and I ran away. I wasn't the type who fights for what she wants with tooth and nail. I was always slow to realize things and only started thinking why I was such an outcast later on. Why didn't I succeed in anything? Why do I always feel that no matter where I go, all I get is kicking and kicking?

Maybe that's why I started taking an interest in dad. My aunt once said of him that my dad wanted to study, he wanted to leave his parents, and he did go to Szeged to be away from home. I think that was during the Rákosi regime, and then there was this military thing in Szeged, some school. That was where my dad went to. He also lived there and that was where he met my mother. So he was living in sublease there at the time, and I've learnt only lately that my mother was also brought up by foster parents. I didn't know about these things when I was a child, I learnt about them only now, after the political changes. And then they were very-very much in love, my father came up to Pest and he allegedly hadn't finished that military school for some political reason. I don't know, this is shady, I don't know about this. He had been demoted too, and he probably did not want to return to Szeged because he had been demoted. He came back to Pest with my mother and they got married here. My father worked at the Gamma factory, on the border of Újpest and Angyalföld. My mother worked there too. My brother and sister were born in fifty-two and fifty-five. I don't know how their married life was, but there must have been something wrong, because my father was living at his parent's place with my mother and my two elder siblings for a while, but later, in fifty-five or I don't know when, my mother got this laundry-like apartment in Újpest with the two children. Then they moved over there, and my father was there with them for a while, too, but he went home to his parents quite often. My mother somehow didn't get on well with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law, but I don't know why. Even though they had been living together earlier. Meanwhile, she became pregnant with me, then came fifty-six, and as there was something daddy didn't like in the system, the revolution came as a godsend. He was a national guard deputy commander, a commander, too. Then he wanted to flee abroad but he was caught.

When my bother died, I once discussed these obscure, dubious family stories with my sister. Why were we in boarding school? Why did I remain at the boarding school? And why did they come home? We noticed that mom never had any picture of dad, and we were trying to find out why wasn't there any. But there really were none. There never had been any. There isn't one up to this day. I told my sister that I would start investigating what the truth

was. And once, sometime in the eighties, it was a weekday, I remember, my boss sent for me. I entered the office, there were two gentlemen there. They showed me their i.d.s, but I didn't really look because I didn't know about these things. They told me they would take me to the police but I could come back to work afterwards. And then they took me to the Újpest police station in this civilian car that looked like a Lada. There at the office was a tall, middle-aged, maybe older than middle aged, loud man in a brown suit, I forget whether he had a tie on, but he was wearing a suit. So this man asked me where I lived, what places I went to, who my friends were, who my girlfriends were, and why I wasn't registered at the sublease. And he told me that if I didn't get registered, I was violating the rules and I would be fined, and that if I lived there without registering, I had better move and look for a place where I could register. So that was the first meeting, the first summons. Then next day I went to work and my colleagues didn't know about this, but on a weekday, a few days later, the phone rang again and they told me to go to the police again, at once, at 10 a.m. The first thing they asked me was again whether I had registered already, who my friends were, what places did I go to. It was always this, who was I talking to, what were my colleagues like, what were my bosses like, and nothing else but this. Whether I had a boyfriend, why didn't I have a boyfriend, private issues like that, about my life.

I felt back then that they were looking to find fault with me. I did get pressurised at my workplace because they learnt that the police kept goading me, they kept coming for me, and then my co-workers asked me what had I done. I told them I hadn't done a thing. And then it happened, when a policeman let me go he told me that he wouldn't harass me any more, and he had done all this for me, because he didn't want me to end up in bad company, because I was the daughter of the revolution. I didn't really get this "daughter of the revolution." Back then I hadn't thought that this could be connected to my father. But this policeman had poked at something in me, so I became interested in this fifty-six thing. That was the time when I went to work for the North-Pest Catering Company. I was working at a self-service restaurant next to the railway station in Újpest. A policeman called Uncle Tibi was a regular there, and I asked him about it. We sat in his car, in private, and I said to him, "Uncle Tibi, please tell me what happened in fifty-six, I'm so curious, I had problems with this date at my old workplace, and the police have also been nagging me." Then uncle Tibi told me "Margit, the time will come, and then we'll sit down and talk about it." But I haven't met Uncle Tibi since then.

And because I didn't learn what was up with this fifty-six even then, I went to the police on one of the fixed days. So on one of these Mondays, Wednesdays or Fridays, I think it was a long day, I filled them up with the story down at the gate that I wanted to inquire about a missing person and that I thought that was where the data of the missing person had to be submitted. The guy said of course, and they received me in this office and the policeman started typing my data, my mother's data, and asked me who was I searching for, and I said my father, who was born in 1930 in Hajdúnánás, I knew this because my sister had written it on a piece of paper for me, but she hadn't given the day and the month. And when the policeman asked me when had my father disappeared, I told him in fifty-six. Upon hearing this, he stopped typing, took the paper out, put it aside and said, "Margit, I'd love to help you, but I can't do that." And out of sheer benevolence, the policeman said, because this one was a very nice policeman, so out of benevolence this policeman told me to hire a lawyer, and the lawyer would have to go the Interior Ministry's archives or whatever, that's where dad's files were and maybe I could learn something about my father, but it was not certain they would tell me, or whether they would tell the lawyer.

Then I left the police station, and since I had no money for things like a lawyer, I went to the family aid centre where they also had lawyers, I told them about my problem, who I

was looking for, and told them when my father was born, who his parents were and when he disappeared, that I was his daughter, but he had other children, and a wife. So I submitted all this information. Years passed. There was a lawyer there whom I always went to see, but he always received me by saying “Margit, we still don’t know a thing, we can’t get into the files.” Meanwhile, my request for an apartment had been handed in at Újpest, but the problem was that I had never lived at the place that happened to be registered in my i.d., but somewhere else, temporarily. So they kept passing the ball to each other. So it was bad.

When did Kádár die? I think it was in eighty-eight. Well I was really happy about it! I distinctly remember that. I immediately ran to the family aid centre and told them maybe it would be easier from then on to learn what happened with dad, because I still believed that dad was alive somewhere, and perhaps he was also looking for us, only he didn’t have the means to find us either. There was a report on TV, at the time, that the Russians took Hungarians out of the country in fifty-six, they changed their names and they had to live there, or were buried nameless. So I listened to the news then, and paid attention whenever there was a list read out to see whether my father’s name was there. But it was never there, and I was part happy, part sad. It meant my father wasn’t living there. And when I went to the family aid centre the next time, one of the women told me “Margit, the Újpest deputy mayor was looking for you, you must go and see him.” She even called him on the phone for me, telling him I was there and asking whether I could go over there. That deputy mayor received me right away, he even made coffee for me and handed me a list. It contained the names of three hundred to four hundred people who had been executed, in alphabetical order with everyone’s date and place of birth, and indicating even the mother’s name. He handed it to me and then I saw that my father’s name was there. I couldn’t cry, I remember that.

Then this deputy mayor gave me a name and a phone number, that I should by all means go see this person because he was looking for me too. I contacted him, and that was when a change started which made me feel that my life would be a bit better. This man received me very soon, even that same week, I think. We talked for a while and he told me the whole fifty-six story. He asked me how was I getting on, what my life was like, whether I had any problems, and if there was anything he could do to help. I had no apartment then and I told him he should help me with that, because I had an apartment request filed but they kept sending me from one place to the other, even though I can’t wait to have my own roof above my head. I told him I wanted to live my own private life because I felt I had the right to that. I also told him that all my life, I felt pushed out of everything. Then this man told me he could help, and he did help. I had my own apartment within a few months, at the same place where the other fifty-sixers live. And I’ve been living at this place for a few years now.

There are three of us who are the children of executed people. The other two have a will that’s somewhat weaker than mine, and because of that they are a bit down-at-heel, and they are alcoholics. They have grown indifferent to this whole thing. They are not interested any more in what is going on right now, they only want to drink and get really drunk. That’s one of the reasons I can’t join with them, and it’s very unpleasant for me. The government provides support to the fifty-sixer Foundation for Freedom Fighters, for example. The fifty-sixers who are said to be older get everything from this money, a higher pension, bonuses at Christmas, October 23, July 16, and I don’t know what else, each year. Yet if I submit a request, they refuse me saying I have no need for that, and that’s why I still feel as if my father’s past is still haunting me. The other day I needed a certain sum, not a huge sum, by the way, to pay the dentist, and the lady who distributes these amounts shouted at me that I wasn’t even a fifty-sixer. That my father had been executed, that was one thing, she said. I felt I wanted to throw something at her. Inside, I felt I shouldn’t do that. And, she told me, I wasn’t even a pensioner. Yet my father had been somebody, he had been fighting for freedom, and I can say that he had been fighting for my freedom too. But still, I’m not free.

When I learnt that he was no longer alive, I felt very bad, I remember that. I thought it over and then I decided to find out who my daddy had been. Well, this was quite a long job. I went to the supreme prosecutor's office and I spoke to a judge there. What he told me felt really good, because he told me I should be proud of dad, and added that if my father were still alive, he would be in some very good position. He also said that dad was a man of good ideas, and that what the government of the time did to him was very sad. But what had happened, had happened. Then he told me where to go and that I could go ahead and look into my daddy's lawsuit records. I went to the military archives then, and when the archivist put the files in front of me, they were pretty thick, by the way, I simply started sobbing. One of the historians had to comfort me. He asked me who the man, whose files I looked into, had been, and I told him he had been my daddy. Then he asked me how old had I been at the time, and said it was quite sad that I had had no chance to get to know him, and therefore my entire fate had been a punishment. I also look at it that way. First I took fifty-four pages out of the files. This included his mates' death penalty verdict, the date of dad's execution, and the record of his execution. I also read mom's testimony and I was a bit surprised by it, and I still feel that way, as if she had betrayed dad. Because mom talked in a way as if my daddy had stolen all sorts of things in fifty-six. But I like the fact very much that we were really young at that time, and dad was thinking of us all the while, because his defense was always that he had three young children whom he wanted to raise.

Whenever this Foundation for Freedom Fighters issues some kind of an appeal, I'm always happy, how good it is that the government hasn't forgotten about us, and it makes me feel so good. Then I submit a petition. I have to write my daddy's file number, his cancellation number and how am I related to him. But when I get the answer that it's been rejected I feel that I have humiliated myself, and what's more, I even have to suffer because my dad had been executed. I feel as if I was on a blacklist. After one such appeal, I once applied for a job at some interior ministry home. And it wasn't that they rejected my application! I never got any kind of answer! There was a reception booth at this home, where I should have answered the phone too. I would have accepted this happily because it's a comfortable job, a job for women, but they told me it was impossible, they only accepted men there. And I learnt the other day that there's a woman working there. I asked her how did she get the job. She said she used to be an interior ministry employee somewhere as a caretaker, that's why she got the job. I immediately understood that that was why I couldn't get it, because I had never been an interior ministry employee, what's more, I felt that I was on the other side. I feel as if this communist way of thinking still existed within the interior ministry. I am against precisely that. My father had been against this too, that's why I feel that we're blacklisted. In my opinion, the children of the executed are all blacklisted.

These one-time national guards now all strut in uniforms, they walk with their heads high and say they had done something for freedom, and I haven't done anything for freedom. OK, I haven't, because I couldn't really do much in my mother's womb, but my father had been an adult and he had done something for me and for the others, too. Only he had died. And it hurts me a lot that the ones who hadn't died are somehow talking about those who had as if those had deserved to die. So I somehow always feel this way, because they always say it in such a nonchalant, strange way that my father had been executed. It really hurts me that they even smear his heroism, they say he was guilty, and hurl at me that "your father really was guilty because he had killed a man." Because it might be true, but it's there that the Military Court and Supreme Prosecutor's Office, too, have declared this null and void. Yet these national guards have the nerve to take justice in their own hands even after such a verdict. And this is very painful for me. I somehow feel that morally, I'm not given what I would deserve. And it hurts me a lot, the way they are smearing each other and the memory of fifty-six.

Once I was talking with my aunt about how different my entire life, my childhood, my schools, the family, so everything, would have been if my father hadn't died. It would have been better, I wouldn't have lived such a life. I would have led a nice family life like other people do. As I was looking at dad's files, the way he mentioned the family, his children, I formed the opinion that my daddy must have been a man focused on his family. Family had been everything for him. That's what makes me think that if he were alive, I'd have a good life. That's one hundred percent true.

*Translated by Ágnes Csonka*