

Chapter 9: Single Parenting

Our children, particularly Nanci, did not take the news of the divorce well, but Joyce and I did our best to reassure them that they would not lose either of their parents. After explaining the 50-50 joint custody, we discussed splitting the time between us. Following the kids' recommendation, we settled on changing their residences weekly. Joyce remained in the Los Altos Hills home and kept the horses. I found a house on Russell Avenue near the children's elementary school; it was also within walking distance of a junior high and a high school. I did not like moving for the fourth time in ten years and promised to stay in that home for a long time.

Although the house's location was ideal, it needed a lot of work. The previous owner liked dark colors; the carpets, the window coverings, and the wallpaper were all brown. I decided to redecorate the home using vivid, cheerful colors completely. Adding large sliding glass doors, bay windows, and skylights made the house much brighter. Resurfacing the old brick-covered fireplace with shale tiles made the family room far more inviting. A landscape architect helped to reshape the front and back yards. We also added a gazebo and hot tub.

Against the decorator's advice, we moved in as soon as the carpets were laid. I let the kids select their furniture and decide their color schemes. Nanci's idol was Miss Piggy¹, and pink was her favorite. Her room reflected those choices. George's taste was more subtle, although he wanted wallpaper with Star Wars characters.

The remodel took two months, and I realized it would have been wiser to rent an apartment until the work was completed. Living with the noise and dust was no fun. On the other hand, I watched the job progress and learned some new skills from the workers.

My mother offered to come and help with the transition. After her arrival, she cooked for us and taught me to prepare some simple Hungarian meals. I went to work a couple of days every other week but always stayed home when the kids were in my house. The books *Mom's House, Dad's House*, and *Co-Parenting Survival Guide* gave me advice on minimizing stress on the children when they switch between the two homes. Both of them adjusted surprisingly well. I, however, need to learn more about mothers' tasks!

One evening, when the children were in my house, the mother of one of Nanci's friends called. She wanted to know if her daughter could spend the afternoon with us after kindergarten. I agreed and promised to pick up the girl with Nanci and bring them home together.

The next evening, she called again. "You left my daughter standing in front of the school!" she scolded. "Thank God another mother drove by before long and saw her being all alone."

I totally forgot my promise to take the little girl home. The next day, I mounted a dedicated bulletin board on the refrigerator and started keeping all child-related memos on it. I took the mom and daughter with us on the weekend to Farrell's Ice Cream Parlor for a treat. However,

¹ Miss Piggy was a major character in *The Muppet Show*.

I doubt she ever forgave me for my absent-minded action because she never asked me to pick up her daughter again. Neither did any of the other mothers!

After my mother returned to Hungary, the kids and I established our weekly menu. I prepared dinners at home for five days: 1) wiener schnitzel (*Bécsiszelet*) with roasted potatoes; 2) a pan-cooked dish with layers of boiled potatoes, hard-boiled eggs, and pepperoni (*Rakott krumppli*); 3) noodles topped with sour cream and cottage cheese mix (*Turóstészta*, although Nanci renamed it “white stuff”); 4) BBQ steak with creamed vegetables; and 5) Swanson’s frozen Chicken Pot Pie. On one of the remaining days, we brought Kentucky Fried Chicken home; on the other, we ate out at a nearby Chinese restaurant.

The winter of 1983 brought an unusually high rainfall to our region. One morning, after dropping the children off at school, I took my car to the Volvo dealer for a major service. They gave me a ride to the CGIS office, where I planned to stay until the work on the car was completed. The service, however, took longer than expected. It was a shortened day at school, and my children had to be picked up. Mike Ball offered to loan me his car. I collected the kids from school, and we drove home. They were going to do their homework. KFC dinner was scheduled for the evening.

Not planning to stay long, I left the car in our driveway with the engine running, and the three of us walked into the house. Shortly, I heard Nanci screaming from her room. “Daddy, Daddy, come, quick.”

I rushed to her room and saw a smashed part of her large bay window. Strong winds had blown off an aluminum sheet from the neighbor’s roof, breaking through our window. The carpet near the window was completely soaked with rain.

After comforting her, I phoned our home insurance agent. “One of our windows was broken by a flying object,” I told him.

“Not covered,” was his reply. “Your deductible for windows is \$500. I don’t think the repair would exceed that amount.”

Frustrated, I was ready to hang up when I heard an enormous thud outside, followed by George’s voice. “Daddy, come and see this.”

I asked the insurance man to hold for a minute and ran to my son’s room facing the street. To my horror, when I looked through his window, I saw that the large tree in our front yard had crashed to the ground, flattening the top of Mike’s car.

George and I went outside in the pouring rain to investigate. The engine was still running, but George could crawl inside to turn off the ignition.

I returned to the phone. “I have bad news for you,” I told the man. “One of our trees just fell on top of a car.”

“Is it your car?”

“No, it belongs to a colleague.”

“Not covered,” said the man calmly. “He has to claim it under his insurance.”

Thoroughly irritated, I hung up on him. Reluctantly, I made the next call. “Hi Mike. How attached are you to your car?”

“It’s a great car. I love it.”

“I’m sorry that a huge tree crushed it in our driveway.”

Mike took the news graciously. I called AAA and had the car towed to a garage. I reimbursed Mike for his expenses and switched to another home insurance company.

Our local newspaper sent a reporter to photograph the front yard after the incident. The next issue showed readers what had happened.



Photo from the *Los Altos Town Crier* article shows Mike's car with the huge tree on its top.

Les Besser was on the phone in his newly purchased Los Altos home telling his insurance company that the storm had blown in a new bay window when he heard a crash. Looking out a window, he discovered that a tree had fallen across his driveway, landing on a car he had borrowed from a colleague at work because his own car was in the shop.

George and Nanci were introduced to computer games when I worked at CGIS, using the company's video terminals. I wanted them to become "computer-literate" early, and shortly after moving into our home on Russell Avenue, I bought IBM's newest personal computer, the XT, equipped with an internal 10-MB hard drive². The kids quickly learned how to use it. After that, they were surprised that many adults were unfamiliar with computers. "Dad, my teacher does not have a computer at home," the surprised 12-year-old George told me one day. "How can he be a teacher?"

I explained to him that home computers were still new to most people. He was proud that he knew more about something than his teacher.



Seven-year-old Nanci and twelve-year-old George are learning to use our IBM PC XT in 1983.

Lifespring encouraged its graduates to teach the principles we learned in the training to our children early in their lives; it also offered special events with kids in mind. I took George

² A minute fraction of the capability of today's hard drives.

with me to a locally held “Family Weekend. During the course, George shared with the group an experience he had at school, where he had not gone along with the majority decision of his class.

“Do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?” asked the trainer, trying to emphasize the value of compromise.

“I want to be right,” answered George, “because when I’m right, I’m happy!”

The group broke out in laughter. Even the trainer had trouble keeping a straight face. During the break, many people congratulated George for his clever answer. He enjoyed his few minutes of fame.

Introduction to the Unexplainable

Although I had been in good health, low back pain began to bother me. Chiropractic manipulations did not help. My former mother-in-law, who had been involved with a medical group that researched the writings of the psychic seer Edgar Cayce³, suggested a visit to a homeopathic clinic in Phoenix. The clinic, headed by two physicians, offered a body-soul evaluation. Although I did not believe in psychic healing, I took her advice and made an appointment with them.

On the first day, they asked me to have a psychic reading. A beautiful woman greeted me at the session and asked why I was there. I explained my back problem, and she began to “read me.”

At first, she gave me a general description of my background and personality. I suspected she had received prior information from my mother-in-law, so I was not impressed. Then, she went into a trance and began to talk about highly personal parts of my life. She brought up events from my childhood that I had never discussed with anyone. My doubt gradually dissipated. *This woman can see things. I’d better pay close attention.*

She talked to me for nearly an hour while I listened, flabbergasted. Among other subjects, she discussed my children and predicted that “they will both be healers.” (In their adult lives, Nanci was involved with rehabilitative Pilates, and George is a physician!) To my utter amazement, she also discussed my “past lives” and told me that a long time ago, I had lived in England in a female body. “You cheated on your husband,” she said. “It created much karma for your present life.” Of course, that was too much, and I dismissed that part.

As for my back problem, she envisioned that the pain would subside when I accepted what I could not change in my life. At the end of the hour, she handed me a session recording. Dazed, I left her. I was beginning to realize that there are things in life for which engineers do not have scientific explanations. Psychic ability is one of them.

After coming home, I followed her suggestion, gradually accepted that I was 45, and gave up trying to behave 20 years younger. In a few months, my lower back returned to its normal,

³ Although he was a photographer, Cayce discovered his psychic abilities and produced hundreds of readings in a trance. Many of those readings specified prescriptions to treat various physical ailments. A biographical book by Jess Stern, *Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping Prophet*, describes his life.

pain-free condition and remained for 30 years. However, the part about my past life sounded so far-fetched that I dismissed it—until it came up again at a technical conference a year later.

A female Dutch engineer approached me during the coffee break at a microwave symposium in San Francisco. “I think we’ve met before,” she said.

She did not look familiar. “Are you using the COMPACT program I wrote?” I asked.

“No. We met hundreds of years ago in England.”

That did not make sense at first. Then, I suddenly remembered what the psychic told me in Phoenix and pulled her aside. “Tell me more please,” I asked.

After ensuring nobody could hear us, the lady confided in me about her unique ability to sense other people’s auras. Additionally, she had frequent regressions to recall her own past lives. Then, she told me an amazing tale. “Hundreds of years ago, you and I lived in England as upper-class women. We were close friends. Both of us cheated on our husbands, but you were caught and brought shame to your family.”

Her revelation astonished me. *What is the probability that two people from different parts of the world come up with the same information? Perhaps this past-life concept has some truth in it.* I met her several times before she returned to Amsterdam, and we became romantically involved. Our friendship in this life, however, was cut short by her death in a car accident. If humans have multiple lives, perhaps we’ll meet again.

Reentering the dating game, I quickly learned it had changed significantly during my 14-year absence. Women had become much more assertive, and the health risks involved with physical relationships had also increased. I joined a singles group, Trellis, and attended some of their functions. I also enrolled in a video dating program called Great Expectations. I liked the second option more because their system allowed the members to preview the personal folders of prospective dates. Reading their completed questionnaires and looking at their photos and video interviews allowed me to meet women with compatible backgrounds and interests. The fact that I had no trouble attracting women, including some younger ones, helped rebuild my bruised ego.



Three pictures from my single-parent days. Left: Ready for tennis. Center: Coming home from Mexico. Right: Listening to the Gypsy playing my mother’s favorite Hungarian song.

For the first three years, I did not take dating seriously; I just wanted to have fun. Then, I began to look for a permanent life partner who would also be a suitable stepmother to my

children. That task, however, was not easy. Single women without children generally wanted to have children of their own. Because I was almost 50 and had had a vasectomy, additional kids were not in my future. Meeting women with children was more difficult because I had to make sure that the family members of both sides were compatible.



Pictures taken from my first three years of single parenthood.

I also learned that making money was easier than keeping it. California laws and my divorce agreement had evenly split our family's financial assets. I looked for investments to recover the money I lost through the divorce. I did not have significant investment experience, so I asked my stockbroker and our accountant for advice. "Put your money into limited partnerships⁴," was their response. "You receive tax shelter for several years. You can reinvest the proceeds in new ventures when the partnership is sold at a profit. It is safe and defers the taxes."

The recommendation sounded good. I checked with another source and received the same advice. I invested a large part of my assets in six different partnerships that owned large office complexes. For several years, I paid minimal income taxes.

In the mid-1980s, the Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Tax Reform Act so rich people and big corporations would have to pay their fair share. The new law ended the use of limited partnerships as tax shelters. The resale market for those partnerships suddenly disappeared. What had been a lucrative investment for decades became almost worthless overnight. Instead of regaining my pre-divorce assets, I lost a significant part of my investment, and the prospect of my early retirement vanished. It seemed that yet another hurdle had been shoved in my path.

⁴ A unique business partnership, where the "general partners" manage the business and assume legal debts and obligations. The "limited partners" are liable only to the extent of their investments, but they receive the tax benefit of "passed through" losses during the development of the partnership.

I was still teaching the short courses, and they paid exceptionally well for a few work days. Most of them, however, required travel that interfered with my domestic schedule. Ideally, until I remarried, I preferred to be Mr. Mom one week and a carefree single guy the next. Being away teaching meant that I had to give up the latter. Finding a girlfriend who was available to travel freely was difficult.

Another Business Opportunity

My sister, who lived in a Cleveland suburb, motivated me to have my own business again. After tolerating the alcoholism of her husband for 20 years, she filed for divorce. She needed to support herself and two college-age daughters but lacked special skills. *I thought she could move to California and work with me if I had a small business*, so I considered starting another home-based business.

Fate presented an opportunity for me. Ron Rose, one of the salesmen at CGIS, called me unexpectedly, "I have a business proposal for you," he said. "Let me come over to discuss it."

When he arrived, he told me that Comsat had not been satisfied with the division's progress and had decided to close CGIS. However, they wanted to be sure that the technical support of their software would continue. "There are over \$1 million worth of support contracts for Super-COMPACT," he said. "Comsat would probably give the contracts away if they were assured that capable people would maintain the support."

Next, he outlined his plan. He and I would start the new company and hire two CGIS support engineers and an administrator. One of those engineers lived on the East Coast; the other was in California. The two of them could provide effective coverage for most of the world. Ron proposed to be the "Administrator," and I could be the President. Annual payroll expenses for the three employees would be about \$150,000. Office expenses, equipment, and overheads would not exceed \$100,000. This new business could be highly profitable with a guaranteed \$1 million yearly revenue.

I liked his idea but explained to him that my time was limited. "Don't worry," he said. "You can be a figurehead, and I will do most of the work."

After thinking it over for a few days, I agreed to explore the idea with Comsat. The company was glad to hear that we would continue to support Super-COMPACT. Ron and I filed the paperwork to set up a new corporation. He felt I had name recognition in the microwave industry and recommended we call the company Besser Associates. Initially, I was hesitant, but after discussing it with others, I agreed to use that name.

We extended good job offers to the two laid-off CGIS engineers before another company could snap them up. They were glad to join us. Éva sold her house in Ohio and moved to California to work for us. Ron and I leased an office in Palo Alto. I was ready to visit Comsat in Washington to finalize our agreement. They asked for a week to create a formal contract.

The week passed, but we did not receive a contract. Comsat asked for another extension. Finally, they announced that they had found a buyer for all the assets of the Compact division, including the support contracts. Our idea of having a highly profitable new company ended before it had a chance to begin.

I faced a serious dilemma—another unexpected hurdle in my life. Our three employees, as well as Ron, are expected to be paid. We had nothing to sell or support. After less than one month of operation, I had to let the two engineers go and bought Ron's forty percent share of the business for \$40,000. I felt responsible for Éva and kept her on the payroll as the Office Manager to handle my course teaching. However, that was not enough to keep her busy.

I recalled some of the feedback I had received from a Motorola manager who came to evaluate our short course at UCLA. "I wish this course focused on the RF frequency applications instead of microwaves⁵," he had written on his course evaluation form. "My engineers need continuing education, but they develop mobile phones instead of defense electronics. Your course has limited value to them."

I thought there might be an opportunity for me to develop courses for personal communication equipment instead of defense communication, and I contacted him. "If we revise our microwave courses to cover RF frequencies, would Motorola give us enough teaching business to justify our work?" I asked him.

"We have thousands of engineers worldwide," he replied. "Talk to Motorola University to find out if you could become part of their continuing education program."

At that time, Motorola was a progressive electronics company. All their technical employees had to take at least 40 hours of continuing education annually. The potential for teaching in-house courses was huge.

I visited Motorola University in Schaumburg, Illinois, to find out how we could establish a long-term working relationship with them. I met three managers, one from the corporate training group and the others from their mobile phone and pager⁶ divisions. They were open to the idea. However, the engineering manager did not want Bob's two-day filter design section. He wanted me to expand my material to five days, including computer lab sessions with Super-COMPACT⁷. "How much would you charge for revising the Microwave Circuit Design course to fit our needs?" the manager asked.

I had not even planned to ask for money but grabbed the opportunity to discuss payment. We agreed and tentatively set up a pilot program at their Fort Lauderdale division. "If the courses help our engineers to become better designers, your company could become the worldwide teaching group for RF courses."

I altered my course material during the following months to satisfy their needs. The three other instructors who taught the next-level courses followed suit. Once the lecture material was ready, I presented my five-day "RF Circuit Design 1" course in Florida. Shortly after, the next level RF class was taught.

The courses were successful, and we repeatedly returned to the division to teach. Within one year, Motorola became a steady customer and requested 20 to 25 classes annually. Our contract specified \$15,000 for a five-day domestic course, plus expenses. Paying the

⁵ Mobile communication initially began at the Very High Frequency (VHF, 30-300 MHz) and gradually moved into the Ultra High Frequency (UHF, 450-950 MHz) range. Both VHF and UHF frequencies are within the RF (Radio Frequency) range. Most of the military communications were at the Microwave or GHz frequencies.

⁶ A small, inexpensive, highly popular wireless receiver commonly used before mobile phones became widely available.

⁷ Motorola had purchased Super-COMPACT for several divisions. The Fort Lauderdale group was one of them.

instructors generously for their contributions assured me of finding top experts in various specialties.

My next target was AT&T. Using the format already established with Motorola, we began to teach at the various AT&T locations. I signed up more instructors who added new courses to our curriculum. Within a few years, Besser Associates became a recognized continuing education provider for the RF and microwave industries. We began looking for an assistant for Éva to handle the increased administrative work.

Branching Into Different Kinds of Lectures

In 1985, Cardiff Publications launched a new communication symposium, RF EXPO. The publisher of their *RF Design* magazine, Keith Aldridge, asked me if I would present a mini-version of the RF Circuit Design course at the conference. Squeezing the five-day course into a single day was difficult, and my first presentation was unsuccessful. Some of the participants slept through part of the day. Others stared with blank faces. When I asked questions, only a few volunteered to answer. One participant summarized how many of them probably felt, “By the first break, I was lost,” he wrote on the course evaluation. I had misjudged the background of the attendees.

Gary Breed, the magazine editor, suggested drastically simplifying the course content. “Your five-day course is aimed at design engineers. The ones who come to a one-day seminar are technicians, salesmen, and managers,” he told me. “Their main interest is in the fundamental concepts.”

I followed his advice and redesigned the course to cover only the basics. We also changed the name of the course to RF Circuit Fundamentals. The promotion emphasized that the course would provide “an introduction to the mysteries of RF technology.”

The symposium the following year was held at the Disney Hotel in Anaheim. Cardiff prepared 100 sets of the course notes. Their registration staff, however, was utterly overwhelmed by the large number of people who showed up at the door. When I was ready to begin the presentation, 150 participants crowded into a conference room with only 100 seats. The hotel staff opened the rear doors and placed chairs in the hallway, creating an L-shaped space. Although loudspeakers were installed for those sitting in the hall, they could not see me or the projection screen. The staff frantically reproduced the notes on the hotel’s copy machine and handed them out by sections to those who had not received them at registration. During the first coffee break, the Audio-Visual (AV) group placed a video camera in the meeting room and connected it to a couple of TV monitors in the hallway. After that, everyone could see the screen. It was a nerve-wracking day, but most of the participants were happy in the end.

On my return from the conference, I sat next to a young woman on the plane. “What did you do in Anaheim?” I asked.

“I went to the RF Expo Symposium.”

“I was there too. Did you see the exhibits or hear some of the technical sessions?”

“I attended a full-day seminar.”

“What was it about?”

“My boss sent me to learn about high frequencies because I sell RF system components.”

“Was it a good course?”

“Oh, yes. I’m sure I’ll feel more confident now when I talk to engineers.”

I did not ask where she had been sitting during the course. I did not want to embarrass her if she did not recognize me as the instructor. The important part was that it might help her to be more effective at work.

The following year, the RF Circuit Fundamental course drew over 300 participants. Encouraged by the interest, I added a second day that also became popular. Cardiff asked for additional short courses and expanded the number of locations for the RF Expo to cover both the East and West Coast. In addition to Anaheim, I taught courses in San Jose, Philadelphia, Atlantic City, and Orlando.



One of my early RF Expo one-day seminars. I used an overhead projector for the illustrations.

Recognizing that only a limited number of people could attend these conferences, I decided to videotape my courses. KCSM Public Television Studio in San Mateo was the most convenient and economical place for the recording. The studio allowed me to record six two-hour segments in VHS format for a fixed price. Two cameras would record simultaneously during my presentation; one would focus on me, and the other would be on the projection screen. An editor regularly switched between the two outputs to make the presentation more understandable. They agreed to provide a single high-definition master tape of the combined sessions.

Compared to current video recording technology, the 1986 methods seem primitive. The recorded image of the overhead projection was far from the high-resolution quality we see in PowerPoint presentations today. However, with limited expertise and an equally limited budget, that was the best I could do.

Meeting the studio’s personnel proved an interesting experience. The day we recorded a short practice session, I learned they had a strict pecking order of duties. During setup, one of the inactive television cameras was in the way, so I asked one of the employees if he would move it. “Only the camera chief is allowed to do that,” he replied, but that person was unavailable. The crew waited 30 minutes until the chief showed up and shoved the equipment aside.

I did not enjoy standing in front of two monstrous cameras. Instead of interacting with a live audience, I had reflectors shining into my face. Reviewing my recorded practice session

was not at all encouraging. I was stiff and made some obvious mistakes. “With this capacitor, we can tune the frequencies,” I said once while pointing to an inductor. Another time, I dropped the transparency marker and banged my head on the overhead projector while picking the marker up.

After several days of practicing alone in our office, talking to a blank wall, I felt confident to begin the recording sessions, and within the space of two weeks, we received the final tape. The first 100 sets of VHS tapes were delivered to our office two weeks later. In addition to our live courses, Besser Associates now had another product to market. In the following decade, we sold nearly 300 RF Circuit Fundamentals 1 and 2 sets. At that point, a publishing company bought the rights to market the videos. The contents were converted to DVD format and are available online⁸ for \$595 per course.



The RF Circuit Fundamentals courses, offered on videotapes and DVDs.

Finding a New Sibling

In 1987, after a week of teaching in Europe, I spent the weekend in Budapest visiting my mother. The first day, as she reminisced about the past, she made a slip of the tongue. “The daughter of that good-for-nothing woman who married your father must be about 40 years old now,” she told me.

“You’d never told me they had a child,” I interjected.

She quickly changed the subject. Although I tried to bring it up again several times, she would not discuss it. On the other hand, I was determined to find out if I had a sister in Hungary.

I knew my biological father had passed away in 1977 and also remembered the street where he lived and went there late that afternoon. Not recalling the house number, I started at one end of the street and knocked on the door of each building’s housemaster. When he was unavailable, I asked tenants if Solt’s wife and daughter still lived there.

The short street had about forty 4-5-floor high buildings, but as I progressed along the street, I did not find any residents who knew of my father’s family. I was beginning to fear my search would be in vain. Finally, in the last building, I saw an elderly man walking out. “Excuse me, does the Solt family live here?” I asked him.

⁸ <http://www.amazon.com/RF-Circuit-Fundamentals-Pt-1/dp/1884932401>

“Not anymore,” he replied. “After the father passed away, the wife and daughter moved out.”

My heart began to pound faster. “Do you know where they live now?”

“I have no idea, but the daughter works for MALEV. Her name is Kati.”

I thanked him for the information. MALEV was the Hungarian national airline. *I should be able to track her down there. But I'm flying home tomorrow morning. I'll inquire at the airport before leaving and contact her on my next trip.*

Mother escorted me to the Budapest airport the following day, and I asked again about my father's daughter. “There was no child,” she told me and looked away. I did not press the issue further with her.

At the airport passenger terminal, I had my mother sit down and tell her I needed to exchange money. This would probably be my only chance to make a stab at tracking down my half-sister. After waiting in line at the foreign exchange kiosk, I stepped to the window. “Do you know someone working for MALEV named Kati Solt?” I asked the blond lady sitting inside.

“Why do you want to know?” she replied.

“It's personal. Do you know her?”

“Kati Solt is my maiden name. What do you want from me?”

I could hardly believe my good luck. Of all the 4,000 airline employees, I found the right person on my first try! “It's a long story, and I don't want everyone to hear it. Could you come outside for a few minutes?”

She did not reply but stepped back and consulted with one of her colleagues. The two of them looked at me suspiciously. Next, she talked with another employee. Finally, she waved at me and came outside.

“Was your father's name László Solt?” I asked when she stood next to me.

“Yes,” she replied in a surprised voice.

“Did you live on Rippl Rónai Street for a long time?”

“Yes. Who are you?”

“I must board my flight soon, so we have only a few minutes. I believe that we have the same father. I am your half-brother.”

That was too much for her to absorb. She stepped back. “That's not possible,” she whispered. “I would know about it.”

I saw that my mother was nervously looking at me. *She must not find out who I am talking to because her reaction might not be pleasant. Kati's mother lured my father away when my mother was pregnant, and I cannot think of any reason why my mother would be nice to Kati. The two of them must not meet.*

I guided Kati back behind the kiosk, where my mother was out of sight. Turning to Kati, I quickly told her what I knew about our father. She still looked numb. “I'll have to think all this over and ask my mother to verify it,” she said.

I told her I would return to Budapest in a few months and look her up again. She said goodbye and quietly walked away. Our first meeting did not end as positively as I had expected.

Before completing my check-in, I said farewell to Mother. Parting from each other had always been difficult, particularly for her, because she was left behind. Before our last hug, she sprayed holy water on me from a small bottle she always carried.

After going through customs and immigration, I waited in the departure area before boarding my flight. Suddenly, Kati appeared. Her MALEV badge allowed her to bypass the inspections. "I'm taking a short break so we can talk more. It's still hard for me to believe you might be the brother I've always wanted," she told me.

We chatted for about 20 minutes, exchanging information about our families. I showed her pictures of Nanci and George. She told me she was married to a four-star general of the Hungarian Army and that he was a devoted Communist. The two of them did not have children. "Keeping in touch with someone in America would present a political problem for us," she said with concern. "You better not write to me. Perhaps we can meet again the next time you're in Budapest."

We concluded our brief acquaintance because my plane was ready to leave. She offered me a handshake first but then changed her mind. Instead, she hugged me and planted a kiss on my cheek. "I'm glad that we finally met," she said, with tears in her eyes.

When the elderly man in the apartment building told me that Kati worked for MALEV, I assumed she would be a flight attendant. I only went to the kiosk to ask for information to avoid raising my mother's suspicion. MALEV had about 4,000 employees, so the probability of walking up to the right person the first time was minuscule. The result was even more incredible because nobody at the airport would have known her by her maiden name. She told me that if I had asked anyone else about Kati Solt, I would never have found her.



With my half-sister, Kati Tóth, at the Budapest airport. We asked one of her colleagues to take a picture before I proceeded with my check-in.

On my long trip to San Francisco, I contemplated what it would have been like to grow up under normal circumstances, with the loving care of both a mother and father. Neither Éva nor I had such luxury. I was determined to maintain contact with Kati and learn more about the father I knew so little about. I was also curious about her Communist husband. Meeting him would allow me to discover how those people felt about the West. The Kremlin's attitude had softened over 30 years after Stalin's death. *Would his feelings have also changed, or is he one of the hardliners? Would he allow Kati to maintain contact with me?*

I fell asleep in my seat, and a new version of one of my recurring dreams returned. After I snuck back into Hungary, fighting broke out again. As I desperately tried to escape through a muddy field, Kati appeared wearing a flight attendant's outfit. "Hurry," she said. "Your plane is leaving." I tried to follow her, but my feet were stuck in heavy mud. She moved farther and farther away from me and gradually vanished. After waking up, I wondered if I would ever see her again.

Traveling with My Children

My children and I vacationed many times in Hawaii, but our most memorable trip there occurred on Thanksgiving of 1982. As we checked into the Hilton Ilikai in Honolulu for a one-week vacation, we heard a powerful hurricane approaching the island. After the first couple of days, the forecast was confirmed. Hurricane Iwa would hit the island by the next day. Most of the hotel guests wanted to move to the lower levels. Our room was on the 24th floor, but nothing was available below the 12th floor when we tried to change. The best alternative was a room on the sixth floor at the Outrigger Hotel, so we moved there.

At registration, the desk clerk handed me several candles and matches. "The hurricane might knock the electric power out," he said. "If that happens, use these."

The clerk's comments did not sound encouraging. "How long would that be?" I asked.

"It might take days to restore power throughout the island," he replied.

Neither the kids nor I had witnessed a hurricane, so naturally, we were curious about what it would be like. We did not have to wait long. The following day, the sun did not seem to rise. We stared into dark skies through the window. The howling winds, accompanied by heavy rain, increased in intensity. We stayed inside our room, and I wondered if it had been a mistake to remain in Hawaii.

The storm's strength steadily increased, and the children became increasingly worried. Six-year-old Nanci was scared out of her wits. Being eleven, George tried to put on a brave face, but I could see he was also frightened. It was not easy for me to appear calm, either.

The eye of the storm passed midway between Oahu and Kauai. Being in the path of the "eyewall," the Waikiki Beach district received gale-force winds. Occasionally, the walls of our large building shook. By noon, the sky was pitch dark, and the rain was pounding fiercely against the window. The kids were petrified and huddled next to me on the sofa. I closed the curtain and tried to divert their attention by telling them a story, but it did not work. I was no competition for Iwa's power.

Suddenly, the electricity went out, and our room became dark. Nanci screamed and began to cry. I lit some of the candles so that we could see. The only thing I could do was to hold them and reassure them that the building would not be blown away. Deep inside, I was just as scared as they were.

In a few hours, the force of the storm diminished. Holding our candles, we descended the stairs to the lobby, packed with guests and residents taking refuge from the storm. Someone from the hotel staff announced that the worst part was over. However, he asked everyone to stay inside until they heard from the police that it was safe outside. The kids and I climbed the six flights of stairs back to our dark room.

I had bought fruit and snacks the night before, and we ate those for dinner. Although the rain was still falling, the kids were over their fright and eagerly planning to tell everyone at home about our scary experience. All three of us slept in the same bed that night.

Cloudy skies greeted us on Thanksgiving morning. Power had not been restored. Like all other hotel guests, we carried candles using dark stairways and hallways. The street outside our hotel was covered with two to three inches of water, and cars traveled slowly. I was anxious to drive around the island and see how much damage the hurricane had caused.

The door to the basement garage was locked. "We apologize to all for the inconvenience," stated a posted sign. "The cars will not be available until the water is pumped out of the garage." An employee told us that parts of the garage were three feet deep in water. Some cars were floating. Fortunately, our car was parked in a slightly higher part of the garage, where the water was only about one foot deep. The next day, we drove around the island. The destruction was incredible.



Left: On the day of our arrival, blue skies and 80 degree temperature greeted us. Right: Dinner at our hotel's restaurant.



The day after the hurricane, rainwater still flooded the streets.

Hurricane Iwa's 120+ mph wind gusts and 30-foot ocean waves had heavily impacted Oahu. The rainfall within 24 hours had exceeded 20 inches. Nearly 2,000 homes were damaged, leaving scores of people homeless. The swells had wiped out most of the roads near the coastline. A large part of our hotel's sandy beach was completely washed away.

Finding food was not easy. Most of the stores and restaurants were closed. The few that served customers had long lines of people. We were lucky to have pizza on paper plates for Thanksgiving dinner—with lukewarm soft drinks out of the bottles.

By the end of the week, life began to normalize. Electricity was restored in the Waikiki area, shops opened, and new tourists arrived. We flew home Sunday morning and, for weeks, shared our stories with friends. None of us will ever forget that vacation!

Closer to home, the IEEE Microwave Group's annual conference was held in various cities in the U.S. Along with hundreds of other companies, Besser Associates always had a booth in the exhibitors' area. Most of the companies gave away small gifts to attract potential customers. Nanci discovered the opportunities to collect goodies and often asked me to take her to those events. We also took one of her girlfriends to the St. Louis and New York conferences, where one booth's personnel teased me about the girls. "Your daughter and her friend cleaned us out," said a salesman when I stopped by his booth. The girls had returned several times to increase their haul of New York souvenirs. I had to buy an additional bag to carry their stuff home.

International Travel

George traveled overseas with me twice. When he was only twelve years old, we visited Taiwan and Japan. He was amazed to see how cramped Asian living quarters were compared to American standards. My former colleague, Chi Hsieh, also gave us a tour of Taipei. While visiting his neighborhood, someone offered George a Chinese treat: a pack of dried seaweed. The local children enjoy chewing them, similar to Americans chewing gum. George did not like the taste, but wanting to be courteous, he kept chewing a piece while holding the rest of the pack in his hand. The faces of the neighbor boys standing nearby indicated that they would live to have some of the treats. When he offered to share the seaweed, the boys gladly accepted it and grabbed the package out of his hand. They stuffed it into their mouths, chewing with relish. I could see that George was relieved to have none left.

In Japan, we enjoyed riding on the bullet train and the subway system and playing Pachinko⁹ in special parlors. George's biggest thrill, however, came when we went to a large department store's toy floor. He found various electronic toys fascinating, and I had trouble returning him to our hotel.

A company manager who represented Compact in Japan, Suyama-san, and his family drove us to a mountain resort for an overnight stay. The place was beautiful, but George had trouble with the Japanese food, which was different from the American and Hungarian cuisines he was used to. He managed to find something he tolerated at dinner, but the following day, he refused to eat anything from the breakfast menu. Mrs. Suyama felt so bad that she took George to the resort kitchen and talked the cook into making scrambled eggs. To this day, George avoids Japanese food.

When George turned 16, I took him and one of his closest friends, Richard, to Europe. Our trip began in London, continued to Zurich, and ended in Budapest. Among the many adventures, their favorite was pretending to be American spies in Hungary. Whenever we saw a "No photography allowed" sign near the airport, railroad station, or government buildings,

⁹ A highly popular Japanese game, similar to American pinball.

they acted like they were taking pictures. If Russian soldiers passed by, the two boys talked gibberish to each other and mimed placing imaginary tracking devices on the “enemy.”

One warm day, while I was driving with the boys in our rental car with the windows down, a Soviet military truck stopped next to us at a traffic light. The boys immediately pretended to demobilize the vehicle by throwing hand grenades into its exhaust pipe, which pointed sideways toward us. Their little game, however, led to something they did not expect. When the traffic light changed to green, the Soviet driver stepped on the accelerator, spewing heavy black smoke into our car!

We coughed and gasped for clean air for some time, but the boys felt that their task of destroying the vehicle had been successful. After that experience, however, I kept the car windows closed.

It was interesting to me to compare the behavior of the boys in the presence of the Soviet troops with the way I had felt when I lived in Budapest three decades earlier. To them, it was a game. To Hungarian children in the 1950s, our occupiers caused fear. I was glad George and Richard had not been subjected to that experience.

Richard, a Chinese-American boy, had no problem with any ethnic food; he ate whatever was put in front of him. George liked European food, except when it was hot, and native Hungarian dishes sometimes included a fair amount of paprika. The first day my mother served us goulash soup, George alternated between one tablespoon of soup and one drink of water. Richard just gobbled it up and asked for more. They both liked Hungarian cookies and pastries. Mother had a hard time keeping up with baking for them.



Left: Flying from Taiwan to Japan. Center: George is playing Pachinko in Tokyo. We liked the game so much that we purchased one after coming home. Right: Dining with George and Richard in Budapest

At the age of 13, I took Nanci to Europe. We flew from San Francisco to Munich, rented a fancy Mercedes, and drove to Budapest. On our way, we passed through Bavaria and visited several castles, including the famous Neuschwanstein. One night, we stayed in an Austrian *Gasthof* so she could see where I lived after escaping from Hungary.

I frequently told my children about the variety of meals Hungarians eat, although I did not cook exactly that way during my single parenthood. “We had a different meal almost every day when I was a child,” I used to tell them. “Meat was rare, but we had a wide variety of casseroles, noodles, and potato dishes.”

When Nanci and I visited my relatives in Hungary, they always offered us my favorite meal: cold cherry soup and Wiener schnitzel. After the third time, we sat down to eat the same dinner, Nanci asked if people in Budapest ate anything else. I explained the reason and, from then on, asked everyone for more variety. By the end of our trip, Nanci had been introduced

to many Hungarian foods. She liked *paprikás csirke* (chicken paprikash), but just like her brother, she did not care for spicy meals.



Pictures taken while traveling with Nanci. Top: At the Munich Airport; driving through the Austrian Alps; and with my sister Kati and her beloved Bigu. Bottom: Standing in front of the statue of St. Anthony—my protective saint—in a Hungarian church; taking Nanci and her friend to New York during an IEEE conference; an old-fashioned photo at Disneyworld.

On the weekend, Cousin Pista drove us to his cabin on the Danube River's shore, about 30 miles from Budapest. One of our tasks was to catch frogs, although he did not tell us why. Only when we returned to his apartment did we learn the reason. His children had a large aquarium with three turtles, each six to seven inches long. The live frogs were served one by one as dinner to the turtles. Nanci and I watched the first helpless frog being torn apart alive in the water by those seemingly peaceful turtles. We excused ourselves from the rest of the meal and never wanted to see those savage creatures again.

Just as I had done with George a year earlier, I took Nanci to the apartment buildings where I had spent my early years. She was horrified to see the musty coal cellar section we stayed in for weeks during the Second World War. "I'm so glad the rats didn't eat your toes," she told me after hearing how scared I was of them.

In addition to giving my children opportunities to broaden their horizons, our travel allowed me to develop an even closer relationship with them. This was particularly true for Nanci, who told me she appreciated that she could count on me no matter where we were. I was glad we had the financial means to take them to nice places.

Back at home, George became interested in track. The Los Altos School District had a popular annual sports event for elementary students called the Junior Olympics. All the schools in the city participate and train their future athletes to compete in track and field events. I volunteered at Loyola Elementary School to help the hurdlers and was the starter for the running events at the final competition. George showed promising ability in the 60-yard hurdles and won the final as a sixth-grader at Loyola School. At Blach Intermediate School, he continued hurdling and set a school record that still stands today.

Encouraged by his success, we practiced during the summer following his junior high graduation to prepare for high school competitions. The 30-inch middle school hurdle heights increased to 39 inches in high school—a significant change—but he could run over them by the end of the summer. He enrolled in St. Francis High School in September 1985, and the track coach was happy to have an experienced hurdler.

In his freshman year, George was undefeated in the 65-meter hurdles Frosh/Soph category. In that event at the prestigious K-Bell race, he set a record that stood for more than a decade. He had to run against the older boys in the Varsity group for team scoring considerations in several of the dual meets. In those races, he learned to accept defeat gracefully.

My offer to coach as a volunteer for the St. Francis team was swiftly turned down. The rejection puzzled me, mainly after they saw how well George performed due to my coaching. “We don’t want the parents of our athletes to be involved in coaching,” the head coach explained. “It could lead to conflicts between the interests of the parent and the team.”

Although I recalled trouble with some parents when I coached AYSO soccer, the St. Francis rule still bothered me. I could not understand why they would not be happy to accept my free service. Only now, after spending more than a decade as a volunteer coach for the Mountain View High School hurdlers and sprinters, could I fully appreciate their reasoning. Of all the problems our coaching staff has experienced, the vast majority can be traced to parental interference. Just as it is best to keep the church and the state separate in politics, it is best to keep parents and coaches apart in high school athletics.

By his junior year, George had become the top 110-meter hurdler in his league. I faithfully attended all his races until the middle of the season when a teaching job took me to the East Coast. When I phoned George in the evening, his usually upbeat morale was low. “Dad, please always be here for my track meets,” he begged me. “I hit two hurdles today and finished last!”

For the rest of his high school track program, I went to see every one of his competitions. He won all the 110-meter hurdle races of the dual meets and placed fourth at the CCS Championship. Participating in track earned him recognition and increased his self-esteem. He graduated with honors in June 1989 and decided to attend college at UC Davis. I did not doubt that he would do well in adult life.



From left to right: George won hurdle races in elementary, middle, and high school. Right: George's 16th birthday cake.

A typical teenager, George wanted to own a car. When he was still a freshman at St. Francis, I promised him my car if he could run the 110-meter hurdles faster than I did in my youth. During his senior year, his best time was 15.1 seconds, which surpassed my record¹⁰ by half a second. Although we ran over 42-inch high hurdles in Hungary, compared to the 39-inch ones used by American high school runners, I gave him full credit and the keys to my four-year-old Nissan Maxima. George was delighted and proudly drove the car for a few weeks. Then, he realized that the family sedan did not fit his image.

"Dad, would it be OK if I traded the Maxima for a Mustang?" he asked sheepishly. I agreed, and soon, he was driving a Mustang. A girlfriend was next on his list. He was on the way to becoming a man.

I had learned to ski in the Canadian Laurentian Mountains during my stay in Montreal. Although I never became an expert in the sport, I found downhill skiing exciting and challenging. The milder climate of California made skiing even more enjoyable. One of my goals was to introduce the children to that winter activity.

In the early 1980s, I took George and Nanci to Heavenly Valley for a ski weekend. I put George into the ski school for a day. Nanci was far more cautious and fearful than her brother, so I taught her. We carried our skis to the most manageable bunny slope and walked uphill about 50 feet. I buckled the skis on her boots and asked her to slide with me. The gentle slope was barely noticeable.

"Do you want me to be killed?" she cried out with terror in her voice.

I reassured her that nothing wrong would happen, but she was petrified. It took quite an effort to have her begin to slide. "She might never learn," I thought.



In this photo, taken at Lake Tahoe ski area, Nanci was 12 and George 17. By that time, they were both very good skiers.

¹⁰ My main event was the 400-meter hurdles but occasionally I also ran the shorter race.

I was wrong. By the end of the weekend, she could snow plow. Encouraged by the results, we went back the next several weekends. Gradually, she began to like it. In about a year, she surpassed my level. After that, she and George took the more daring routes while I stayed on the intermediate slopes.

Nanci loved Miss Piggy of the Muppets and frequently imitated the little pink pig's "Hi-Ya" sound and karate chop when she did not like someone. That almost caused a problem for us once.

When she was approximately seven, I took her to the Cow Palace in South San Francisco to hear Kenny Rogers, one of her favorite singers. Shortly after we left the concert, Nanci had to go to the bathroom. The nearest convenient place was a tavern with a large number of huge motorcycles parked in the front. The inside of the smoke-filled beer hall was packed with riders dressed in black leather like Hells Angels. Trying to be inconspicuous, I guided Nanci to the ladies room.

"These men stink," said Nanci. "They need to take a bath."

"Be quiet," I whispered. "We could be in deep trouble."

"Don't worry, Dad. I can 'Hi-Ya' them."

I picked her up and held her close to me. "Don't say a word," I said while walking through the drunk bikers. When she was finished in the bathroom, I quickly carried her outside. She was puzzled and could not understand my concern. After all, she would have protected me!

Nanci had a cat at her mother's house, and she had been begging me to have a dog or a cat in my house. I had always been a dog-lover, but with my travel schedule, owning one was impractical. Her persistence, however, eventually wore me down. After some research, we located a cute little kitten, brought her home, and named her Bubbles. In addition to the two canaries I bought for the kids earlier, we now had a four-legged pet at home. Nanci was pleased.



Left: Bubbles as a kitten. Right: A year later, Nanci holding the adult Bubbles after I gave her a bath and haircut. Neither Nanci nor Éva approved my pet grooming work.

Even in her early years, Nanci wanted to be an actress. She loved to watch Shirley Temple movies and reenacted the performances whenever she could find an audience. Her teachers recognized her ability and selected her for several of the school's theater productions. Beginning with Christmas plays in kindergarten, she played the starring roles in *Jack and Jill*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella*, *Princess and the Pea*, and others.

Another of Nanci's ambitions was to become a cheerleader. Beginning in junior high, she tried out for the school's team every year—without success. She worked hard on her routine and did well in singing, dancing, and chanting. Her weak area was acrobatics; she was not as good in gymnastics as the other girls. I did my best to help her, only to watch her being rejected year after year. She was brokenhearted for weeks every time, but she did not give up. I wished she would quit the tryouts, but I admired her perseverance.

St. Francis High School was within a five-minute walk of our house, and the same year George graduated, Nanci enrolled there. Her brother's family name created instant recognition. She was invited to join athletic teams and groups. Unfortunately, skiing was the only sport in which she excelled. Worse, she did not make the cheerleader team there either. Although she was an "A" student, the fact that so many expected her to shine in athletics wore her down.

"Dad, I'm tired of not living up to George's sports star image," she told me. "Let me transfer to another school."

I felt her pain and agreed. She began her second year at Los Altos High School. Once again, she failed to make the cheerleading team. I did my best to boost her self-esteem by pointing out the other areas where she did well, but she was determined to be a cheerleader.

Finally, in her junior year of high school, she succeeded. I proudly witnessed her becoming one of the chosen nine on the cheerleading team. Her dream was fulfilled, and she participated in the team's activities throughout the school year. The following year, however, she decided not to try out. "Once was enough," she told me. "I just wanted to prove to myself that I could do it." Mission accomplished!



Left: Nanci with George and I after she played the role of Mrs. Potiphar in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat. Center: As a princess who could sense a pea placed under 20 layers of feather mattresses. Right: Nanci's long-sought dream finally came true in her junior year, She is second from the left in the back row.

A Telephone for My Mother

During the summer of 1988, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Károly Grósz, visited the United States. After meeting with President Reagan in Washington, where he expressed a desire to establish closer contact with the West, Grósz made several stops in the U.S., including San Francisco. The Hungarian-Americans of Northern California honored him at a dinner, and I was among the invited guests. He was sitting at the head table with the Hungarian Consul and some American dignitaries. After building up my courage, I decided to grab the opportunity and ask for assistance for my mother.

Under socialism, the Hungarian telecommunication system remained in a primitive state. Only a few residences had telephones—in many cases, party lines—and installing new service in an apartment was virtually impossible. My mother had petitioned for phone service for nearly two decades, but her request was always denied. Grósz's visit offered an opportunity to appeal at the highest level.

I walked up to the head table and stood before the guest of honor. "Forgive me, Mr. Prime Minister, but I have an unusual request," I told him in Hungarian when he looked at me.

"What is it?" he asked.

After introducing myself, I explained that my elderly mother lived alone in Budapest, and I wanted to allow her to call for help by phone in an emergency. I also briefly told him about my continuing education company and offered to teach courses to Hungarian engineers during a forthcoming visit to Hungary.



President Reagan greeting the Hungarian Prime Minister at the White House.

"We would not expect anything from you," he said with a smile. "Come to see me when you're in Budapest, and I'll do my best to help." He gave me his business card and wished me all the best. Joyfully, I returned to my seat and finished the wonderful Hungarian dinner.

A month later, I arranged a trip to Budapest and wrote a letter to Grósz to remind him of our discussion. After arriving in the city, I called his office in the Parliament. "The Prime Minister is in Moscow for a conference," his secretary informed me. My heart sank, but she continued. "He received your letter and wanted you to see one of his cabinet ministers. I'll transfer your call to that office."

Another secretary came on the line and told me Mr. S.T. would see me the following day. "His driver will pick you up at your mother's address," was her unexpected offer.

The following day, a shiny, black, Russian-made ZIL limousine was waiting for me in front of my mother's apartment building. The driver greeted me warmly. During the ride, he wanted to hear about life in California. At the Parliament, he turned me over to a guard who escorted me inside the building.

It was my first time inside the Parliament. I followed the guard up the impressive red-carpeted stairs to the second-floor reception area. Within a few minutes, I was in the office of the Minister of Industry.

The man was amiable. After shaking hands, he asked if we could address each other by first name. Of course, I agreed. He asked the secretary to bring us coffee. Then, he wanted to know why I was there. I described my mother's need for a telephone and the fact that she had been denied many times.

The minister was quite familiar with the national shortage of telephones. "What we need is a brand-new digital telephone exchange, but the American embargo prevents us from

buying one,” he told me. “We can produce more phones, but the central office doesn’t have the capability to satisfy the demand. Installing telephone lines in brick and cement buildings is another problem. However, I’ll figure out something to find a line for your mother.”

“Thank you. I would be very grateful.”

We chatted for some time before his secretary reminded him of another appointment. As we parted, he wished me a pleasant stay in Budapest. His driver took me back to my mother’s place. Some neighbors noticed when I stepped out of the official government automobile and looked at me curiously. I did not care. My mother might have a telephone after all.

Within a few weeks after my return to California, our telephone at home rang in the early morning. “*Lacikám, megvan a telefonom,*” (Les, I have a phone) I heard my mother say through the noisy line. Even though the connection quality was poor, it was the best telephone call I had received in a long time. My mother was elated to have such a luxury.

A month later, during my next visit to Budapest, I called the office of the helpful minister and asked to see him. That time, he invited me to lunch in a restaurant rather than meeting in the Parliament. I placed five American \$100 bills in an envelope before going. In the restaurant, I thanked him for his assistance with the phone installation and asked him to accept a token of my appreciation. He looked inside the envelope and said, “I’m glad it worked out.” With that, he pocketed the money. I had learned how to do business in socialist Hungary.

Delivering a Presentation in Budapest

The Hungarian government-sponsored telecommunication research institute, *TÁKI*, accepted my earlier offer to the Prime Minister. The group invited me to give a seminar on computer-aided design of microwave circuits at their facility. *TÁKI* employed top-notch microwave engineers in Hungary. Until 1956, one of their tasks was to assist with developing the Soviet military communication system. After the revolution, the Kremlin did not trust the Hungarians, and *TÁKI*’s research was reduced to domestic applications. The guarded research center was built on the Buda side of Budapest, on top of a hill, surrounded by the most prestigious residences of the city.

I had mixed feelings about their request. On the one hand, lecturing as an engineer in my native country, which I had left as a technician three decades earlier, appealed to my ego. On the other hand, Hungary was still part of the Eastern Bloc. I would have to be careful not to give away any unpublished information that might be used to hurt the West. I agreed to teach a half-day summary of my UCLA short course.

A problem I faced while preparing for the presentation was not knowing the Hungarian version of the technical terms I had learned in English. I had given courses in Japan and France where I spoke in English, and a local translator continuously summarized my talk, but the task would be different this time. I needed someone to help me with my native language.

TÁKI offered to provide one of their bilingual researchers to assist me with the Hungarian terminology. Dr. Tibor Berceli, one of their top microwave engineers and a full professor at the Technical University of Budapest, was selected for the assignment. I sent Tibor a printed copy of my transparencies before my talk so he could prepare the handout material.

The two of us held a quick rehearsal at their facility on the morning of my talk. During the rehearsal, I added a few handwritten pages and asked Tibor to make transparencies for me and print copies of the extra pages for the group. He seemed troubled by my request.

"I need permission to use the copy machine," he told me. "We may not receive the permission in time for your presentation."

I assumed his concern was not finding help to copy the material. "The two of us could do it quickly," I suggested.

"I'm not allowed to use the machine. It requires written permission from the Director!"

I still did not understand the problem and assumed perhaps it was a union restriction. I recalled when I visited Ford Aerospace as a consultant and discovered that an engineer was not allowed to replace a component in a circuit board. Only the technicians were allowed to use the soldering iron.

"Perhaps I could run the copies if you are not allowed," I offered.

"No one is authorized to use the copy machine here without special permission," he said quietly. "It's a security restriction."

Finally, I understood the meaning. The political system would not want people to be able to reproduce printed material. Freedom of the press did not exist there.

I proceeded with the presentation without the additional pages. The participants asked many questions and told me at the end how much they appreciated the information. Tibor helped me out whenever I stumbled on unfamiliar Hungarian terms. The two of us have maintained contact and are still close friends. *In 2016, Tibor received the IEEE Microwave Career Award, the highest international recognition in that field.*

FBI's Visit

One evening, I was at home, copying a videotape cassette someone had loaned me. Shortly after I sat down to watch the program, the telephone rang.

"This is Agent M... from the FBI," the voice at the other end of the line told me. "We're seeking information about one of your former employees at CGIS. Would you allow me to come by to talk with you?"

I was puzzled. *What would the FBI want from me?* "Who are you looking for?" I asked him.

"Let me explain it in person," the agent persisted. "May I come over to see you now?"

"Yes, you may," I replied. "I'm not doing anything special."

"Would it be OK if I bring another agent with me?"

"Yes, go ahead."

About 20 minutes later, the doorbell rang. Not wanting to interrupt the progress of my video copying, I turned off the television display. When I opened the door, I saw two well-dressed people outside, one handsome man and a beautiful woman. They flashed official-looking badges and handed me their business cards. Everything looked authentic, so I led them inside the house and offered them seats. I sat adjacent to them on the sofa, eager to hear what they had to say.

The man looked at my entertainment center, where the audio equalizer was flashing its colorful LED lights. "Are you recording our conversation?" he asked.

“Oh, no. I'm just copying a...” I stopped suddenly, remembering those FBI warning screens appearing at the beginning of all commercially recorded programs.

The agent graciously did not press the issue and began to explain the reason for their visit. Several years earlier, some vitally critical proprietary documents had disappeared at the Ford Aerospace Company's Palo Alto division. Their investigation had focused on a Chinese-American employee of my former company, who had regular access to the Ford facility. They wanted to know if I knew of that person's present whereabouts.

I told them that after CGIS had shut down its operation, I lost touch with most of the employees and had no idea where that person might be. The agents took careful notes of everything I said. After asking questions about some of the other former employees, they apologized for taking my time and prepared to leave. Before parting, however, they asked me to contact them if I heard about the person of their interest at any time. I promised to do so, and they left.

Twenty years later, I met a woman who used to work at Ford Aerospace. When I learned she was a security officer, I asked if she knew of those missing documents. To my surprise, not only did she know of the incident, but she had personally investigated the suspected Chinese industrial espionage. The case had created quite a commotion within the company, but as far as she knew, it had never been solved.

And I was never prosecuted for copying the video...

An Unexpected Side Career

During the latter part of 1988, the president of Cardiff, Bob Searle, initiated a major shakeup of the *Microwave Systems News (MSN)* magazine. He fired many staff, including the publisher, and asked me if I would become the new Editorial Director. His request surprised me. “I'm not a writer,” I told him.

“I've seen the articles you've written for our publications,” Searle replied. “They're good enough. Besides, as Editorial Director, you must write only a short monthly column each month. We want you to hire new staff and supervise the operation.

Explaining that I already had a good business did not change his determination. “Your magazine involvement could be part-time,” he countered. “We want your name on the masthead of *MSN*.”

He outlined what Cardiff could offer me. Their large Palo Alto building had many empty office spaces, and my small company could easily fit into one section. We could use all their business equipment. In addition to a generous salary, they would give Besser Associates a full-page advertisement every second month in two of their publications, *RF Design* and *MSN*.

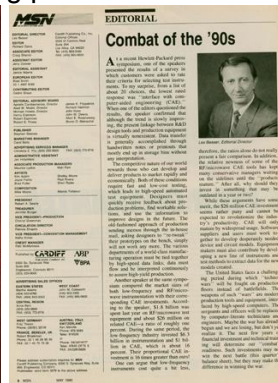
At that point, I could no longer resist, and we reached an agreement. I would spend one-third of my time on *MSN*'s editorial duties. My first task was to reassure the remaining demoralized employees about the ongoing future of the publication. Next, I hired new editors and administrative staff and began to work with them. A month later, Besser Associates relocated into *MSN*'s building. After being cramped in a small office, we suddenly had all the space we wanted.

One of the first lessons I learned in the publication business was timeliness. Printing and mailing the monthly magazine had rigid deadlines that could not be missed. The problem was that we did not have complete control over all material. People submitting articles did not always send in their work as promised. Advertisements sometimes arrive late. To make planning even harder, the total pages in the magazine varied month to month, depending on the advertisement space sold. We could not exceed a specific ratio of editorial to advertising pages.

Unlike my predecessor, I did not restrict my editorial column to technical issues. One month, I discussed American educational problems under the heading, “Johnny Must Learn to Read.” A month later, I asked why our universities do not teach engineers oral and written communication skills. In an editorial entitled “Engineers Need Not Apply,” I described my recent experience seeing a classified ad in a single newspaper. It read:

“Wanted: Expressive, outgoing, friendly, communicative, articulate male. Engineers need not apply!”

In the editorial, I posed some questions. If the last sentence had not been included, how many engineers would meet the listed characteristics? Did we choose to be engineers because we were born poor communicators? Or were we the inevitable result of the educational and training process we endured?



Left: The front cover of one of MSN's monthly issues. Center: The masthead and my editorial column. Right: One of the full-page Besser Associates advertisements in MSN, promoting in-house courses as “House Calls.”

Another editorial column raised the question, “Guns or More Butter?” suggesting that the Cold War should be eased. I wrote that negotiating with a rational and reasonable man like Gorbachev seemed logical.

Surprisingly, our readers appreciated my raising these issues. The magazine received numerous “Letters to the Editor,” complimenting the new direction. Our advertising revenues began to increase.

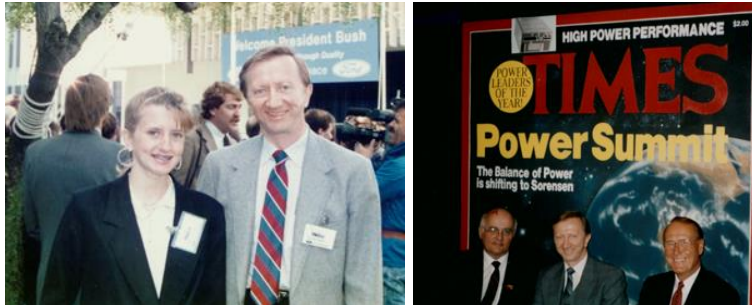
One of the local TV stations planned to air a hawkish program about the role of microwaves in military hardware. They set up an interview with the editorial director of another Cardiff publication, *Defense Electronics*, but the editor was held up in traffic when the TV crew arrived. “The show must go on,” said the crew chief, and he asked me to step in for the missing man.

“I don’t know much about military defense communications,” I replied.

“Don’t worry. We’ll edit the parts where you don’t have the answer.”

They did a great job of making me look like a defense expert. Watching the program on TV later made me wonder how much other “experts” know about their topics when they appear on air.

When President George H.W. Bush visited the West Coast in 1988, Nanci asked me if I would take her to a talk scheduled to be presented to the Ford Aerospace Company in Palo Alto. She was a reporter for her middle school’s newspaper and wanted to write an article about the President’s speech. One of the fringe benefits of my position with the publication was a press pass so I could take her. We sat in the first row, only a few feet from the President. Nanci’s presence at the speech elevated her status at school.



Left: School Reporter Nanci at President Bush’s speech. With her hair up and wearing business attire she looked more like an adult than a thirteen-year-old. Right: A mock Time magazine, showing me with look-alikes of Premier Gorbachev and President Bush.

In 1989, we began to publish interviews on MSN. Each month, someone from our editorial staff or I asked the opinions of business and technical leaders of our industry. Encouraged by the readers’ positive response, I contacted the Soviet embassy in Washington and requested an interview with Premier Gorbachev. Without committing to a specific date, they indicated that it would be a possibility later that year. Cardiff gave the green light to the trip. Excited, I began to prepare for my first trip to the Soviet Union.

Finding the Woman of My Dreams

After seven years of dating, I finally met a woman through Great Expectations who seemed to have all the qualities I wanted. My first date with special education teacher Susan occurred at the Magic Pan restaurant in San Jose. It was lunchtime, and I ordered my favorite dish from that restaurant, cheese blintzes. Because a single order only provided three blintzes, not enough to fill me up, I always asked for a double order—served on the same plate. Susan ordered a chicken salad.

Another waitress brought our orders, and the blintzes came on two separate plates. She placed the salad in front of Susan and one of the blintz orders in front of me. “Whose is the second order?” she asked.

“It’s also mine,” I replied quietly, not wanting to attract attention in the crowded restaurant.

“You must have a big appetite,” said the waitress with a loud laugh.

People around us also laughed. Susan noticed that I blushed. That reaction and the fact that I greeted her with a bouquet of roses made an excellent first impression.

All my friends who met Susan, including my former in-laws, told me she would be my perfect wife. She was educated, attractive, and had two well-balanced children. At that point, her son Kent was 17 years old, the same age as George. Susan’s daughter, Daphne, was 18,

six years older than Nanci. When my mother visited us, she gave me her approval, too. Our four children liked each other, eliminating my fear of possible family feuds.

After nearly two years of dating, Susan and I decided to marry. We had a simple church wedding, followed by a reception. Over 100 of our close friends celebrated with us.



Even my old-fashioned mother was highly impressed with Susan and gave me her seal of approval.

Our honeymoon in Kauai allowed us to wind down and plan our lives together. Ensuring our children's lives would continue smoothly was one of our highest priorities. Daphne was in her second year of college but still lived at home. Kent was beginning his first year at UC Santa Cruz but would be home for holidays and summers. George was in his last year of high school. Nanci was still in junior high school; she and George were at our house every other week. Our children were all doing well academically, had close friends, and stayed free from tobacco and drugs.

We added another bedroom to my house to accommodate the enlarged family. Susan left her teaching job to help us in our business. In addition to giving up my kitchen duties, I welcomed her much-needed administrative skills in our office. My kids appreciated Susan's well-balanced home-cooked meals.

Of her many good traits, I especially admired her motherly devotion to her children. Undoubtedly, she would be a good stepmother to my kids, and I did my best to always be there for Daphne and Kent.

I soon learned that Susan was extremely well-organized. She always knew where everything was in the house. Recognizing that unique ability, Kent affectionately named her "411." When one of us could not find something, we yelled, "Calling 411." Susan would appear and find the missing item in no time.

People often say that once the initial sparks of married life die away, partners drift apart. In my second marriage, just the opposite has happened. The longer I have lived with Susan, the more I love her. We have proved that two nitpicking Virgos can enjoy a harmonious marriage. We balance each other's weaknesses and combine our strengths. I will be forever grateful to God for bringing the two of us together.



Pictures with Susan. The one on the right was taken at our wedding on August 5, 1989.



Left: With our children (Nanci, Daphne, George and Kent) before heading to the wedding. Right: At the reception with my former in-laws, Nelson and Doris Bogart.

A Sensitivity Lesson

Two months after our marriage, I was in the office late afternoon finishing a long article. Everyone had gone home so I could focus on my work. A sharp jolt shook the building as I submitted the file to print and walked to pick up the printout. Some acoustic ceiling tile brackets snapped open, and the floor moved. Another jolt followed. *It's an earthquake. I must take cover.* I ran to a doorway and stood there until the movement stopped. It was the biggest earthquake I had ever experienced.

The lights were still shining. The power service had not been interrupted. At that point, I realized I had not saved the MS Word file I was working on and rushed back to my computer. As I sat down, the electricity went off. I lost several hours of work on my long file!

Annoyed and still shaken from the earthquake, I tried to call Susan at home, but the line was busy. After several attempts, I finally reached her. Not knowing the quake's magnitude, I exclaimed, "We lost power here just as I tried to save my work. My long Microsoft Word file is lost!"

"Are you worried about your stupid file instead of asking how we are doing in the house?" she asked incredulously. "Don't you want to know if the house is still standing?"

I realized how insensitive I had appeared and tried to assure her that she and the family were my main concern. Complaining about losing a computer file was not the best way to begin that conversation. I attempted to rush home to be with the family, but the drive took three times the usual ten minutes. None of the traffic lights worked, and there were long waits at every major intersection.

Fortunately, our home sustained no structural damage. A couple of bookcases spilled their contents, and some dishes broke in the kitchen. A 27-inch Zenith television fell off its stand,

face down in the family room. Surprisingly, it worked fine when I righted it and switched the set on. I wrote Zenith a testimonial about the durability of their product.

Later in the evening, we heard that the Loma Prieta quake was 6.9 on the Richter scale, the strongest one in our area since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Son Kent was attending the University of California at Santa Cruz—near the quake's epicenter. When the first tremor hit, he was among hundreds of students in a large lecture hall. Despite all the earthquake training California students had received, the panicked students ran outside the building for safety. That night, they slept on the lawn, away from the dormitories.

Many buildings in the Santa Cruz area were heavily damaged. Throughout Northern California, the quake killed 63 people and injured nearly 4,000. Approximately 10,000 people became homeless after their homes suffered severe structural damage. The loss of my file became trivial in comparison.

Approaching Political Changes

During most of my European trips, I would also spend a few days in Budapest. In addition to visiting my mother and Pista's family, I found opportunities to meet Kati and her husband, Lajos, who had retired from the army. The bits and pieces Kati told me about my father allowed me to become familiar with the man I had met only a few times. According to Kati, my father and I shared physical resemblance and analytical minds. She also gave me photos from his earlier life, including his military service.

Lajos was a devoted Communist Party member. He believed everyone should work as hard as possible to build a better society and take only from the common good according to their needs. Being a former general, he often lectured me about the evils of the capitalist system. "You tell President Bush that..." was the beginning of his frequent complaints, followed by some perceived injustice committed by the United States.



Left: Pista in my mother's apartment, celebrating his 53rd birthday. Right: in a photo taken when Susan visited Budapest with me for the first time, Kati and her husband, Lajos.

“Lajos, I don’t have a direct phone line to the White House,” I would reply.

“I understand, but you must agree that I am right,” he continued. Being outranked, I quietly went along with his arguments.

Significant changes were coming to the entire world. At the beginning of 1989, the Hungarian government removed the barbed wire fences and landmines along the border between Hungary and Austria. When Susan and I were in Budapest in the late summer of that year, we went to see Kati and Lajos. They lived in a four-unit apartment building next to the West German¹¹ Consulate, guarded by armed Hungarian soldiers. While we chatted in my sister’s living room, I noticed something strange through the window—people wearing civilian clothing were climbing over the wall into the backyard of the consulate. The Hungarian guards, seemingly unconcerned, looked in another direction.

“What’s going on?” I asked Kati.

“East Germans are escaping,” she replied. “Once inside the consulate, they’ll be granted passage to West Germany.”

The news astonished me. I had heard that Gorbachev had relaxed the Soviet political grip over the Eastern European countries. However, for the Hungarian government to allow their socialist comrades to escape to the West openly was far beyond my imagination.

Something unexpected was brewing on the political scene!



Breaking down borders... Hungarians toils for their freedom yesterday, pulling down the electrified fence on the road in Vienna.

Hungary turns the Iron Curtain into scrap



Eyewitness
Ian Traynor
in Hegyeshalom,
Hungary

even halting for a minute. Their boss, Colonel Balazs Kovacs, had one explanation for the group: “It makes Hungary feel better that we have an old-fashioned border with the West.”

The soldiers worked on the suburban garbages with their axes, crowbars and protective gloves.

As they progressed along these miles of the Austro-Hungarian frontier, they left

discarded segments of rusted barbed wire as a memento of the way the world used to be.

This part of the world used to be a no-man’s-land. The Hungarians got rid of that in 1972, but until Monday the 16th miles of fencing along the border with Austria had its voids of electricity running through it. “Not enough to kill, but enough to shock,” said Colonel Vidoss of the border guards.

some 420,000 a mile to erect. It is now costing around 120,000 to pull down the whole lot over the next 18 months. History will repeat, the top brass clearly think.

“This is the beginning of a new process which we hope will help our international image a lot,” said Col Kovacs, head of the border guards.

However symbols of political change in Hungary and attitudes towards the West, it is hardly surprising that

now much better than with many of the Warsaw Pact allies. With friends like Russia and Czechoslovakia, what needs enemies?

But how had the Hungarians managed?

They were not asked for their views. “As far as I know, the building of this system was not mentioned in those orders,” said Col the talkative way of justification.

And was there not now a risk that some would seek to

Hungarians do not have to try to cross in such a way,” retorted Col Vidoss.

But these Hungarians are hardly the problem. What about disgruntled Czechs, Slovaks, and East Germans with easy access to Hungary?

“You will have to ask those other countries if they will stop tourists from staying in Hungary,” said the colonel.

“We do not want to deal with this.”

Hungarian border guards are dismantling the barbed wires, allowing visiting East Germans to flee to Austria.

¹¹ After the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into two parts. East Germany had a socialist government and belonged to the Warsaw Pact. West Germany had a Western-style democratic system.