

## Chapter 13: Short Articles from Glen Tidings

To end my story, here are some articles I wrote for our retirement community's monthly publications about events not mentioned previously in the previous chapters.

### Birthday Surprise

*Szilvás Gombóc*, a plum dumpling, is not a food but a vice. Grown Hungarian men daydream and reminisce about plum dumplings they have known from childhood—they remember the exact circumstances of their last exposure and brag about how many they can eat in one session. If a season passes without a plum dumpling orgy, they feel deprived and gloomy.

In earthbound reality, however, szilvás gombóc is a potato dumpling with a pitted purple plum and a melted sugar cube inside. To the eager initiate, the revelation comes even before the first bite, when the fork jabs into the dumpling and the hot plum juice squirts out. From then on, it's a riot of sensation: gluey versus chewy, sweet and tart versus tender and bland—a unique experience for anyone's gastronomic repertoire.

I've missed this exquisite joy for several years, but in 2020, Susan took pity on me and cooked szilvás gombóc for my birthday. Preparing this Hungarian treat is a labor-intensive exercise in culinary skill, starting the previous day with boiling and ricing the potatoes and letting them dry overnight. The following day, the potato crumbles are made into a buttery dough, the sugar cubes are tucked into the plums, and just the right amount of dough is wrapped around the plums and their sweet surprise. The moment of truth comes when the dumplings rise to the surface in the pot of boiling water, hot and ready. Voilà! Success!



### A Sudden Realization

Switching on my mobile phone after our Glen Tidings editorial meeting, I read an alarming text: "Susan tripped over a curb and broke her arm. She is at Scripps Hospital ER in Encinitas!"

Remembering that she drove our car to the beach that morning, I rushed home to get my wallet, planning to take an Uber to the hospital. But, hearing the news, a kind neighbor offered to drive me to Scripps, and I gladly accepted it.

At the ER, they ushered me to one of the treatment rooms where an X-ray Technician was already imaging Susan's arm. She looked pale, with an IV stuck into her right arm, and her left hand seemed to be in a crooked position. After greeting her and noticing her blood pressure was low, I Googled the picture of her favorite movie star, James Mason, on my cellphone! Whether it was the photograph's effect or the saline drip, her blood pressure gradually returned to normal!

An ER Physician soon informed us that Susan had fractured and dislocated her left wrist. After injecting pain medication into her wrist, I breathlessly witnessed the unique "reduction treatment!" While a



nurse held Susan at her waist, the doctor raised the injured arm and pulled her hand up forcefully. Her hand position straightened.

Before being discharged, the team wrapped a temporary splint around her arm to prevent the shifting of the bones. We visited an orthopedic hand specialist two days later and learned that the fracture did require surgery and she would need to wear a permanent cast for six weeks.

During her recovery, the reduced effect of her homemaking activities made me realize how much extra work she does taking care of me and our villa. Therefore, I will love and appreciate her even more!

### **Beautiful Budapest Birthday (written by Susan)**

“Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Besser! Let me sit you by the window,” said our hotel’s hostess, leading us to a cozy table overlooking the pedestrian walkway along the Danube. The sparkling blue sky held the promise of a day filled with celebration—not only was it my birthday, but the Pope was also in town for a special Sunday mass at Heroes Square.

Our table was suddenly surrounded by servers singing “Happy Birthday,” surprising me with a colorful custom-decorated chocolate torte. Cake for breakfast! The day was off to a great start.

“A children’s choir is singing at the Rock Church, next to the Gellert Hotel in Buda—I know you would enjoy that”, Les suggested later. After a short metro ride, we climbed the hill to the church and walked inside. Spiritual, contemplative, and comforting—but no choir. Disappointed, I walked out of the bright sunshine.

“Oh, look! Someone has prepared for a wedding,” I commented after we exited the church. *How romantic*, I thought as I viewed a small table and two chairs draped in satin on the veranda overlooking the Danube. The table was set with flowers, candles, and two champagne glasses. Curious, I walked closer to get a better view. Two gypsy violinists approached me, singing, “Happy Birthday to you!”

*What!! This is for me?* Les and our guide, Nora, beamed as they saw stunned surprise spread across my face. I never expected this and kept shaking my head in disbelief. “Oh, my gosh, how did you plan this without me knowing?”

I was shocked! We sipped champagne and ate delicious cake as the gypsies played their favorite melodies. As we gazed at the panorama of the city beyond, I knew this was one birthday I would never forget!



### **Tree Climbing**

One of my favorite fruits is the delicious Blenheim apricot. Unfortunately, its harvest season and shelf life are extremely short, making transporting and selling difficult. Most growers have switched to more extensive, genetically modified types, yielding more plump apricots – without much taste. After a resident told me about a Blenheim apricot tree near Lemonberry Lane, I eagerly monitored the growth progress of the fruits. Finally, when the ripe apricots began to fall off the tree, I took a

bag and climbed up the tree to pick some. Finding my way upward was relatively easy. However, standing on oblique-angled tree branches and holding on to the bag and a tree branch with one hand while reaching out to pick off the fruit with the other was more difficult.

I finally decided I had collected enough apricots and started my descent. At that point, however, I realized how much more challenging it was to get back to the ground safely. While going up took me less than a minute, getting down stretched into a long and stressful process. My arms and legs trembled by the time I reached the ground.

Another resident chuckled as I shared my experience with other residents the following day. “Don’t feel bad, Les,” she said. “Even the animal king has trouble with coming down from trees.” With that, she played me a video taken during her African Safari. It showed a magnificent male lion balancing awkwardly on tree branches high above the ground. “The female lions know how to climb up and down trees, but the males don’t. They jump down.”

Next year, I’ll ask Susan to pick the apricots.



## Second Place

Visiting family living afar involves careful planning. Making reservations, packing suitcases, flying in fully loaded planes, and renting cars — in addition to missing some LCG community activities and my regularly scheduled pickleball games — takes energy and expense. However, all those events become insignificant when we share joyful moments with our loved ones.

Susan and I enjoyed seeing how our granddaughter Holly embraces life. Tall and extremely slender, our just-turned-six-year-old loves singing and dancing, and her Disney Princess admiration is all-encompassing.

However, Holly is a slow eater, often leaving large portions of her meals unfinished. Coming from a nearly starved childhood, my reaction to rejecting food is quite strong. With her parents’ agreement, I invented creative ways to encourage her to eat more. Food games like *Dinosaur Battle*, fought between two bitesize foods stuck on two forks, where the loser must be eaten, and Treasure Hunt, where the “treasures” (also small food portions) are immediately swallowed, were highly successful. With the help of such games, she consistently finished her meals with us while having fun.

One morning, though, she showed no interest in eating breakfast. After we listened to one of her favorite Doris Day songs, *Anything You Can Do, I Can Do Better*, I challenged her to see which of us could finish our cereal first. Having enjoyed that competitive song so much, she couldn’t refuse my challenge, and we proceeded to eat. She completed her last spoonful while I still had some cereal left, so I lifted her arm high and declared her the CHAMPION!



She enjoyed her victory for some time, obviously pleased with her new title. Then, she stepped next to me and lifted my arm with a big smile on her pretty face, announcing, "SECOND PLACE!"

### **Columbia River Cruising**

With twenty-five other LCG residents, Susan and I cruised on a memorable six-day journey through the Snake and Columbia Rivers, starting at Clarkston, zigzagging among the states of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, and ending at Portland. We passed through evergreen forests, locks, and rocky gorges, visited eventful sites, listened to historical lectures, and ate delicious meals on the ship. Before boarding the paddle-wheeled American Empress steamboat, we stayed one night at the luxurious Davenport Hotel in Spokane to have all passengers tested for coronavirus! Mask-wearing was mandatory on the ship during dockings and all bus trips for additional safety. Our ship's route coincided with part of the famous Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804. Thanks to the control of the rivers during the last century, our boat did not have to deal with treacherous rapids and waterfalls that made the early explorers' lives difficult.

At each stop, the ship passengers could choose optional excursions and frequently run Hop-On-Hop-Off buses to visit well-documented local museums and other exciting parts of the towns. Notable areas we saw included:

**Richland, WA**, Manhattan Project Historical Park, where Plutonium production took place for the WW2 *Fat Man* bomb, as well as for our nuclear weapons for decades.

**The Dalles** rolling hills in Oregon, where Native American Indians lived for thousands of years. Pioneers, adventurers, gold miners, gunslingers, and other characters of the Old West rushed there to settle in the mid-1800s. Now the region is famous for its vineries.

**Stevenson, WA**, where we visited the Bonneville Dam, which generates 5.5 Gigawatts of electricity. A separate river-branch protects fish migration, allowing visitors to view the fish swimming upstream.

**Astoria, OR**, is the oldest American settlement west of the Rockies. Climbing 186 steps to the top of the Astoria Column Tower exposed visitors to a magnificent view.

It was an unforgettable trip!

### **Touring the Channel Islands**

The Channel Islands between France and the UK may be better known internationally, but the California Channel Islands offer a neighborly invitation to astonishing wonders. Susan and I recently toured some islands with a *Road Scholar* group to enjoy the scenery and wildlife and learn about the islands' long history.

Our Channel Islands were formed by volcanic activity millions of years ago and, according to fossil evidence, have supported human life for 13,000 years. Isolation from the mainland created and protected a specific range of plants and animals that cannot be found elsewhere. The fight to preserve these is ongoing.



**A 1904 electric car**

Indigenous peoples included the Tongva and the Chumash, whose presence dominated the LA Basin and the South Channel Islands for over seven thousand years. The arrival of European explorers brought disease and conquest. Surviving Chumash and Tongva were forcibly removed from the islands in the early nineteenth century and transferred to mainland Franciscan missions. An era of European-style settlement of the islands followed, introducing sheep and cattle ranches and creating havoc on island ecosystems, including the local extinction of sea otters, bald eagles, and other species.

In 1980, five islands—Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara, and the marine environment surrounding them—were designated a National Park, and destructive invasive species were cleared from the place. The wild and unique land is being re-established, and research teams regularly track ocean health.

Primitive camping is available year-round on a limited basis due to the fragile nature of the ecosystem; other attractions include hiking, birding, whale watching, snorkeling, and kayaking. From the Channel Islands Visitors' Center in Ventura, visitors can access the islands via park concessionaire boats or helicopters.

Plan a trip that will open a rare and precious new world!



**This island fox only lives there**

### **Calling 411**

Back in the time when phone companies still offered operator services, one of our sons declared, “Mom is like 411. She always knows where we can find our things.” From that day, that name stayed with Susan, and whenever a family member could not find something, all we had to say was, “Calling 411!” After Susan appeared and learned what we were looking for, she immediately led us to the right place. It always worked!

Asking her how she developed such incredible capability, she modestly said, “I am the one who puts things away, so naturally, I know where they are.” But that still does not explain how she always knows where I put things!

Now that we all have access to Google and Siri, they can answer virtually all questions, but in our home, I still call out for 411 whenever I lose something...



### **Dear Mom**

Even though Valentine's Day greetings were not practiced in Hungary while I was growing up, I am sending this card to you now with the hope that it will reach you in the skies. I want you to know how much I appreciate your unconditional love while raising me as a single mother behind the iron curtain. I still remember the long days you'd spent in our apartment building's dingy laundry

room, washing and ironing other people's laundry so I could wear decent outfits and become our family's first high school graduate. You also found time to keep our place clean, buy fresh food at the market, and place a home-cooked dinner on our table daily. On the rare occasions when we had something special to eat, you always gave me the larger and most tender portion.

When I could escape to the West following the unsuccessful 1956 revolution against the Soviet Union, you unselfishly advised me to take it. You told me I would have a better future—even though it meant leaving you behind. Only much later, when I had my children, did I realize what a tremendous sacrifice that separation must have been for you!

Dear Mom, please forgive me for not verbalizing this to you during your life!

Your loving son.



### High-Tech Car Service

Because I am such a caring husband, I surprised Susan at the end of her water exercise class and offered her a ride home from the Capistrano Swim Center. She settled into our Tesla, and just as I'd done thousands of times before, I pressed the brake and moved the drive-controller lever toward the drive position.

To my surprise, instead of the car moving forward, a message appeared on its 16-inch LCD panel: *To move, select either DRIVE or REVERSE.*

I selected Drive again, but we didn't move. Switching to Reverse brought no movement. Repeating the process did not help; I could not make the vehicle budge in either direction! All the other readings seemed fine, and the battery level showed 230 miles' worth of charge. But our Tesla stubbornly remained in the parking spot, refusing to move!

After years of computer experience, I knew what to do, almost without thinking. I defaulted to the universal fix—and rebooted the car's operating system!

Still no change. Other tricks did not bring any results, either. I had exhausted all my IT ideas and knew I had been defeated. I felt helpless and frustrated.

Tesla's App offers free Roadside Assistance, so I called them from the car. A personable service technician answered from a Salt Lake City home. He remotely confirmed our problem and sent a "Hard Reset" command.

Just like that, the Tesla completely shut down around us. The screen went dark, and every system died. Susan and I sat, each as silent as the car, realizing our vehicle was much brighter than we were.

All the displays returned to everyday life after a few minutes of scary silence. With relief, I selected Drive, and we headed home.

Technology is indeed fantastic—when it works!



## Just Google It!

After our morning meeting, while heading to 24HR Fitness, I stopped by Spectrum's office to replace our ailing DVR.

"May I have an ID?" one of the two young clerks asked me, standing behind the counter.

Reaching my sweatsuit pants pocket, I realized that instead of my wallet, I took with me my business card holder. Pulling out a card, I handed it to the man, hoping it would be satisfactory.

"Sorry, but I need a photo ID," he said.

"Just Google my name," I replied jokingly— not wanting to drive home for my wallet.

The two men looked at each other, and one began typing on the keyboard. Then, both looked at their monitor with increased interest.

"Wow, it's you," said one with an impressed expression. Then, he twisted the monitor so I could see the display, showing my portrait and biography. Next, they looked at the other Google postings about me.

After asking more about my past, they gave me the best service I've ever received!

### **New Password**

Our small regional bank recently faced a financial crisis, and a new bank took over our investment portfolio. The Account Executive assured us the paperwork would be conveniently handled online using DocuSign. After electronically signing hundreds of pages of new documents, we finally reached the point of assigning a new bank account. Here is the following online exchange.

BANK: Please enter your new password

ME: hungarian

BANK: Sorry, the password must be more than ten characters

ME: hungarian american

BANK: Sorry, the password must contain at least one numerical character.

ME: 1 hungarian American

BANK: Sorry, the password cannot have blank spaces.

ME: 1hungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, the password must contain at least one uppercase character.

ME: 1HHungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, the password cannot consecutively have more than one uppercase character.

ME: 1\*!\*Hungarianamerican

BANK: Sorry, "\*" and "!" are not allowed to be used.

ME: 1Hungarianamericanwhoisbecomingveryannoyed

BANK: Sorry, that password is already in use.

### **Northern Lights**

Lists of the Natural Wonders of the World compete to name favorites, but every single list includes the Northern Lights, also called the Aurora Borealis. The latter name comes from two ancient Greek gods: Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, and Boreas, the north wind god.

Ancient cultures thought the lights were unique, too. The Chinese thought they must result from fights between good and evil dragons. The Finns believed they were magical spumes of water ejected from giant whales, while Greenlanders considered the eerie, shifting lights to be the souls

of dead children. More cheerfully, the Cree Indians saw them as images of their ancestors celebrating in heaven.

Modern science has provided a less dramatic story. In reality, the Northern Lights emerge when particles emitted from the sun collide with the Earth's upper atmosphere. Earth's magnetic field bends the resulting solar winds toward the magnetic poles. These winds collide with atmospheric particles in their path and gain electrical charge, producing visible light above the northern regions of Earth. Similar sights, Southern Lights or Aurora Australis (dawn and the south wind), occur near the southern magnetic pole.

During our recent North Atlantic cruise, Susan and I had the good fortune to witness this magnificent phenomenon in one of the Greenland fjords. Even though we had to crawl out of bed in the middle of the night and march to the top deck—only to wait for an hour in the cold wind—it was well worth the inconvenience. The display was breathtaking, and our “Bucket List” has been shortened.



### **Blame it on the doorways!**

Are you frustrated when you walk into a room to do something but cannot remember why you went there? You might feel better knowing you are not alone, and there might be a scientific explanation for your problem.

Researchers at Notre Dame University's Psychology Department conducted experiments in two different forms. First, they asked participants to perform specified tasks at one end of a long corridor, pass through a door, and repeat the same tasks at the other end. Next, they had to experiment with assignments in another corridor the same length as the first one. This time, however, they did not have to cross a door. The distances walked in both experiments were identical, and the assigned tasks varied randomly among the groups.

Comparing the outcomes of the two types of experiments showed that those who did pass through the doorways scored consistently lower than those who did not.

“We learned that passing through doorways might cause such memory lapses,” the professor in charge concluded. “Entering or exiting through a doorway serves as an ‘event boundary’ in the mind, which separates episodes of activity and files them away. Recalling the decision or activity made in a different room is difficult because it has been compartmentalized in the brain.”

Now that you know this when the same problem happens, you may think, “All I have to do is to go back to the first room.” Well, not so fast—crossing through the doorway again, you might forget why you are going back.

Conclusion: Doorways are evil! Avoid them at all costs!

### **Senior Drivers**

Before the coronavirus restrictions stopped us from having large group activities, over 200 LCG residents participated in the AARP Safe Driver courses I'd conducted. Reviewing recommended driving techniques, recently introduced State driving laws, and available auto safety options, in



addition to discussing the most common traffic violations seniors encounter, has helped many of our residents maintain safe driving practices. Of course, exceptions always happen.

Last year, a few weeks after taking one of the eight-hour courses here, a 'graduate resident' called me. "I received a traffic ticket for not stopping while turning right at a red traffic light. The instructions are not quite clear. Would you help me?" she asked.

After reviewing her ticket, I phoned the Encinitas Traffic Court: "I am calling on behalf of a lady who resides at La Costa Glen. She received a traffic citation for a red-light violation. She wants to know if..."

"Is she your wife, Sir?" the clerk interrupted me.

"No—I am an AARP Safe Driver course instructor. This lady took my safety course here last month..."

Interrupting me again! "Well, Sir, if I were you, I would not be bragging about that!"

Remaining silent, I listened to her instructions. After reviewing the information with the resident, she agreed to attend a one-day traffic school instead of getting a point off her driving record.

A few weeks later, the resident told me. "Traffic school was quite interesting. And guess what? Another LCG resident happened to be in my class at the same time. She and I are also members of our Safety Committee!"

Senior drivers...



### Signs of Becoming Old

Public transportation is free to seniors in Budapest. As a dual Hungarian–American citizen, I can use the streetcars, buses, and subways without cost. They are clean and safe and do not require long waits.

I boarded a streetcar loaded with passengers during a recent visit to that city. A middle-aged woman stood up from her seat and waved in my direction, offering me to take her place. I first assumed she was inviting someone behind me, but looking back, I did not see anyone else. Embarrassed, I thanked her but declined the offer, puzzled as to why she would invite me to sit down. *Perhaps she took me for being a foreign visitor?*

After spending long and stressful hours with my ailing sister a few days later, I returned to my hotel, taking one of those lengthy escalators to a subway station during rush hour. Within a few minutes, a long train arrived, and I stepped into one of the cars. A man immediately jumped up from his seat and asked me to take it. Being physically and emotionally drained, I accepted the offer this time, wondering, *Do I look so tired that even others can notice it?*

One morning after returning home from the trip, I mentally rehearsed my opening statements for a forthcoming LCG Safe Driving presentation while getting dressed.

"Did you say something?" asked Susan, stepping into the bedroom.

"No, I did not."

“It’s funny – I heard you talking,” she said.

I suddenly remembered when my mother occasionally talked to herself. Once, I pointed it out to her, and she replied, “You’ll do it also when you’re old!”

Have I reached that age?

### Steak Dinner

Near the end of August, our Food & Beverage Director announced beef steak as a menu option for an entire week. The first available day, Thursday, August 27, was my birthday. Selecting a medium-rare steak, I asked for a “large portion,” indicating that it was a special occasion. The steak arrived as specified, with a baked potato, sour cream, and sautéed mushrooms. I looked forward to a tasteful dinner and selected special wines to accompany the meal.

Around 6 pm, Susan and I started dinner. After taking the first bite, however, the phone rang. “Step outside with your wife,” our neighbor asked me. “You must see this,” she added.

Interrupting the meal, we walked outside and were promptly greeted by several neighborhood couples singing “*Happy Birthday*.” I was moved, and we chatted with our friends for a while.

Returning home, I was ready to finish dinner. To my surprise, however, my plate was empty. Susan’s vegan Tofu plate was untouched.

“Am I losing my mind?” I wondered. “Yes, I’ve been forgetting things lately,” or so I thought until I saw the happy face of our dog—wagging her tail. She had eaten the rest of my steak, the sour-cream-covered baked potato, and the sautéed mushrooms!!! The plate was licked clean!

Feeling frustrated and hungry, I emailed our F&B Director the story. Even though he must have been home by that time, within 30 minutes, there was a knock at our door: One of our servers brought me another complete steak dinner!!!

Don’t we live in a wonderful place?





## THE RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS AWARD

*Presented by Consul General of Israel Dr. Andy David in honor of the late Anna (Besser) Valkar. Anna's son, Les Besser, will be accepting the award on her behalf.*

Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to those who perished during the Holocaust, presents the Righteous Among the Nations award on behalf of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Persons recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations" are awarded a specially minted medal and a certificate of honor both bearing their name. Their name is also added to the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.



**Anna (Besser) Valkar** Anna Besser, the eldest of five siblings, was born on June 14, 1911, in Szekesfehervar, Hungary. In 1939 she became the housekeeper of a Jewish man who allowed her to move into his residence with her young son. She worked there for three years until Fascist laws forbade Jews to employ Christians. Sympathetic to her former employer and other Jews, she helped them obtain "letters of protection" from the consulates of Switzerland and Sweden, neutral nations.

As World War II raged on, the German army occupied Hungary and the Hungarian Nazi Party took control of the government. Anna, now living in her own apartment, helped Jews to escape persecution by giving them her own identification papers and those of her deceased family members. During the war's final months, she hid two elderly Jewish men in her small apartment, putting herself and her son at grave risk.

Anna continued to work in domestic service after the war. She raised her son and adopted her 12-year-old orphaned niece. After the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, her children escaped to Austria and immigrated to Canada. Anna remained in Budapest and visited her children and four grandchildren in the United States, where they eventually settled. Anna passed away in Budapest in 1993 at age 82, her son at her bedside.

