

Gabriel Makowsky, 1908-1958

A tragic life

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For Mima, Dvora, and their and my children, grandchildren and beyond

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1 Prelude

Gabriel (Gabi) Makowsky was my beloved stepfather from 1951 until his tragic death in 1958. He entered my life when I was three years old as my mother's husband. Naturally for me he was my true father. When I learned otherwise I was eight years old. My true father, András Majtény, suddenly appeared in 1956. Two fathers are better than one. Gabi became Gabi-papi, and my true father became András-papi.

I remember Gabi-papi as a dedicated father living with my mother. András-papi was remote. After Gabi-papi's early death a complex picture emerged slowly. Sixty years after his death I started to search various archives in order to complement the bits and pieces I knew about him from the family saga. Gabi was born into the culture of east-european Jewery in Switzerland, the Shtetl upon Sihl, where the Kaftan-Jews of Zurich used to live. The emancipated, assimilated and economically successful Jews in Switzerland were called Necktie-Jews, indicating the difference in terms of their dressing habits.

Gabi very much wanted to escape the world of the Kaftan-Jews and become a Necktie-Jew (Krawatten-Jude). He was a dazzling personality, full of contradictions, always in conflict with the authorities. He was a victim of his own cravings for recognition, be it with women or for economic success and social standing. He had bouts of depression and periods heightened selfconfidence. He definitely had traits of a narcissistic personality.

2 From Wiskitki to Luzern

Gabi was born on June 6, 1908 as the son of Wolf (Schoel) Makowsky and Sara (Laura) née Kryschtal. The family-booklet (Familienbüchlein) deposited in the citizen register of Wülflingen (today part of Winterthur) states that Wolf Makowsky was born on December 20, 1886 in Wiskitki in Tsarist Poland as the son of Abraham Makowsky and Chendla, né Miler. Gabi was their first-born, followed by David Makowsky, born on January 17, 1910.

Little is known about Gabi's grandparents. A document I found on the internet site of JRI-Poland states that Abram Makowski and Chinda Miler were married in Wiskitki in 1878. Their son, Shajer Wolf was born in 1886 in the same town. Chinda died in 1887, a year after Wolf's birth. There was at least one more child, Szajndla Makowska, born in 1883, Wolf's sister. It seems that after their mother's death Abram Makowski moved to Góra Kalwaria, where

their widowed and most likely remarried father was an innkeeper.

In the 17th century Góra Kalwaria was supposed to be a purely Christian town and Jews were not allowed to settle there. In the early 19th century, the ban on Jewish settlement was lifted and afterwards Jews became the predominant group in the town, also due to their expulsion from Russia. Jewish life in Góra Kalwaria was dominated by the followers of the Chassidim of Ger, the most influential Chassidic group in Tzarist Poland, numbering over 100'000. Wolf emigrated to Switzerland before 1906, most likely in order to evade both military service in the Tsarist army and escaping the all embracing control on everyday life imposed by the Grand Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (1847-1905), third Gerrer Rebbe from 1870 to 1905. Ger follows the way of Menachem Mendel of Kotzk in stressing service of God in a sharp and objective way, as opposed to the mystical and spiritual orientation of other Hasidic groups. Ger also places much emphasis on Talmud study and is known as having the strictest views among Orthodox Jews regarding sexual relations.



The synagogue and courtyard of the Rabbi of Gur (Góra Kalwaria). In this photo: the buildings used to store grain and furniture. Photographed in 1980¹

¹Copyright: 2009 IDEA Information Systems



This is a photo of Tzaddik Alter's prayer house in Pijarska Street in Gora Kalwaria. It was taken before the war.

There were two synagogues in Gora Kalwaria. One belonged to the kahal, the Jewish community, a progressive one, and the other belonged to the tzaddik, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, or Imrei Emes, 4th rebbe of the Ger dynasty, the last of the dynasty to live in Poland.

Wolf Makowski settled in Luzern and made a living as a travelling salesman. In March 1907 he married Sura Gitel Kryschtal from Kladova, then in Austro-Hungary, now in Romania, daughter of Benjamin Kryschtal and Mariem Praskowsky. In later life she called herself Jeanette. The common language of the young couple was Yiddish. After Gabi's birth in 1908 they decided to become Swiss citizens. There were several communes which were known to like refurbishing their coffers with increased fees by selling citizenship – mostly to Jews. Wülflingen (now part of Winterthur) was one of them. The Makowskis lived a modest life but seemingly earned enough to pay for the exorbitant fee to become Swiss citizens. The family-booklet states that they became citizens of Wülflingen on July 4, 1909 while still living in Luzern. Jewish life in Luzern was bristling, although the the community was rather small. In 1384 the Jews had been expelled from Luzern. They only started to resettle there at the beginning the 19th century. Coming from various backgrounds they administered Jewish life peacefully together, Necktie-Jews and Kaftan-Jews, orthodox Jews and conservative Jews, Gerer Chassidim and Litvaks. Only in 1912 the Lucerne synagogue was built with the support of Josef Croner, a Necktie-Jew from Karlsruhe who was enthusiastic about the city and the community. It was designed by the architect Max Seckbach who also designed the big Frankfurt Synagogue which was destroyed by the Nazis in the Kristallnacht.



Synagogue of Lucerne²

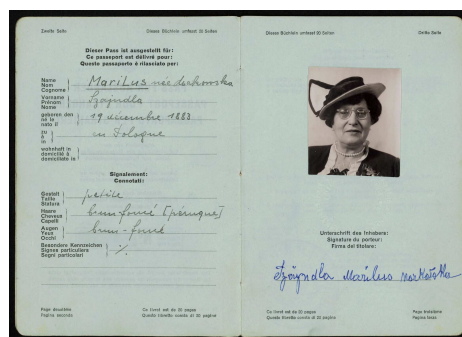
While Wolf and Sura (Jeanette) were expecting their second child, Wolf's sister Szajndla joined them in Luzern arriving without legal papers. She might have joined her brother fleeing an arranged marriage. Szajndla gives Góra Kalwaria as her birthplace. She states that she spent all her childhood there, but it is reasonable to assume that having moved there at the age of four, she would not remember her time in Wiskitki. She remained faithful to Gerer traditions all her life.

Szajndla joined her brother's family in order to help in the household of four, and also joined her brother in his activities as a travelling salesman. Before 1929, Wolf moved with his wife and children to Zurich and took residence at Feldstrasse 114, in the Shtetl upon Sihl (4th district). Szajndla stayed in Luzern till 1937 making a living as an independent sales representative. She only became a Swiss citizen through marriage in 1937. Her first husband, Jakob Potocki was 17 years her senior, a milkman, citizen of Arboldswil in Canton Baselland, and living in Oberwil, not far from Arboldswil. He had a daughter of a previous marriage, who lived in Milano. Potocki died in 1940 in Basel. Szajndla acquired a milkshop in Basel which she run till her second marriage in December 1945. Her second husband Asher (User) Marilius, a traveling salesman, lived in Zurich since 1914. He was 9 years her senior. Although living in Zurich, he had remained a citizen of Romania. According to Swiss law, she consequently lost her Swiss citizenship and became a Romanian citizen. Szajndla moved in with Asher in Zurich's Shtetl upon Sihl and joined the ultra-orthodox community

²Photo by Gryffindor Wikipedia

Agudas-Achim of Zurich which was dominated by the Gerer Chassidim. Asher died in 1953 and Szajndla was left without sufficient resources for a living. She filed a request to reinstitute her Swiss citizenship in Arboldswil and received poverty support from there. She inquired whether she would received poverty support also in ase she would, as a Swiss citizen, emigrate to Israel. However, the welfare institution disrecommended emigrating to the young Jewish state due to the political uncertainties and Szajndla's advanced age. Szajndla died in 1961 and is buried in the orthodox cemetary of Zurich. Her link to her brother Wolf's family was severed. Even while living in Zurich she had met Wolf rarely. Wolf's two granddaughters remember having seen her only once. What struck them most of this encounter was her refusal to shake hands with her secular minded adolescent family members.

The detailed description of Szajndla's life is due to the meticulous investigation of the police of Canton Zurich during her request to regain Swiss citizenship. About Wolf Makowsky the archives have revealed little so far.



Szajnda's last passport

3 Gabriel Makowsky, the first years 1908-1946



Gabi, ca. 1946

Gabriel (Gabi) Makowsky was born on June 6, 1908 as the son of Wolf (Schoel) Makowsky and Sara (Laura) née Kryschtal. His parents were Jiddisch speaking observant Jewish immigrants from Czarist Poland and became Swiss citizens of Winterthur in 1910. Later they moved to Zurich. Gabi, like his father, became a tailor and later had his own clothing store. In an arranged marriage, as customary among observant Jews of the period, he was betrothed to Rosa Mandeltort before 1934. They had two daughters, Marlene, born in 1935 and Gerda in 1939.

Gabi seemingly also had a brother who committed suicide when a young man. However, I could not trace details.



Gabi Makowsky as a young man, between 1933-1935

The economical situation before and during WWII of the Makowskys was precarious. Gabi had to declare bankruptcy and was investigated several times

for fraudulent business practices. During the general mobilization of the Swiss Army between 1939 and 1945 Gabi served in the army.



Gabi in the Swiss Army (Aktivdienst, between 1940-1945)

In 1944 he joined the newly refounded Swiss Communist Party (Partei der Arbeit). The victory of the Red Army over the Third Reich of Germany may have contributed to this decision. At the end of WWII he looked for new business opportunities in Switzerland and Southern Germany, dabbling in the black market and finally founding his company TRACONT AG. His financial situation improved dramatically. He got interested in American cars and free spirited women, although, being handsome, he seemingly was already philandering before that. Nevertheless, he remained a dedicated father and a caring son, and had no intention to get divorced soon. In 1948 Rose and Gabi were domiciled at Alfred-Escher Strasse 38, in the posh second district of Zurich. He had left the Shtettele upon Sihl (Aussersihl), where the Kaftan Jews lived and moved into the area of the upward mobile emancipated Bow tie Jews.



Gabi and the girls, ca. 1946 in Weggis

In the background his parents



The Makowsky family on Bürgenstock

Gabi's life from 1929-1948 is described in a police record of the Special Service of the Cantonal Police in Zurich.

G1.pdf, pp 4-5

A letter from the Special Service, Zurich from December 30, 1948 to the Police department, Intelligence Section

in response to a request by the Police department Schwyz from December 22, 1948 in matters TRACONT AG, Zurich, Fraumünsterstrasse 15.

Sent to

- a) commander of the Police of Kanton Schwyz, and*
- b) Office of the Federal Prosecutor in Bern.*

- *Tracont AG was founded in 1946 and deals with delivering Love-gift parcels. Founder and CEO is Gabriel Makowsky, born June 6, 1908, citizen of Winterthur, formerly Polish, merchant, Son of Schoel and Laura née Kyrschtal, married to Rosa Mandeltort, domiciled at Alfred-Escher Strasse 38, Zurich 2.*
- *Makowsky used to work as a tailor and traveling sales man. Later he ran and owned a clothing store, but went bankrupt. He left claims in the amount of 63,000 Fr. More recently he recovered financially, first renewed as a traveling sales man, and today as owner and CEO of Tracont AG. He managed to buy back all the certificates of loss and satisfy his creditors with c. 30% of the owed money.*
- *With his business with Love-gift parcels he earned beyond any doubt a lot of money. Supposedly Tracont had in 1947 a monthly turnover of 40,000-50,000 Fr.*
- *Makowsky is today listed in the Tax register of the City of Zurich with an annual income of 40,700 Fr, and capital of 10,000 Fr.*
- *In the years between 1929 till 1946 he was in 25 cases under criminal investigation of the District Attorney of Zurich.*
- *These investigations include negligent arson, scams and embezzlement, etc. In 1929 and 1936 he received judicial penalty, but both penalties are by now deleted from his records.*
- *Currently, Makowsky is again under investigation by the district attorney. The current case concerns scams in large amounts*

related to his business with Love-gift parcels. The investigation is still pending, and nothing can be said about its possible conclusion.

- *Other complaints concerning his business conduct, such as non-delivery of the Love-gift parcels, are here not known.*
- *From a political point of view it is known that Makowsky is a member of the PdA (Formerly Communist Party of Switzerland) since 1946, active in the Party of District Zurich 2.*

4 Tracont AG, 1946-1950

The purpose of the company he founded in 1946, Tracont AG, was to distribute food packages (SOLI-Pakete) in occupied Germany, Austria, and later also in Israel. Gabi also founded another company, Fahag AG, for the exploitation of new inventions. Tracont served as the organizer of the SOLI-food packages on behalf of the Centre Sanitaire Suisse, an organization of left-leaning medical professionals which was founded during the Spanish Civil War in order to help the Republicans. Tracont AG also supported the creation of children's homes for war orphans and refugees.

Tracont AG was eagerly observed by the Special Services of the Swiss Political Police, and also by the Secret Services of the US and France in Germany, and the British and US in Austria. Tracont AG was suspected to be heavily involved in black market activities trading also in non-humanitarian merchandise. It was also suspected, without justification, to be a cover company in the service of the Soviets.

Gabi traveled frequently to Southern Germany in order to promote its activities. On one of his trips in 1948, he was dangerously hurt in a car accident, which left the bone above the right eye badly damaged.



Colis Suisse



SOLI Pakete



Gabi with his Buick Roadmaster, 1948
before his car accident

The Swiss Federal Archive has several boxes of material collected under the label TRACONT which show that the humanitarian activities of Tracont AG where under scrutiny since 1946. The Swiss consulates of the US, Germany and Austria report to the political branch of the Federal Police about minor complaints concerning undelivered food packages and suspicions about improper business practices. They also report about business contacts of Tracont with various communist organizations, and contain copies of wire tapped telex traffic originating from the telex line of Tracont AG. It is clear that the activities of Tracont AG where in direct contravention of the Truman doctrine whose aim it was to economically isolate the Soviet controlled part of postwar Europe.

In February 1950 the Swiss Consulate in Baden-Baden sent a confidential report to the Federal Political Department in Bern, which was then forwarded to the office of the Federal Prosecution claiming that G. Makowsky was a Soviet agent. A similar report was already sent in 1948 from the Swiss Consulate in

Vienna. The Vienna report cited American sources, whereas the Bade-Baden report cited French sources.

G1.pdf, pp 6-8

Mister Minister!

I have the honor to draw your attention to the activities of one of our compatriots, M. G. Makowsky, director of the company Tracont AG in Zurich. I have already in the past maintained a rather voluminous correspondence with the administrative and commercial divisions of the Swiss government concerning the business of this company.

Tracont AG was till 1948 mainly active in expediting food parcels in Germany. Its activity led to an investigation of the occupying powers which ended with the interdiction on all its activities in the French Zone of Germany, due to its incorrect way of conducting its business.

M. Makowsky has as his assistant the Princess Hélène of Mecklenburg, holding a British passport. She is the daughter of Count Karlow, Herzog zu Mecklenburg, who lives in Sigmaringen. The behavior of the young Princess has caused multiple commentaries in Germany, and her father himself shares with us his concerns.

During a conversation I had recently with a high-place French personality I was informed that both, M. Makowsky and the young Princess of Mecklenburg are not only involved in dubious black market activities, but that they also work as agents for the Russian NKVD. My source assured me that both the French and the German Services are well aware of these activities and that he could guarantee for the authenticity of this information. The Princess, holding a British passport and being fluent in Russian, is a useful accomplice for Mr. Makowsky, even more so, as her name and family status allows her to establish connections with important personalities. My informant is a high officer of the French Services and a Knight of the Maltese Order, representing this Order in Germany. I believe that we better take this source seriously. Furthermore, my informant is familiar with matters concerning the family of the Herzog of Mecklenburg, who himself is also a member of the Maltese Order.

I am sure the above information is of value to you, and, in case I

learn more in these matters, I will let you know as we.

Be assured, Mr. Minister, of my high esteem,

The Swiss Consul

G. Naville

There exists also a similar letter, this time sent from the Swiss consulate in Vienna. It is true that the Princess was a friend, and possibly a lover, of Gabi, and that she was known in leftist circles in Switzerland. People close to Theo Pinkus, a prominent Swiss Communist, remember him mentioning her as the Red Princess. However, the above denunciation were fabricated by her father, the Duke (Herzog) of Mecklenburg, who was worried about the reputation of his family. In the Swiss Federal Archives Gabi's and the Princess's supposed connections to the NKVD are not further pursued. The Princess got married to a Swiss-Egyptian engineer in 1955 and moved to Zurich. She died in airplane accident in 1962. I contacted the House of Mecklenburg-Strelitz at editormecklenburg-strelitz.org to learn more about the Princess, but did not receive any reply.



Princess Hélène of Mecklenburg

The web-sited of the House of the House of Mecklenburg-Strelitz

<https://mecklenburg-strelitz.org>

gives the following biographical date for Duchess Helene:

Duchess Helene was born on 15 November 1924 in St Leonards on Sea. She was the third child and only daughter of Duke Georg and his first wife Duchess Irina. Early life Born at 131 London Road in St Leonards on Sea, Duchess Helene was the second member of the

Grand Ducal Family to have been born in the United Kingdom after the first child of Grand Duke Friedrich Wilhelm and Grand Duchess Augusta. She was christened into the Roman Catholic Church receiving the names Helene Cecilie Therese Maria Immakulata Viktoria Sophie Franziska Monika.

At birth Duchess Helene bore the title Countess of Carlow due to her paternal grandparents marriage not having received dynastic recognition. This situation changed on 11 September 1928 when along with the rest of her family Duchess Helene became a member of the House of Mecklenburg-Strelitz and a Duchess of Mecklenburg following their adoption by her great uncle Duke Carl Michael as his dynastic heirs. Duchess Helene spent her early years in Germany at the Remplin Palace in Mecklenburg until it was largely destroyed in a fire instigated by the local Nazi authorities during the night 10 to 11 April 1940. After the loss of their Remplin home Duchess Helene and her family and their staff including the childrens English governesses and French tutors took up residence in a villa at 4 Nikisch Street in the Grunewald quarter of Berlin. She lived here for the next four years until February 1944 when the villa was destroyed during an Allied bombing raid. Following the loss of a second home Duchess Helene and her family went to live with her brother in law and half sister, Prince Franz Ferdinand and Princess Irina of Isenburg, at the Birstein Palace in Hesse. In August 1944 Duchess Helenes father was arrested by the Gestapo, only gaining his freedom in February 1945 following the intervention of a Papal nuncio. A month after his release the family reunited in Sigmaringen having been invited to the town by the Princess of Hohenzollern.

Following the end of the Second World War, Duchess Helene remained in Sigmaringen living with her parents in the Prinzessinnen-Palais at 9 Karl Street. She lived here until her marriage in Hinterzarten on 10 February 1955 to widower Hassan Sayed Kamil, a Swiss-Egyptian engineer and businessman. Through her marriage Duchess Helene became step mother to her husbands young son Karim whose mother Otty Laila Kamil-Lott was the only fatality in the Sabena OO-AWO plane crash in Zurich on 19 December 1953. Following the marriage Duchess Helene moved to her hus-

bands native Switzerland, living on Restelberg Street in Zurich. Her husbands businesses Mechanical Corporation (MECO) and Motoren Turbinen und Pumpen AG (MTP) were headquartered in the city, while Duchess Helene served as Vice President of the Board of Directors of clothing manufacturer Cosma Costumes et Manteaux SA. Duchess Helene gave birth to their daughter Sheila in 1958 in Chur. In July 1962 Duchess Helene and her husband were holidaying on the island of Sylt in Schleswig-Holstein. She left the island on 7 July in a plane chartered by her husbands company with just her and the pilot on board. The flight was scheduled to land in Düsseldorf where a family friend was to take Duchess Helene to the Netherlands to attend a christening. However the plane never reached its destination coming down for unexplained reasons in flames in Riesenbeck killing both Duchess Helene and the pilot Hans Tinnefeld. Duchess Helenes funeral was held on 12 July 1962 at the Church of the Redeemer in Sigmaringen, following which she was interned alongside her mother in the family crypt in nearby Inzigkofen. A requiem was also held the following day at the St Martin Church in Zurich.

Duchess Helenes widower later remarried and emigrated from Switzerland to Canada with his new wife Leonora Gross during the 1970s. He died at his home in British Columbia in 1991. Duchess Helenes daughter Sheila studied computer graphic design at Sheridan College in Canada before spending a number of years working for the Canadian government. She later worked as a life and business consultant based in Hawaii. Sheila died on 21 March 2018 in Victoria, British Columbia in Canada.

Gabi's business with the food packages came slowly to an end in 1950. Although the Political Police could not find any support for its suspicions, Gabi was left with serious problems with various tax authorities of Switzerland. His support for the deprived of the post-war era was widely appreciated among its beneficiaries, and slandered by the new forces of the Cold War. His support for the young state of Israel was substantial. He believed that Communism and Zionism were the positive ideological movements of his time. The victory of the Red Army over Fascism and the creation of the State of Israel as the new Jewish homeland were for him proof of this.

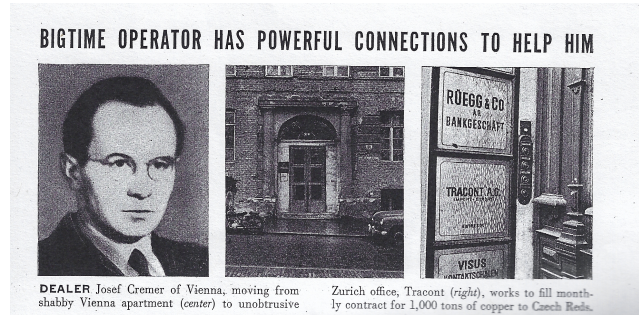
5 Tracont AG, 1950-1953

In early 1950 a new chapter starts for Gabi Makowsky. He meets Alexander (Sandor) Deutsch and his daughter Marianne (Marika) Majtényi, my mother. Sandor Deutsch is an émigré Hungarian industrialist in search of business opportunities. He already owns 100% of a company in Liechtenstein, HEUREKA, for trading in non-ferrous metals and chemical raw materials, which he founded in 1948. He also owns 50% of a chemical company in Switzerland, the Rheinchemie AG, which he founded in 1949 together with the Swiss A.H. Meyer, who holds the other 50%. A.H. Meyer is leading importer and distributor of petroleum products in Switzerland. After Sandor's liberation by the Red Army in Berlin in May 1945, Sandor returned to Budapest and found his wife and daughter alive and well. He resumed his position as CEO of HUNGARIA AG, a Hungarian multinational chemical company. Originally, he believed in his mission in creating a liberal and democratic Hungary under the leadership of the Small-holders Party. When the political situation became more difficult he prepared his emigration and at the end of 1947 he did not return from a business trip and settled first in Geneva, and then in Zurich. He was given residence permission in Switzerland on the basis of his own means, but was not allowed to work as an employee. His wife followed him to Zurich in April 1949. His daughter, my mother, was coaxed into divorcing her husband, Andras Majtenyi my father, in February 1949, and joined him in June 1949 with me.

How exactly Gabi and Sandor met I could not reconstruct. But it must have been in early 1950 or even late 1949. Both were looking for opportunities in East-West trade, and both had various useful connections for such a project. Gabi was also familiar with the black market prospering in occupied Germany and Austria.

At the end of 1950 an old Hungarian business acquaintance of Sandor, Gyula Gross, introduces Josef Cremer, a Viennese merchant in East-West trade, to Sandor and to Gabi. What ensues is a very lucrative partnership between Sandor, Gabi and Cremer. Sandor had connections to Chile and was looking for buyers of large quantities of copper and other non-ferrous metals. Cremer is looking for suppliers of copper for Czechoslovak state monopolies. Due currency restrictions in Austria, he also needs an established Swiss company, through which the deals could be arranged. TRACONT AG seemed suitable for the planned cooperation. It was a perfect match. Sandor, Gabi and Cremer agreed to share their profits in three equal parts. For two full years, from January 1951

till January 1953, business was flourishing.



Josef Cremmer and Tracont AG, December 1952.

1952 picture by David Douglas Duncan

as published in LIFE Magazine January 1953

What Sandor and Gabi did not know: In January 1951 the Swiss Federal Police was investigating a bizarre espionage case. They had arrested three Czechoslovak individuals, Leon Diamond, Irene Fleischner (alias Hermine Schanelcova, alias Irene Stern), and Juda Friedmann, who all somehow were linked to an elusive Josef Cremer from Vienna, owner of ERLCOM, Import and Export. The Swiss were convinced that this Cremer was an agent of the Czechoslovak secret service, however they did not know, at this point, about Cremer's dealings with TRACONT AG. Only in the Fall of 1951 they discovered by chance that TRACONT AG was the basis of Cremer's operations. From then on the Swiss tapped the telex lines of TRACONT AG.

What Sandor and Gabi did also not know: TRACONT AG was also in the focus of the American CIA. The Americans viewed selling copper to EASTERN block countries as helping the Soviet Union in their military build-up. During the Truman administration it was a professed goal of American Foreign Policy to limit export of strategically relevant goods to Soviet controlled countries. However, on the ground little was done to implement this. With the election of D. Eisenhower the Cold War factions in Congress hoped to change this. At the end of 1952 David Douglas Duncan, a star photographer of LIFE Magazine, was given plenty of background material about EAST-WEST trade and sent on a mission to document the flow of strategic goods. He found Josef Cremer to be a key operator.

In January 1953 LIFE Magazine published Duncan's photo report. Simultaneously, the Swiss issued a search warrant of the premises of TRACONT AG and the private quarters of Sandor and Gabi. They also issued a warrant for the

arrest of Josef Cremer and arrested him in February at Zurich airport. Whether it was by coincidence or not, remains a mystery.

For TRACONT AG The lucrative copper trade came to an abrupt end. No criminal charges were raised, Cremer and Sandor were served an expulsion order, and Gabi was left with various charges of tax offenses. Cremer continued his copper trade using an Italian company he founded for this purpose. His company ERLCOM and its successor companies, were active at least till 1975. Sandor fought his expulsion order in court in several instances and lost. Finally he was allowed to stay in Switzerland on humanitarian grounds.

6 Gabi and Marika

Gabi noticed Sandor's daughter early on. Marika had followed her father with me on a transit visa. Her plan was to leave me with her parents and go on to Canada to build her own life. One of her schoolmates and intimate friend was married there. But her father, who had coaxed her into a divorce she did not really want, now was cruel and strict. She was a divorcee and was not supposed to abandon her child.

Marika had no residency permit for Zurich and stayed registered in the famous Hotel Verenahof in Baden near Zurich. Although her divorce from my father seemed reasonable from her parent's point of view, Marika and Andras were still madly in love and, immediately after Marika's arrival in Switzerland, they engaged in an intensive correspondence lasting until September 1951. She kept Andras' letters whenever she moved to a new apartment, whereas Marika's letters to Andras were lost (or destroyed) in the course of his turbulent life.



Hotel Verenahof, Baden

During her first year, Marika spent time in various resorts in the mountains of Grishun. She had several suitors, but none of them was willing to engage in a lasting relationship. Mostly they were only after a casual adventure while

being in the hotel. Occasionally she met Hungarian emigrés in search of young charming and intelligent wife, but the moment they realized that Marika had a two year old son, they dropped their courting efforts. Marika was deeply unhappy in Switzerland and prone to succumb to her ex-husband's efforts and return to Budapest. There was only one catch: Marika's emigration had a negative effect on Andras' career. He lost his job with the ministry of Trade and Commerce, and even his father was pushed into the second rank of the party elite becoming CEO of Monimpex, a state monopoly company in agricultural goods. His aspiration for a decision making position in the Politbureaux or similar was a victim of changing political fortunes caused by the Cold War, but also a consequence of having direct relatives in the West.

Marika had grown up in the Budapest of prefascism and antisemitism as a spoiled princess and her father's darling. In 1940 she had to study agriculture and animal husbandry in order to prevent the complete nationalization of father's huge estate and model farm. In late 1943 she was engaged to Dr. Ferry Freund, a lawyer and gifted amateur baritone.



Marika and Ferry, 1944

The engagement was based on mutual love and also approved by both families as fitting the social and economic status of the fiances. The planned marriage for April 1944 could not happen, because of the the German occupation in March 1944. Ferry was drafted to forced labor at the Eastern front, and Marika and her family were arrested by the Gestapo. They all survived the traumatic experiences of German rule and the siege of Budapest, but they found themselves in different world. Ferry, returning from forced labor service, became a state prosecutor in Budapest, but was not interested in renewing the engagement with Marika. In 1946 he had to leave Hungary, because he was accused of favoritism in handling cases of young women accused of minor cases of collaboration.

In late 1945 Marika had met Andras Majtenyi, a young communist starting

a brilliant career in the ministry of trade and commerce. His father was a high-ranking communist entrusted with financial aspects of reconstruction and nationalization of the Hungarian economy. Andras and Marika got married in 1946. I have written a long essay about the circumstances of their love and divorce.



Marika and Andras, 1946

In 1947 Andras was one of the architects of the first post-WWII Romanian-Hungarian Economic Cooperation Treaty, signed in January 1948. His diplomatic career seemed assured. Andras was slated to become an attache for Trade and Commerce But the political climate changed at the Hungarian Embassy in Bern. Marika was expecting, I was born in March 1948. At the same time Sandor announced that he would not return to Hungary, but would stay in Switzerland. He wanted his wife and his daughter to follow him.

For Gabi, Marika was the woman out of a fairy tale. She was his Jewish Hungarian Princess. Unlike his former Princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Marika was looking for a husband. She was Jewish and had a well-to-do father, who already was Gabi's prospective business partner. She was educated and had a refreshing humor. She was beautiful and knew how to move in elegant circles. And she had a son. Gabi was blessed with two daughters, but he always wanted a son. In late 1950 or very early 1950 Gabi started to court Marika.



Gabi and Marika
Carnival Ball



February 1950
Davos

Gabi had abandoned his marital life some time ago but now, suddenly, he initiated his divorce procedure. In February 1951 he was a free man. The divorce was by mutual agreement. Both parties agreed in the divorce document that their mutual incompatibility and ceased marital relationship was beyond repair. Gabi's financial arrangements were generous, custody of the daughters was given to the mother, but extensive visiting rights for the father was granted. Gabi appeared to Marika like a good potential provider. His business with Sandor and Cremer was flourishing, and he treated her indeed like prince would treat his princess. But most importantly, among all the suitors Marika had met, he was the only one who took not only an interest in her son (me), but really cherished the idea of being a good father.

Marika had to make a decision. She had been repeatedly in conflict with the police for violations of her residency restrictions. An ultimatum was given to her: She had to leave Switzerland by the end of August 1951. Ferry was still on her mind, how would their marriage had worked out if the German occupation of Hungary had not prevented it from happening? During the siege of Budapest the thought of his return kept her strong. But he came back a changed person. Returning to Andras was of no use. Her ex-father-in-law, Jenő, had visited Marika in summer 1950 in Flims while on an official trade mission. He wanted to see his grandson. They had discussed the matter. But under the new political configurations in Hungary, Jenő advised against such a move, in spite of his desire to have his grandson close. He had to admit that Andras was prone to make her miserable at times. Marika had not really spoken to Gabi about her traumatic past, nor did he reveal to her details of his past

political and commercial activities.

In July 1951 Gabi and Marika were formally engaged and registered their planned marriage at the City hall of Zurich. Shortly after that, Gabi and the his daughters accompanied Marika to Flims and visited me in the children's home, where I spent already the second summer. I remember it well. Gabi had given me a toy sailing boat which I used in the bathing tub till I was adolescent. In August 1951 they got married and had lunch in the Pavilion of Hotel Baur-aulac. Present were only the two witnesses, Gabi's lawyer, Dr. Spivak, and Gabi's dentist, Dr. Feigl. Neither of the parents were invited. Sandor and his wife spent their summer taking the waters in the Grand Hotel in Scuol-Tarasp. On the day of her marriage, Marika sent a telegram to her parents: "I got a Swiss passport!".



Sandor and Rozsi in Scuol-Tarasp

The newly wed couple went on a luxurious honeymoon to Venice. They stayed in the lavish Danieli Hotel, housed in the 14th century Palazzo Dandolo close to St. Mark's Square. They visited the customary tourist places. They ate at Harry's Bar and fed the pigeons in front of St. Mark's Basilica. The ultimate highlight of their trip was their visit to the opera witnessing the world's first performance of Stravinsky's opera *The Rake's progress*, conducted by the composer himself.

*The Rake's Progress*³ is an English-language opera from 1951 in three acts and an epilogue by Igor Stravinsky. The libretto, written by W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, is based loosely on the eight paintings and engravings *A Rake's Progress (1733-1735)* of William Hogarth, which Stravinsky had seen on 2 May 1947, in a Chicago exhibition.

³quoted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rake%27s_Progress

The story concerns the decline and fall of one Tom Rakewell, who deserts Anne Trulove for the delights of London in the company of Nick Shadow, who turns out to be the Devil. After several misadventures, all initiated by the devious Shadow, Tom ends up in Bedlam, a hospital for the insane at that time situated in the City of London. The moral of the tale is: "For idle hearts and hands and minds the Devil finds work to do."

It was first performed at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on 11 September 1951 with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf creating the role of Anne Trulove, and Robert Rounseville that of Tom Rakewell.

I I have my doubts whether they both grasped the historical meaning of the event. The took a private gondola from the Hotel to the Teatro La Fenice, and when Marika left the gondola the zipper of her dress tore apart. The wardrobe ladies fixed it for her somehow, but Marika's mind was with the zipper and not with Stravinsky or Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.



Marika and Gabi at the Teatro de la Fenice

In 1950 Sandor and Rozsi rented a two-room apartment in the Apartmen-
thaus Wellenberg in the Old City of Zurich, at Niederdorfstrasse 10. Already
before their marriage, Gabi and Marika rented two more two-room apartments
in the same building. One for themselves for after their marriage, and one for
Marika and me. After their marriage Marika moved in with Gabi and they hired
a nanny, Trudi Murbach, who stayed with me in Marika's former apartment. I
do have a few memories of that time. The caretaker of the apartment house
had a German shepherd almost my size of whom I was afraid. I remember the
elevator in the building and my first tricycle which I rode in the apartment.
Trudi stayed with us till I started school. To my surprise she showed up at my
mother's funeral in 1987.

Marika was genuinely happy. After two years of yearning, she had found her prince who cherished her and fulfilled all her expectations. For the New Year they went to Paris together and had champagne and dinner at the Eiffel Tower restaurant, they went to the Moulin Rouge in the evening and strolled around the Montmartre during the day. They went window shopping on the Champs-Elisées and at the Galerie Lafayette on Boulevard Haussmann. In January 1952, Gabi rented a five-room apartment in a residential apartment building at the lake shore opposite the Enge harbor. It had to be remodeled and furnished. It should be ready in the late summer of 1952. Gabi and Marika hired an interior decorator, they bought Persian and other Oriental carpets, chandeliers from Murano, porcelain from Herendy, paintings and antiques in galleries and at auctions, in Zurich and during their trips abroad. Marika spent time with her mother at the expensive dressmakers of Bahnhofstrasse and replenished her wardrobe. Gabi bought her exquisite jewels. Gabi enjoyed spending money on her.



Marika and Gabi, December 1951 in Paris

In fall 1952 the apartment in the Green Castle (Mythenschloss) was ready. Gabi hired a live-in maid (Ilse) from Austria, a cook (Ilona) from Hungary, and continued employing my nanny Trudi. I remember the day Trudi took me from our apartment in the Old City for walk along the lake shore. She told me there would be a surprise at the end of the walk. And surprise there was!

Arriving at the harbor of Enge we crossed the street and entered number 22 of this immense green building, climbed up to the first floor and rang at one of the apartment doors. Marika and Gabi opened: “Welcome home!” mother took me in her arms, then put me down and pointed to Gabi: “This is your Papi”. Next, they took me and Trudi to one of the rooms and told me: “This is your

room, look well around”. There was a bed, and small table, chairs, and a row of cabinets. Marika opened one after the other: Two were for cloths, and the one in the corner –“Well, open it yourself!”. It was full of toys. Thus began my life in the Castle.

7 Life in the Castle

Life in the Castle had its daily routines. Gabi would get up early. As long as the lakeside bathhouse was open, he would walk over to it dressed only in his gown and go for a short swim. He would then spend half an hour in the bathroom shaving and grooming his hair, powdering his face, use plenty of after-shave and eau-de-toilette and get dressed. Ilse would serve coffee and fresh croissants which the nearby bakery of Bertschi had delivered early in the morning. Gabi would read his morning edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and then walk along the lakeside park to his office at Fraumünsterstrasse. He would leave before eight, when Marika and I would still be asleep. Trudi, my nanny, would come at eight, wake me up and get me ready in order to accompany me to a private kindergarten. Marika would wake up at around nine. She would ring the bell in the kitchen which could be activated from her night table in the bedroom. Ilse would serve her breakfast in bed. She would take her time to get dressed and leave for town.

Around noon, Gabi would return home for lunch which Ilona, the cook, had prepared. Trudi would pick me up from Kindergarten. Lunch was served by Ilse in the dining room at one, but Marika often was late. Trudi, Ilse and Ilona had lunch in the kitchen. After lunch Gabi would have a look at the midday edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and have a short nap. He then would leave for his office again at three p.m. in fresh shirt and after having shaved again. He would be back in the evening to read the evening edition of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, and then spend his time with Marika.



The Mythenschloss

The Mythenschloss was built in 1925-1927 by architect Arminio Cristofari (1883-1957). It belonged to a special type of upper middle-class, representative residential buildings at privileged locations, such as the "Rotes Schloss" (Beethovenstrasse 1ff.), the "Weisses Schloss" (General-Guisan-Quai 30ff.) and the "Neues Schloss" (Stockerstrasse 9ff.). The six-story residential palace was built with a U-shaped layout. The Mythenschloss was a characteristic feature of the newly developed Zurich lakefront⁴.

Gabi was proud of his new wife and his recent economic achievements. He liked to show off his new status. He introduced Marika to his friends. He took her out to fancy restaurants, or to the shows at the Terrasse night club. Once he offered champagne to all guests, the artists and the dancers at the Terrasse. It must have been after a particularly successful business transaction. Gabi loved his lavish life style.

Gabi also tried to build a bridge between his parents and his new parents-in-law, between his daughters and Marika and me. On Rosh Hashana eve (the Jewish New Year) of 1952 a festive traditional dinner was prepared. Gabi's parents and daughters, Marika's parents and their best friends, Ady and Louise Farkas were all invited to celebrate together. The next day they all went to the Synagogue, Gabi's parents and the girls to the Conservative Löwenstrasse Synagogue and all the others to the Synagogue in the Community Center of the Conservatives at Lavaterstrasse. Gabi and Sándor had reserved seats next to each other in the third row. I was allowed to stand between them. Gabi and Sándor were welcomed by their many acquaintances, and Gabi presented

⁴ Quoted from <https://www.swissre.com/about-us/our-global-presence/campus-mythenquai/architectural-history-of-the-mythenquai-part-3.html>

me as his young son. Both Gabi and Sándor had submitted their bid for their Torah reading, donating the money to the Jewish National Fund. It was Gabi's huge donation which left the congregation in awe. The breaking of the fast on Yom Kippur was celebrated at Sándor's newly rented apartment in the Enge district close to the River Sihl. Rozsi left Synagogue after the Yiskor⁵ service at four in the afternoon to prepare her famous Gugelhopf. Her maid, Margrit, had worked all day to prepare for the reception. The guests were all from Sándor's and Rozsi's circles: Sándor's sister Hermine with her husband, uncle Mucki, the Farkas couple, Gabi, Marika and me.

Chanuka 1952 was celebrated in the Castle with a Chanukia and a Chanuka bush (Christmas tree), again with Gabi's daughters. For the New Year 1953 Gabi invited family and friends to the Baur-au-lac Hotel. 1953 was ushered in.

8 1953

The year started with a storm and the collapse of the copper business. Gabi's TRACONT AG was under suspicion of serving as a turntable for espionage activities. The Swiss Political Police issued search warrants also for the private premises of Sándor and Gabi and confiscated documents. LIFE Magazine published its article about the Sixth Column working for Soviet interest, presenting TRACONT AG and Josef Cremer as the culprits. Josef Cremer was arrested by the Swiss Police in Zurich. Political charges against all of them were dropped quickly. However, Sándor and Gabi were left with horrendous pecuniary claims by the tax authorities, and Sándor was served an expulsion order because he supposedly had violated the conditions which formed the basis of his residency permit by working for TRACONT AG. Marika was left in the dark about the true situation. As if nothing had happened, they all spent a winter vacation in the Grand Hotel Bevedere in Davos, Sándor, Rozsi, Gabi, Marika, Trudi and me.

At the end of February Marika suffered a gall colic and had her gall bladder removed. She stayed for four weeks in the private clinic of Hirslanden for recovery receiving visitors and flowers every day. After that Gabi took her for a vacation to San Remo, but left her alone after a few days due to urgent legal and

⁵ yizkor, (Hebrew: may he [i.e., God] remember), the opening word of memorial prayers recited for the dead by Ashkenazy (German-rite) Jews during synagogue services on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), on the eighth day of Passover (Pesa), on Shemini Atzeret (the eighth day of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles). It is customary that people with both parents alive do not attend this service.

business matters in Zurich. In letters to her brother in the US, Marika describes her feelings of abandonment. Gabi returns after two weeks to pick her up. They also buy a miniature brown poodle from a renown breeder, after Gabi promised that he and his (!) son would take care of walking the dog. I remember how my grandparents took me to the airport to welcome mother's return, and the surprise of getting a dog. In his pedigree certificate he was named Casimir. To us this sounded odd as a name for the dog, and we renamed him Rolly.

The collapse of the copper business forced Gabi and Sándor to go separate ways. Sándor now dedicated his time and energy to his chemical company Rheinchemie. He had acquired the patent of the Miracle Ink developed by György Biro, the brother of Laszlo Biro, the Hungarian inventor of the first commercially successful ballpoint pen. Gabi used his other company, Fahag AG, and his money from the copper deals, to invest in adventurous inventions. He hoped to turn them into marketable products. His big bet was a newly developed detergent for dry cleaning, which he hoped would conquer European and American markets. The investment was risky and the tax authorities put a further squeeze on Gabi's financial situation. Ilona, the cook, was not replaced after she had a squabble with Gabi and quit. Trudi's duties were reduced to the afternoon. Ilse, the maid, took over Trudi's duties in the morning. In December 1953 bad news arrived from Hungary: Marika's ex-husband was arrested and accused of being a Western agent. He risked being sentenced to a long prison term. It reinforced Gabi's determination to be a true and Jewish father for me.

9 Marika's Judaism

Marika and her mother were baptized as adults after they were released from Kistarcsa concentration camp near Budapest in Fall 1944. This in spite of Sándor's fierce opposition to baptism. Sándor was still interned by the Gestapo as a privileged detainee on Svábhegy (Svab Mountain) in Budapest. Between May 1944 and until Marika's release, Sándor and Marika with her mother were allowed to correspond with each other in German, so the Gestapo could understand their letters. Both sides of the correspondence survived the war period. The issue of baptism was extensively discussed. Sándor was a proud Jew and a proud Hungarian citizen. Assimilation for him had its limits. When the Arrow-Cross Fascists overthrew Horti, Sándor was deported to Mauthausen, and finally to Berlin. Marika and her mother were hiding in Budapest in protected houses

with documents issued by R. Wallenberg and also by C. Lutz. They both opted for baptism at this late stage of the persecution of the Jews. When Marika got married to András she insisted that he, an atheist, although of Jewish descent, should be baptized as well. I was born and baptized Roman Catholic and remained, for the time being, uncircumcised.

Gabi's Judaism was alien to Marika and she never felt close to Gabi's parents. His Zionist enthusiasm left her indifferent. Gabi wanted Marika and me returned to Judaism and Sándor was a silent accomplice. When I reached the age to enter primary school in Spring 1954, the medical service of the City Schools deemed me too fragile to start school, although I could already read and count. I used to be ill frequently and the Jewish family doctor, Dr. Rosenbusch, suggested that my tonsils should be removed. Dr. Rosenbusch was also the Mohel of the Conservative Jewish Congregation of Zurich. Gabi wanted him to circumcise me at the same occasion. To convince Marika they told her that I suffered from a phimosis, a condition where the foreskin is too tight to be pulled back over the head of the penis (glans). Phimosis is normal in babies and toddlers, but in older children it may be the result of a skin condition that has caused scarring. It is not usually a problem unless it causes symptoms like difficulties and pains during urination. Needless to say that I do not recall such symptoms. But my foreskin went the same way as my tonsils, and Dr. Rosenbusch, while performing the circumcision alone, said all the customary brachot (blessings). I was schooled in Spring 1955 in the City School and at the same time in the Jewish Community Center at Lavaterstrasse for Jewish education classes. These were held twice a week for two hours each between five and seven in the evening. It was also arranged that I would be called János Makowsky, although my legal name was János Majtényi. The school principal, and also Marika, agreed to this because children of divorced parents were still treated as pariahs. Gabi actually would have liked to adopt me as his son and heir, but Swiss law at the time did not allow adoptions for people who already had children. He asked Marika to initiate a name change procedure which required the agreement of my biological father András. Only reluctantly Marika agreed. My father later told me that he was very hurt by the request. He finally signed his agreement with tears in his eyes while still in jail. In January 1956 the Hungarian lawyer brought the documents personally to Zurich. But at that point Marika was in no hurry to go ahead with the planned name change.



Marika and son, first school day, April 1955

The first week in the city school brought two surprises. One of the children in my class approached me asking whether I was Gabi Makowsky's son. "Yes", I said. "Good, so you are one of ours". It seemed that the other Jewish parents had instructed their children with whom to play. There were over forty children in my class, about three quarters were Protestant, and the rest Roman Catholic and Jewish in equal proportion. Jews and Catholics were usually from upward mobile families who only recently moved into the Enge district. The Catholic Church of Zurich Enge was only recently, in 1951, consecrated, and was not allowed to have its own church bell. Tensions between Catholics and Protestants were still virulent, and latent antisemitism, especially among the Catholics, the norm. Indeed, one of the Catholic children, Seppli, approached me also during the first week: "You killed Jesus!", "No", I said, and he grabbed me at my throat and threatened to beat me up. A few days later he approached me again. "You killed Jesus!", "yes", I said, I had learned my lesson. This time he really beat me up. I ran away from school, crying bitterly. Gabi enrolled me in self-defense classes for Jewish children, organized by Mr. Eisenring, a militant member of the Swiss Section of the Jewish Defense League. Next time I came home crying after another antisemitic incident, Gabi slapped my face for not defending myself properly. Gabi had a penchant for corporal punishment. In the Grand Hotel in Davos in 1952 he spanked me publicly during dinner in the dining hall of the Hotel because I did not behave properly. For the rest of our vacation I had to eat dinner with Trudi in the Hotel room. Marika told me later, that she was shocked and hurt. "Remember,", she told Gabi, "he is not your son". However, for me I was his son, and I internalized the punishments as perfectly justified. When I was five I even proposed a deal: Could I take an advanced portion of spankings and then have a free go for some misbehavior? Gabi smilingly agreed

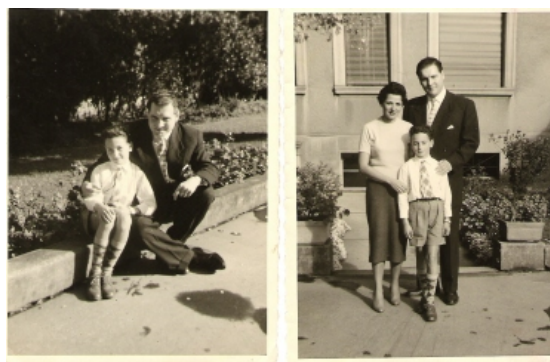
and was willing to give me ten spanking blows, but mother intervened. She could not approve of such a perverted deal.

10 Bankrupt again...

Gabi's financial fortunes remained elusive. The detergent business did not take off, the tax debts and the legal expenses took their toll, and, worse, financial guarantees Gabi had underwritten, had to be paid. Sándor was asked for help to avoid declaring bankruptcy first in 1954. Marika started to doubt the wisdom of her hasty marriage but a sense of loyalty kept her from considering divorce. Gabi was a good father to me, and she could not miss the growing male complicity between Gabi and me. He took me to the Züri Fäscht⁶ in 1954 and spent money lavishly on all the entertainments offered and seemed to enjoy it as if he was a child himself. Marika and I spent summer vacations with friends and families among Gabi's acquaintances in Riccione, then an upscale newly developing seaside resort near Rimini. Winter vacation were similarly spent in Kitzbühl, Austria. In 1955 Gabi's financial situation got worse again, and again Sándor was asked for help. Gabi's office moved from the Fraumünsterstrasse to a less expensive and less representative place at Freigutstrasse near the Orthodox Synagogue. Another attempt to turn an ingenious invention into a marketable product failed again. This time it was an electric high speed toy train with inclined tracks. His next attempt of starting a successful business was in portable knitting machines. His idea was to market them among housewives who then could knit at home and sell their products via a marketing organization. With each knitting machine sold Gabi offered courses on how to use its various modes of functioning and instruction sets for the production of sweaters, socks, shawls and winter caps. He hoped these knitting machines could repeat the success of the Singer or Bernina sewing machines almost hundred years before. During WWII the Swiss Army had used home labor to have the knitted parts of the uniforms produced while at the same time providing an income for the women of families in remote Alpine valleys and poorer rural areas. However, the textile industry had changed since, and home labor was not adapted to the needs of the fashion industry. Gabi was struggling and had to give notice to his long time assistant. Marika had no intention to help him out in his business.

⁶ Zurich's summer festival with luna park along the lake and spectacular fire works at night.

With the change of the government in Hungary in July 1956, shortly after Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalinist practices, my father was released from jail. The social unrest in Hungary reached its peak on October 23, when a student protest turned violent which led ultimately to Soviet intervention, starting on November 4 and lasting till November 10. Simultaneously Israeli, French and British troupes occupied the Sinai peninsula in reaction to Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal. The Swiss authorities, fearing shortages of fuel, ordered by decree that during the four Sundays between November 18 and December 9 the use of fuel driven cars be forbidden. On Saturday November 24, 1956, my father András sent a telegram from Vienna announcing his arrival by train in Zurich for the next day. He wanted to see Marika and his son before continuing on his way as an émigré to Paris. On Sunday morning Marika rushed to the train station in order to meet him. She told Gabi to join her a bit later and to bring me along. "And what shall I say to the child?", Gabi asked. "That you are not his real father and that you now bring him to meet his real father". A world collapsed for Gabi. During four years he did everything to be a good father, and now!? I remember how we walked on this car-free Sunday of November 25 from the Green Castle to the Enge station and further to Bahnhofstrasse in the direction of the main station. On the way Gabi told me where we were going, that we were to meet my father, and that he was not my father. "But you are", I said, "that is what what matters". And I embraced him tenderly. I had now two fathers, and six grandparents, I already looked forward to the additional birthday presents. There would be Gabi-papi together with mother, and András-papi, still a bit abstract and unreal.



András, Marika and me in November 1956

In early 1957 Gabi had an unsuccessful suicide attempt. One evening, working late in his office, he did not return home till midnight. Marika was worried,

and with Sándor she went to Gabi's office. There he was, sound asleep, with his head on his desk, in his right hand a loaded handgun still aiming at his right temple. There was also an empty whiskey bottle and a still half-filled glass, and a barely started, good bye note, addressed to his daughters and Marika. "I am sorry, I have reached the end of the road", but then it seems words failed him.

Gabi was bankrupt, not only financially. He had failed his Hungarian princess. His dream of being a Jewish father to her son turned into a nightmare. They even discussed divorce. When I was an adult and already divorced myself, I asked my mother whether she had ever loved Gabi. "Loved? I held him in high esteem", she said, "and I would not have left him while he was in despair. My loyalty to him would not allow it". She had told him as much in good faith, but she did not realize that what Gabi heard was the opposite. Gabi truly loved her. To him her loyalty sounded hollow. If ever he would get out of his mess, she would go.

11 The end

Gabi's two daughters had grown up. They were finishing their apprenticeship as laboratory technicians. and were preparing their Aliyah, their emigration to the newly founded State of Israel. They were active in the most socialist of the Zionist Youth Movements, the Hashomer Hatzair, and were already assigned their Kibbutzim, Baram and Tel Amal, respectively. Marlene (Mima), the older would leave with her fiancé Jochi at the end of 1957. Gerda (Dvora) and her fiancé would follow a few months later.



Gabi and his daughters, Marlene (left) and Gerda (right)

On February 5, 1958, Gabi was alone in the apartment in the Green Castle. Marika was late for lunch as usual. I was with a broken leg in the hospital,

ready to be released the next day. Rosl, our most recent maid, was walking our dog. Gabi sat in the armchair in the sitting room, right under the antique silver pendulum clock, an English make from the early 18th century. It chimed one p.m. In his right hand he held a handgun. He aimed it at his right temple. This time he did pull the trigger. The bullet went straight through, leaving a mark in the adjacent wall. Gabi had reached the end. Only three months before he had invited a professional photographer to take a family picture, right under the pendulum clock.



Gabi with parents and daughters, Marika and me, 1957

Marika did not remove the mark of the bullet in the wall. With the years she forgot about its existence, but in 1980, when the Green Castle was to be completely renovated and she had to move out, she showed it me, in a matter-of-fact way and without visible emotions.



Marika, the young widow in 1958