

Through Sick and Sin

Welcome all and follow me as I meander down memory lane in an attempt to retell some fascinating tales about my father, Victor Egar who came to India from Hungary in 1939. Unforseen circumstances saw him settle in this wonderful country until his death in 1997. If I maintain and keep up this blog, I also plan to include crazy family stories, my attempts at poetry and humorous anecdotes on my trave an air force wife.

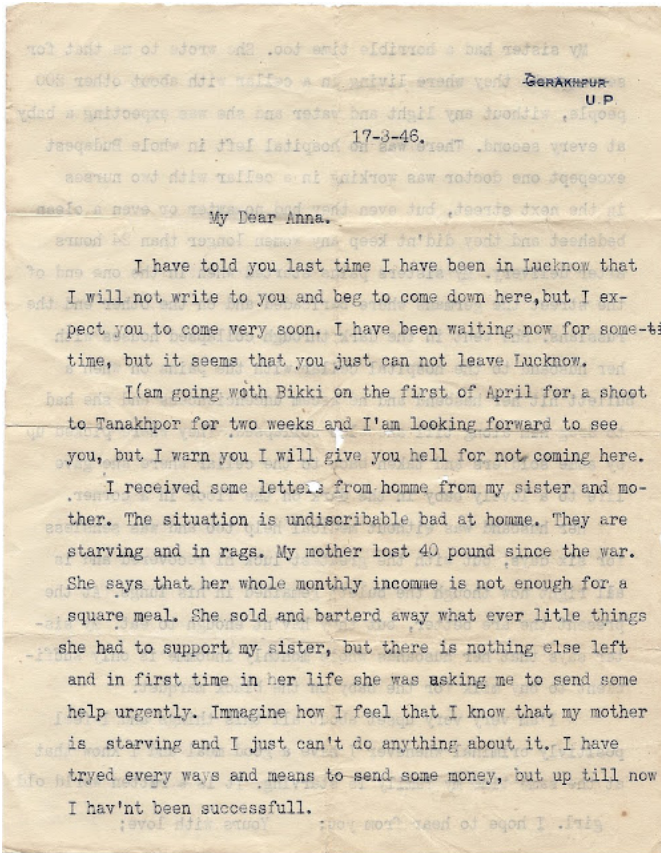
For all my new friends who have recently started following this blog.....please start at the very beginning.....it is a good place to start to get the full impact of this fasc tale.

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Sunday, 4 September 2011

And Life Goes On

After the trauma of Amrita's tragic death, Victor began to pick up the broken threads of his existence in Saraya. He lived very comfortably in a palatial bungalow surrounded by a sprawling garden. He had a cook and bearer who looked after his everyday needs and a "maali" to tend to the grounds. The staff got a handsome salary of four annas a month and Victor was told he was spoiling them by paying too much! His work at the clinic completely absorbed him. He had to face an outbreak of plague, closely followed by an epidemic of cholera. Tropical disease and medicine, which had so far only been book knowledge, learnt in medical school, became a harsh reality with which he had to quickly familiarise himself. Unfortunately, circumstances back in Hungary were not so good. World War II was raging on and Victor's mother Blanca and sister Viola were living in abominable conditions. He never wrote letters, but would sometimes furiously pound out a few lines on his old type-writer using just two fingers, unmindful of grammatical or spelling mistakes. This letter written to Anna in 1946 tells how harrowing the situation really was.



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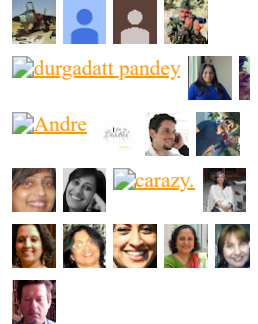
solitary wanderer

Gurgaon, Haryana, India

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My sister had a horrible time too. She wrote to me that for seven weeks they were living in a cellar with about other 200 people, without any light and water and she was expecting a baby at every second. There was no hospital left in whole Budapest except one doctor was working in a cellar with two nurses in the next street, but even they had no water or even a clean bedsheet and they didn't keep any women longer than 24 hours after delivery. My sister's pains started when in the one end of the street the Germans were barricaded and on the other end the Russians. She went in the dark through collapsed houses with her husband to the hospital cellar with the pains on when a bullet hit her husband and he became unconscious and she had to drag him along till she also collapsed. They were picked up by some soldiers and taken back to the cellar where she gave life to a lovely baby in the dark on the floor in a corner.

Her husband was without medical help too and was senseless for six days, but with the greatest luck he recovered and is all right now though the bullet remained in his lungs. At the present they are better, but they haven't enough to eat. My sister says that her husband's whole monthly income is only sufficient to buy milk for the baby on the black market.

I'm very very upset about all these things and I feel positively criminal whenever I have a good meal and I know that at the same time my family is starving. It is a rotten world old girl. I hope to hear from you; Yours with love; Victor

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On My Bookshelf

Season of the Rainbirds by Nadeem Aslam
 The Dovekeepers by Alice Ho
 Life Without Summer by Lynn Griffin
 The Forty Rules of Love by El Shafak
 The Writing on my Forehead by Nafisa Haji
 When God Was A Rabbit by S Winman

Feedjit

Victor eventually sent for Blanca after the war and she arrived in India in 1948. She was quite content living with him in Saraya, pottering about the house, cooking Hungarian meals and overseeing the upkeep of the garden. At one point of time the household included Nina, her mother Anna,


her half sister Kiran, me, and a dog. Blanca was overheard sorrowfully telling the neighbour "My poor son is living surrounded by women....even the dog is a bitch"! Her command over the English language was not very good and she had to tactfully be told that this was not a very complimentary thing to say.

Regrettably, over the years irreconcilable problems arose between Nina and Blanca and she chose to return to Hungary in 1963. It broke Victor's heart to say goodbye to her because he knew it was unlikely that they would meet again.

Viola, Victor's older sister, whom he had last seen in 1939 decided to visit in October 1982. He travelled to Delhi to receive her, and found much to his embarrassment, that after forty three years he could not recognise her. He had to actually ask a number of old women at the airport who they were before he finally spotted a dodderly old lady, standing in the wrong queue, who turned out to be his sister.

Viola had planned to stay three months but found the Indian climate unbearably hot, the food too exotic and the environment extremely dusty and dirty. When she developed a stomach ailment, it terrified her to think she would die in this strange country far from her own loved ones. She returned to Hungary after just three weeks.

Victor felt a mixture of relief and sadness after she left. Their conversations had been difficult - his Hungarian was rusty and her English was not very good. All the friends he inquired about were dead and all the remembered places of his youth did not exist any more. It was depressing for the siblings who had once been close, to find that they had nothing in common anymore.

Posted by [solitary wanderer](#) at [14:45](#) 7 comments: 

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Friday, 2 September 2011

Big Game Hunting



Victor on "shikaar" in Nepal

Kirpal Singh Majithia's younger brother Surjit Singh Majithia, was the first ever ambassador to the neighbouring kingdom of Nepal from 1947 - 1949. Nepal, at that time, was ruled by the powerful Rana dynasty, who held sway till 1953. Surjit Singh was also deputy defence minister in Jawaharlal Nehru's 1952 ministry and cut a very dashing figure in the corridors of power.

In those days big game hunting was a sport encouraged by the British and indulged in by maharajahs and wealthy landowners. Tiger, leopard and rhino heads were much sought after trophies, glassy eyed deer and wild buffalo adorned bungalow walls and coffee table legs made of elephant feet were very fashionable to have on display in ones drawing room.

Kirpal himself was an avid and renowned marksman and every winter there would be meticulously planned "shikaar" trips organised by the Ranas, in the Terai foothills of Nepal. The family owned elephants would be sent up a couple of months in advance to set up camp and get ready for the arrival of the esteemed members of the hunting party. Victor and Amrita were always included in the exclusive guest list and even after she died, he continued to enjoy this annual expedition.

They would arrive at the camp to find tents neatly pitched, hot water for baths ready and bearers at hand to meet all demands. Meals were always formal affairs and after a hard days sport, men would change into dinner jackets and ladies into their evening gowns and there in the middle of the jungle amidst the buzzing of mosquitoes, a toast would be raised by candlelight to the victors of the day.

I have seen unbelievable 16mm footage of some of these shooting sprees. First would come the "beaters", whose job it was to frighten the hidden beasts towards the waiting line of elephants. They would walk through high grass, hollering, jumping and thrashing the ground with sticks, all the while clanging pots and pans together to create an unholy cacophony. There were a couple of instances where a tiger turned around and badly mauled one of these hapless men but that never diminished the enthusiasm and excitement of the "haaka" or beat.

Frightened animals big and small, would blunder out of the grass, running for their lives, only to be meet by a wall of elephants being urged on by their "mahouts". Atop each elephant sat a "sahib" with a high powered rifle and what followed was carnage of the worst kind. There is no sound in the old movies but one can see the impact of the bullets ricocheting off a rhino's thick hide again and again, until it is finally brought down.

Soon after Victor married Nina in 1954, he decided to take her along to experience the thrill of a tiger shoot, which as it turned out was the last time he would ever hunt again. A piteously bleating goat was tied as bait beneath a tree while they clambered up into a "machaan". This was a crude blind constructed high up in the branches, where they would have to make themselves as comfortable as possible and settle down to wait in complete silence. Towards dawn a tigress emerged stealthily out of the scrub and padded towards the goat. Victor silently took aim and fired, bringing the rising anticipation of the past hours to an abrupt end.

Nina was completely devastated and wept uncontrollably, sickened by the sight of such a beautiful animal slaughtered in cold blood. She later told Victor if he wanted to impress her he would have to meet the tigress on her own grounds, without a weapon or the safety of a "machaan". She made him swear then and there, never to hunt big game again and it was a promise he would always keep.

Despite his reputation as a big white hunter, it was from my father Victor that I inherited an unusual love, understanding and respect for animals. When I was growing up we would still go out to the jungle every winter but he would only shoot the occasional jungle fowl for the "khansamah" to prepare for dinner. These outings became more of a weekend getaway in which we were privileged to observe wild life in an astoundingly beautiful natural habitat.

I am also making it a point not to comment on what I personally thought of sporting traditions in those days. Life styles were different then and it is not my place to sit in judgement of what was the norm in a bygone era.

Posted by [solitary wanderer](#) at [12:59](#) 5 comments: 

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Elephants on "shikaar"

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