

A Miracle in the Cathedral

Background Information:

The following story was sent to this author over the Christmas week of December 2011 from László Tornyos in Hungary. His parents were the principals in this remarkable account of devotion and sacrifice from the period of late 1944 to the bombing of the cathedral on March 4, 1945. Along with this account of his parents were old photographs from their lives before the war and after, as they raised their children as a family in Hungary. The pictures in many cases needed repairs to correct deficiencies in the images, and both the photographs and the final draft of their story, as you will now read, have been reviewed for accuracy by Mr. Tornyos prior to the posting up on this website.

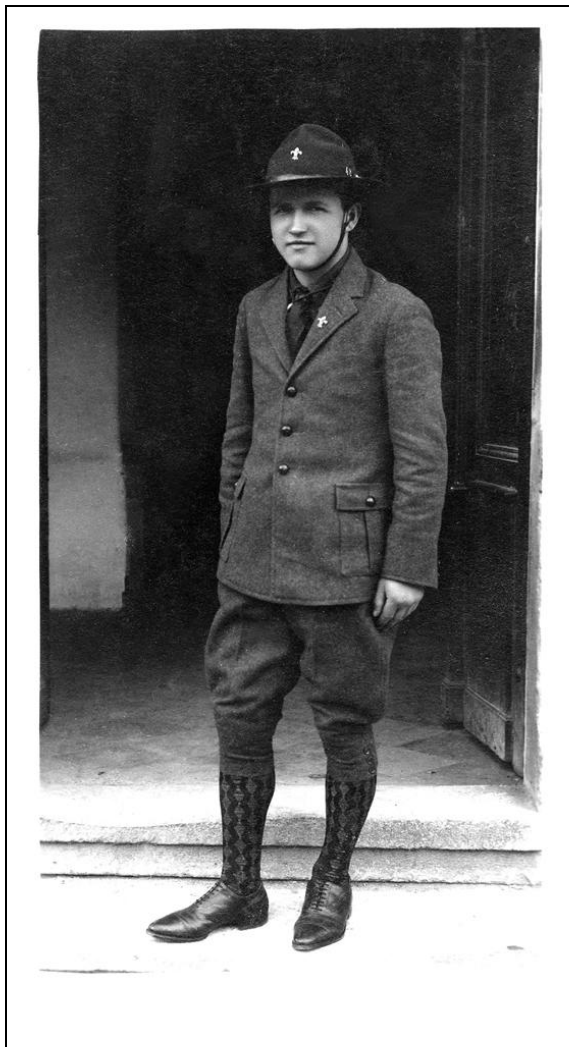
The Author

The Story Begins...

My father was born in 1907 and my Mother in 1910. They lived in Nagykanizsa, Hungary for most of their lives including the war years. The father's family had ten siblings and his older brother, József Tornyos, eventually became a priest at the Szombathely Cathedral prior to the war, and was still attached to the cathedral at the time of the bombing in 1945. One of my father's sisters also became a Nun.

Towards the end of 1944, my father was drafted into the Army as were all healthy males at the time, and after some training, was sent to the front to fight the advancing Russian troops near Lake Balaton. This battle took place in the vicinity of Lepsény and Enying in an attempt to stop their advancement Westward.

(1927 @ 20 years old in 'Levente' uniform.)



My mother was very worried about this and she often tried to follow his movements where-ever he went. She did mention that she followed him close to the front lines – sometimes at night, asking other soldiers of his whereabouts. She traveled to Hajmáskér and Várpalota and found herself at one time in a “No Man's Land” between the fronts. She would carry a basket of food, and tobacco to barter with the Hungarian Troops. She was warned on several occasions not to travel to the front lines searching for her husband as it was too dangerous for her. She continued her searches however, but was never able to connect up with him until early in 1945. She would sometimes leave her packages with other soldiers behind the front lines, and ask them to forward these packages to where her husband was. She was a fearless woman by nature and could not be talked out of these trips to the front line.

Towards the end of the war in 1945, my father was seriously injured in the battle of Balaton against the Russian Army. He sustained his injuries as he was laying in a foxhole (or trench), when a Russian hand grenade hit a tree trunk behind him, and it exploded spraying shrapnel that immediately wounded him. He had the sensation that his whole body was torn apart and it was missing from the waste down. He said farewell to life on this earth and began praying as he laid in the bottom of his foxhole. After awhile, another soldier near-by started to yell for help which made my father realize that he was still alive. He tried to turn to his left side to raise his right foot. That is when he saw that the toe of his boot was missing along with his toes. Unable to turn to his right side, he then started to scream for help, fearing that he would bleed to death.



(1937 The Young Wife Anna)

The medics arrived and applied a tourniquet to stop the bleeding and bandaged his wounds. They carried him to a peasant's cart using a stretcher along with 5 or 6 other wounded soldiers. They left immediately at a fast pace while bombs and grenades were exploding all around them. My father and those who were wounded were taken to Balatonalmádi where a temporary military hospital had been set up in a school yard. Here they removed his right leg leaving a 10 cm stump below his knee. His right foot and leg had been shattered by the shrapnel and hanging by tendons. They operated on him without any anesthetics or painkillers. There was also a hand size piece of flesh missing from his buttocks. He was shortly removed from the field hospital and sent back to the military hospital at Szombathely.

My mother, on the other hand, was more fortunate. She was always a homemaker with no outside job, but helped her husband in the glass business. She was a devoted wife and spent much of her time raising the children as was the custom in those days. Her husband had heard of the bombing of the cathedral while in the hospital, but was under heavy sedation, and was receiving medications to relieve the pain from his wounds, so he did not mention the bombing at the time of his wife's treatment. My mother did not talk much about this day's events either for the remainder of her life.

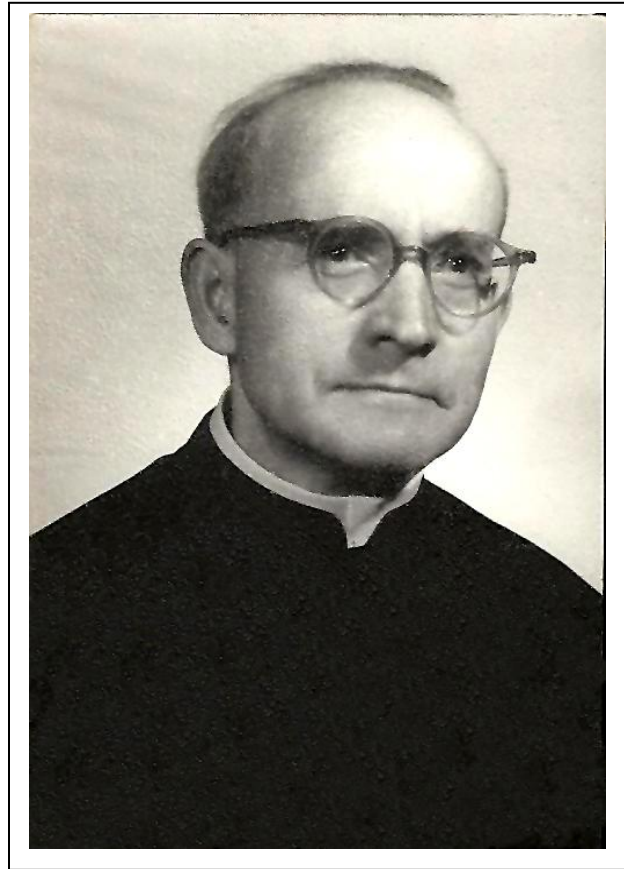


(1954 Family Photograph)

However, she related and did talk about the reason for her visit to Szombathely on March 4th, 1945. She had traveled to Szombathely and arrived before the 10:00 AM Mass. She did not know anyone in Szombathely except for her brother-in-law, who was a priest at the cathedral. She did attend the service in the morning and waited inside the cathedral for her brother-in-law after the service, in prayer and contemplation for her husband. While waiting for her brother-in-law, Joseph Tornyos (the brother of her husband), who on this very day ended the morning service for Bishop Sándor Kovács.

Her brother-in-law was also involved with a reception at the mid-day luncheon that had been planned in advance to be held in the Bishop's Palace right after the service. He was not available to meet with his sister-in-law immediately after the service. She was expecting to get his help in obtaining the release of her husband from the hospital and then travel back to Nagykanizsa for further recuperation at home.

(At the sound of the warning sirens, the Sacrament was immediately taken to the crypt for safe-keeping by Associate Pastor Joseph Lelkes.)



(1964 József Tornyos, Priest at the Cathedral)

(Author's Note: As the three great doors at the front of the cathedral would have been closed at the sounding of the air raid warning, she would have probably taken a seat in the forward pews near the small Pulpit on the North side of the isle. From this position she would be able to see the entry door of the South Transept, and he would also be able to see her in the Nave as he entered the cathedral through the Transept Door from the Bishop's Palace, having come through the iron gate in the privacy wall around the garden at the back of the Bishop's Palace.)



While waiting in the cathedral and prior to the first bombing run by the 485th. Bomb Group at 12:42 pm, Mrs. Tornyos was in the Nave, soon hearing the wailing of the warning sirens outside, alerting all in the city to the dangers ahead. She never talked about this precise moment or where she was at the time of the bomb's bursting through the roof of the cathedral. She did say often, *"It was terrible, everything was shaking all around, there was a great cracking of wood, the falling in of the ceiling and roofing material all around her."*

Dust and smoke now filled the air about her, it would have been difficult to breathe. *"This is when a formidable "Blessing" came from God and surrounded her for protection somewhere near or at the small Pulpit."* She had survived the concussion and heat of three 500 lb. bombs, all exploding above and around her. She often said: *"It was a miracle, ... A Very Large Miracle."*

She always emphasized that none of her extremities were broken – not even one bone.

Above Photographs: The Bishop's Archives

Her Son now continues:

At the time we did not give her experience any significant thought, but now, being further away from the events, and with new information, we think that we know what happened that day in the area of the small Pulpit. The rescuers found my mother (probably unconscious, by Author) under a pile of debris within the total devastation inside the cathedral. Someone, upon finding her, assumed that her arms and legs were broken, and this was picked up and published in the documents and newspapers of the

day. In reality, she was rescued from the debris and rubble, and was immediately transported to the hospital with bruises for further examination. They then determined that she had no broken bones nor had she sustained internal injuries, and released her that very day. It is quite possible that she learned from her brother-in-law (the priest at the cathedral) later, what the local newspapers wrote about her injuries.

My father's convalescence was lengthy but he did recover from his wounds, and received an artificial leg, and eventually learned to walk with the aid of a cane, and he also learned to ride a bicycle. He, with his wife of many years, raised their children and operated a glass store in Nagykanizsa where they lived their life together. In his business he repaired windows, sold new glazing (windows) for new construction, as well as glass for picture frames.

End



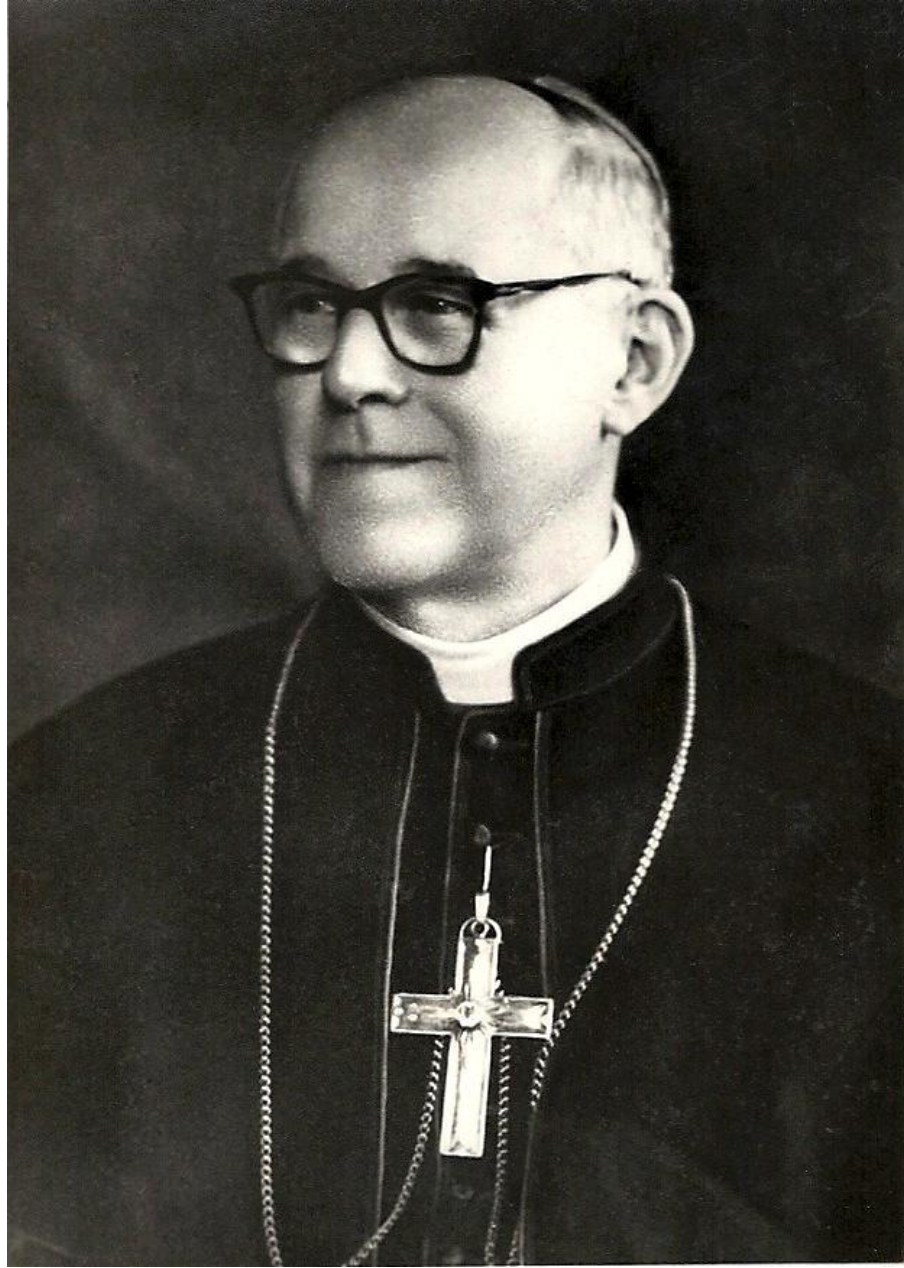
The Family Tornyos: 1956
(Erzsébet, Mária, László, Anna and István)

In Conclusion: I wish to thank Mr. Tornyos for this personal account of his mother and father, and for allowing me the use of his family's photographs and story to help me understand and appreciate his mother's words: "The Extraordinary Miracle" that indeed took place within the Cathedral on March 4, 1945. It would surely be fitting to have a memorial candle at the second column on the North side of the Nave (to remind those who visit or attend the cathedral regularly), that would remind us all of God's Divine Mercy and Protection amongst the chaos and destruction of that day, that has been so profusely recorded in historical photographs and accounts since then.

All photographs and accounts in this article remain the property of László Tornyos and are used here with his kind permission in advance.

Wrapped in Eternal Sleep a few feet away rests the Bishop who took upon himself personally, with God's strength and support, the Reconstruction and the Rededication of this very same cathedral two years later on September 7, 1947.

The Author.



Bishop Sándor Kovács



Anna Tornyo

1985