

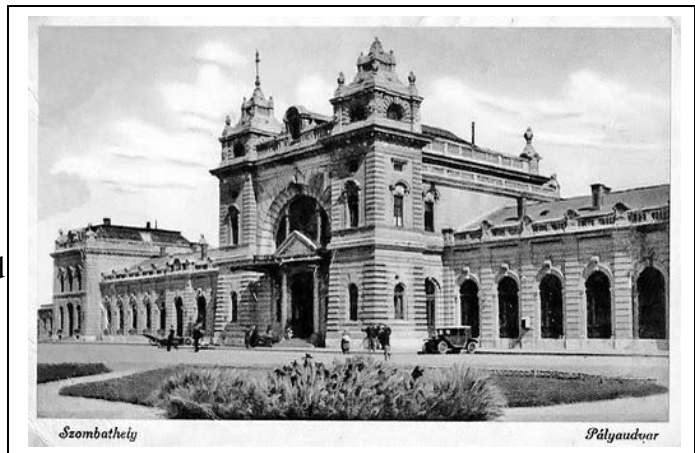
Memories of September 1947

by Paul Kalotay

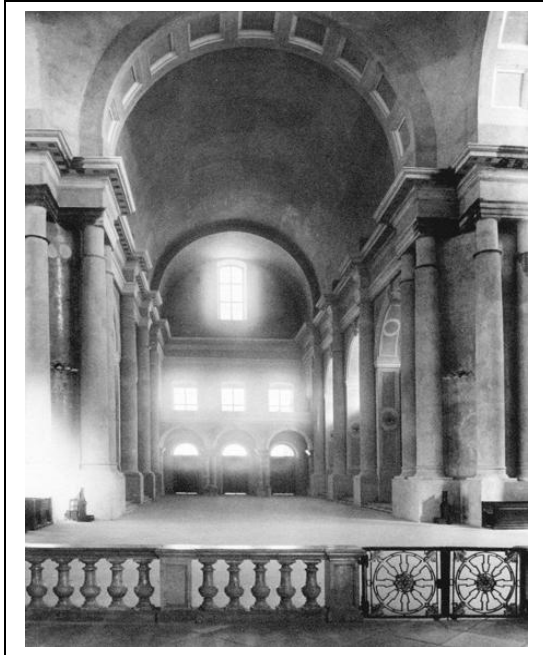
Author: The following story was received from Paul Kalotay in December of 2011. As a young man, he was associated with the Cathedral and served as an altar boy under Rev. Dr. Gyula Géfin, (1889-1973), Rector and Director at the Seminary in 1945. As a young lad in Szombathely, Paul was very much interested in reception of radio broadcasts (both standard and short wave), and had a keen interest in electronics and all things electrical. The stories that will now unfold are his recollections of the two days in September 1947, when the Cathedral was re-consecrated on Sunday the 7th. and the following Monday's events at the town's Főtér (or Main Square), where the Marian Congress would be held on the 8th. It was estimated then that the crowds in the city for this two-day event would be in excess of 100,000 people. As the Cathedral is reported to have held 5,000 worshippers (all standing), plus additional dignitaries and visiting clergy seated in the Sanctuary areas, Paul's particular skill set and interest now come into play along with others of the group, starting a few days prior to the Sunday's re-dedication. A sound system was going to be needed in the Cathedral as well as for all the visitors in the city who were not able to get into the Cathedral.

After the bombing of March 4, 1945, reconstruction begun and by late spring of 1947 enough work had been completed that plans were made to re-consecrate the Cathedral early in September. In the early months of 1947, American Hungarians from Szombathely and the county of Vas had learned of a need for an organ to replace the one destroyed by the bombs, to be used at the time of the dedication. Donations were accumulated here in the United States to purchase an electronic organ (from Wurlitzer or Hammond), and this unit was crated up and shipped to Szombathely in advance to arrive before September 7th. By ship and rail the unit traveled to Szombathely and arrived several days prior to the celebrations.

Paul now writes: "A group of us who were headed up by Gömbös László greeted the arrival of our new organ at the railroad station and we moved it into the organ loft area at the back of the nave upon arrival. The two large speaker cabinets, that also contained the amplifiers, measured 3-3.5 feet squared and approximately 2 feet deep and were placed on pedestals so that the sound would travel out over the railing of the choir/organ loft and into the nave. The keyboard (klaviature) was not very large and was mounted in a wood framed console that was not visible over the railing of the loft. The organ came with a freestanding bench for the organist to sit upon.



The keyboard was medium sized, nowhere near the multi-level keyboards of today, but closer to the size of a smaller piano-keyboard, and there were foot-pedals as well. The speaker boxes as well as the keyboard console were of a very simple design, wood constructed and without decoration or ornamentation as I remember.



The new organ had arrived just days before the festivities. Gömbös and all of us, who were part of the “public address crew” in these subsequent days preceding the service of rededication, were busy with the wiring inside and outside the Cathedral as well as cabling for Sunday’s service inside that required a microphone and additional speakers. It was a simple task getting the organ into position after uncrating the instrument, but some additional time was needed to connect everything together and to undertake sound checks.

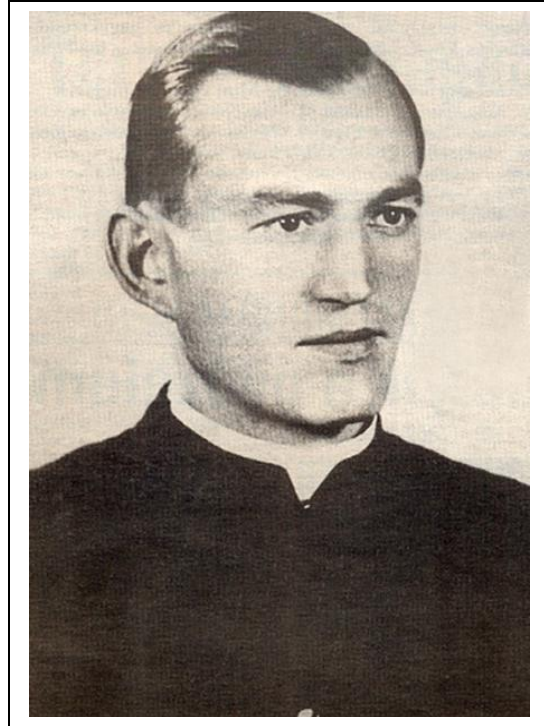
Finally the moment arrived after checking all of the connections, and the power switch turned on. The pilot lights lit up, as we held our breath that there would not be an explosion or smoke from an electrical short. A big sigh of relief could be heard from all of us in unison. It had gone well, excepting

for a single high stuck note that now made its presence known, and this was quite audible. Our mouths dropped as we realized that we now had a problem on our hands. There was nothing to explain away the stuck note and there were no obvious signs of damage in the transportation to Szombathely over the preceding weeks. While scratching our heads and moving around the keyboard and hitting the cabinet gently and pushing on its outside panels, somebody must have inadvertently done the right thing as we pushed and pressed the console around its sides. Now as this was an electronic organ, it would be hard to explain what took place. But as it turns out, it may have been an electric harmonium, which operated with air blown reeds; therefore it would have been easier to theorize that mechanical damage to the cabinet was the culprit. That’s about all that I can recall of this problem.

Now as we were quite happy about the outcome, we – or better to say – the crew, started to touch the keyboard and test the various keys and registers, set up the volume levels, and tried to get something like music out of the machine. As it turns out, the group was much better in electrical activities than in their musical abilities and accomplishments.



About this time – it must have been around 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening, when all of a sudden the Reverend Dr. Radvány appeared among us in the organ loft. It belongs to the story that he was also the professor of music, music history and singing at the Seminary. This is why we had a close working relationship with him over the days leading up to this evening, and we had gotten very close to him. He was our unelected but widely accepted leader, and we were allowed to call him “Miska bácsi” or Uncle Miska. He now arrives in the organ loft and you see him almost ecstatic having heard from outside our long musings with the keyboard. The Seminary where he lived was next door and either we produced enough volume that was heard everywhere, or he was sort of expecting something, and was waiting in the garden at the back of the Seminary where the professors and the future priests were spending many hours walking, praying, and reading their Breviarium. (A book containing the Offices for the eight Canonical Hours of Prayer for every day of the year. Beginning in the sixth century with the Monastic Breviary and by the Middle Ages, the rites of the church had now been expanded into five books: the Breviary, the Missal, the Manual, the Pontifical and the Processional.)



Anyway, he surveyed the situation, and saw that we were waiting to hear some words from him at that moment. He said nothing, saw that the seat was in position, he sat down on the bench, adjusting the seat by drawing it a little closer to the keyboard console, (seconds now seemed hours), and he then gave us huge smile as we all were waiting and holding our breath. The moment had come, there was no turning back, and a “Great Moment of Truth and Expectation” descended upon us all standing there, without even the smallest sound of our breath.

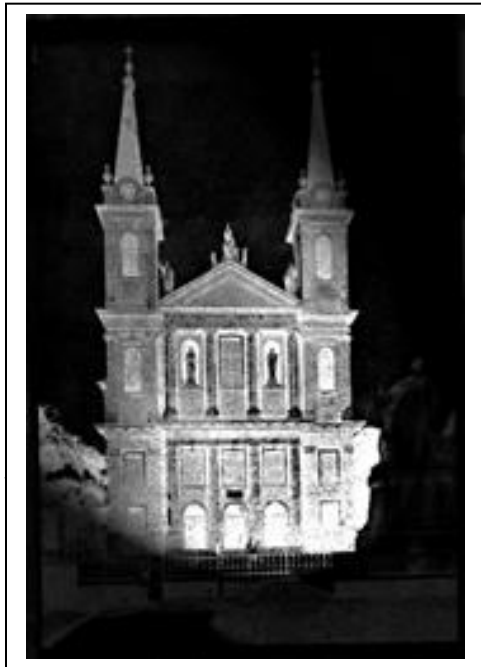
And he started to play the popular song: “Tico-Tico”, one of the very well known jazz-organ-numbers of those days. In an instant we were filled with joy, and needless to say, there was not a sacrilege committed, as the church had not yet been re-consecrated, but we all were filled with such relief at that moment that it’s almost impossible to describe. But as you can see, this moment was never forgotten now some 67 years later in my memory.”

Hear/Watch: Ethel Smith playing the organ, “Tico-Tico” (2:00 min. clip) from the film “Bathing Beauty” 1944, M.G.M. Studios. (The movie was 101 mins. in Technicolor, 11 reels, 35mm. film.) Click on the link below.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXrnuwZreHg>



Author: After March 4, 1945, by the end of the month the Germans had gone and the Russians now held a iron grip on the country. They would remain for forty-four years but the city continued to repair the damages suffered from the war. As the situation consolidated, schools reopened, and people started to live again. Shortly thereafter, plans were made by the Catholic Church and by Bishop Sándor Kovács to rebuild the cathedral. There was no shortage of help, in labor, donations and material, although some construction materials were very hard to come by right after the lost war. Anyway, the church was cleared of debris from the bombing and the repairs begun in earnest. By September of 1947, the Cathedral itself was ready for re-consecration, and Cardinal Mindszenty had planned to come to Szombathely as the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church. (One additional note: Cardinal Mindszenty knew the city well and had attended the local “Premontrei Gimnazium” as a youngster and had his final examination there as well.).



The Cardinal and Bishop also coordinated the re-consecration events with the opening of the Marian Congress that would be held on the following day on the 8th. as there would be well over 100,000 Catholics in the city. Additional events were also planned: A play at the Seminary on Saturday evening: “The Cathedral Speaks” (a play that commemorated the struggles of the original construction of the church which was begun in the 1790s under Bishop János Szily), following the play, the cathedral was bathed in floodlights. On Sunday afternoon a choral concert with multiple choirs was held in the cathedral, and beyond late into Sunday night several candlelight processions, as well as the “Great Celebration” on the Fötér the following day (a Monday). Accommodations were provided for trainloads of visitors that required use of public and private schools, buildings and homes to be made available for worshippers that would flood into the city as they would need a place to rest, sleep,

seek restrooms and perhaps take some nourishment. By God’s Grace, this was all accomplished with order and without incident - unlike the conditions that we have in these modern times with large crowds gathering together to celebrate, protest, or to create anarchy.

It can also be noted that during the reconstruction period, both the Bishop and the Cardinal were very keen to accomplish the task of rebuilding and this has been noted in documents from the era. It was not unusual to have them climb up the scaffolding to inspect the workmanship and progress of the repairs. (Authors note: My wife, who was then very athletic, climbed to the cathedral’s roof top along with her brothers and sisters and with thousands of other persons, forming human chains that passed down bricks, rubble and salvageable construction materials at the start of repairs.) Theft of valuable metals, building materials and art soon forced the cathedral officials to fence off the cathedral site to all for safety and preservation, and to begin the inventory of salvageable furnishings that remained undamaged inside, and then all would be safely removed to another undisclosed location for the reconstruction period.

Paul continues: “There was an obvious need to provide a microphone, pre-amplifier, amplifier and speakers for all the events, for the many tens of thousands of worshippers that were expected to participate in the events. None of the above was available in a country now in ruins, soon after the war. Therefore, a number of people came forward – mainly radio repairmen, radio technicians and a number of radio hobbyists (remembering in 1947, that radio amateurs were outlawed by the regime), gathered under the leadership of Gömbös László, to try solve the problems now facing us. Gömbös himself, being the best in the town, built from scrap parts an amplifier sufficient to provide the large venues with enough power and amplification to drive the loudspeakers. Incidentally the speakers were probably borrowed from the MAV Railway Company that had public address systems at their railroad stations, nobody else had anything usable. Cables had been left behind by the German troops, who had very systematically wired the city for their own telecommunications needs, were salvaged after they had left the city in 1945 by some resourceful individuals.

So far everything was developing nicely. But there wasn't a microphone in the city but little did we know, that the wheels were turning in neighboring Austria. The condenser microphone itself (the best available at that time), had been smuggled across the boarder from Austria by some enterprising individuals for the weekend festivities. It was the only microphone in all of Szombathely and it was moved around as needed both in the Cathedral and on the Főtér for all of the activities. Upon its arrival, Gömbös again came to the rescue. He designed and built a very special pre-amplifier for the microphone that would interface with the large power amplifiers that drove the speakers at the various venues.

The first installation took place in the Cathedral for the Sunday's re-consecration service with the proviso that everything would have to be moved early in the morning of the following day to the Főtér, for the gathering of the faithful. We were lucky that there was almost enough cable to prepare the wiring of this second installation in advance. The speakers, microphone and amplifiers and a small amount of connection cabling were all that were needed the following morning to be moved and reconnected. After the Congress had ended, Gömbös and our crew with the help of spirited followers and helpers, made the move of all equipment back into Cathedral by later in the evening on Monday the 8th.



Newspaper Photo fm. 9-7-47. The crowds that had gathered outside and could not get in for the service. The tree at the top was in front of a building that now holds the Cathedral Archives.

It was feverish activity up to the gathering on the Főtér, with the installation of equipment, and the setting of volume levels. Our equipment was installed at the platform just in front of the Trinity Statue which served as a background for the dignitaries and podium. We were all there, to spring into action if needed but fortunately this was not needed. There were no problems at all. At the end of the festivities, all of a sudden Cardinal Mindszenty appeared before us, followed by several church officials. He came to us, said thanks for the efforts, congratulated and shook hands with everybody. We all felt it was well worth it for all of our efforts.”



A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



F.



G.



H.

Photo Credits:

1. Railroad Station, Postcard (Turn of the Century) László Földes Collection.
2. Nave Interior, Photograph 1947 (or later), Bishop Archives, Szombathely.
3. Organ Loft, Photograph 1947 (or later), Bishop Archives, Szombathely.
4. Rev. Dr. Radvány, Printed Photograph, undated, Berzsenyi Daniel Knoyvtar, (Research Dept.).
5. Cathedral at Night, Printed Photograph, pre-War, Recreation by author.
6. Cathedral Square on Sept. 7, 1947. Newspaper photograph, Kepes Sziv. Sept. 20, 1947.
7. Marian Congress "A" Photograph 1947, Bishop Archives, Szombathely.
8. Marian Congress "B" Photograph 1947, Bishop Archives, Szombathely (Széchenyi István utca).
9. Marian Congress "C" Newspaper photograph, Kepes Sziv. Sept. 20, 1947.
10. Marian Congress "D" Newspaper photograph, Kepes Sziv. Sept. 20, 1947.
11. Marian Congress "E" Bishop Kovács Sándor speaking, Kepes Sziv. Sept. 20, 1947.
12. Marian Congress "F" Photograph 1947, Bishop Archives, Szombathely.
13. Marian Congress "G" Printed photograph from, Uj Ember, undated.
14. Marian Congress "H" Photograph 1947, Bishop Archives, Szombathely.
15. Colored Image of Bishop Kovács Sándor on cardstock. Original painting held by the Bishop's Palace.
16. Postcard from 1957.
17. Bomb damage photo of Marian Congress provided by Paul Kalotay.
18. Letter held by the family and photograph of Elevator Doors (2006).

The Russian troops take Szombathely (March 1945).

Author: Paul now concludes with his recollections of the day when the Russian soldiers entered the city at the end of March 1945 and who remained for the next 44 years. Due to the length of this story it has been placed here on the Website for viewers to read. There were no images available from the period, but it validates a second true story that is now available with photographs, in “Google’s Picasa Albums” via the search words: fotosbyfritz and then moving to the album entitled: “A Backstory” and clicking on the image to open the album.

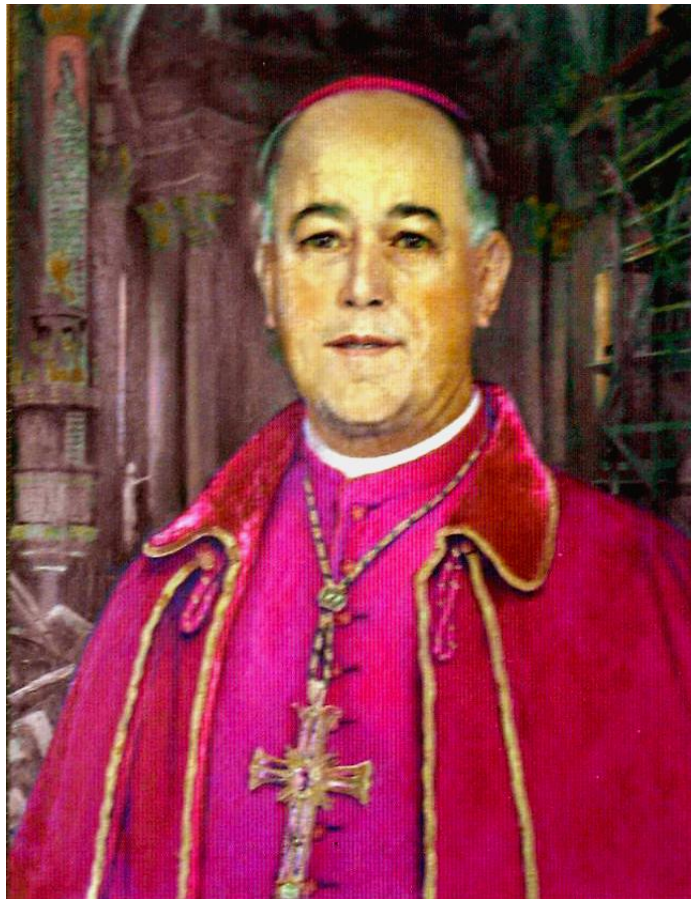
Paul continues: “...I was there on this very sad day when the Russian troops arrived in Szombathely in the last days of March 1945. As these troops made their final assault on the city, my family moved in with friends in their large house just outside of the city. We were hoping to escape the shelling and fighting in Szombathely as the front moved westward and closer to the center of the city. We stayed with friends, all three generations, for those last two days until the Russians arrived into the area of our refuge. Once again my family was forced to move now eastward, back towards the city walking opposite to the advancing Russian front. All that we had with us were the clothes on our backs as we walked back on the main road towards Szombathely. Along the way others who were also fleeing the advancing Russian front joined us. There were numerous families that continued to join us as we walked on the road hoping that if we all stayed together it would give us a better chance to reach our homes back in Szombathely.

After reaching the city it became obvious that there was no chance to get back into our apartment, so we headed toward a nursery which we knew had a big garden adjacent to the Seminary. We arrived there without major interruptions and were allowed into the Seminary where Dr. Gyula Géfin, the Rector of the Seminary, greeted us and was willing to put us up. As it turns out, this was the ideal solution, because – as we found out sometime later – our rather large apartment in the city was by this time occupied by Russian troops. Anyway, we settled in at the Seminary, specifically in the new Ala part of the building, where all the students lived in single cell units. Since there were six of us in my family, we got one cell and a room of one of the professors at the Seminary.

This is the place that we happened to be at the time of the shooting. The Reverend Radvány was near the main entrance to the Seminary when the Russian troops broke in, looking for and demanding women. The Reverend stood his ground and tried to stop the intruding soldiers. As we were told shortly, shouting followed by angry words and finally one of the Russian soldiers fired a shot into the man who stood in front of them. The Reverend collapsed to the floor, the Russians turned around and left. We heard the shot at the back of the Seminary where we lived, and by the time we got to the entry, the incident was over. As far as I know, the Reverend had been shot in the chest, possibly in the lungs. I do not recall what happened after these events, as we were all asked to return to our rooms. There was a doctor either in the Seminary at that moment or there was one near by, who rushed to the entrance area of the Seminary and was able to render first aid and thereby saving Reverend Radvány’s life. His recuperation took quite a long time from this wound as I remembered, but the good Lord insured his recovery as he was going to be called upon many times in the years following, in service to his Lord and Savior.

I do not recall how long after the above incident we stayed in the Seminary, but we could never go back to our original apartment, due to the occupation. We moved to my grandfather's house where we lived until 1953, when we were forced to surrender this house and we were expatriated to a small village near Szombathely. The family had to stay there for two years before we were able to move back into the city of Szombathely.

My family and I also signed the document that was presented to Dr. Radvány and you can find my signature at (1st. column, 7th. position) as did all of my family except my Uncle, who by this time was a POW. He returned to us two years later from Armenia. I also found your wife's and her family's signatures – what a surprise after 67 years and how vivid the memories still remain with me from this dark period in my life.” (Document can be found in Google's Picasa Photo Albums titled “A Backstory” – image #22, via the Search Words:) fotosbyfritz



Bishop Kovács Sándor
(1944 – 1972)

(Note the background in the above painting)

Author: I have received from Paul, an additional photograph that is a wide angle view of the Főtér during the Marian Congress. This image was taken from the location we believe to been the Hangya Building (the 1st. or 2nd. floor). To place this photograph into perspective I have preceded the 1947 image with a postcard from 1950's which will help identify the buildings across the Főtér. Buildings that were destroyed in 1945, have not been replaced by 1947, and have left spaces in this Southward looking overview of the crowd below.



Postcard from 1957 looking towards the Franciscan Church (eastward). On the right edge you can see a building with a parapet at the roof line and a signage for a store that was called “Vas Bolt”. In the next image, this building now can be viewed with many viewers on this balcony (now on the left side of the photograph) watching the proceedings of the Marian Congress going on below them. I wish to thank Paul for sending this rare perspective view of the crowds on the Főtér in 1947 that now follows.

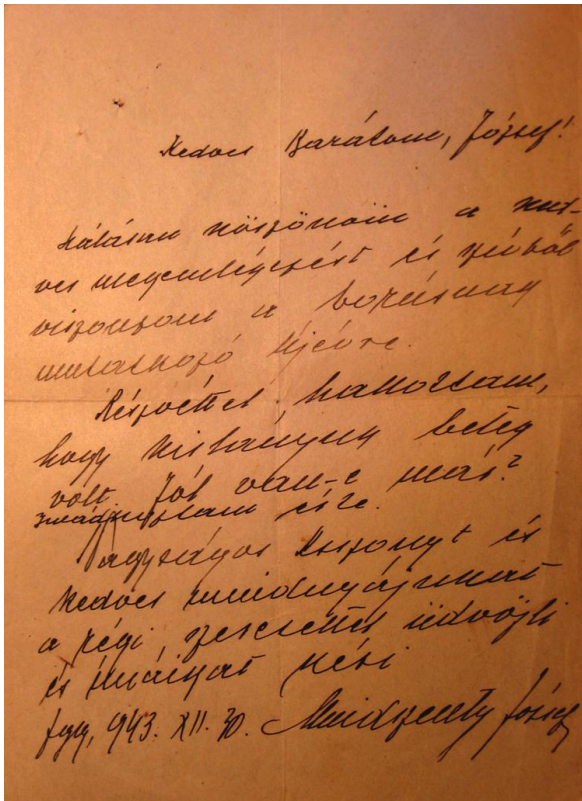




←Bomb damaged buildings still visible→
during the Marian Congress - Sept. 1947.

- *Memories of September 1947* -

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On September 9, 1947, before the Cardinal left the city to return to his cathedral, he made a private visit to a family who lived in the city and whom the Cardinal had married the parents many years earlier when he was then a priest. His small note in his hand appears above in Hungarian dated 1943.

My dear friend Joseph,
 Thank you gracefully for your kind remembrance and I return it from the bottom of my heart on the occasion of the dark-appearing New Year.
 I heard with regret that your daughter was sick. Is she feeling better by now? I prayed for her.
 My loving greetings to your honourable wife and to all of you, asking for your prayers.
 (Zgg = Zalaegerszeg) 1943. Dec.30.

Mindszenty József

*Kedves Barátom, József!
 Hálasan köszönöm a kedves megemlékezést és szívből viszonzom a borúsnek mutatózó Újévre.
 Részvétellel hallottam, hogy kislányod beteg volt. Jól van-e már? Imádkozom érte.
 Nagyságos Asszonyt és kedves Mindnyájátokat a régi szeretettel üdvözli és imádatot kéri
 Zgg (feltehetően Zalaegerszeg, magyarázat a szerzőtől) 943.XII.30*

As he entered the building he was greeted by the youngest member of the family in her finest dress, and with a bouquet of fresh cut flowers, she presented these to him with a greeting. They then entered the elevator together (above) and traveled up to the families apartment. The visit was for a short period of time (approx. 15 minutes) due to the Cardinals tight scheduling for his day's activities. (The pictures above were taken in 2006 and the letter was from a private collection of documents that had been saved by the family).