

Recollections of a Princess by Bob Little

Livia Molnar

a.k.a. Princess Livia Katalin

Growing up on the south side of Chicago, I was accustomed to various accents, foods, and customs of families who had immigrated from Europe. But that experience had not adequately prepared me for Livia Molnar. Ben Moffett had a vigorous basic science research program within our Department, and his histology lab was run by a stern, intense, Hungarian, 54 year old lady who ran a very 'tight ship.' She called orthodontic residents undertaking such research 'her boys.' My project kept me in her lab for hours and hours with much down time between lab steps during which Livia shared little tidbits of her background. She said she was a physician, lawyer, opera singer, refugee, and a former member of the Resistance in her home country of Hungary during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

I enjoyed the stories but thought she was certifiably crazy. My view began to change. A story in a local newspaper told of an attempted mugging in which the perpetrator had been apprehended by the intended victim. The victim was Livia. She modestly told me that while being attacked by the mugger, she quickly dispatched him with well placed Karate chops and a Judo throw. She then pulled out a revolver from her purse, fired two shots into the air to attract help, and then cocked the hammer and placed the barrel against his forehead saying "You will stay quiet until the police come." No big deal to Livia. She faced much worse while in the 'Resistance.' I thought, "Can all of this be possible?"

One of the department secretaries was eager to research her family tree and encouraged Livia to do the same. It would be fun. Within two weeks all Hell broke out in the Orthodontic Department. The State Department showed up and whisked Livia back to Washington D.C. for a coronation ceremony. She was the heir to the throne of the Hungarian Monarchy and Livia was to have the crown jewels that for decades had been stored at Fort Knox for the monarchy in exile. Unknowing of this diplomatic furor, I asked her "What did you do this weekend, Livia?" Without fanfare she said, "I had to fly to Washington (on a private jet, by the way) for a ceremony." I thought, "She really is nuts!" But then I read the newspaper description and saw photos of the crowns, jewels, and now Princess Livia Katalin.

Livia began to bring two grocery bags on her routine daily bus trip to UW. But there were no groceries in those bags. They were filled with pounds of crown jewels to show 'her boys.' She invited a few of us and our wives to her house where she had much of her collection spread out on her dining room table. I just had to try on one of the crowns and found it very heavy. It was tightly surrounded by over 200 diamonds, most the size of dimes. She pointed out that the inner lining was platinum since only platinum was to touch the skin of the royal. The other jewels on display were unbelievable as well. I had to protest that she must get these crowns, brooches, rings, etc. into a vault at a bank. The police came to transport them, but an appraisal had to be done before the bank could accept the treasure trove. That requirement did not work out very well since the representative appraiser from a Bellevue jewelry store said that the jewels and

crowns were priceless and providing a value estimate was impossible. Somehow that problem was later resolved and no more jewels came on the bus.

Her stories in the histology lab became more detailed and grandiose, but now I could no longer dismiss her claims. She actually was a cousin of the royals and spent her youth around Budapest and Vienna at various castles of the former monarchy. She actually was trained as a physician and lawyer. She actually was a trained opera singer and sang at all the best opera houses of Europe. She actually was in the Resistance and could blow things up and could easily handle an unsuspecting mugger, after all.

And it went on. When I asked one Monday about her weekend, Livia said she had attended a wedding. I innocently asked, "Oh? Where?" Livia casually replied "Monaco." Prince Rainier had sent his private plane to bring her to the wedding of his daughter, Princess Caroline. I am still in shock over that one.

President Carter tried to placate the Hungarian communist government controlled by Russia which felt entitled to all of the Hungarian crown jewels. In January of 1978 Carter ordered Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to give back the Holy Crown of St. Stephen, but the Russians were not satisfied. They wanted all that Livia had been given, two more crowns and many jewels. Threats were made. Livia's granddaughter was kidnapped for a week, but Livia held firm about the jewels. The final straw was when a rifle shot narrowly missed Livia as she walked across the causeway between the B and D wings leaving a bullet hole in the glass. And then she was gone. In fact, her whole family was gone within days. Oddly, all written news stories of Livia disappeared from the record. Today you won't find one word about her on an internet search. Hopefully, she and her family were made safe and secure, but who knows. And what about the crown jewels?

Princess Livia Katalin. Unique does not adequately describe her.