

**Vivian Törs, Permission to Speak, the Concealed Letters of  
Szendónia Pfeifer**

**MAY 19, 1937**

My Dear Böske,

I hope the Bar Mitzvah took place without any problems, and that Lali was healthy...Who attended and what happened?- write all to me. Édi was home with the Müller boy. They went back on Monday. As I told Gyula, Géza is still coughing. I would like him to go to Pest to see a doctor, but he's waiting until he's better so he can travel. Maybe, the summer heat will cure him.

Miksa secured a position for Édi at Gerbaud's. He accepted it today. He was in a big dilemma because Kepes brought him into Providentia Insurance, where he also works. Of course he was not pleased that Édi left the firm so quickly, because there was no one to replace him yet, and carry out his duties. Miksa says he's going to talk to Gerbaud so that Édi may stay with Kepes until he can find a new man to replace him. We told Édi not to allow this to happen. His pay is horribly low, 40 pengös, the first month, then 50, finally to 60 pengös. But Miksa said to just accept it because there will be more, shortly.

For us, it means more unplanned expenses, but what can we do? As soon as Édi is settled, there will be room for Lali. He should come when vacation arrives.

How are you with your eye? What news is there? What did Marika say, how did she like staying with us? Vilma and family are home now, and are well. What did you do for Pentecost Day? Was there anything appropriate for the holiday in the store? When are you coming out to see us?

Love and kisses to you, Szidi

**MAY 5, 1944**

My Dear Ones,

I received your letter. It is very wrong, Sister, if you can't keep yourself strong. Ilonka said that you are always crying. You know, this doesn't help at all, you will destroy your eyes, and your well-being. I am bearing it with iron resolve, and I am succeeding in overcoming the many useless tears. I haven't received any communication from Géza, with the exception that on the first week, the form accompanying his returned passport was in his handwriting. Since then, nothing. I also sent two parcels, but I don't know if he received those either. What reassures me a little is that Szöki Frommer has not written either. I can't imagine my poor old man like this, how can anyone?

We are staying strong. Édi continues going to work. He already has quite a reputation in the village, and several employers would like to have him. I am managing quite well, because Mrs. Steier is coming here to clean and to help, so I am not alone, because when Édi is not here, it is terrible being alone. The only problem is with the laundry. No one wants to do laundry at home, but we are not allowed to hire a laundress to come in. I have already washed the small items by myself. One of the socks is finished, let there be enough yarn left for the other. Is there any word of Jenő G\_\_? Yesterday, we were called in to the gendarmes and they recorded all of our personal information. I don't know, what does this mean? One must be ready for anything. Szerén wrote that Magda and family are living with them. At Jolán's, there are strangers, and also, Boriska, because they took his home away. Anna and family are still in the old place. They are well. Pista I\_\_ is also not in his home.

On Thursday, I went to the doctor. He measured my blood pressure. It said 165. I don't believe this, since it was at 190. It doesn't matter though, I did get some milk ration coupons.

No one is coming to our place. They are avoiding us as if we were lepers. But the good God is still keeping an eye on me, as Édi is still by my side, may it stay this way- I am not even asking his friend Józsi to take him on the trip.

Write as you are able to, this means a lot also. May God give all of us strength and health.

We kiss you with much love, Szidi

Géza's address:

Internáló Telep Garány U. 12 Bodzásujlak Zemplén megye

Write him a card once in a while.

**MAY 16, 1944**

My Dear Kind Ones,

I received Gyula's letter today. I am hurrying to answer, because I don't know if I will have time in the next few days. I am home alone, Édi is out working. Maybe he doesn't even know what is the news? I already learned this morning, our tenant showed us the newspaper. I am maintaining an iron resolve to keep from falling into despair. I also don't know what we can take, what not. The authorities here have not yet been in contact, but I am expecting them, any minute. Today was the weekly market and Mrs Gyermelyi was saying that they had already taken Mrs. Pfeifer to Tata, yesterday, but they took her husband to Komárom. Now, what I dread the most is that they will rip Édi away from me. If only my dear old man could be here beside me. Mrs. Spácz received a card from her husband saying that they took him from Nagy Kanisza to Sárvár, and that maybe they would take Géza there also. The rest, you can imagine. Where are, or where will the Szpéters be placed? The enormous amount of things that are here, where will they go?

If we are still here on Monday, I will write a card. Conversely, I will write from the new address. I hope that my letter will find you still there. May God give you better fortune. Be strong. Support each other as long as possible. There is still a good God watching over us.

While this is so, I can keep writing. I kiss you with much love,

Szidi

**MAY 29, 1944**

My Dear Szerénke,

I don't even know where to start. Because what I have gone through, and what I have see here is too much even for a horror novel. Firstly, Édi's parting. I thought I was going to die. All alone here in the huge upheaval. What was fortunate was that Teri Spácz and her mother helped me, and they even slept here, so somehow it was bearable. I emptied the entire house and placed the contents into storage. I made an inventory, the local authorities would not sign it. A finance officer was also making an inventory. He stayed behind when we left. Supposedly, he was going to lock up the house. There is a Hungarian Junior Officer living in Józsi's room. The bed and other items remained there. As distraught as I am about Géza, I was so happy that he didn't have to witness the destruction of his entire life's work. Last week, I received a few lines from him. Only on the delivery notice, he wrote a few lines, that he can receive a parcel every 8 days, up to 5 kg. He sent home his winter undershirt. A tightly folded-up slip of paper fell out of the parcel. Apparently, Frommer smuggled it in. I guess Géza didn't have the guts. I don't understand why they are not allowed to write home? I sent him a parcel from home, and will do so from here, if I am able. I brought the stove from the summer kitchen. There is a large, open shed here in the courtyard, we set it up there. All the residents cook here, because they didn't bring one. We left on Friday, at 11 o'clock. Big vehicle crammed with mishmash. We had to ride on the outside of the packed cars, because the local authorities sat with the drivers, as guards. The entire market square was filled with people. Why, it was horrible, but we endured it. We didn't shed one tear, so they wouldn't see us cry. We arrived after an hour. We had to get down in front of the Jewish Prayer House, where they would tell us where we are going. What I saw there is unforgettable. The long, narrow courtyard, completely filled with luggage, bundles of bed linens, cupboards, dressers, dazed people, the rain beating down on them, because that had also begun to fall. I cannot speak of the despair I felt, I thought we would have to live there. Szerén Gladi lived there, and she greeted us in tears. They assigned us quarters, and now we are here. It is a pleasant neighbourhood around here, villas with spacious courtyards. The car let us off here, everything was dumped in the yard, with us having to take everything inside. What a hovel was assigned to us, a long, narrow room with a bad door and window. The lowlife tenant was in the process of moving himself out at the same time. I am together in this hole with the Spáczes, and Mrs. Frommer (Ilonka Mallinger), so we are four. Right away, they set to whitewash, scour, and filling

holes, so it wouldn't smell so much. I brought a roll of lightweight carpet paper, we lined the room with it, and set up the beds, so at least we had a reasonable place to sleep. I brought a bed, and 6 mattresses, the Spáczes, a folding cot, Mrs. Frommer, a chaise-lounge, and the Spácz daughter is sleeping on the floor on two mattresses. I also brought a smaller cupboard, Mrs Spácz, a double kitchen cupboard. My cupboard didn't fit into the room. It is standing in the hall. There is no kitchen, but there is a pantry, where we stored crates, etc. I also brought the stove, all the foodstuffs, clothing I could think of, one outfit for Géza, and Édi. Why, you can imagine the state I'm in. But now, let them not force us to move us again, that would be dreadful. We are cooking together, Mrs.Frommer, Mrs. Spácz, [she] is the chef, she cooks very well. I am the organizer, I think we are going to fit together well. We haven't met with any of the others from Zsámbék, although they don't live far from here. There are about 24 of us here in this courtyard, from Budakészi, Kistétény, and Biai. Kramer is here also, it is horrifying how he looks, disconsolate, ashen, helpless. His housekeeper is with him. He recognized me. We spoke a little. His son killed himself before they left. Now he is constantly searching for him, and cries. Where it is possible, I am trying to avoid company-- there is always constant talk and complaining. But enough of this, because 1000 pages would not be enough.

Was Édi up to see you? I won't write separately to Lolánna, I don't have the patience for it now. Show her my letters if she's interested in seeing them. I send her many kisses, also.

I hope you are recovered? Géza is still in Garány. God be with you, I send everyone many loving kisses, Szidi

My address: Veisz Budafok Pannonia utca 54

**May 30, 1944**

Hamvai Gyula úrnak Budapest

Kerepesi-út 38 sz.II

My Dear Ones,

I arrived favourably on Friday afternoon, at 1:30. I have settled in as well as possible. I am sharing housekeeping with the Spáczes, and with Mrs. Frommer. There is a good courtyard, roomy and pleasant. Édi wrote, still to Zsámbék, from Vác. I don't know if he's still there. Géza also wrote last week, but only on the parcel label, because he sent his laundry home. He is asking for a 5 kg parcel, every 8 days. Perhaps I can send them from here, with Mrs. Frommer, since her husband is with him. I spoke to Klári, on the telephone, and they also wrote about it. It is impossible to carry out what they discussed. The Spáczes procured the same for me, in writing. When I settle down a bit, I will write more. The miracle is that I lived through all this and kept my health. Do write...

I kiss you with so much love, Szidi

Pfeifer Gézané Budafok Veisz: Pannonia utca 54



**JUNE 3, 1944**

Hamvai Gyula úrnak Budapest

Kerepesi út 38 sz II-21

My Dear Ones,

I hope that you have received my letter of last week. Nothing has changed since then. There is no news from Géza. Because of this, I have plunged into doubt. I received a letter from Magda on Friday. They received two postcards from Édi, which they sent to me. My poor dear, he hasn't gotten anything from me, from here yet, because he left Vác on the 28th. He wrote to them from Dombovár because he didn't know my address.

Magda also shared some sad news. They took Imre, Gábor, and 19 others from the store, since then, they know nothing. No one is spared the blow. The Irmas haven't written here yet. They must have received my letter? I hope that you are keeping well, healthwise. Who was called in from the family? Now I would ask you, dear Gyula, if it doesn't cause too much difficulty, go to Károly Spácz' tailor shop, his address: Tormai Leczél u. 15. He is available 8-1, 3-6. He would like to speak with you, regarding my situation. I am planning to write to Irma today. Szerén is also sending parcels to Géza, the question is, is he receiving them? With the exception of the money, nothing has come back to me, nor to Mrs. Frommer.

I kiss you with much love, Szidi

Pfeifer Gézané Budafok

## JUNE 7, 1944

My Dear Ones, I received your card, so I will first reply in connection to it. I would very much like it if you would slip Géza's returned card into a letter. Likewise, the 100P which we posted from Zsámbék on the 24th was returned here by the postman on the 30th. It said on the envelope that he had moved. I posted a parcel of food and some clothing on the same date, but that was not returned. But then, Mrs Frommer also mailed some money, and that did not come back either. But they are both together. I don't understand, how he did not get my cards, as you write, although I wrote very frequently, and slowly, slowly, I prepared the poor dear about the events. First, I wrote that that Édi's friends had already been called in, then I wrote that he left, and so on. I never received any notice from him, except that at the beginning of last week, he sent back a parcel of dirty clothes, and he wrote a few lines, only on the mailing slip, that he is well, and that every 8 days I may send him a 5 kg parcel, which I did while still at home. I don't know if I have written about this to you, but when I unwrapped his parcel, a tightly-folded note fluttered out, I was so happy about it. It was Frommer who had smuggled it in for his wife, I read it, he writes that Uncle Pfeifer is also enjoying himself. I don't understand why Géza was afraid to write. But this is how it is. That is why I would really like to know what, and on what date he is writing. I also speculated that maybe it came back because I sent 100 pengös twice in a row. Now I don't know, what should I do? I will wait until Mrs Frommer also gets some news. Mrs Spácz' husband has probably gone from Sárvár, to where Lali is. He wrote from there, before he left. -

Here I am on one road with them. I am very happy with this, it is good to be among familiar faces, and not having to be together with strangers. Mrs Frommer and Mrs Spácz do the cooking. Teri Spácz and I clean and do the sewing. We are still tidying so that we all have room, because our little nest is very small for the four of us. We have lately become five, an elderly man from Tök named Schwarz who has been married to a Christian woman for 40 years, and has now landed here with Mrs Frommer, because they are both from Tök. Fortunately, there is a large open shed in the courtyard, where he sleeps on his straw mat. We feed him a little something warm to augment what he brought with himself. But what will happen when it gets cooler? I brought the stove from the summer kitchen with me. We cook on it in the shed. The courtyard is very pleasant and spacious, but all day it is buzzing like a beehive. We are 22, together with the tenants who were already living here. Kramer from Biai is also here. It is terrible how he looks, ashen, helpless. His housekeeper is with him. His son, Miklos, killed himself last week before we came here. Now he is constantly waiting for him, in tears. They told him

that he was called up. I spoke with him, he remembered me and the entire family.-

Last week was a nightmare. I emptied out the entire house into the big warehouse.

I didn't bring anything with me apart from my bed, the mattresses, a cupboard, clothing and foodstuff, the Spáczes--folding cot, kitchen cabinet, etc. Mrs Frommer, her chaise-lounge. We came together from Zsámbék in 4 cargo trucks. Also, we women had to sit on top. There was a huge crowd in the street for the spectacle. The whole house remained wide open because the finance officer was still working on the inventory, so he said. A huge amount of things stayed there, and all the merchandise in the store, also. I brought the inventory with me. What was my biggest despair was that Édi was called in from one day to the next. It's a good thing his things were together, because I had a feeling it would be like this. My poor dear, he had so little happiness while he was at home. I sold one or two items, small trinkets. On the road, it began to rain. We stopped in front of the Jewish cultural house or prayer house, where the scene took even my breath away. Long, narrow courtyard filled with luggage, bundles, people. There is no horror novel which could tell of this, it was nightmarish. This is the spot where they assigned us our quarters, a good distance from the town. The auto stopped in front of the gate, because it couldn't go inside to the courtyard. There were two carts there, the lowlife living there was in the process of moving himself out. There was no one who could assist us. The German driver did end up helping, for a good tip. We women helped to bring everything in, we threw everything into the courtyard, as the rain continued to sprinkle. We inspected the assigned room, why, what an awful hole it was. Long, narrow, bad door, bad window, dirty, smelly, bad mortar. Right away, we plunged into whitewashing and scouring, so we could put in the beds. We brought some old blankets, the whole room is covered with them. We came late, we were the last to arrive, the better rooms were occupied sooner, but we are together, at least. In the rooms in town, one has to cook where one sleeps. We don't. In spite of that, we are constantly moving things, but at least, it is presentable. What I fear now, is that we are going to have to leave here, also. I think often about you, where you are going to end up. I spoke to Irma, twice on the telephone, they also wrote two letters while still in Zsámbék. I don't know what is their current address.

The Spáczes' relatives wanted to take them in, they even obtained permission for me to go to Pest with them. They even came out, so they could talk to the gendarmes in Zsámbék but they wouldn't authorize it, they were told that one must make further inquiries in Budafok. But from what we are reading, it may not be any better in Pest.

Klári also spoke about Gyula's message, I also tried, but they said that one would have had to taken steps sooner. Now, if only things would remain as they are...

I received a card from Édi, sent here from Zsámbék, but he must have written it from Vác, because it was dated the 26th. I haven't been to town yet, the others, yes. I have no desire to be among people, everyone only talks about their problems.- Klári wrote that the Delikát girl, Mrs. Farkas, lives here in Budafok. Yesterday, I made some inquiries about her here in the courtyard, it turns out the house belongs to her. She came today and explained she doesn't live here because she also has another house in town. She has a beautiful, large garden. There must be something foul going on, because they have a 13 year old daughter living here, who took a couple of pods of green peas out of her basket and she snapped at her that she didn't pick them for that reason. Apart from that, she said that Márta Tökölön, the doctor's wife, was taken away, later, writing from Kistárca, and she spoke about lots of things, all the things that had happened to her family-

The J's have gotten two months of reprieve in Tököl, but everyone must work. There is no bomb shelter here, but there are very good ones in town.-

Write more about yourselves and all that you know, the sooner the better. You would not believe how lost I am. Once again, I have to mention how fortunate I am that the Spáczes are by my side. There is no news about Lali, nor Jenö. The socks are done. I have placed them with the rest of the men's clothes, because I brought some of those, also.

God bless you, I kiss you many times, Szidi

**JUNE 7, 1944**

My Precious Böske,

I received your letter, together with Géza's card. I wasn't very surprised about Gyula being called in, because there was a gentleman here from Tök, an acquaintance of Mrs Frommer. He is 59 years old, and was also called in, on Friday. My dear Böske, the only advice I can give is to stay strong, and don't give up on yourself. One can be strong with a great deal of will. Start packing, nice and slowly. I don't know if you were already able put something aside? If not, as many undergarments, outerwear, lots of dry goods, cooking pots, bed linens, sadly, one can't take everything, although in Pest perhaps one can take more. I don't know. Your bed, a smaller cupboard, a small table, 2 chairs, good chests, if you have them. Sadly, these I didn't have. Bake some pastry which keeps well, and eat well, because it provides strength. Don't hesitate to cook some quick foods for yourself, some type of petrol, turpentine, or gasoline, also. I brought one bottle of each and brushes also. For Géza, and Édi, I brought one each, a suit, undergarments, shoes. We hardly fit, everything is all over the place. If I had to move, I don't know how I would gather everything together once again. The parcel came back from my Géza, with the other 100P, it seems he moved. Mrs. Frommer hasn't gotten anything back yet. Don't bother with sending anything now, until I know where he is. Only, where can I enquire? Klári also wrote last week, saying that they moved nearby. When did they write to you? I am so unsettled because every day here, there is some new, nightmarish news making the rounds. Apart from this, I would be all right. Mrs. Frommer cooks well, Mrs. Spácz assists, I clean and tidy, I help Teri with the sewing, etc. After that, writing, this is how the day passes. I haven't been to town yet, I don't even have the desire. Starting today, it is only permitted to shop between 3 and 5 in the afternoon, the others take care of this also. I am waiting for some communication from Édi, most recently he wrote to Serén from Dombóvár, because he hadn't yet received my address, my poor dear-

Things are really buzzing around me.

Everyone is here, starting with the highest-ranking women, on down. There is even a girlhood acquaintance of Anna's here. Magda wrote about their troubles also. But there is not one J. family who isn't dealing with some tragedy. Because of this, Sister, one must remain strong. We need to live for the sake of our dear ones also, as long as that is allowed. Has Pista Hamver been called in yet?

**JUNE 11, 1944**

My Dear Ones,

I received both of your postcards. Your news about the Irmás hit me terribly hard. Now I am a little calmer because I've heard from more than one source that they took them to Fehérvár. The landlady, the Delikát girl, said that the Ercsis[?] were taken there also. Her mother-in-law lived there. There were some who had already written from there. I am waiting impatiently for communication from them. It is good that Gyula has returned and that you are not alone. I hope you have received my long letter? I would be sorry if it were lost--I made an account of everything. Since then, I have written a card, in which I wrote that the money and a parcel came back from Géza, but the last one, in which I sent some clothing, did not. It said he had moved, on the mailing label. Mrs Frommer did not receive anything back, although the two were together. She is now writing to her younger brother, who goes in for Jewish counselling, and is inquiring what could be done. You can imagine what kind of state I'm in because of this, also. My Édi wrote a card postmarked the 28th, to Szerén, who sent it to me. He wrote it in Dombóvár. Since then, I don't know anything about him. The Taubers wrote also, she is not with the boys, she was still in Vác last week. Today, Emil B, sent a friend here, with a note for me. He is sick and couldn't come. He asked was there anything I needed? He said he would come see me once he is well.

Have you packed anything up yet? Do you have any idea where you will be ordered to go? There are many different rumours swirling about how we cannot stay here either. I don't know, what were the Irmás allowed to take with them? Please God, let this not be our future also. You haven't spoken with Mrs. Zoltán? There is so much I could talk about, but is impossible to write. As for me, all I can say is that I am managing, but in a constant daze, as if I have been hit in the head.

I went to town for the first time yesterday. It is a good distance from here. We went to weekly market. We are only allowed to shop between 3 and 5. There were all kinds of greens. We visited with the locals. Everyone lives in a decent room, although they are overcrowded, but at least it's a room. Ours is just a closet, still, if only it could only stay this way. Write, and often, as long as it is possible. You have no news of Lali?

I kiss you with so, so much love, Szidi

**JUNE 28, 1944**

My Dear Ones,

Today I received in hand, Gyula's letter. I was very uneasy that you hadn't written your address, until now. I have lived through some very difficult hours here, as there is no bomb shelter in the house. Truly, it was just the grace of God protecting us. He is the only one who can say what is waiting for us, also. Let us continue to place our trust in Him. Sadly, I don't know anything about Géza, Édi, nor the Irmas. I am afraid to be by myself even for a minute in my so-called room, because I fall into despair wondering what is happening to them? I don't know which direction, what place they are in. Why, have you not received any news either? Szerén is writing more often. Imre and his brother-in-law are still in Pest, but they don't know anything further. There are ten people with them, she writes. This is not that many, in such a large home. Jakab's boys, Gyuri and Feri, have also left. They don't know anything about Gyuri. Her letter is also filled with despair. Bass also wrote a few lines asking if there was anything I needed. I wrote back saying I didn't need anything. I am well, healthwise. There is word that the Spáczes are going to work in Tétény, in a state-run garden. I will not be happy if they are not beside me, but if they do go, I will be all right, somehow. One must not think of home, nor sleep. My front tooth fell out, and the crown from another one. I was able to get it repaired, but the results were so bad that now it has to be removed. I have received news that our home has become a stable. What is with the store, I have no idea. And your home? Did you leave your things there? I don't know if one could inquire about Géza through the Red Cross? Write more often. I will write also. I don't know if I addressed my letter correctly, it was hard to read the address. Just now, there was a big discussion amongst the Spáczes, should they go or not? In the end, Teri decided not, she was afraid to accept work in this heat, because she has a weak heart.- Now we have laid out a bomb shelter, it's not very good, but it's better than nothing. May God not give us the opportunity to have to [use it].

God be with you, many loving kisses, Szidi