

Panni Koltai With Her Son



This is me (on the right with the book) and my son Karcsi Koltai. I don't know the other woman in the picture. The photo was taken in 1956 in Budapest but I don't remember exactly where.

This whole 1956 thing [the Revolution of 1956] was very frightening. We thought that the country would have a quiet time and all of a sudden we had to be afraid once again; we only saw from it what made us frightened. We had done a lot of things out of [communist] convictions because we thought that we were right. We felt that we had done all we could, yet what came out of it wasn't what we had wanted. And we were very much surprised that it turned out the way it did. 1956 was a big disappointment for us.

It made me feel the way I felt during World War II because Pista, my husband, didn't come home. I was coming home from work - at that time I worked at the Public Servants' Trade Union in Puskin Street, and I got home without any problems - and I was thinking as I was walking on the street,

'How funny, where are these people marching to?'. I didn't like the look of them, somehow. I had been through so many things and I felt that somehow all this wasn't quite square. I got home and Karcsi was already at home doing his homework. I said, 'Dad?' and he replied, 'He is not back yet'. Then I shitted my pants a little, so to speak. He finally came home [that night]. I tried to attenuate things as much as I could. I took Karcsi to my workplace every day. We walked from house to house, talked and got a little drunk - we took some alcohol with us. We walked a hell of a lot; I took him to my workplace, then home, then to my workplace, and home again.

Pista didn't come home for five days because he was departmental head in the Ministry for Food at that time and he organized the provisions for Budapest. It was a hot potato because he had a great responsibility. The ministry was located in the building where the Ministry of Agriculture is today, opposite the Parliament. [Editor's note: on 25th October there was a massacre in front of the Parliament when the armed forces opened fire on the mass of demonstrators. Almost 100 people were killed and 300 injured.]