

Lajos Mura

IN ITSELF



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Mura Lajos

Foreword

This book was not written as a book.

It was assembled from Mura Lajos's letters, e-mails, notes, and scattered surviving writings — from fragments that remained on computers, in messages, and in memory. I gathered them, arranged them, and tried to preserve the voice I knew: direct, restless, ironic, strict when he felt strictness was needed, often funny, and flattering neither himself nor the world.

Lajos died in 2006. To me he was not merely the writer of these thoughts. In many ways, he was my father in place of my father.

When I was homeless in Hungary, he took me in. He fed me. He stayed up with me through the nights. He did not really teach, at least not in the usual sense of the word. He learned with me. When I was preparing for my school-leaving exams, he said he was so bored while driving around the country that I should read my textbooks aloud to him and record them as audio, so he would have something to listen to on the road. I do not know whether he ever needed those recordings. I do not even know whether he listened to them at all. But I made them, and I got the best marks.

That was often how he helped. He did not drag a person forward. He created a reason for him to set out.

This book is not a system of doctrine. It is not always gentle. Some of its thoughts are hard. Some belong very much to his own time, temperament, wounds, humor, and lived life. He could be raw, unfair, provocative, and extreme. And he could be extraordinarily generous too.

What matters in this book is not that one should agree with every sentence. What matters is that these sentences belonged to a man who lived intensely, thought without cease, and often cared for others by indirect routes. Behind the irony and the severity there was food on the table, a place to sleep, a night kept awake beside someone else's future.

I did not try to make him smoother than he was. I only wanted to make him readable, and leave his voice intact.

If the reader sometimes argues with him, that is all right. He probably would have argued back. But I hope he will not be judged only by the sharpness of his words, but also by the life standing behind them — and by the people he helped to stand on their feet.

Finland, 2026
Mikael Denut

What Could I Tell of My Life

The fact in itself that so far everyone
has died does not mean
that I will too!

Mura Lajos

It is night. This is the right time for writing, the right time for being. Sometimes I have even begun to enjoy the garden. When the family is asleep, I go out onto the terrace and meet the world. Not the built world, mind you, but the created world, or the world that simply came into being. It has a staggering force. Through the cracks of silence, faint rustlings here and there; the light of the naked moon seeps through the gaps in the clouds; the smell of unknown plants and animals mingles with the good, rich night air; the stars blink in surprise.

The whole universe warns us what shabby little battles we are fighting here, while nature is beautiful, indifferent, without pity, and time is measurable and finite only for us.

It gives one pause that we live neither in the past nor in the future. One is at most a memory, usually falsified; the other is merely fiction. And yet man is capable of wasting the only enjoyable present on mean and petty affairs and aims.

Socrates is supposed to have said that the unexamined life is not worth living. What, I wonder, would the man of today tell of his life? His qualifications? His jobs? An inventory of the possessions he acquired? My daughters sometimes urge me to write down the things I tell them. Probably, of course, this is how they want to get out of having to listen to them.

But what could I say of my life that might interest them, or anyone else? Can one moment learn from another? Can the lives of six billion people be told? There was a writer who immortalized the story of a single day in a work of nearly eight hundred pages. And he was right. For the moment is realized not only in events, but also in the many-layered complexity of phenomena and thoughts, feelings, reflections, and emotions. The ten minutes of standing on this terrace could not be typed up in ten hours. Feelings and thoughts piled one upon another sweep me away to quite distant waters.

I came back into my room: papers on the desk, affairs unsettled and impossible to settle. The ashtray is all sorrow; stubbed-out cigarette ends sprawl there, and fat smoke sways. Everyone nags me because of the cigarettes. The family worries, the doctors preach about cancer. They are probably right. They say I am going to die, but as a joke I usually say what Nietzsche said: that this is the end in both the best and the worst case. It is interesting that people are horrified at the thought that the world will go on without them from now on, and it never occurs to them that it has already been going on without them for billions of years.

Everyone studies and becomes very educated. I hope there will still be room for a few thoughts of their own. Without that their brains will resemble a pawnshop, where other people's valuables are stored temporarily.

The person looking for a mate formulates so many kinds of demands, and these demands keep changing besides, that it is impossible to find a living human being who satisfies them all. In a woman I am always looking for something else. And this depends on my mood at the moment too. Motherly, virginal, lustful, kind, wild, gentle, combative, wise, silly, a friend, a lover, a playmate, serious and mad, and so on and so on and so on. And it keeps changing. Show me one like that.



On Struggle

There are two ways to get to the top
of an oak tree. One is to climb it.
The other is to sit on an acorn and wait.

Kemmons Wilson

Those who knew the most about struggle were the Asian Taoists, Zen Buddhists, and other philosophers who gave the spiritual background to the martial arts. It is hard to imagine that, over five thousand years, the multitudes of arrogant, conceited, and jealous generations would not have shaken out the forgettable or invalid parts of the ideas formed about Zen and the martial arts. It is far more likely that the experience of millennia further polished and improved them.

Body and consciousness, the outside world and our inner life, essence and appearance are not opposites or dualities but forms of an indivisible whole. Change, change of any kind, influences every sort of action and relation, in every form of existence. In the cosmic order, mutual connection reigns. Our own movements and those of others depend on one another. You and your opponent form a unity. In truth we fight only against our own imperfection, since if we were perfect we would find no one able to defeat us. It can be seen, then, that the person of the opponent is indifferent, and even the fact of victory or defeat. If we lose, we have merely measured our limits at that moment; if we win, we must seek a worthier opponent, but the process cannot be closed.

Lao-tzu writes in the Tao Te Ching:

So the sage,

by drawing back, goes forward;

not preserving himself, he remains.

So it is:

his own interest never drives him,

and therefore his own interest is fulfilled.

What do the words above conceal?

Fear influences only those who do not understand that defeat does not exist. On the road to ourselves, how many times, in how many directions do we step? Can one common vector be drawn for a thousand directions?

Struggle, whatever it may be, is a way of life. There are no goals that must obligatorily be reached, only the beauty of perfecting oneself for its own sake, and its unreachable harmony. Success and the achievement of goals are light by-products. Failures need not and cannot be avoided. They are an inseparable part of the road, as death is an inevitable part of life. You cannot protect yourself from it. Accept it with dignity, wisdom, and without blinking, and it is built into your being as experience. "He does not preserve himself, and therefore he remains."

Training is not preparation for the struggle. Training is the struggle itself. A struggle for perfection, for harmony, for knowing and overcoming oneself. In order to be able to act without consciousness, the consciousness of training must be heightened. Whoever merely wants to win and not perfect himself is incapable of training rightly and consciously, incapable of recognizing the automatic birth of movements repeated thousands and thousands of times in training. Whoever cannot, while practicing a movement, get past the dead point of boredom and feel the overwhelming many-coloredness and infinite variety of this one movement is wasting his time; at most he will learn something, but he will not feel the essence of the technique, the technique will not become in him a natural and self-evident

automatism. If, however, he does feel it, he cannot tire of one movement even after hours; he is reluctant to put an end to an unfolding but unreachable experience of recognition.

In struggle there is no time for conscious thought. Whoever wants to “use” a technique is already too late. Intuition brings the body and the technique into operation. Compared with concentration, the technical details, hand positions, movements, feints and tricks are only secondary.

The unity and simultaneity of intuition and action is the essence. Here essence and appearance merge, lose their duality; only the here and now exists. Intention and deed must happen at once. The movement practiced and drilled consciously a million times now comes to life unconsciously in a flash. We do not do what must be done; it happens. In this process and this moment, reason no longer has a role. If you have practiced well and rightly, with a broad, essential, concentrated awareness, the phenomenon calls forth the appropriate reaction, and through the technique what must happen happens.

Therefore in training, while walking the “way,” consciousness must be expanded, and the goal is to understand and feel the essence of the technique.

In struggle the possibility, the “phenomenon,” is the most important thing, and thought does not create it.





To the Child

If a great blow or spiritual pain befalls you, first of all think that this is natural, because you are human. What did you imagine? You are human, so those dear to you will die, your friends will leave you, and everything you gathered and loved will fly away like dust in a storm. This is not miraculous, but according to the order of nature; this is simple and natural. Rather, what is astonishing is that great blows do not strike us every day. You are human, and therefore you must suffer; and your suffering will not last forever, because you are human.

Márai Sándor

You are already adult enough to understand that the world more or less does not care how much of the lesson you learn, how much you know of history, mathematics, and so on. This is even truer in sport, where in fact everyone has an opposing interest. You cannot seriously think that anyone — anyone — truly cares how much YOU deign to master of what they ought to teach you through painstaking and detailed work. Especially not when they do not see in you that you truly want it. Especially not when you might perhaps beat their favorite, their pet, their daughter. There is only one person interested in your progress, and that is YOU.

A person is forced to be self-taught. If you want to know something, learn it yourself. If you want to defeat others, if you want to be better than others, teach yourself; you must prepare by your own methods. Never think that what you can receive from others will be enough for you. Others give only as much as they are required to give, and at present that is barely anything. Neither accountability nor orientation toward results forces anyone to do anything.

Whatever you come to know better than others in life, they will buy from you. But nothing is paid for in advance. You always have to pay the school fees yourself. And this is not true only of sport. People buy finished things, and do not like to fuss over making them. You may not like this, but it is true. Six billion people are trying to create their place in the world, and for that reason, sparing neither money nor effort, they strive to master something that distinguishes them from the others, something they know better than the others, so that they can sell themselves, because this is their only real chance of maintaining and supporting themselves. This is the chance to win respect, esteem, a little attention for themselves in this enormous mass of humanity. No one, I emphasize no one, cares about those who fall behind, those who drop out of the race.

For the majority it is reassuring when a competitor drops out. But in general it is true. No one truly cares about others, except when his interests force him to maintain the appearance of caring. You yourself must achieve the point where others need you. You must acquire knowledge, results, abilities that your environment needs, and at the magic word they notice you, stand beside you, ask for a share in your successes. Recognizing their interests, they move close to you; in every possible way they signal that they have supported you for a long time, that they always said there was something in you, and that in general they played a great part in your getting this far. Your number of friends grows. Your supporters multiply. But only after YOU have created yourself.

In this way they save themselves a lot of unnecessary work, possible mistakes, and so forth. It is simpler to ask for a share in the success of things already made than to walk the laborious road that leads to success. One need not be offended by this, nor despise them. One must take note that everyone tries to choose the easier path. People are just like that. The situation must be received with a smile, and only you know why you are smiling. You know them, but they do not know that. They are damn satisfied with themselves for being so clever, cunning, and skillful. After a while they will even believe themselves, that they created you. No matter. They can still be loved. They can still be very sweet.

But you must know that you can count only on yourself, only YOU can create yourself. A person has relatives, friendly connections; these must be maintained, because man cannot live alone. But it must also be known that these people are good company: you can clown

around with them, chat, travel, drink a bit, and so on. They may be sweet; they may love you. They will gladly do you small favors too — especially if it costs no money or great effort — but if you have a truly serious problem, in the end you can count only on yourself. Everyone lives his own life, has his own problems, his own tasks, and they will not risk their money, their time, or their existence for you. Everyone must solve his own life. That is the guiding thread.

You cannot count even on relatives. They too have their own tasks in life. How much can my brother, my sister, their children count on me? Hardly at all. In small sums, for a day or so a year, I devote myself to them, but otherwise let them solve their own affairs. I have enough problems to solve without them too. I have to keep my own family in view. If they cannot get on by their own strength, I cannot solve their lives anyway. Since my teenage years I have consciously fought my lonely struggle with the world, with more or less success. This cannot be given, lent, or have its experiences handed over to anyone. How, then, am I to help them? People spend hundreds of thousands on language courses and all kinds of further training. Athletes spend hundreds of thousands on coaches, private lessons, and so on. For survival, for getting ahead.

While you were a little girl, you could still believe in the world of adults, that everyone wants good, that everyone wants to help, that adults break their backs so that YOU may learn something, achieve something. You can no longer be that naive.

Hundreds and hundreds, thousands and thousands of children pass, and have passed, through the hands of teachers and coaches, who, in return for their salaries, more or less, depending on the strictness of the management, teach them something well or badly, and that is that. If it works, good; if not, that is good too. No teacher has ever been held to account for a child bad at math or history. No coach is held to account for why the formerly so talented children came to nothing.

Vető József said: “Success has many fathers; failure is always an orphan.” And so it is. Orphaned and abandoned is the one who does not make himself for us.

While a person is young, or a child, he may easily believe that others are interested in his fate, that others anxiously watch his every step and stand ready to help if there is trouble. In reality there is not even much time to maintain this appearance, because they are already looking at the next opportunity; moreover, when the suspicion of failure dawns, everyone starts looking the other way, thereby signaling, as it were — I have nothing to do with you, it is not my fault — and goes after apparently important other business. There is no need to get especially hung up on this. Life is like that. Everyone protects and watches his own interest. Life goes on. Many people did not even receive from their own parents the attention and support we try to demand from strangers working for pay. It cannot be demanded. In many professions people do shitty work; why do we think that in a place where the work is extremely hard to measure and check, anything can be demanded?

Apart from your parents, you are not truly important to anyone. Just as no one is important to you apart from yourself, and later your children. For children, even their parents are not truly important, except insofar and as long as they are needed. This is the order of nature. It is not bad; it is the pledge of survival.

The world and life are cruel, but beautiful. Truths hurt only because we have always made ourselves believe the pretty lies. If we understand life and people and our own fallibility clearly, and see that only this has happened: we have understood that they are no

better than we are, then it no longer hurts. We are born alone and we are alone when we die too. In fact, if we truly understand the world, we must realize that there is not much wrong with it. It is as it is, and not much can be changed about that. It is not even certain it should be. Life, just as it is, must be contemplated with a smile, cheerfully. People like balanced, calm, successful people because there is no need to fuss with them, no need to help them, no need to feel guilty because of them. In the company of such people everyone feels good and safe. They can be understood. If we accept and understand this, one can get along quite well in this life. The real trouble is with understanding ourselves.

Szabó Lórinç wrote:

“...I am a prisoner among secrets
that are called: I.”

Why is it hard to know ourselves, to create ourselves? Perhaps because of the tormenting desire to appear perfect before others and before ourselves. Yet we are full of faults. We are dissatisfied with ourselves, outside and in. Short, gangling, thin, fat, stiff, rickety, flat, hunchbacked, tousled, slicked down, and so on — and that is only the exterior. Our behavior is foolish, clever-clever, conceited, timid, loudmouthed, wet-fish, gushing, cold, chattering, mute, envious, jealous, stuck-up, faint-hearted, and so on. Are we like this? We are. At least to some degree all this is in us. How much of what? That is the question: whether we judge it well, and how much we can and want to change.

Considering, however, that in life we can truly count on almost no one, we must be on good terms with ourselves.

Once and for all we must say:

I am the one and unrepeatable X.Y., who is as I am. I love myself and I love life. I want to live well and happily, and I know, world, that in this I can count only on myself. I will be on good terms with you, my fellow human beings, because you are neither better nor worse than I am, for you too want to make your own lives better, even at my expense. I am not angry with you; I am ready. I am not perfect, but neither are you. I, however, seek out and find countless ways to improve myself, so that thereby my chances may be better of securing the life that suits me. My abilities are good, and considering that I consciously train myself in the continuous perfecting of my outer and inner qualities, I will be better and more effective than you.

Elizabeth Bowen wrote:

“Jealousy is no more than feeling alone
against smiling enemies.”

You can shed this only if you stand smiling and alone among jealous enemies.

To be honest, I do not know how much can be understood, with a teenage head, of all that I have written. How much is a child your age able, or willing, to believe, accept, and take in? I tried to phrase it simply, without more serious philosophical and sociological arguments. Naturally this has led to simplifications and in places to shoddiness, but perhaps the essence is understandable.

I tried to sketch a basic stance on which a preparation for LIFE, much more conscious than mine, can be built. You must know that whatever you take up, this is true: what you can receive from others is too little for you. If someone wants to be an archaeologist, he cannot rely on what everyone learns in history. Simply because what you can receive from others, others receive too, and so you do not have that extra from which YOU can profit.

“For some people pessimism is only an excuse for laziness,” said a poet named Dalchev. Unfortunately he was right. Many of us, many times, hide behind our pessimism in order to excuse ourselves from realizing aims that seem hopeless, or at least to require great effort. “It won’t work anyway,” “I can’t do it anyway,” “it’s already too late,” “I don’t have enough time.” Who does not know these words, heard a thousand times, spoken a thousand times, used by everyone so regrettably often?

Vörösmarty said:

“decide, and you have spoken your fate”

Sartre said:

“man is what he makes of himself”

Extraordinary determination is needed for a person to realize his dreams against a world whose interests oppose him. A famous actress said this.

Whatever you take up, it will be a struggle. A struggle for a better life, a struggle to create yourself. But of course the struggle does not have to be bloody and agonizing. It can be entertaining too. It can be enjoyed, as if you were watching an interesting life story from the outside.



Verse Fragments

Mark it well, but never lose heart:
hope, disappointment, struggle, fall, a great race
running to the grave. Always to seek the good,
the beautiful, and not to find it — that is life.

Madách Imre

My breed is the breed
no curse, no prayer can bind;
my blood keeps ancestors
cold and afraid in mind.
Always cold, always afraid,
yet still they made their stride.

The evening wore a lovely grey;
outside, where garden shadows stay,
the snow-crunch sketches, soft and slow,
the shapes of silences in snow.

A window's hoop holds stars in bars;
above me, through the cloud-rent scars,
the naked moonlight leaks below.
In hollow night, tomorrow's loom
weaves worlds from matter's deathless womb.

The ashtray is a grief entire.
The stubs, like twisted corpses, tire
and sprawl; in heavy smoke, half-drowned,
the lamplight rocks without a sound.

How many fears have we designed
to wall the dread inside the mind?
How many Edens, hells, have we
lied up against eternity?
No sworded angel drives us hence,
no key-hung elder waits in suspense.
Our wings have fallen, feather by feather,
or perhaps they never grew together.

Look — evening drinks the motley dress;
bare solitude walks in nakedness.
The soul, a stray in its own wood,
whimpers for what it never understood:
angel, prophet, shaman, sage,
anyone, anything, age after age.

In silence-cracks the faintest cries
have long since folded up their eyes.
No fertile words press to be said.

Startled being, overhead,
blinks confused among the stars.
On night's silk sheet, time stands — and mars

the dark like standing water, spread.

Roads with no end twist on and pass,
fields lose their borders in the grass,
hesitant lakes rock, root on root;
the frightened wildwood, mute,
seeks certainty with thousandfold root.

Somewhere in nowhere, on and on,
a sobbing train creeps toward dawn.
In hollow night, tomorrow's loom
weaves worlds from matter's deathless womb.
The scent of children's dreams, once more,
drifts softly through the room and door.



Enthusiasm Slowly Runs Dry

Every wise man whose thoughts I have managed to know has taught me that one must live and write as if every action of ours were the last in life, as if after every sentence we wrote, death would put the period.

Márai Sándor

Enthusiasm slowly runs dry; for me the unknowability of the world makes the world more exciting. I wish I did not know the truth about Father Christmas. Where is the intimation, the secret? I love women too because they can never be completely figured out. If the world could be learned from tomorrow's lesson, it would be boring. Whoever learns it has no novelty, no magic. That is why friends interest me more.

In real life I am a little different too. There the facts of life are impatient; there I am not quite myself either. In life I am an entrepreneur, where I must care about others besides my family. For twenty-five years I have been doing something that is far from me.

Before I had a family I was so poor that even in winter I had sandals, and there was no heating and no bathroom in the flat. It was a happy, unselfconscious life! I read and dreamed and argued my way through my youth. You are rich as long as everything you own is inside you. Once you begin to have property, you acquire obligations.

I was not lonely; girlfriends, friends, all envied me. I was free. The more property you have, the more obligations you have. In the end you become the slave of your possessions. You work so that you can pay twenty different monthly bills.

Today I am happy; I changed consciously, I wanted children. At thirty I married and set about a little creating a home for the children. Money never interested me; earning it — I am not a real entrepreneur. I earn as much as is badly needed and then I do not bother with it.

Every day I took the children to training, to school, and every day I went for them. Negotiations and such were secondary. I could have been a big entrepreneur long ago, only then the business would come first. But it would not come first even if I were childless. Life ticks along, and that's that.

I adjust the company only as much as makes it almost run by itself; sometimes I myself do not understand what we live on with so little investment. No one helped, neither my wife's parents nor mine; I would not have allowed it anyway, because they would have wanted a say.

I Grew Up in an Institution

Do not struggle too hard. The best things
happen unexpectedly.

Gabriel García Márquez

I grew up in an institution, and that made my job easier; because of it I was very poor and very free. I knew my parents when I was little, then I was already in the institution when they died. I was lucky; they were brutal alcoholics.

At fifteen I already had to support myself, but I had no taste for it; I earned enough for food and books. Back then books were very cheap. I went to school and worked on building sites, but only as much as I had to at the moment. It was good. There was a one-room-and-kitchen council flat; I lived there without parents. The mates and the girls came up to my place. The parties were there. Elsewhere the parents would not allow it.

I was privileged, but there were boys whose mothers packed sandwiches in such a way that there would be some for me too. They knew I was hungry. Now I pay it back to those around me who are young, talented drifters. That makes the world round. A small good deed is a great force, and one never knows where, in whom it will pay back; that is the beauty of it.

Those sandwiches have already borne much interest for people who were not even alive then and do not even understand why, or where it came from.

I Can Talk for Hours, You Know

If a man wants to meet every expectation,
he is most certainly overestimating
his own abilities.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

I can talk for hours, you know. Sometimes for hours, according to malicious tongues for days, I only brood and think; but when needed, I make lightning-fast decisions.

They do not understand that in truth I am not a man of action, but a contemplative type. I cannot say it exactly. Contemplation is the desire to know, understand, and interpret the world.

I roam far. I would need hours just to tell the road there. And it is not one road, but darting about. This is understanding, not knowledge. Many people know a lot.

When I founded the Ltd. in '89, I told the members and employees that I wanted to be the stupidest one. What do I need a partner for who knows even less than I do? I see the use of someone who is smarter and more diligent than I am.

They tolerate us. It is good if we have a place. It is not the same whether a person gives up or loses the illusion of freedom. As time goes on, sometimes we feel there is an ever-narrowing path and we cannot step out of it. Yet the road is inside us. That is why I was lucky, a very poor orphan; every road was mine, and I chose. Always.





Work Is Not Good or Bad

If we behave politely and understandingly toward others, we invest pennies and receive a fortune in return.

Thomas Sowell

Someone invented it, but do not fall for it: work is not good or bad. In the old days, because of the quality of the means of production, labor was scarce. There were slave-taking wars. Then they invented the idea that it was compulsory for free people too — because only in this way could the needs of society be produced. Today the means of production are too developed. Twenty-five or thirty percent of humanity could produce the necessary goods. That is why they invent the wooden iron ring.

Job creation! Think about what that means! Work was invented to produce goods, so creating jobs is a lunacy. But there is overproduction of everything. The trouble is they do not dare tell people; the truth appears only in specialist books. In the literature it is called the “inverted pyramid” theory. Tell people that seventy percent of them work unnecessarily. What is there demand for? Name one thing of which there is no overproduction. But they do not know what to do, because wherever unemployment goes above ten percent, the young start grumbling, drifting, and crime grows rapidly. What would happen at fifty or sixty percent?

So they keep quiet about it and job creation goes on so that social peace more or less remains. But the delusion still lives — because people do not read such things — that one must work. Work is not a matter of honor, do not believe it, because you will become the victim of a delusion. Either you do something out of necessity or gladly. This is a microsocial problem. Society is based on verbal, tacit, or written contracts. So is a couple relationship. We do not talk about it, but it is a contract in which everyone does his own thing. Who does what can be decided.

Let Everyone Feel Good as They Are

Big words are worth nothing,
they fly away like the autumn wind,
but love, if it springs from a pure heart,
accompanies a person as long as he lives.

József Attila

My wife moved in with me as an eighteen-year-old secondary-school girl. Until the children were around ten, she did not even see work. Then she said she wanted to work because she was going mad at home. I said fine, work, whatever you want, and it makes no difference at all whether they give you money or not.

She asked me to find a place, but I said no to that. If she wanted to work, let her act according to her judgment, but she should choose. Then she worked and nearly died of it. Her nerves were shot. They said I should get her out of there. I said I had not put her into anything. If she wants, she can quit; I will not tell her what to do. Then she quit, and later went somewhere else. At thirty-eight she said she wanted to go to university. I said fine, do as you want, I support you. She will graduate soon.

At home too my wife does what she wants. If she cooks, she cooks; if not, restaurant or cold food. If she cleans, good; if not, then not. She spends as much as she wants. Everyone always does what he wants.

When we were newly married, the money should have been budgeted. She could not. After a few arguments I said I would never argue about money again; I will put all our money here in the cupboard, and I do not care what she does with it. I never borrow, but I can stand hunger well; then we shall see how the children stand it.

Since then money is not discussed. If there is some, we spend it; if there is none, we wait. Her salary goes into her own bank; she does with it what she wants. I support the family if I can. There is no argument, but she learned to budget; she realized that we can count on no one. Everything is in joint names. Never, never was there an argument about money. Is it good this way for her? Is it good this way for me? If yes, who cares about other people's opinions?

What I want to say is that there is no rule for this. Our family is probably not typical, but it works. We could both have worked and accumulated more. But understand that this was not the goal. The goal was that everyone should feel good as they are, or as they want to be.





The Child Will Never Be One Year Old Again

Have you ever felt you would like to go,
and yet would stay, if fate allowed it?

Scent of a Woman

I learned early that money is a by-product. Work is not really suitable for producing money. Simply because there is no real need for productive workers. Where jobs must be created, how would they pay work properly? Work is a lost, old-fashioned concept left here from old centuries. Your family's situation does not stand or fall on you. If they create a shitty job for you, with shitty pay, you will be neither richer nor happier. Happiness is the harmony of desires and possibilities.

The richer are not happier either. A little more money does not give happiness, because then again you buy something on installment that has to be maintained and paid off, and you are in the same place, only the situation is more tense. A person should do what he can or loves, what he gladly does, and the money will somehow come as a by-product. I do not know how it is with others, but I was happy poor, and later money did not interest me either. Somehow there was always some, as much as was needed.

We lived in a one-room-and-kitchen flat and in a one-and-a-half-room panel flat too. It was a palace. I adored it! It was in Újpalota, a good little den, and the children still mention it. I made beds for the children out of wood with my own hands. One was a little house; its roof was the bedding box. The other was a little garden, with colored slats. In the evenings I carved away in the cellar. Did we love it? We loved it! And we were happy. Did money interest me? It did not. We had something to eat, we played good games, in the evening I read Toldi to them. They were happy.

By then I was already an entrepreneur; I could have earned a lot if I had pushed a little, but I did not push. The child will never again be one year old, nor two, nor three, nor four. Enjoy it when it is there. Should I get home in the evening when the child is already asleep, but in a good car? My office has been at home for seventeen years.

I don't give a shit about wealth. I will die one day, and my unknown children should quarrel over a rich inheritance? Well, this is what I am like, this is how I think, and many friends call me an idiot because they consider me talented. If someone is an entrepreneur with one hand and makes a living, what would happen if he actually worked at something? Rich? Unhappy? What for? But it may also be that if I strained for money, I would not succeed. I have seen plenty of that.

That Is What a Peasant Boy and a Goat Are Good For

I've learned that people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget
how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

When we started out, my wife was a secondary-school student and her possessions fit in one shopping bag. Mostly textbooks. She could not even make scrambled eggs. In my flat there was a bed, a desk, a piano, and books.

I take only as many steps as go by themselves. I was happy and content even there. Neither my wife nor I ever undertook any extra burden in order to “get ahead.” No one is going to give me a fixed salary anymore. The children do not like commuting from here into the city; it is too far for them. So perhaps I will sell this house and we will buy a flat inside. I annoy my wife by saying a panel flat, because I adored that. She did not adore it the way I did. She was afraid of the drunken neighbor and the piss-soaked entrance hall.

When I was a little kid, in the countryside — where I spent the summer — my grandfather charged me with bringing the goat home. I was a Budapest child; I set to it and pulled and pulled. The goat just stood there. I cried terribly. After half an hour a laughing little peasant boy came by and taught me not to pull the goat, because it would go home by itself; I should just follow it. I learned for life that things go their own way. I do not force them; I follow events comfortably. The goat was good for many things. I used it in child-rearing too. I was behind them, but I did not drag them forward. I supported, but did not force. Well, that is what a peasant boy and a goat are good for: learning a piece of life wisdom.

In a relationship the fair thing is that everyone does what he wants, and does not force it on the other, either by words or behavior. Of course this is difficult because my wife does not agree with me in everything. Child-rearing is the only source of quarrels. She likes to give orders, but in our house this provokes terrible resistance. I demand no rights. I say my opinion, which is usually liberal. I hold that things must be directed not by command but by request, and that children have exactly as many rights as she or I do. This drives her crazy, because of course the children know it. She says I am against her. To this I usually say I am against no one, but I am for truth and my principles.

I will give an example. A little child announces before bedtime that he is hungry. Wife has a fit: why didn't you eat at dinner, there is no eating now. To which I say: Bunny, in the evening while watching television you make two or three rounds to the kitchen; why do you think the child is deprived of rights and deserves fewer trips to the fridge than you do? Then she shouts that I am raising the child against her. There are a hundred examples like this. I say I am raising the children for justice. Adults think the child is their property and has no rights. They must receive equal treatment. Well, so the days roll by gently. The children did develop great self-awareness; sometimes even I find it too much, but the principle is this, and that's that.

You know, people communicate this as follows: if the child becomes a clever, decent adult, then it was my upbringing; if he becomes a criminal, then society and his buddies raised him. I do not even believe in upbringing. By living together, a person tries to plant his views of the world and values into the children, but still the most important thing is love and a lot of time together. That is why I did not want to work more than necessary.

The children have grown up; they now want to become independent so much, even emotionally, that they only snuggle up if they forget themselves or if they have some sorrow.

Girls are difficult. They cannot discuss their women's matters with me, and in other matters my opinions are so overwhelming and fully formed that it bothers them. Now that

they have become university and college students, they would like to become intellectually independent too, and that is quite right.



The Male Sex Has Become Uncertain

It is better to light one small candle
than to curse the darkness.

Confucius

The male sex has become uncertain. Roles seem to be switching. Women want to direct and not make themselves emotionally vulnerable. Men are confused. They cannot find the essence of nature: the gentle, devoted companion who must be protected. They must protect themselves from strong, sometimes initiating, criticizing, independent women.

József Attila knew: "Not only desire, but necessity too shoves me there." But where? To these hard, selfish, pretty but dangerous girls? And for the boys, tenderness remains in their mothers. This is not good like this, but time will solve it. Progress moves in waves, but the normal always remains in the middle and strives back toward it.

Every young person obviously likes to be the center. It is no trouble if they imagine themselves the center. At first the world is like this for everyone, and then unfortunately we grow up anyway. A child sees that the world revolves around him. That is as it should be. We can learn much from the old generations: to feel and think at the same time; if only we could hand this on to the young. But it is no use having a transmitter if there is no receiver.

The world changes much faster than we do. Even our own children are hard to inspire. They feel it is outdated, although the basic values have not changed for millennia. It is only hard to apply them, and ever harder. It is hard to see the tree for the forest. So many kinds of "values" are shown today. One can see, but it is hard to make others see. Life is life; it cannot be acted, you must give yourself, whether it is advantageous or not. Most people never realize these things. They think the world is trash, although the world is a little like a mirror: what you give, you get. Of course the thing is not chemically pure. It is all its own world. There are more than six billion worlds, and only culture binds the world-views of all these people into one volume.

Science tries to be objective because we are subjective. This may be what holds things together: science and the arts. Without these our world would fall apart. From the demand for objectivity we feel that what we see of the world is somewhat the result of our own filter. We seek common points and abstract. This is the spiritual part; the bodily part is love. This preserves humanity. Body and spirit are needed together, and there is no priority. This is what makes us human beings. Desire only disturbs this a little. It is the instrument of preserving the species. It works without spiritual heights too. Otherwise the stupid would die out. God is a great master.

Love Is More Important Than Being in Love

Everyone thinks of changing the world,
but no one thinks of changing himself.

Leo Tolstoy

Pure love is platonic. Unfortunately everyday life kills being in love. The platonic remains pure because we do not live it in everyday life. It fertilizes us only spiritually.

Love lived out in reality may be fruitful, but it can also perish and sadden everyone. But even then love can remain. I am speaking of emotions. Sex is instinct. Love is a sustaining force. Love helps so that instinct alone does not rule.

Love is more important than being in love. Being in love is selfish and only a blaze. Love is selfless and eternal, because it is not worn down by rough reality. This follows from the role it fulfills.

That is why, when young, we are more inclined to fall in love every five minutes, because when young we are still very selfish. The person in love does not give up his love so that it may be better for the beloved. The one who loves is willing to do even that. This is a more lasting and stronger feeling, but in a given case no less painful.

A couple relationship is the field in which no one has ever been able to be wise or clever. Time is a great lord. For several thousand years we have felt the same things. In this we human beings are alike. Good and bad, clever and stupid suffer alike.





Early Purposefulness Can Backfire

To be a man is, precisely, to be responsible.
It is to feel, when setting one's stone,
that one is contributing to the building of the world.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Many children are weaker than they show. They want to be strong; this can make their behavior hectic. Early purposefulness can backfire; it leaves too narrow a strip for the future, and when it perhaps turns out that the goal was wrong, it is already late. If a person looks too close in front of him, he more easily bumps into something.

Try to get far while looking directly at your feet. One must look ahead, but not necessarily at a precisely defined point. Let the young dream calmly, let them look ahead into nothing; sooner or later they will find something.

No one should try to be other than what he is. At first this hinders him, but later it attracts around him those who value it. This is very important.

Luck often looks like cheating, and knowledge often like luck in the eyes of the envious. But cheating exists, and luck exists too. It may be that I cheated a lot of times, only I did not know it. But could it be known that I am only stupid, while the others are cheats? Stupidity is easier to notice.

The Woman Is to Blame

Those who don't know how to weep
with their whole heart
don't know how to laugh either.

Golda Meir

A man either knows women or loves them. Allegedly the two do not go together. I write this because my daughters are grown up and I love them very much. Consequently I cannot find my way around them.

The woman is to blame. This is an eternal axiom and, as such, it requires no proof. Now she has invented that my blood pressure is high. We measured it and it was 185 over 115. I said the instrument was bad, but she replied that it showed a good reading for her. In vain I argued that the measurement of two unknown data says nothing about the instrument. But then, women...

She forced me to go to the doctor, which turned out to be a highly instructive and equally useless activity. I was almost glad that after so many years of living here as a way of life, the district or family or whatever doctor would get to know me. My blood pressure naturally went up already because it was written: "KINDLY TAKE A NUMBER," which I would gladly have done, if there had been a number. After that nimble little old woman pushed in front of me and blocked the door. I am not willing to fight hand-to-hand with elderly matrons in order to get in to a representative of a profession I do not hold in very high esteem. But time solves everything.

In the end I did get in. She measured it, wrote the prescription, and that was that. It was not too high (my blood pressure), and she could not say anything clever. I had not expected her to. I told her I was married; perhaps this explains the high blood pressure, and I suggested that this fact should be entered on social insurance cards. They could save many examinations. Since the doctor was a woman, she did not much appreciate my effort to make her work easier. I am not going to get used to it.

Meanwhile I came upon an important sociological connection. Women live longer, as we know. This is because they go to doctors more, care more about their health. In my view, however, this gives them no enjoyable advantage, because it could probably be shown that they live longer by exactly as much time as they spend sitting in the waiting rooms of various doctors.

This recognition greatly improved my sense of well-being, so my visit to the doctor proved useful after all. The ways of God are truly inscrutable. Who knows what seemingly unnecessary side roads lead to great recognitions. Well, so much for medical science.

Otherwise we are well. Everything is as before. People work, politicians lie and do not speak to one another, but the caravan moves on. Of course no one knows where, but perhaps this is the only thing in it that can fill us with hope. The future would be terrifying if it became predictable. So far everyone has been wrong about it, and let us hope this will remain so in the future too.

The family is all right; everyone does his own thing or something he thinks is his own thing, and with this we lull ourselves into the illusion of living a full life.

The children are still looking for the road to happiness, although I told them that happiness is the harmony of desires and possibilities and there is nothing to look for. But they keep looking. Young people are like that. They are always looking, because their eyes still look outward. Inward-looking eyes find it even if they do not seek it. But there is time. The search is useful in itself, though they will not find what they are looking for; they will find many things. And that is the meaning of this meaninglessness.



I Envy Those Who Are on the Road

Life is like drawing: sometimes we must act quickly and decisively, take things firmly in hand, and see to it that the great lines stand before us at lightning speed.

There is no place here for any limpness or doubt; the hand must not tremble, the eye must not blink this way and that, but the gaze must be directed only at what is before us.

Vincent van Gogh

I envy those who are on the road and those who arrive. Those who move as a way of life, and those who see. I am not thinking of tourists, the participants in the modern migrations organized by the experience industry. Just as a high mass is not suitable for admiring a church, however uplifting it may be, so one cannot feel the past and present of cities and peoples in even the most thorough lecture of a tour guide. Living there is incomparably more and better suited to it.

We dream of this, but realities rob us of our dreams. The most intrusive form in which reality manifests is money. And cowardice too.

A person approaches the cities of his dreams with difficulty and fear, as an adolescent approaches women too beautiful for him. Perhaps I am not yet mature, fit to receive them. Perhaps platonic love has true relevance. We wish neither to be disappointed nor to leave unsatisfied. And so we do not go at all.

But you went.

Courage and readiness to take risks. There is no doubt that the millions of sounds, smells, images, experiences soaking into you are unobtainable and unfathomable for the legions of tourists. However hard, laborious, heavy with doubts and fears it may be, in my eyes you are the TRAVELERS. Because you are movers.

For a chatterbox of my sort, writing is difficult. The mass of piled-up thoughts, questions, opinions is hard for the slow and unpracticed hand to peck out. A person sometimes realizes how few there are with whom it is worth sharing his thoughts.

How few he wants to share them with at all.

I hope you are feeling well. Learn a lot about the world, so you can tell me about it, me who sits at home.

It Is Hard to Love Wisely

If you are kind-hearted, that is a fine virtue,
but first look to whom you are being kind.

La Fontaine

In ancient China, the system of micro-community relations resting on patriarchal principles was regarded as form-giving for the larger unit. Allegedly they had words for family and state, but no word for society.

In today's "inverted pyramid" world, we do this backwards too. We regard the world of state, form, and idea as form-giving for the family. We create a democratic, self-organizing mini-society in which we respect the sovereignty and decision-making right of every family member. This, of course, makes our own decisions criticizable and appealable. Our intentions and deeds must be explained, and our explanations are not always acceptable to others. Yet decisions must be made. And they must be made well. Decisions useful and reasonable in the long term for every member of the family must be made, even if those decisions meet resistance.

We must sadly see that it is hard to love wisely. The children are sometimes angry with us, sometimes regard us as despots, because they feel we take no account of their will, their opinion. A parent must never take offense.

He must not take offense because he loves. And he must not take offense because the children are right. They are right, just as in a given case we are too. We cannot be so senseless as to believe that there is only one truth. The short- and long-term conception of quality of life is ambivalent. At their age it cannot be expected that they consciously and voluntarily make sacrifices for distant goals which are sometimes vague even to us. The pain caused by their present suffering and desperate protest is hard to soothe, of course, whatever justification we see for our acts. We must endure it. The facts of life are often like this. They must be endured.


I should note that I did not know how to love wisely. Perhaps later — rightly — they may reproach me for this. I loved them very much, but perhaps precisely this caused me, in many, very many questions, to yield to the temptation of the easier, more comfortable road for them. Later they will pay a heavy price for my weakness. The painful thing is that in a few months children get used to everything. I only ever had to hold out that long.

Parma Dreams

Love of country begins when those who live
in one homeland love one another. But this
is so hard for people to understand.

Albert Wass



A large, lush green weeping willow tree stands as the central focus of the background. In the foreground, a wooden table is covered with a patterned tablecloth and set with a dark green pot, a white bowl, and plates of food. The scene is set outdoors, with a cloudy sky and a glimpse of a building in the distance.

**So it seems he is gone.
Did Europe not mourn him?
Did no one even notice?
No wonder. When the wind scatters the embers,
a few lines may fall from the pyre
and find their place alone.
That is all the work leaves behind
for later curiosity.**

Miklós Radnóti: First Eclogue