

From Hungary to Algiers

A second cousin of mine, Tamás (Thomas), lives in Hungary where he is employed by an agricultural business. He is blessed with a green thumb and he enjoys his occupation very much. His younger brother, Pali (Paul) is an industrial electrician, who works on things that reside in power plants, a job that is in much demand and has sent him to exotic places abroad, like North Vietnam and Mongolia.

This story took place a while ago, when communism was still controlling Hungary. The government, as always, needed money, specifically hard currency, so they would send people like Pali abroad, and received hard currency and paid Pali in Hungarian money. This arrangement was accepted by all parties and Pali was one of the first Hungarian citizens to



own a camcorder. He used this device as a means to open a conversation with many females, but that's another cup of coffee.

These trips would last for weeks on end and Tamás found himself missing his younger brother, so he decided to visit him. The fact that he speaks only Hungarian and had little money would have stopped most others, he wanted to go anyway. The enclosed pictures are of the vehicle he had available for the trip, a scooter with a 50-cc engine. He loaded it with the essentials and set out for Africa.

He didn't have enough money to eat regularly every day but to him, that only meant that he could ride farther that day. He was skin and bones by the time he got home.

He met up with an Italian farmer working in a vineyard and Tamás had a conversation with him, during which they managed to exchange information about taking care of the plants. (I imagine excessive use of hands were required to accomplish this.)

He slept on the ground at night which gave him some stories: one night he was awakened by the noise of a train at speed only a few feet from where he was sleeping. Another night policemen woke him up looking for identification papers.

Somewhere in France he lost his passport, which he didn't realize until the border for Spain. He went back and found it! He made his way across the Straits of Gibraltar into Africa, where he was, once again, awakened by some soldiers wanting to know his business. Then the engine stopped working, so he took it out of the scooter, hitchhiked to the next town, got it fixed, went back to the scooter, installed the fixed engine and continued to find his brother.



Of course, Pali had no idea that his older brother was coming for a visit, so you can imagine his surprise.

After the visit Tamás made his way home without any major incident. As I said before, he was skin and bones when he got home.

A few years later he informed me that he would like to visit America. Formalities taken care of, Mary and I drove to pick him up at the airport in New York City. It was the fourth of July weekend. He spent the whole trip to our house talking about everything, not really noticing the surroundings. He told us of his plan, which was to buy a motorcycle and use it to see as much of America as he had time and money for. I wanted to show him my pride and joy of the time, a red smoke 1982 BMW R100RT parked in the garage. He barely glanced at it, saying it was too big. He was looking for something much smaller and trips to several motorcycle dealerships yielded no results. We were both frustrated by this until he came up with a plan. He had a friend in Ontario, so I put him on a bus heading to Canada with a sigh of relief.

Two days later he showed up on a 100 cc. Honda dual-sport bike and by the next morning he was packed and ready to go. By the next night he was in Washington, DC, enjoying the fourth of July fireworks, then headed South. My two aunts and an uncle lived in Sarasota, Florida. They or I had no idea that Tamás was on his way to visit them. As luck would have it he arrived in the middle of the night and since, I imagine, he was pretty tired, he parked the bike and laid down for the night on their front lawn. You can guess what happened next: The police came in the middle of the night and woke him up along with everybody else in the house.

Tamás was gone for a little over two weeks and when he came home I hardly recognized him, he lost so much weight. He slept under overpasses and ate very little, except for a few times when waitresses were kind to him. During the time he was away he managed to see the east coast down to Florida, where he took a right and managed to reach Texas before he turned toward home. He quickly recuperated and delivered the Honda back to Canada and before I knew it, he was back in Hungary.

This story always amazed me and made me want to be more adventurous. Maybe it inspired me to never think of a trip only in terms of the destination but marvel at everything along the way.