

Bella Steinmetz



I had this photo taken in Marosvasarhely, in the Weintraub studio. The dress was made here too, it was a very elegant, very beautiful blue, rather light colored dress. My legs were slender too, I have to tell this, without any conceit. And a little collar, with lace all around. And look at my shoes! I brought most of my shoes from Pest. My uncle demanded me to spend every year at least one month at his house, so why shouldn't I have bought? I bought there. My husband said: 'This is such a nice dress, have a photo taken and send it to your uncle!' Almost all my photos were taken like this. No decorations on every photo. My photos were all simple.

Irma, my sister-in-law was a real Pest-lady, she bought all her clothes only in Pest. She was a great fashion lady. It was her who helped me, when I was a bride. She took me everywhere: to a saloon, where the models came [and presented the dresses] so that I chose which dress I needed. I said: 'That's the last straw!' I was so bored! However they lived very differently in Pest. She told me: 'This will be fine for the morning, we need a costume, this will be your wedding dress. This will be suitable for reception dress, when guests will come in the after-noon.' She ordered me everything. I was happy to get out from there, because models bored me as they were posing in front of me. I was interested in music, I was completely different. I was so elegant when I came home, but it broke my heart to spend so much money on rags. Reception dress...! What for? Who am I to receive? Well, my girlfriends. I was very naive in this respect. I don't have a photo of my own wedding dress. They didn't take any picture. As I was so bored by the wedding, so bored, I could hardly wait its end to get in the car and go home. I wouldn't have stayed there to take photos of me. Now I'm sorry, because I had a very nice wedding for my first marriage. And I was the most

elegant in Marosvasarhely, because it was always others who dressed me, they dressed me even from Kolozsvar. My sister-in-law and I went together to Pest. 'Do you have this kind of dress? Do you have that kind of dress?' She stayed a lot at me, she came to visit us. She was the brown Mrs. Almasi, I was the blonde Mrs. Almasi. I always had blonde dyed hair. I dyed my hair until I got married for the second time. In short I was always elegant, and back then it was uncommon - but [I dressed] only within the limits of good taste. Otherwise my husband wouldn't have tolerated me. However people received me everywhere. I frequented the club. When I was a bride, my society was still together. Some were married already, some weren't. If I went to Pest, we met. I went to Pest until late 1941.

In Marosvasarhely it started in autumn, and we had a ball almost every week. Every association organized a ball once in a year: we had Bethlen Kata ball, the MSE [organized] the sports ball, then the Lorantffy Zsuzsanna [Women's Association] ball, that was the Hungarian women's society, four or five balls were kept each year. The Jewish Women's Society [the WIZO] organized a ball once in a year in the Palace of Culture. One could go to a ball with invitation, and the snack-bar was always supported by the respective association: drinks, meals, meat. The snack-bar was very well provided, and this produced quite a lot of money. One wanted to surpass the other, well, all of them wanted a more and more beautiful ball. So that I had my specialty as well [at the ball of the Jewish Women's Society], cake a la Almasi. For me it was the simplest thing to prepare. It was a simple cake, but of course I put whipped cream on it, and all kinds of colored, green, red, violet little jelly on the top. I chopped up almond and hazel-nut, and the top was sprinkled. It looked so nice, like a flower garden. And that was all with the cake. People always looked for it, for Mrs. Almasi's cake. We had discussed that five of us would bring cakes, three, four, five would bring meat dishes, men drinks. We also prepared fine punches.

We received invitation for everywhere, and participated at every ball, because my husband was a young lawyer, and he had to show himself, so that people would learn about this young lawyer. We never went just the two of us, there was always a little company, two or three families besides us. We always went everywhere together. We had our own society. My evening dresses were extraordinary. I had my dresses from Pest, the material came from Pest, and the dressmaker made it here for me. This was created by her, this is made of velvet. [Editor's note: Bella Steinmetz refers here to the dress she wears on the photo.] She used to say: 'Listen to me! I will make you an evening dress, I won't endure any remarks that I shouldn't do it like this... I will do it. If you like it, you take it, if not, I won't work for you anymore!' I always had my dresses made by her. However I didn't order many, because I bought ready-made dresses in Pest or I had dresses made there. My sister-in-law took me to an elegant saloon, so I saw these dresses there. That's how I brought myself this kind of velvet. This is a special, very expensive velvet, as velvet can be coarse and soft as well. The dress was black, and it had a backline. The whole town was saying that what a 'thrifty' person this Mrs. Almasi was, that she had saved half a meter of material just to show her back. But I had a cape for that dress. I put it on only when we set down to the table. If we set down, I took up the cape. Whenever I danced, I took it down. In the evening we were going to the ball, and I put on the dress. My husband said: 'Oh well, but my dear...' I say: 'Why, what should I be hiding? What is it I should be ashamed of?' 'Well, after all...' I say: 'Don't worry now, look, I have a cape, I will put it on if someone finds it too flagrant.' We addressed each other formally with my first husband as 'maga', I don't know why. Not with the second one, but first-name informality didn't work at all with

the first one. We always addressed each other with 'maga'. Although it was such a great love, my God...

For example in Pest a bulky gossip journal, the 'Szinhazi elet' [Theater Life] was published. One could read about theatres, plays, one could find crosswords, and this kind of who-with-who, who-to-who... What is interesting, that after the war books were sold here at the flea-market, and Szinhazi elet as well. We had an acquaintance who always bought it, that was his 'literary' lecture, and who told me: 'Hey Bella, do you know that you appear in the Szinhazi elet?' It was written there that 'There was in Marosvasarhely a very pretty young woman whose fame is due to that she was saving dress materials...' It was then that I found out what they had written on me. It wasn't interesting anymore. This was after the war.

Before the war all kind of music was played one after the other at balls. In the evening, at the beginning there was a short performance, let's say until eleven, then the ball started, the dance started. The czardas dances were towards the morning, after five o'clock. People used to joke: 'Well, Mrs. Almasi has swept again the hall.' Since I was always the last one to leave the hall. Oh, I danced so much... I got used to, as I frequented clubs that people would gaze at me. Sometimes I liked it as well that people stared at me.