

John Janos Linczmajer

Died: April 26, 2009

John came to Dartmouth by a perilous and unusual route. He and his brother George (older by four years) both fled Hungary after the Soviet invasion of that country on November 4, 1956. Both are our classmates. George, 75, lives now in Connecticut and is retired. John, however, died in Budapest, Hungary, on Sunday, April 26, 2009. He had just turned 70 on April 19, one week before. He had never married, said George, who graciously consented to be interviewed for this memorial profile.

George, our classmate Erno Horvath, who knew both brothers, and Wikipedia describe the historical events that propelled the brothers John and George to Hanover, where they arrived shortly after Winter Carnival in February 1957, about six months before most of us got into town as freshmen.

A spontaneous and largely student uprising against the Soviet occupation of Hungary had begun on October 23, 1956 and spread rapidly throughout the country. On November 4, a large Soviet force invaded Budapest and other regions of the country to suppress it. Though Hungarian resistance continued until November 10, over 2,500 Hungarians and 700 Soviet troops were killed in the conflict, and 200,000 Hungarians fled as refugees, reports Wikipedia. Mass arrests and denunciations continued for months thereafter. By January 1957, the new Soviet-installed government had quelled all public opposition.

George was one of those who fled, arriving in New York in late 1956 or early 1957. It took John a little longer. Erno explained why (in a June 2010 e-mail to the author).

After the Soviet clampdown, Erno said, John and his friends who'd fought the Soviets saw that their cause was hopeless, so got rid of their rifles and fled. "John was on his way home on foot when the Soviet and Hungarian military police stopped him," Erno wrote. "They found a cartridge in his pocket, immediately arrested him, and put him in the county jail in his native city of Veszprem. In a day or two, many youngsters, mainly high school kids, were put on Soviet military trucks and deported to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic."

At the time of his capture and deportation, John was 17.5 years old, wrote Erno.

"After four weeks of interrogation those under 18 were released and returned to Hungary facing uncertainty, possible imprisonment or execution," Erno wrote, and John was among them. "There were three 16-17 year old girls in John's group on the Soviet military truck whom the Soviet soldiers raped. The

girls were heavily bleeding. The Soviets threw them off the truck and they died on the road.”

But somehow John escaped, and found his way to New York in early 1957, where he reunited with George, who said in his interview he’d arrived there a few months previously. George had by then succeeded in getting a scholarship for himself to attend Dartmouth, and said he thereafter arranged the same for John. So it was that they both found their way to Dartmouth in February 1957, just missing Carnival.

Fraternities provided housing to both John and George men during all their years in Hanover. John was a member of Phi Delta Theta. The two brothers and Erno, none of whom spoke English, enrolled in an English class for beginners. John was a member of the Cosmopolitan Club for three years, The Russian Club for two, and the canoe club for two. He majored in economics.

George said he and John “loved the countryside around Dartmouth, the outdoor atmosphere, the outing club, and did a lot of hiking.”

After Dartmouth, John worked in Europe for Coopers & Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) for many years, said George. He left that organization and got into real estate development in Spain. After the regime change in Hungary in the 1990’s, said George, John returned to Budapest, and again connecting with Coopers & Lybrand became involved with development projects there, including a huge one sponsored by a Belgian consortium. He retired in 2005.

George said John was a very good jazz guitarist. He was “absolutely fluent” in French, Spanish, English, and German, George said, so much so that on one occasion some Frenchmen were trying to guess what part of France he was from. “”He had a superb musical ear,” said George.

John was also an inventor, George said, holding at least two patents, one having to with a flying wing, another relating to a continuous transmission for an automobile.” He was a very talented fellow,” said George.

Erno remembers John fondly. “John’s untimely death is a great loss. He was a kind, personal, vivacious and likeable fellow. He was happy to play his guitar for friends, classmates and relatives after his return to Hungary. He always welcomed former classmates visiting Hungary to his home.”