

ANDREW ZOLTAN FENVES, MD: a conversation with the editor

Andrew Fenves (*Figure 1*) was born in Budapest, Hungary, on November 29, 1953, and he grew up there. He and his family moved to the USA in 1969 and to Dallas shortly thereafter. After graduating from Hillcrest High School, he went to Stanford University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in mathematics in 1975 after only 3 years in college. He graduated from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School (UT Southwestern) in 1979. His internship and first year of medical residency were at the



Figure 1. Dr. Andrew Z. Fenves during the interview.

Jewish Hospital of St. Louis, which is connected to Washington University. The remainder of his medical residency and his nephrology fellowship were at Baylor University Medical Center (BUMC) in Dallas. After completing his fellowship, he was in the private practice of nephrology in North Dallas before becoming full time at BUMC in 1991. Dr. Fenves has participated actively in the internal medicine training program and in the nephrology fellowship program at BUMC. He is also clinical professor of medicine at UT Southwestern. He received the John S. Fordtran Teaching Award in the 1995–1996 academic year and the Faculty Excellence Award the next year. He was elected to “The Best Doctors in America” in 1998. Despite his active private practice and teaching activities, Dr. Fenves has contributed to investigative activities, including the publication of nearly 50 articles, almost entirely in peer-reviewed medical journals. He is married to Saralynn Busch, and they have 2 daughters. Dr. Fenves is a wonderful storyteller, a major contributor to the Baylor environs, and one of our most outstanding physicians.

William Clifford Roberts, MD (hereafter, WCR): *Dr. Fenves, I appreciate very much your willingness to talk to me and therefore to the readers of BUMC Proceedings. We are in my home on March 18, 2004. Could we start by my asking you to describe some of your earlier memories, where you grew up, your parents, your siblings?*

Andrew Zoltan Fenves, MD (hereafter, AZF): Thank you for asking me to talk about my past. I was born in Budapest, Hungary, on November 29, 1953. My Hungarian name was Andras Fenyves. Our household consisted of my sister, my parents, and my maternal grandparents. Six of us lived in what would be

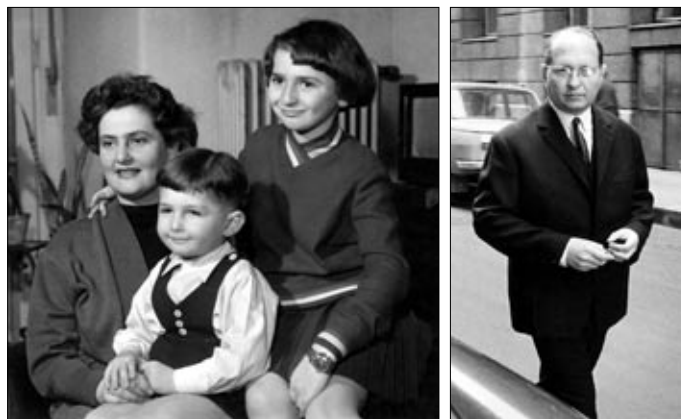


Figure 2. The Fenyves family in 1956: Vera, Andras (age 3), Eva (age 9), and Ervin Fenyves.

considered a spacious apartment by Hungarian standards. It was the 1950s. My earliest memory was playing in a real burned-out Russian tank at age 3. It must have been right after the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

My father, Ervin, born in 1924, is still alive and continues to work. In my youth, he was an assistant professor at Eotvos Lorand University and an experimental physicist, a rising star in the large experimental physics institute in Budapest. He had joint appointments.

My mother, Vera, born in 1926, worked outside the home before I was born. She speaks multiple languages, particularly French, English, and German. After I was born, she was a stay-at-home mom. My sister is 6 years older than I am, and I remember her taking care of me (*Figure 2*).

I have fond memories of my maternal grandfather, Karl. He was a pharmacist as well as an avid pianist. He played the piano 1 to 2 hours every day, and I enjoyed listening. He was also an organist in the largest synagogue in Budapest. Karl spoke 7 or 8 languages; he had an excellent working use of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, as well as Russian, German, Serb, and Hungarian. He read a portion of Homer's *Iliad* to me in Greek. He was a remarkable man. He was born in 1891 and died in 1970 and told remark-

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Figure 3. At age 7, ready for a chess tournament.

able stories about World War I. He was a medic in the hapless Hungarian army that immediately lost to Russia. He actually spent some time in Siberia in a Russian prison camp, but he was very well treated as a medical officer. He returned to Hungary via Japan, and he told colorful stories of his trip back.

WCR: *What is your mother like?*

AZF: My mother has always been a major driving force in my life. She was always around except when she went on trips. She is full of life, gregarious. Even though she didn't go to college, she is very intelligent. I got my information about the world from her. I very much viewed the world through her eyes.

WCR: *What is your father like?*

AZF: My father is extremely bright. He and I would discuss science, literature, and history. He taught me to play chess when I was 4, and I became a very good chess player by age 6. My dad loved that I played chess. He would bring me out when adults were invited to the house to play chess, and I would routinely beat his friends, who were humiliated by the loss. By about age 6 or 7, I had a chess trainer who started taking me to tournaments (Figure 3). I played chess like a 6- or 7-year-old would—a wide-open game not restricted by years of training. I was original and very aggressive. My mother disliked the fact that I would be going to these smoke-filled rooms with mostly men 20, 30, or 40 years older than I. She basically talked me out of pursuing a career in chess. I might add that chess was very important in Hungary, as it was in the Soviet Union. Most international grand masters are Russian.

There is a small follow-up to this chess story. I was completely hopeless in physical education during elementary school. I couldn't climb ropes, and I was the shortest and weakest member of the class. But chess was considered a sport in Hungary, and therefore I got high grades in physical education, instead of flunking it, because of my chess abilities.

WCR: *Did you give up chess?*

AZF: After age 7 or so, I played chess very little until later in elementary school when I was an alternate to the junior championship in Budapest. I resumed the game at Hillcrest High School, and our team was the Dallas city champion. I came in third individually in Dallas, but that was the end of my chess career.

WCR: *What was your father like? He must have been disappointed when your mother talked you out of being in chess tournaments.*

AZF: He was perhaps a bit disappointed, but something new appeared. He had a number of friends who were incredible mathematicians—people of the status of Paul Erdos. He was the most prolific mathematician of the 20th century in terms of number of publications. A fantastic book written about him is called *The Man Who Loved Numbers*. I met him at an early age. I also met Pal Turan and Alfred Renyi, two very eccentric but brilliant mathematicians. They would bring me mathematical problems to solve. Solving these problems did not require higher mathematics but required great originality. If I solved one or two of these occasionally, I was quite proud of myself, and my dad was equally happy. In fact, from that time forward, I knew that I would become a mathematician and pursued that goal until midway through my college years.

WCR: *It sounds like your home was quite a warm one. Both your father and mother appear to have a great capacity for friendship.*

AZF: That is correct. There was some conflict as well. It wasn't completely idyllic. The conflict partly resulted from the fact that 6 people and 3 generations lived in the same apartment.

WCR: *How many rooms were there?*

AZF: Four large rooms—a bedroom for my parents, another for my grandparents, a dining area, and a living room—and then a very small room that my sister and I shared. The conflicts that occurred were of a political nature and had to do with the fact that my mother wanted to leave Hungary and, at least in the early stages, my father was not excited about this idea.

WCR: *He changed his mind after the Russians came in?*

AZF: Somewhat. In 1956, when I was 3 years old, we were in Yugoslavia visiting relatives. Apparently, there was a chance to stay there or perhaps escape to Italy. Because my dad was a rising star both at the university and at the experimental institute, he elected not to leave. Whenever political problems emerged in Hungary—and there was plenty of unrest in the late 1950s—my parents argued about why we had not left the country.

WCR: *What about your grandparents?*

AZF: My grandfather also had offers to leave Hungary in the late 1940s, right after the war—not as a pharmacist but as a pianist. He was actually offered a contract in the USA, but he did not accept it. He loved working as a pharmacist. He worked until he died at age 79. My grandmother Elizabeth also worked. She never went to college but was a bright woman, and she worked in one of the kitchens of the only Jewish hospital of Budapest: a kosher kitchen with a separate milk and meat kitchen.

WCR: *When was Elizabeth, your grandmother, born?*

AZF: She was born in 1905 and died in 1985.

WCR: *She sounds like she was a very warm person.*

AZF: She was. As my father got more prominent, my parents began to travel more. The typical Hungarian system under communism allowed no more than 2 family members to travel at a

time—effectively leaving 2 hostages behind, assuring that the travelers would return. With my parents gone, my grandmother was our mother and babysitter, and I spent a lot of time with her, as did my sister. Occasionally, my father and my sister would travel or my father and I would travel together for short trips, but never more than 2 of the 4.

WCR: *Your father was a visiting professor?*

AZF: Exactly. He gave talks and went to international physics conferences.

WCR: *What about your father's parents?*

AZF: My father's father, Zoltan, was born about 1900 and died about 1935, when my dad was 16. That was very traumatic for my dad. Incidentally, our family name is Fenyves, which is my father's name to this day. I dropped the "y" many years later when I became a US citizen.

WCR: *Why did you do that?*

AZF: I thought it would be simpler to pronounce. By that time, I was about to go to medical school and thought Fenves would be easier than constantly having to explain that "ny" is a single, soft Hungarian sound.

WCR: *How did your father's father die at a young age?*

AZF: He committed suicide.

WCR: *What about your father's mother?*

AZF: My father's mother, Valeria, came from a family in what's currently Czechoslovakia. I don't know much about her parents. I think her father was a businessman. Her sister had a very large family, and her sister's entire family was killed in the Holocaust. Not all were killed by the Germans; some were killed by local Slovakian fascists and some even by Hungarians.

WCR: *When was Valeria born?*

AZF: She was probably born about 1900. After the war, Valeria lived with her sister, whose family had been devastated, in their own apartment. Her sister was pleasant but insane due to her past trauma. They both lived in Budapest. The third person in their home was my father's stepfather, whom Valeria married after my grandfather died.

WCR: *Valeria died when?*

AZF: She died after I left Hungary, so probably around 1976.

WCR: *Did your father go to university?*

AZF: Yes. About age 18 he could still get into university even though he was Jewish. He began to study mathematics and physics. He also went to pharmacy school, not because his heart was in it but because my grandparents on both sides were pharmacists—my father's father had a pharmacy and my mother's father had a pharmacy. His parents wanted him to work in the store. In the height of the war, of course, the university ceased operating, and then Jews were completely dismissed and could no longer attend. My father resumed university after 1945 and got both a pharmacy degree, which he was very proud of, and a degree in physics and mathematics.

WCR: *How did your mother and father survive World War II?*

AZF: My mother was very Aryan-looking, pretty and tall with light brown hair. My grandfather, her father, obtained false Christian papers for her. These papers depicted her as a displaced Christian person from the countryside. Additionally, she had a wonderful Christian friend, an older man, who had a restaurant in Budapest. He hid a few Jews, including my mother, and a few

soldiers who deserted the Hungarian army. During the day my mother worked in his restaurant, and at night she slept in the restaurant's kitchen or in various places with the others who were being hidden there.

My mother's mother, Elizabeth, went from house to house after a while and stayed with various friends and occasionally strangers. She had purchased gold chains before the war and cut off pieces to give to the owners of the different places where she stayed. Money was worthless at this point, so people paid in gold.

My father's situation was more complicated. He stayed for a while in Budapest but then the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944, and soon thereafter my father was deported to a forced labor camp. Then, he was transferred to an even more punitive labor camp, where people were committing suicide and many were tortured and killed. He realized early on that he was going to be killed if he did not escape. Because of his pharmacy background, he had enough medical knowledge to become the medic of this group. That enabled him to eventually escape with another person. He returned to Budapest and joined the underground in late October.

WCR: *That was still 1944?*

AZF: Yes. He was in a forced labor camp from April 1944 to about October 1944. This was the worst of times—when the deportations from the ghettos started in big numbers. He was very good at drawing. He was able to forge the signature of the German commander of Budapest, and so he would shuffle back between the Jewish ghetto and the Swiss embassy delivering Swiss passports. There was a wonderful Swiss consul named Lutz who saved countless Jewish lives by issuing Swiss passports to Jews as a way of protection. So, my dad shuffled back and forth. He told me that initially the guards at the ghetto gates were very suspicious, but because he kept going every day, he eventually was a familiar face so they figured he was a courier of the Swiss embassy.

In January 1945, the Russians finally arrived and began to bombard the city. My dad got a serious shrapnel wound from the Russian artillery. His foot was severely injured, and he ended up in an infirmary and spent the rest of the war recuperating there.

WCR: *Did it permanently affect his walking?*

AZF: It gave him a tiny bit of limp, and he has a hole in the back of his foot.

WCR: *The Germans thought he was an employee of the Swiss embassy?*

AZF: Correct, and he even got false papers. He was very lucky that they never strip-searched him. Unfortunately, one way that the Germans and the Hungarian police identified Jews was to strip them to see if they were circumcised, since non-Jewish Hungarians were not circumcised. My grandmother Elizabeth's father was the closest family member who was deported to Auschwitz and killed. He was picked up on the outskirts of Budapest in a strip search. They would have men get naked, and those who were circumcised were deported to Auschwitz. Many decades later we found an eyewitness who remembered my great-grandfather in Auschwitz, at the infamous train station where passengers were separated for the gas chamber or for slave labor.

WCR: *Your sister made it through?*

AZF: Yes, my sister is 6 years older, so she was born in 1947.

WCR: *I imagine your mother didn't go to college because her age for college would have coincided with World War II.*

AZF: That's exactly right. My mother was also a very good pianist—not quite as good as Karl, her father, but quite good. Her dream was to go to the academy of music, but it was out of the question at that time for a young Jewish woman to be accepted to the academy.

WCR: *Did you play a musical instrument?*

AZF: No. I had a very brief stint playing the classical guitar, but I was awful.

WCR: *What has your sister done?*

AZF: My sister, Eva, became a pharmacist as well. She went to pharmacy school in Budapest. In 1967, at the age of 20, she married a pediatrician. She stayed behind in Hungary after we left in 1969. For 8 years, I did not see my sister at all. In 1977, my sister and brother-in-law and their daughter, Monica, who was 4 years old, emigrated to the USA to join us.

WCR: *What was life like from 1953 until 1969, when you emigrated to the USA? It was during that period that Hungary was entirely under the Russians, I presume.*

AZF: Part of my life could be described as very gray in the sense that Budapest was an unhappy city. Nevertheless, we had a nice family life. Budapest had been ravaged by World War II and also by the 1956 revolution. People seemed hopeless and very suspicious. There were informants everywhere. The secret police was very strong. People were very careful of what they said unless you were a very close friend.

Elementary school was regimented, in the sense that we had to sit with our hands behind our back, stand every time a teacher came in, and raise our hands if we wanted to say something. The curriculum was completely rigid. On the other hand, schooling was legendarily excellent, with very rigorous covering of the sciences and mathematics. History, of course, was entirely distorted and taught from a communist perspective. My memories in elementary school were good. I was a straight-A student—including physical education because of my chess playing.

One of the first major events in my life came in 1964, when I was about 10. My father had risen to a high rank in the physics world and had received a 2-year appointment at a linear accelerator in Dubna, Soviet Union, about 100 miles north of Moscow. Between 1964 and 1966, my father basically was gone. Luckily for me, my sister and I had 4 long trips to the Soviet Union. In the summer, I would leave in June and come back in late August. I would get there mostly by train. A couple of times we flew on those early Russian propeller planes. Those were unforgettable.

For the first time, I got a view of the world. To be sure, it was the Soviet Union, but I loved the Soviet Union—not for its politics but for its size. Early on, maybe because of my mother's stories of the war experience and the Holocaust, I felt very stifled and extremely restricted, like there was no way out. All of a sudden my eyes were open. I met Russians who survived the war, and I was amazed when they said, "Well, when the Germans were closing in on Moscow, we just took a train and went 2000 kilometers to Siberia, and that's where we spent the rest of the war." Although things were harsh and difficult, the size and power of this country impressed me. And the people were very nice to me.

WCR: *Could you speak Russian?*

AZF: I learned Russian quite well. Unfortunately, I have forgotten most of it. This was a major career move for my dad, and his salary was very high by Russian standards. My dad had

a driver available to him, so we could go to Moscow whenever we wanted. Ultimately, we visited Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), Yalta (where the famous treaty was signed), Tallinn (the capital of Estonia), and Riga (the capital of Latvia). These were wonderful trips that sparked my desire to leave Hungary if the opportunity arose.

WCR: *In these 4 trips, you were in the Soviet Union a total of a year?*

AZF: It was about 10 months—3 months each of 2 summers and 2 months each of 2 winters. I took an extended winter vacation where I would take some of my textbooks with me, and I was a good enough student that I caught up and then came back in the early part of February.

WCR: *When you grew up, what was the population of Budapest?*

AZF: The population of Hungary was 10 million and that of Budapest, about 2 million, much like it is today.

WCR: *It sounds like there was enough money in your household that you were able to go to a concert or another performance if you wanted to.*

AZF: Yes. Both sets of grandparents were quite wealthy before the war. The war devastated them and, of course, the pharmacies on both of my grandparents' sides were confiscated, nationalized if you will, by Hungarians, and my grandparents did not receive any monetary compensation. Because Karl, a pharmacist, continued to work, and because my dad, a self-made man, began to rise in rank, we started to have more money. And then the Soviet Union made a big difference. Every time I came back from a trip to the Soviet Union, I brought back with me a Spanish 6-string guitar or some very primitive calculators and then sold them. Also, we bought Oriental rugs in the Soviet Union, especially in Moscow. They were made in Afghanistan or Iran.

WCR: *Were there any teachers in Budapest who had a particular influence on you?*

AZF: I had the same teacher from first through fourth grades. She was pretty and intelligent, and I was totally captivated by her. Interestingly, she very much toed the party line. This led to my early political education by my mother. Once when my dad was preparing for a trip to England, I told my mother that I was afraid for his life because the English queen was likely to behead him since he was from a communist country. She then educated me about the political realities. Since I was very gullible, I had brought the party line home. That began my political education, which was very important later on. When I left Hungary, a lot of my compatriots who also emigrated had a much harder time adapting to the West because their parents were afraid to teach them the true realities. Initially, they were very critical of the West because they still carried a lot of baggage from what they had learned in school.

As for the rest of my elementary school career, I don't recall anybody of particular interest. After 8 grades, which is the end of elementary school, I was on track to become a mathematician and applied to a secondary school in Hungary, called a gymnasium. Gymnasium is very important in Hungary since you go there for the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, at the end of which you either go off into the world or you go to the university. I had to apply to a special ninth-grade gymnasium that was specializing in mathematics. I took an oral entrance exam. My future mathemat-

ics teacher asked me problems; I had to go to the blackboard and solve them. My earlier experiences with those great mathematicians at home came in very handy. I did well and was accepted. I spent ninth grade in Kolcsei Ferenc Gymnasium.

One other experience had a profound effect on me. In the Soviet Union, we met a British physicist who lived in Dubna. In 1967, he invited me to visit him in England. My parents sent me alone. (One could go because there were 3 hostages left behind.) I spent a month with this physicist and his family: 2 weeks in Canterbury and 2 weeks in a small town outside of Manchester. I fell in love with England. I loved the people. Suddenly, I had gone from what to me looked like a black-and-white movie in Hungary to a color movie in England. People were happy. I was hoping until the very last day of that trip that my parents would miraculously appear with my sister and I wouldn't have to go back to Hungary. I was devastated for a few days, realizing that I had to go back. I absolutely resolved at that point that I would leave Hungary. That led to some conflict with my parents, who detected my feelings and knew that eventually I would leave. The final straw was preregistration for the draft. At age 18 everybody had to serve in the Hungarian army, an idea that did not thrill me in the least. I resolved to leave before I turned 18 to avoid serving the mandatory 2 years in the army.

WCR: *How did you get out?*

AZF: In 1968, I was 15, and my father received another promotion. He was to work on behalf of the Hungarian government at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, a part of the United Nations. My father's job was as a physicist, a technical expert, enforcing the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. His area was South America; he would travel there and make sure that those countries were not secretly accumulating weapons-grade plutonium for military purposes. This was a 2-year appointment, starting in 1968. My father had a diplomatic rank and therefore carried a diplomatic passport.

Our secret plan was for my parents and me (my sister had married in 1967) to move to Vienna and spend 2 years there. It was an understanding among the 3 of us that we would simply not return to Hungary. But this plan did not work. The Hungarians had a hunch that my dad might not return to Hungary and therefore kept delaying the issuing of exit passports for my mother and me. My father started his job in Vienna alone. Then abruptly, about 5 months into the job, he was recalled to Hungary and told he could not go back to Vienna. He was forced to resign. One evening he came home extremely frightened that he was going to be arrested. All that night my family burned documents. Despite resigning from his United Nations position, he retained 2 things that were key to our later escape: his United Nations passport, which was called a *lesse passe*, and diplomatic license plates for his car. He returned to the university and to the experimental institute in Budapest, but he began to have a lot of fears. Additionally, the Czech revolution occurred in 1968 and was then crushed by the Russians.

In the summer of 1969, my parents obtained permission for the 3 of us to go to Yugoslavia on a 30-day vacation. The *lesse passe* is good anywhere in the world, but you cannot leave your native country with it. We had to get to a neutral country. Once we crossed the border into Yugoslavia in our car, we drove into the woods, unscrewed the Hungarian license plate, and screwed

on the diplomatic Austrian license plate. We then went from Yugoslavia to Austria on a Sunday evening in August. Thousands of Austrian vacationers were returning from a long weekend on the beach in Yugoslavia. The lines that had the Austrian license plates were not even stopped; they were just waved through. However, on the Austrian side, we were stopped. The Austrian border guard could not understand why there wasn't a stamp in the *lesse passe* showing that we had left Austria for Yugoslavia, which, of course, we hadn't. My father in perfectly fluent German had a long and painful discussion with the border guard. Finally, my father suggested that he call the United Nations in Vienna to verify that he really was employed there. Of course, on a Sunday night, he knew that that was a bluff. Ultimately, we were let in.

Once we were in Austria, we crossed into Lichtenstein and eventually Switzerland. Those border crossings were easier because people weren't escaping from Austria into Switzerland. We ended up in Geneva, Switzerland, only about 5 miles from the French border. There is a linear accelerator there called Cern, and my father was able to get a job there. By this time he was a very well recognized physicist, so when he showed up at Cern saying, "I've escaped from Hungary," they handed him a month's check of a salary, saying, "You are a visiting professor here, but don't come to work. There are several Russian and Hungarian scientists here, and it would be a *faux pas* if you're here."

Then we went to the American embassy in Bern. My father knew a wonderful man, Shapiro, a physicist who worked for naval intelligence during the war and who had State Department connections. After we arrived in Switzerland, my father received 2 job offers within 24 hours—one from the University of Pennsylvania and one from Stanford University. He selected the University of Pennsylvania because it was a 1-year appointment. The fact that he had a job waiting with a salary in the USA and the State Department connection greatly accelerated our coming to the USA. We stayed in Geneva about 7 weeks and then were allowed into the USA.

WCR: *You arrived in the USA when?*

AZF: On October 11, 1969. When we arrived in Philadelphia, I was ill with the measles. We stayed initially with the Seloves, both physicists at the University of Pennsylvania, who were very gracious to us. Soon thereafter, we rented a house, and I started 10th grade at Lower Marion High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. That was the hardest year of my life academically. I had only rudimentary English skills. I went to high school in a foreign language, and one of my first courses was economics. As a communist boy from the Eastern bloc who did not speak English, economics was very difficult. I flunked the first test, which was given 2 days after I arrived. I made a D on the second test, a C on the third test, and a B+ on the fourth test. The teacher said, "Anybody who can bring up his grade like this in my class will get the last grade, a B+." By the end of this year, I was on the honor roll.

Things soon changed again. My dad's position at the University of Pennsylvania was given to recognize his merits from the past, but it was not a permanent position. Although he taught at the University of Pennsylvania, his major effort was to look for a more permanent position, which he found at the University of Texas at Dallas, which was the only graduate school in Texas



Figure 4. Senior at Hillcrest High School, age 18.

where he had a friend, a Hungarian mathematician. In May 1970, we moved to Dallas.

WCR: *Where did you go to school here?*

AZF: For my junior and senior years, I went to Hillcrest High School in Dallas (Figure 4).

WCR: *How many languages could you speak by this time?*

AZF: At that time, I spoke good Russian, English, Hungarian, and some rudimentary French.

WCR: *How did it work out at Hillcrest? Were you happy with Dallas?*

AZF: The first year in the USA was very hard for me academically because of having to learn the language. The USA was not what I expected. I thought it would be like England but on a much bigger scale, but really the USA is quite different. Philadelphia was not a beautiful city like London. Although students were excited to see a foreigner in Ardmore High School, the newness eventually wore off, and I felt rather isolated. I followed the other students in the neighborhood to the bus, but I could never figure out what bus to take back home, so I always walked home. One day I took the wrong bus and it took me to a totally wrong place, and after that, I gave up. My day consisted of going with the students to school, being in school, being extraordinarily tired from listening to history, literature, and economics in a foreign language, and then having to walk home a couple of miles. When arriving home, I was so tired that I would take a 2-hour nap. Then I would have dinner with my parents. I would watch some TV shows, which was good for language, do homework, and go to bed. That was my life for a year.

At Hillcrest, I began to make some friends. I was still a bit of a novelty—this Hungarian boy appearing in the 11th grade. I was on the chess team, becoming the first board, and our team went on to win the city championship. I had a very eclectic group of friends, mostly social outcasts like myself who were strange but intellectual. I had learned to play bridge in the Soviet Union,

so I also began playing some social bridge. My career at Hillcrest was better than at Ardmore.

Things really changed when I applied to college. Once I got into Stanford, people began to notice me a little more, but that was toward the end of my senior year.

WCR: *Were there any teachers at Hillcrest who had a particular influence on you?*

AZF: There was a chemistry teacher, Charles Head, who to this day keeps up with me via e-mail or reunions. He was particularly nice to me. My algebra teacher, Sarah Waldman, was also particularly nice to me, and since I loved mathematics and especially algebra and number theory, she would occasionally let me teach the class.

WCR: *How did you and your family adjust to Dallas? Did you like it from the beginning?*

AZF: It was quite difficult early on. My mother left both of her parents in Hungary and my grandfather died in 1970, the year we moved to Dallas. My mother could not go back for the funeral. Because we left illegally, escaping from Hungary, the Hungarians pursued a criminal trial against my parents. I was considered a juvenile, so I was not tried. My sister had to hire an attorney to represent my parents in their absence. Ultimately, both of my parents received prison terms, my father 3 years and my mother 2½ years. This kind of behavior by the Hungarian government sent a strong message not to come back to Hungary to visit ailing parents. There was a danger of having to serve time in jail. My mother's early experience in Dallas was colored by the fact that she didn't drive. English was the weakest of the 5 languages she spoke. She missed my sister and her parents. My grandmother did visit us in Dallas on several occasions over the next few years. We wanted her to stay in Dallas, but she didn't speak English and had a hard time in the USA. She loved being with us but missed everything about her life in Hungary, like her language, her apartment, her friends, and her granddaughter, so she always went back.

The most difficult issue was my sister's not being allowed to come visit us. My sister and brother-in-law were not allowed to travel at all, even to Eastern Europe, for about 3 years after we left Hungary. Ultimately, they were allowed to go to places like Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

WCR: *Your leaving must have been a particular embarrassment to the Hungarian government because your father was such a prominent individual.*

AZF: That is correct. After the 2 years spent in the Soviet Union, my father received the Hungarian National Prize in 1967. He received it at the same time as the world-famous Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly. The national prize came with a big cash award and a beautiful little emblem, but it also came with a little card. The holder of this card could use it to get into places like a sold-out movie or concert.

WCR: *When did Hungary open up so you could visit?*

AZF: I returned to Hungary for the first time in 1991. That's when things began to open up with the fall of the Berlin wall. The Russians finally withdrew from Hungary about 1992. Immediately, communism was defeated in Hungary and it became a democratic country.

WCR: *What process did you follow to apply to colleges in the USA?*

AZF: Having come from Eastern Europe, I knew of only one college worth going to, and that was Harvard. I was convinced that my goal in life was to get into Harvard and that anything less than that was going to be a bitter failure.

WCR: *After the first few weeks, you were making all A's at Hillcrest High School?*

AZF: Yes. I was a very good student. I had fairly unbalanced Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, however. I had major strength in mathematics and a little better than average score in English—which I was very proud of, since it was a foreign language for me. I applied initially to 3 schools: Harvard, Princeton, and Cornell. A professor friend of my father's told me that I should also apply to Stanford and Berkeley. I didn't even know where Stanford was. I was accepted into Stanford in April 1972. I opened the envelope and read the acceptance but was not at all impressed and put it aside. A few days later I got a letter from Harvard placing me on the waiting list, and I was devastated. I thought that my academic career was over and that I had completely failed my father. Fellow students in my high school, however, began to be very impressed that I got into Stanford, and this reaction came to me as a complete shock. I learned that Stanford was a very good university.

WCR: *Palo Alto, California, is a long way from Dallas. Your family was very close. It must have been hard on your parents for you to go that far away.*

AZF: My mother was very unhappy, but my father was proud. My father knew Robert Hofstadter, a Nobel laureate in physics at Stanford, as well as Hungarian mathematician Gábor Szegő. He felt strongly that I needed to go. At the same time, there were financial pressures, and I was told that he could afford only 3 years of college. My mother was concerned about my being so far away. She too put pressure on me to finish college as soon as possible and then come back to Dallas.

WCR: *How did Stanford work out? You had never been to California before.*

AZF: I had never been to California or to the campus. My entire first-quarter allotment was basically spent on the taxi drive from the airport to the campus. I arrived with a single suitcase. I was dropped off in the middle of campus. I didn't know where the dormitory was. After that first shocking day, I had the most wonderful time in college. I was completely maniacal in terms of courseloads so I could finish in 3 years. I actually attended Stanford only 8 quarters and finished in $2\frac{2}{3}$ years. But I had a wonderful time. For the first time, I made really close friends. I majored in mathematics.

My mother, a major influence on my life, suggested that I may be well suited for medicine because I liked working with people. For the 2 summers before entering Stanford, I worked at UT Southwestern with a wonderful biochemist, Paul Srere. He made some seminal contributions to cholesterol metabolism and to enzyme research. I worked on sodium dodecyl sulfate–polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis in his laboratory. That introduced me to scientific research and to biochemistry. Paul Srere's next-door research mate at the Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospital was Roger Unger, who was working on glucagon. It was an exciting time; samples were coming in from all over the world since he had the best radioimmunoassay for glucagon. He had a rabbit in his lab that became famous for providing a wonderful antiserum to glucagon. At Stanford, I took all the mathematics courses that were

required for my major but also took premedical classes—chemistry, biology, and such.

WCR: *Was it your mother who encouraged you to work at UT Southwestern?*

AZF: Yes. She did not know Paul Srere. At a university dinner party with my father, she had met the wonderful endocrinologist Marvin Sipperstein. My mother is a wonderful, jovial, full-of-life woman who enchanted Marvin, and her usual opening line would be, "I have this brilliant son whom you absolutely have to have work for you in your laboratory." Marvin could not say no. He gently told my mother that he did not have room in his laboratory but that he had the funds to support me for a small summer clerkship and that he had a dear friend, Paul Srere, a biochemist at the VA Hospital. I got my introduction to science through my mother, and I'm forever grateful to Marvin Sipperstein, who shared an office with another endocrinologist, Dan Foster. I picked up my paycheck once a month from his office, and I would say hi to Dan Foster. Ever since, our lives have crossed in many interesting ways. Dan Foster was very involved in civic activities at that time and was on the board of the Dallas Independent School District. Probably the reason I got into Stanford is that I wrote an abstract on the little work I did with Paul Srere and submitted that to the Westinghouse competition, where I became a Westinghouse semifinalist. Dan Foster, being on the school board, recognized another semifinalist student from Dallas and me. Ultimately, I think, this helped me get into Stanford.

WCR: *How did you like the beautiful Palo Alto area? You must have thought you were in heaven.*

AZF: I did, absolutely. There were several aspects to this. For the first time, I was independent. As much as my parents were a guiding influence, for the first time I was truly on my own. I tasted the kind of freedom I always longed for, and I absolutely flourished. I became independent and self-reliant. The weather was gorgeous. I think San Francisco is the most beautiful city in the world. I was poor and had no transportation, but I had friends who had cars, and they took me to the symphony or to plays occasionally in San Francisco. I adored the city and life in California.

I was a very thin person at that time, weighing 115 pounds. (I'm 66 inches tall.) As I was leaving home for Stanford, my mother told me that a lot of students were starving at Harvard, so I began to eat immensely. I didn't want to starve. I gained about 15 pounds the first year, and I could never get below 130 after that. I was a member of the Stanford eating club, and that helped as well.

I adored Stanford and loved my courses. One of the first professors who really impressed me was Gordon Wright, who taught European history. His specialty was 19th-century Germany and Prussia. He was a marvelous old-fashioned professor with a bow tie. He would start his 1-hour lecture promptly at 8:00 AM. As the second hand approached 9:00, he would always be on his last sentence. I almost went into history because of him. I also had memorable mathematics professors, but they were mostly eccentric, idiosyncratic individuals who were overweight, asthmatic, and nervous.

Until this time, I had always been number one in my class in mathematics and basically never had to study. I would just listen to lectures and maybe do a couple of problems at home, but the subject came to me easily. All of a sudden at Stanford, I had to

study. Every student had been number one in his or her class. Worse yet, a couple of areas of mathematics began to be quite hard for me—in particular, topology. I had a difficult time with abstract topology, and I didn't particularly like linear algebra. My favorite area was number theory; I was very good at it, especially prime number theory. Yet I began to have some doubts about a career in mathematics because I wanted to be as good as I can be, one of the very best, not just one of the better ones. And mathematics, I felt, was a little bit like music. You either are a concert pianist or you are just somebody else playing in the orchestra.

Also, I liked all of the other sciences: biological sciences, chemistry (particularly inorganic chemistry), and physics (real physics, not premed physics). I should say parenthetically that my father was always very kind and never pressured me to become a physicist or a mathematician, something I greatly appreciated. He indicated that he would be happy if I chose medicine as a career.

I took a couple of courses in film and theater that I really enjoyed and was involved in 3 theatrical productions in my dorm. I had supporting roles only, but I really enjoyed that, and I met different kinds of students who were not in the heavy sciences. One of my fondest memories at Stanford was meeting people who were in totally different fields. Some wanted to be film directors or art directors, and I had intense conversations with them about these topics. I have always encouraged my children to have experiences that widen their horizons. That's the most valuable experience of college, in my view.

WCR: *When did you decide to go into medicine?*

AZF: Although I was going to get a degree in mathematics, I cared only about a very narrow area the field—number theory, problem solving, and algebra. I decided to apply to medical school with the idea that I might perhaps return to mathematics or pick a field within medicine that was as mathematical as possible. I applied only to medical schools in Texas. My parents, particularly my mother, wanted me to return home, and there was also strong financial pressure. My father had taken loans to pay for the first 2 years of Stanford. For my third and final year at Stanford, I got a partial scholarship. Also, I worked every summer and saved money during those 3 months.

WCR: *You graduated from Stanford in <3 years?*

AZF: Yes. The fall of my third year in college was spent at Southern Methodist University (SMU). During that time, I took the Medical College Admission Test and interviewed for medical school, since I applied only in Texas. This was a logical thing to do. I then returned to Stanford for the winter and spring quarters of my third and final year and finished requirements for my degree. During my semester at SMU, which I did not like very much, I was a social outcast as a new student from Stanford. Nobody could figure out why I would want to take a semester at SMU. I did not know a single soul, and I also lived at home. By this time I also had a girlfriend at Stanford, and I missed her as well. Nevertheless, the time at SMU served its purpose.

In January I got word that I had gotten into my second choice for medical school, the University of Texas at Houston. My first choice was UT Southwestern, and ultimately I was accepted there.

WCR: *You went to medical school after 3 years of college. There weren't many students in your class who had done that.*

AZF: Only one classmate of mine, in a class of 204, had finished college in 3 years.

WCR: *No one in your family or extended family was a physician. Is that correct?*

AZF: There is one exception. Both my mother and my father are only children. My father's father, my fraternal grandfather, was one of 7 children. Several of the siblings were pharmacists, and one of them, Kornel, my great-uncle, was a very well respected obstetrician and gynecologist. My father always spoke very highly of him. He died in Terezin, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. I visited Terezin, and I'm pretty sure that my great-uncle was one of the physicians who ran the infirmary at the concentration camp. I was told he died there of "natural causes," which may well be true, although one wonders how you die of natural causes in a concentration camp.

WCR: *What were some initial surprises for you in medical school?*

AZF: In college I had taken the absolute minimum premedical requirements to get into medical school. I had concentrated on mathematics. I was utterly unprepared compared with other bright students who went to college for 4 years and had concentrated on the biological and chemical sciences. Initially, at least, I did not do well, particularly in anatomy. Toward the end of the first semester of my freshman year, I was notified that I was on the verge of failing the course. I had always been an extremely successful student, so I took this rather hard. I should also mention that for financial reasons, I lived at home during medical school. That was wonderful but a source of distraction. It also decreased the number of hours I could study. After the letter from the anatomy professor, I became intensely serious about anatomy and thereafter studied as much as I could, but it was a bit too late for that year. At the end of the first year, I was in the lower half of my class.

UT Southwestern was extraordinarily grade conscious. Up until this point, both because of my European education and my years at Stanford, I was used to taking essay and verbal exams. Multiple-choice exams were relatively new and were hard for me. I was very critical of them, and yet this was the only format for the exams. In my first year at UT Southwestern, many scores were reported to the third decimal point. I thought that absurd.

WCR: *How did you intermix with the Texans? You had gone to high school in Dallas, of course, but then you were with a very sophisticated lot at Stanford.*

AZF: The interactions in medical school actually worked out fairly well. The students were very bright and exhibited great intellectual ability and curiosity. To be sure, they didn't have the worldwide interest in terms of history or philosophy that I saw at Stanford. Medical school, however, especially UT Southwestern, was very goal oriented: "Let's learn medicine and that's enough." Because there was no undergraduate campus, UT Southwestern was truly a trade school in many ways, albeit an excellent one. I filled other intellectual needs not so much in medical school but by living with my parents and interacting with their fascinating friends. I always loved their dinner parties and met a number of the faculty members at the University of Texas at Dallas.

WCR: *How did medical school work out after the initial year?*

AZF: After the warning letter regarding anatomy, I began to work extraordinarily hard. Even though I lived at home all 4 years

of medical school, I began to spend a lot more time on campus. I went to the library and made some friends who lived in apartments around campus. I spent time with them and studied with them.

My second year was a much better year. I was much more comfortable and was getting excited about medicine. In addition, I began to do some research. This time, I moved from Paul Srere's lab to the laboratory of a pulmonologist, Sami Said. Sami Said was born in Egypt and spent some time at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. His claim to fame was the codiscovery of vasoreactive intestinal polypeptide (VIP) while he was at the Karolinska Institute. I worked on the radioimmunoassay measuring VIP. I did this at the VA Hospital; he was just 1 floor down from Paul Srere and Roger Unger. I wrote an abstract and presented it at the student research forum at UT Southwestern.

At the same time, I was a bit disappointed about the darker side of academics. Dr. Said asked me to write part of a manuscript for a paper on VIP, which I dutifully did. Ultimately, my name was not on the manuscript. When I asked him about it, he told me that I had not done enough of the original work in this paper. Yet I had done a lot of the work in the laboratory, and I actually wrote part of the paper. I was greatly disappointed in not receiving authorship, and as a result I became somewhat sour on academic medicine.

WCR: *How did you react to the basic sciences? Were you very glad that you had decided to go into medicine?*

AZF: Yes, I was. After my first year, I began to love the subjects, particularly microbiology, biochemistry, physiology, and pathology. Dr. Bruce Fallis in pathology was wonderful. He was a stern, almost General Patton–like character, and he taught the subject didactically, and I loved that. All students loved that course. We did not use a textbook; we used his notes put together over 20 years of teaching this course. I loved the basic sciences and found that I belonged in medicine.

My true emergence was in the third year. My first year was very weak, the second year was much stronger, the third year was better yet, and then in my fourth year I was completely convinced that I did the right thing and have never regretted it since.

WCR: *As you rotated through the various specialties of medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics/gynecology, and so on, was your choice of future specialty relatively easy or difficult?*

AZF: I did not make an early decision. I loved just about everything except surgery. I delivered 35 babies on my own at Parkland. Some of my fellow students were disappointed that they were not allowed to do cesarean sections as third-year medical students. I really liked obstetrics/gynecology and strongly considered pursuing it as a career. I also enjoyed pediatrics. But I soon realized 2 things. I loved the medicine part of obstetrics/gynecology more than I liked the surgical part. With pediatrics I realized that I enjoyed talking to patients, so I liked the older pediatric population. That realization began to channel me toward medicine. I did not like surgery. I was clumsy with my hands, and I couldn't do knots very well. I dreaded being in the operating room holding a retractor. I did the medicine rotation in my third year. Under Dr. Donald Seldin's program, third-year students had 20 weeks of internal medicine, 10 weeks at Parkland and 10 weeks at the VA Hospital or BUMC. I did my medicine rotations at Parkland and at the VA Hospital and loved both. After that 20 weeks, I was certain that I was going into medicine. I worked very hard on

the wards and obtained good references. I worked so hard physically that I really didn't have much time to study, so I did not do spectacularly well on the exam. I don't remember exactly what I made, but I didn't achieve the high grade I was hoping for in medicine. I was very pleased, however, with my clinical work.

WCR: *Who on the faculty at UT Southwestern had a major impact on you?*

AZF: Paul Srere, of course, taught biochemistry. I got to know him well. There was an immunology professor, Wayne Streilein, whom I loved working with. A microbiologist named Don Capra was also one of my heroes during the basic science years. In my third year, I had a wonderful medicine attending, Ron Anderson, who is the long-time chief executive officer of Parkland Hospital. At that point he was in the division of general internal medicine. I loved his attending rounds. Finally, in my fourth year, there were 2 very memorable attendings: Morris Ziff, a preeminent rheumatologist, and Joseph Goldstein, who taught a genetics-endocrine-metabolism course. Dr. Goldstein at that point was already very well known but had not yet received the Nobel Prize. We presented a case of Conradi syndrome to him on rounds. This is a rare, recessive, inherited disorder of infants with characteristic physical findings. Dr. Goldstein was impressed by this case and agreed to write a reference letter on my behalf. His letter of recommendation opened the door for interviews for internships at places that were beyond my reach per se because of my grades.

WCR: *How did you decide to go to St. Louis for internship?*

AZF: After finishing UT Southwestern and having the Parkland and VA Hospital experiences, I wanted to go to a hospital even busier than Parkland. My first 2 choices were Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan and Bronx Municipal Hospital in the Bronx, an Einstein affiliate. I wanted an extraordinarily busy, inner-city hospital for my internship. Luckily, these were very difficult places to get into, and because of my early medical school career, I didn't have the grades for acceptance. I then interviewed at Jewish Hospital of St. Louis, which at that time was still separate from the premier Washington University program (Barnes Hospital) but still an excellent program. This was when I was rather sour on academics, and I was interviewed by a physician in a lab coat in his laboratory. I must have been blind or crazy, but I expanded to him on how I disliked aspects of academia. After the 30-minute interview, I walked out and realized what I had just done, and I felt that I had totally ruined my chances of acceptance. After I got into Jewish Hospital, I asked this physician how he could have graded me well. He said, "You were original and I knew that what you were saying was from the heart and that you really had this sour experience. I totally appreciated that. Everybody else told me what they thought I wanted to hear. You gave me a challenging conversation." I learned from that lesson that you never know how interviews go.

WCR: *How did your internship go?*

AZF: This was 1979. By this time, my sister had arrived permanently in the USA with her husband and their 4-year-old daughter, Monica. They lived in Dallas. My brother-in-law, a pediatrician, had to retrain. He was back in residency.

My internship year was wonderful, and I loved it. I worked extraordinarily hard. I devoted that year to becoming a good physician. I spent long hours in the hospital and usually ate my meals there. I had a unique situation of not having my family



Figure 5. Saralynn and Andrew in St. Louis at his favorite Hungarian restaurant, 1980.

there and not having any attachments early on. I loved internal medicine, a view that has never changed since.

The medical students were from Washington University, and they were very good. They had little “scut work” to do. I liked that because they demanded to be educated. I liked teaching medical students. There were wonderful attendings, and I enjoyed taking care of patients.

WCR: *Did you apply to Parkland Hospital for internship?*

AZF: No. I did not apply to Parkland because I was told in fairly certain terms that I would not have much chance of getting the internship. Parkland was very competitive at that time. Although I improved as the years went by in terms of class standing, I still did not have the appropriate credentials.

WCR: *You stayed 2 years at Jewish Hospital and then decided to come back to Dallas?*

AZF: Yes. I met my future wife around the middle of my internship (*Figure 5*). She was an undergraduate, a junior at Washington University. We met through our parents. Her mother was a dean at the University of Texas at Dallas, and my father was a professor of physics at the same institution. My father and her mother had had lunch together and discovered that both had children in St. Louis. I was given a phone number to call, and Saralynn and I got together in St. Louis. Because of a number of circumstances in my second year at Jewish Hospital, I decided to return to Dallas. The major factor was that I knew that I wanted to practice in Dallas, and the time was appropriate to return. My interest at this time was in pulmonary medicine.

WCR: *When you came back to Dallas, Saralynn had finished college.*

AZF: That’s right.

WCR: *What were the features of Saralynn that attracted you to her?*

AZF: On our very first date, we went to a restaurant in St. Louis called Balaban’s. I was impressed that she listened to my stories intently, laughed, and appeared to really enjoy them. As you can see, I love telling stories about my life. She was vivacious, intelligent, and intense. We just hit it off really well from early on.

WCR: *She was from Dallas originally?*

AZF: She was actually born in New York City, but she had lived in Dallas since about the age of 2.

WCR: *That was another enticement to come home?*

AZF: Exactly. And my wife has a wonderful large extended family, which I have very much enjoyed to this day. Her family is so different from my very small family.

WCR: *How many siblings does she have?*

AZF: She was one of 4 children. Her father, Sylvan Busch, was a well-known and well-respected internist in Dallas who died at age 37 of malignant melanoma. Her mother later married an attorney, also a widower, who had 2 children. She basically grew up as one of 6 children. Saralynn also has numerous cousins, nieces, and nephews and a wonderful stepmother named Hannah Galerstein.

WCR: *When did you get married?*

AZF: We came back to Dallas in 1981 and got married on June 28, 1981 (*Figure 6*). We had a 2-day honeymoon in Dallas, and then I started my third year of residency at BUMC. In my second year in St. Louis, I applied to both Parkland and BUMC, but Parkland did not have a third-year position. John Fordtran at BUMC granted me a third-year spot.

WCR: *How did you like your residency year at BUMC?*

AZF: I greatly admired and respected the chief of medicine, William Peck, at Jewish Hospital. He is a well-known endocrinologist who was extraordinarily proper, trained at Harvard, and conducted morning report and attending rounds in a very formal fashion. He had great knowledge. However, once I decided to leave St. Louis and come back to Dallas, I became a persona non grata. He considered me a traitor to his program. I found out later that they considered me a very good intern and resident and were considering me for chief resident in the fourth year, an important honor at Jewish Hospital and a position that usually would guarantee you staff privileges. Unfortunately, nobody ever communicated this to me. Once I decided to return to Dallas, that consideration was ruined. Dr. Peck actually made my last 6 months rather difficult.

I greatly admire John Fordtran, and he has wonderful humanistic qualities. He was a chief that I was really proud of. In particular, I remember these examples. At Jewish Hospital, if an intern or resident had a conflict with an attending, the house officer was automatically wrong regardless of the facts of the case. In my third year of residency at BUMC, on one occasion one of my interns called a neurologist to come in late in the evening to make a determination about brain death. The neurologist was very reluctant to come in and gave my intern a hard time. When I relayed this information to Dr. Fordtran, he immediately intervened, and the neurologist personally apologized to my intern. I felt that this was a righteous thing to do. Having said that, if you messed up, Dr. Fordtran also let you know about that in no uncertain terms.



Figure 6. Saralynn and Andrew Fenves on their wedding day, 1981.

WCR: *As you were finishing the residency at BUMC, you decided to go into nephrology?*

AZF: As a third-year resident at BUMC, I had missed my chance to apply for a fellowship in the second year, which was when houseofficers ordinarily applied for their fellowships. My interests lay in pulmonary medicine and critical care, and in particular my hero from Jewish and Barnes Hospitals was Stephen LeFrac, a wonderful physician and well-known pulmonologist. He was head of the critical care sections at both Barnes and Jewish Hospitals. I came to Dallas in my third year with the idea that I would either do general internal medicine or a pulmonary fellowship. I rotated at BUMC with the then-chief of pulmonology, Charlie Jarrett. I had a wonderful rotation with him, and he basically offered me a spot for a pulmonary fellowship at BUMC. I also applied for a pulmonary fellowship at Parkland Hospital and was led to believe that I would be able to do my pulmonary fellowship there if I so desired.

All this changed. In the residency training program at BUMC, residents had to take 2 months of nephrology in the final residency year. Nephrology was unavailable to interns or second-year residents. There were 2 attendings at the time: Martin White, who was the director of the division of nephrology, and Michael Emmett, the associate director and the only other member of the division. One month was spent with each attending.

In my month with Mike Emmett, he inquired as to what I was going to do. At this point I was considering private practice or a fellowship but leaning toward a fellowship. I told Dr. Emmett that I would sit out a year and moonlight as an internist and then begin a pulmonary fellowship. Toward the end of the rotation, Dr. Emmett looked at me and said, "You were a mathematics major.

You are not a lung doctor. You need to go into nephrology; it's a lot more mathematical with dialysis and all the calculations." Initially I thought he was joking. Toward the end of the rotation, he announced that he and Dr. White were beginning a renal fellowship at BUMC. There was a fellow, Dr. Fathi, who had actually started at UT Southwestern but could not finish her fellowship there. Thus, Dr. Fathi was a second-year fellow at this time. An attractive feature for me was that I could start immediately after my residency. Thus, I became a nephrologist and have never regretted that decision.

The fellowship was wonderful. I worked with 2 marvelous individuals: Dr. White and Dr. Emmett. All the didactic conferences took place at UT Southwestern. I spent every Thursday at the medical school going to their physiology conference, their journal club, their renal grand rounds, and their internal medicine grand rounds. The faculty at UT Southwestern at that time was stellar: Drs. Don Seldin and Juha Kokko. Juha Kokko was chief of the nephrology section. When he found out that a BUMC fellow was coming over to UT Southwestern, he always made sure that I was assigned the most basic science papers possible to review in journal club. He clearly tested me. After the second time I reviewed a paper about toad bladder transport processes, he was convinced that I could crack it. From then on, we were on very good terms.

A wonderful thing occurred during my fellowship. Mike Emmett told me about a few interesting patients who developed carpal tunnel syndrome while on dialysis, and biopsies taken during carpal tunnel surgery disclosed amyloid. He told me that this occurrence was most unusual and that only a couple of letters addressing this issue had been published in French-language journals and then only in abstract form. He gave me this project and it changed my career. I found a number of other patients with carpal tunnel syndrome with amyloid, a unique amyloid, beta₂-microglobulin amyloid. Radiographs taken of the wrists of these patients disclosed carpal bone cysts. Drs. Emmett, White, and I described the carpal bone cysts in these patients with beta₂-microglobulin amyloid. Our article was the very first in the USA to describe this association. This clinical investigation allowed me to present an abstract as a second-year fellow at the American Society of Nephrology meeting. Ultimately, this project turned me on to clinical investigation. The fact that a small clinical observation could lead to something very exciting was completely enticing to me.

When I finished my fellowship, I wasn't offered a position directly with Dallas Nephrology Associates (DNA), the group of 12 nephrologists that included Drs. White and Emmett. Instead, Dr. White told me that DNA wished to set me up in a northern suburb of Dallas in private practice. So I went into solo private practice in Collin County, covering a number of hospitals. I had no cross-coverage whatsoever for the next 2 years. I was on 50 of 52 weekends for the next 2 years as well as every night. I took 2 weeks of vacation a year (*Figure 7*). This was a trying time for me and my family. The first year I drove 36,000 miles, primarily going from hospital to hospital. At the end of that year, we opened our own dialysis unit in Plano. My weekends got even busier. Early on, I might have had 2 or 3 patients in the hospital, but by the end of the year, I had 10 or 12 patients.

Even with the demands of private practice, I volunteered my time as an unpaid consultant physician at Parkland Hospital.



Figure 7. Relaxing in Vail, Colorado, 1989.

Dr. Seldin knew who I was, and he gratefully accepted my offer. Starting in my third year of private practice, in addition to covering all these hospitals, I would break away 5 times a week for an annual 6-week period and make consult rounds at Parkland. I worked with the fellows, residents, and medical students. I had a great need to teach, to be involved in academics, and I thoroughly enjoyed these 6-week periods. I began to climb the academic ranks: I started as a clinical instructor and after several years became a clinical full professor.

WCR: *How did you get back to BUMC?*

AZF: After the first 3 years, Dr. White and DNA decided to liquidate Collin County Nephrology Associates, and I became a full member of DNA. That was very rewarding to me. Over the next few years, I recruited 3 other recent nephrology fellowship “graduates” to provide patient care for a very busy practice in the Plano, Richardson, and McKinney areas.

By 1990, BUMC had a renal transplant program and needed more nephrologists. Michael Emmett called: “I know you love to teach at Parkland and I’m told you’re a good teacher. Would you like to come to BUMC to be involved in the residency training program?” I was delighted. I loved the potential of teaching interns, residents, and medical students and spending more time with Mike Emmett and Marty White. In addition, I would be able to reduce my driving time.

WCR: *You came back to BUMC in what year?*

AZF: In early 1991.

WCR: *You were gone from BUMC for 7 years. Did you live in the same house the whole time?*

AZF: During my fellowship, we lived close to BUMC, but when I started in private practice in Plano we purchased a home in far North Dallas, in Collin County. Thus, I was very close to Plano Hospital and Richardson Hospital. We lived in that house for 7 years. When I came back to BUMC, we bought a house in Dallas (Figure 8).

WCR: *What was your life like when you were out there those 7 years and you were going to all these different hospitals? What time would you get up in the morning?*

AZF: I woke early. If I attended at Parkland, I would get up at 4:30 or 5:00, run to 1 or 2 hospitals, do dialysis rounds, dialyze my patients, and see some patients in the intensive care unit. Around 9:45 AM, I drove to Parkland Hospital for rounds from 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM. I would grab a salad on the run, jump back in my



Figure 8. Carla (age 9) and Diana (age 5) in October 1992.

car, make it back to Plano about 1:00 or 1:30 PM, see the patients I hadn’t seen, see the new consults, and get home usually about 7:30 or 8:00 PM. I paid a price for this schedule, at least during those 6 weeks annually at Parkland. I didn’t see my family much. Other days, the same would happen except I would not have this 3.5-hour block, so I would have more time for office work and get home a little earlier. I also would start a little later.

The central feature of these years was that almost every day I covered 5 or 6 hospitals and, unfortunately, would have only 3 or 4 patients at each hospital. There were some very positive aspects, however. I was a big fish in a small bowl. I was the only nephrologist around initially. I got consults on critically ill patients, some with very minor electrolyte or other abnormalities. It was clear to me that the physicians wanted my opinion because they respected me. Perhaps the consultation indications were a little soft, but they wanted me involved. That was very rewarding.

WCR: *What is your life like now? You are head of the division of nephrology at BUMC. What time do you get to the hospital? What time do you leave? What time do you get home? What time do you get to bed now?*

AZF: I’m on a number of committees now. On an average day, I wake up around 6:00 AM and generally I’m in the hospital by 7:00 AM. I take morning report 2 months of the year, which is one of my favorite things to do. That is 3 times a week from 7:00 to 8:00 AM. I also do general internal medicine attending rounds twice a year, and I always attend on the renal service, so I have a lot of contact with fellows, residents, interns, and medical students. From 8:00 AM to noon, I make hospital rounds with either a resident or a fellow. I always go to the noon medical housestaff conference. I’ve been in charge of this conference schedule for the past 8 or 9 years. I enjoy noon conference, as I keep learning. It’s like I’m in a constant internal medicine review mode. Mike Emmett, Mark Armstrong, and a few other attendings also participate in these conferences.

In the afternoon, I continue rounds and see new consults. As chief of the nephrology division, I have some administrative responsibilities. Our division has grown from 2 faculty members years ago to 13 full-time division members. Also, I’m responsible for several other conferences: the Austin lectureship and nephrology grand rounds.



Figure 9. The Fenves family at Diana's bat mitzvah, 2000. Photo by DeStena.

In the past few years, clinical research has begun to take more of my time. I'm currently involved in 2 research projects. One is a study sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) called the Dialysis Access Consortium (DAC). This multicenter study looks at vascular access in dialysis patients. Duke, Vanderbilt, and UT Southwestern also participate. In years past, I have been involved in other projects, including one concerning atrial natriuretic peptide. We generated a manuscript that was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

There are often afternoon or late afternoon meetings. I see private patients in the office on Swiss Avenue all day on Tuesday and occasionally on Thursday or Friday afternoons. My schedule doesn't leave much time to write papers, but I still treasure this activity. That's done in the evenings and on weekends. I'm on call every third weekend at BUMC, and those weekends are very demanding. It's not unusual to see 40 hospitalized patients during each weekend day. On the weekends I'm off, I get up early on Saturday to write and prepare lectures, and that continues into the afternoon on Saturday. I often do that at home.

WCR: *How much sleep do you require a night to feel good?*

AZF: I really require between 7 and 8 hours.

WCR: *What time do you get home?*

AZF: I get home between 6:30 and 7:30 PM.

WCR: *Tell me about your family.*

AZF: I have 2 daughters, Carla and Diana, who are now 20 and 16 years old. My wife, Saralynn, worked in marketing and development and has a master's degree in business administration from SMU. She has a diverse work history, including working for Skip Garvey, MD, a surgeon who was chief executive officer of the Zale Lipshy University Hospital. She now does a lot of volunteer work and devotes her life to the girls.

Both Carla and Diana attended the Greenhill School of Dallas. Carla is currently a sophomore at Stanford University. She lives in the same dorm where I did 30 years ago. Diana is a sophomore in high school. She loves art, literature, and philosophy. Both are wonderful kids, and we're really proud of them (Figures 9 and 10).

WCR: *Where is Diana thinking about going to college?*

AZF: Diana is just beginning to turn her attention to her college choices. I think she would love a small liberal arts college.

WCR: *What does Carla want to do?*



Figure 10. The Fenves family in December 2003. Photo by Lipshy.

AZF: Carla is having a fabulous time at Stanford. She is a religious studies major. She has wide interests and is very active in the life of the campus.

WCR: *Is religion a major part of your home?*

AZF: No, not in a spiritual sense. However, I have a very strong Jewish identity. Growing up in a communist country, organized religion was not allowed. Worse, religion was not only discouraged but could potentially be punished. Nevertheless, my parents talked a great deal about Jewish history and culture, particularly as it existed before the war. Saralynn is very active in the Dallas Jewish community, and our children were raised in the tradition of Reform Judaism. Carla is very involved in a campus Jewish organization called Hillel. Recently, she was elected to the national board of Hillel.

WCR: *Is there alcohol in your home? When you get home at night, do you have a drink of alcohol?*

AZF: Once or twice a week I have a glass of red wine. I do enjoy some special vintage of California or French wines, especially with friends or on a special occasion.

WCR: *What do you do on weekends when you are off? Do you have any hobbies?*

AZF: I am an avid competitive bridge player—almost an addict. I learned bridge in the 1960s. In the 1970s in medical school, I played competitive bridge for the first time with Brady Allen, another BUMC physician. I rarely play tournaments now because of my busy schedule. My goal is to be a life master.

WCR: *Do you ever play on the Internet?*

AZF: Yes. I play on the Internet some nights. That's a fun way to do it, and it can be done in about 2 hours without leaving home. I enjoy golf but have very limited talent for the game.

WCR: *Have you ever encountered the investor Warren Buffet when playing bridge on the Internet?*

AZF: No, I have not. However, one of my bridge partners stumbled into a bridge game on the Internet that included Bill Gates. Warren Buffet and Bill Gates occasionally play at tournaments, where they sponsor professional bridge players on their team.

WCR: *Do you read much outside of medicine?*

AZF: Unfortunately, not much any more. I used to be an avid reader, reading all the classics, especially through high school and college. My wife and daughters are avid readers.

WCR: *Do you have as much energy left after you get home at night now as you did 10 years ago?*

AZF: Most of the time, yes. I hope this is genetic, as my dad is 80 and still works full-time. In the last few years, my group, DNA, has been kind enough to give me more “protected time.” Once a week, my afternoon is protected, and I can do intellectual work, write a paper, review articles, and so forth.

WCR: *I heard that your house burned down on February 18, 2003. That must have been a tremendous shock and tragedy for you.*

AZF: It was certainly a shock. I tend not to use the word “tragedy,” because to me that would mean that somebody was hurt. Fortunately, nobody was injured. We lost a lot of our possessions. Fortunately, we were able to salvage quite a few family photographs. Our 16-year-old, Diana, was particularly hard hit by the fire. Dealing with the aftermath of the fire has been a full-time job for Saralynn.

WCR: *What have you done since? Have you rebuilt?*

AZF: After agonizing discussions, we decided to sell the lot to a builder, who demolished the house and has built a large new home. We lived in a hotel for several weeks. Then we rented a house for about 8 months, and about 4 months ago we purchased a 10-year-old home in a zero-lot line community. We still haven't replaced all of the furniture. But we're moving on.

WCR: *Is there anything you'd like to discuss that we haven't touched on?*

AZF: I have been lucky to be involved in 2 recent NIH-sponsored projects. The first one was the high-profile National Analgesic Nephropathy Study. BUMC and DNA have an enormous patient population. Our group covers not only BUMC, of course, but the entire city with about 47 nephrologists. We have some 2300 hemodialysis patients. The NIH is very interested in delivering numbers and making sure that their funded projects come to fruition. Money is tight; they want results. We have the unique ability to provide the skills and the patients to complete these projects. Bill Henrich, who is chief of medicine at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, invited us to participate in the National Analgesic Nephropathy Study. The same thing is happening with the DAC study.

WCR: *Not only on my behalf, but on behalf of the readers of BUMC Proceedings, I want to thank you immensely for pouring your heart out, so to speak.*

AZF: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

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