

Thomas Polanyi

LETTER TO EVA GABOR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, POLANYIANA

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Eva Gabor, Editor-in-chief
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Dear Ms Gabor,

I am delighted that the remarkable life and intellectual achievements of my beloved aunt Laura Polanyi-Striker have found their way into the pages of *Polanyiana* through the [publication](#) of the lecture of Judit Szapor (*Polanyiana* Vol. 6, No 2, p 43, 1997). This number of *Polanyiana* has only recently come to my attention.

I must take exception, however, with one egregious mistake in the paragraph which concerns me and my brother Michael (not Louis as stated in the genealogical chart p. 48). On page 49 it is stated that "...her nephews, fleeing Italy in 1941, were stranded in Cuba, simultaneously suspected as Italian fascist spies and refused an American visa because of their Jewish religion". Nothing could be further from the truth. The facts are as follows.

My brother and I desperately needed to leave Italy in 1941, but we were unable to obtain immigration visae to anywhere, particularly not to the US. For this reason we enlisted as deck hands on a merchant ship of a neutral nation whose first destination was New York. It must be recalled here that immigration to the US since the early 1920s was based on a quota system which allotted visae in limited numbers according to the place of birth of the applicant. My brother and I were born in Budapest and the "quota" for Hungarians was full and a waiting period of many years was required. We were not even remotely thinking that we would be admitted to the US.

Thus we arrived in New York with valid passports but no visa. We had informed our father, who at the time was living in Brazil, that we were embarking on a merchant ship bound for New York, arrival time uncertain – in fact the trip took six weeks. The ship berthed in a godforsaken dock in Bayonne, NJ, which also served as a ship cemetery. A long rickety wooden walkway connected the ship to ground. Soon after docking, aunt

Laura (Mausi neni) appeared! She had been informed by our father of our trip and she had been watching the arrival times of merchant ships in the newspapers!

What happened then is that Mausi neni in concert with our father's American employers headquartered in New York, succeeded in convincing the Immigration and Nationalization Service to let us be transferred directly to Ellis Island from the ship to which we were confined and with a guarantee that we would leave shortly for Cuba. And so it happened that our trip ended in Havanna, Cuba.

Some time afterwards the US decided that refugees from the Axis countries could apply for an immigration visum to the US in view of the wartime conditions and the large number of unused quota slots. Clearly this was not an easy process: extensive personal references from people of standing in the US were required. Mausi neni was indefatigable in mobilizing the people required for this task and as Judit Szapor well states it, "she was apparently well armed to master even the administrative hurdles of the American immigration policy." We received our immigration visae and in 1943 arrived in the US.

Whatever one may think about the immigration policies of the US, the statement in Szapor's article on this subject is thoroughly unfair.

In conclusion, I would like to mention again that I am most pleased that Mausi neni's colorful, intelligent and generous life has been brought to the attention of many.

Sincerely
Thomas G. Polanyi

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