

Glanz, Susan. Kopacsi-Gelberger, Judit. *Heroes Don't Cry*. [n.p.]: BookSurge Publishing, 2009.  
AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012):  
<http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

---

Kopacsi-Gelberger, Judit. *Heroes Don't Cry*. [n.p.]: BookSurge Publishing, 2009. Pp. 356, appendix, photos.

Reviewed by Susan Glanz, St. John's University, NY

In 2009 on her blog, Judith Kopacsi-Gelberger wrote about her memoir that “after close to thirty years of constant rewritings the book is finally done and at a printer.” Although in 1992 a Hungarian version of the memoir was published, as the blog indicates the English version did not appear until in 2009. The book, (supposedly) based on the diaries she kept since the 50s, is a chronicle of Judith Kopácsi's and her parents' life. Her father was Sándor Kopácsi, the Budapest police chief between 1952 and 1956. The love and admiration Judith felt for her father shines through every page of the book, which points to both the strength and the weakness of this book. The strength is Judith's strength, the battle one woman fights to protect her father and she shows that perseverance pays off; the weakness of the book is that the reader does not learn much of the daily life in Hungary during the time the author lived there.

The first two thirds of the book tell Judith's story of growing up in Hungary. The father's family lived and worked in the working-class city of Miskolc, her father and grandfather were skilled workers and were left-leaning social democrats. After the Communist Takeover in 1949 her father was promoted politically and after completing the Party School, a college established for the ideological training of the cadre, was appointed to Police Chief of Budapest in 1952. The appointment came with perks, which the child (and the adult) Judith (born in 1946) does not examine. Although her brief description of the events of the 1956 revolution does not exactly match the known events, the discrepancies do not deter from the readability of the book. Her father, an admirer and believer in the goals set for the country by reformist prime Minister Imre Nagy, was arrested by the returning Russian Army. A farce of a trial followed, whose verdict we the reader can anticipate: Sándor Kopácsi, was sentenced to life in prison. Judith's mother lost her job and was reduced to supporting her daughter by selling pretzels at the zoo, and Judith was labeled “child of a class enemy.” The title of the book, *Heroes don't cry*, was the reprimand her grandfather uttered to Judith in 1956, when the frustrated Judith physically attacked a Russian secretary who prevented the family from visiting her father in the Fő street military prison. The years that followed, especially the depiction of Judith's high school years were the usual teenage angst, the overall desire of fitting in, rejection from classmates, and first love. Judith's father's sentence was commuted and he was released from prison in 1963 on the day that grandfather Kopácsi was buried. Her father's “history” followed Judith to her jobs, which as a result were short-lived. Although her father suffered from what today we would call PTSD, he still knew influential people, with whose help he arranged for his daughter to go to Canada in 1965 for a visit. The Hungarian Jewish community sprang into action to find a suitable bachelor for her to allow her to stay in Canada. The subsequent sketch of the resultant forced failed marriage and a happy second marriage leads the author to the major decision that making use of Canada's family reunification statutes she would free her parents from Hungary. To achieve her goal she had to battle not only the indifference of Canadian bureaucrats, but the “interests of the Hungarian state”, the euphemism used to reject passport applications in Hungary. Using the Canadian and European media effectively and with the help of friends, especially George Egri, a Hungarian-Canadian journalist, George Faludy, a leading

Glanz, Susan. Kopacsi-Gelberger, Judit. *Heroes Don't Cry*. [n.p.]: BookSurge Publishing, 2009.  
AHEA: E-journal of the American Hungarian Educators Association, Volume 5 (2012):  
<http://ahea.net/e-journal/volume-5-2012>

---

poet, and many others, the Kopácsis received their exit visa, and the family was reunited in June 1975. To deal with the nightmares of his imprisonment in Hungary, Sándor Kopácsi wrote his memoirs, which were first published in French and then in English (*In the Name of the Working Class*). The political changes of 1989 brought complete rehabilitation to the Kopácsi name, with the ex-police chief's rank honorarily restored and receiving an apartment in Óbuda in 1990. He died in 2001.

This very readable book introduces us to two idealists, Judith and her father. Both spent the majority of their adult lives fighting for what they believed in, and eventually, they both achieved their goals. Judith continues to work on keeping her father's name and memory in the limelight. In 2011 Hungarian papers reported on naming a square after him ([http://hvg.hu/itthon/20111212\\_utcanevek\\_valtozasa](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20111212_utcanevek_valtozasa)), and the family website that Judith maintained has a section dedicated to him (<http://www.kopacsi.org>) as does another website she has created ([http://www.gelbergocia.org/gelbergo/index.php?page=kopacsi-sandor&hl=en\\_US](http://www.gelbergocia.org/gelbergo/index.php?page=kopacsi-sandor&hl=en_US)). Judith gives the reader glimpses of her inner life at every age, which makes the book a pleasure to read.