

Your Excellency, Reverend Fathers

After the shock of Father Joe's passing somewhat subsided, I sat down to think about his life. This is a personal journey of mine and the journey of the Sopron Group with Father Joe through our lives.

Joe and I were born in Szombathely; he was a year ahead of me in our Alma Mater, the St. Norbert High School of the norbertine fathers. Our intertwining journey through life started in earnest in 1951, when we started our university life, as baleks, as the first year students were called.

I recall the time when we were studying together for our first mathematics exam during the Christmas break at their home. Joe, Joska, studied constantly, he was an excellent student and his constant studying remained with him to the rest of his life. After two years of learning about land surveying both of us decided to try something new, interesting and mysterious, geophysics. Our geophysics professor humorously described the difference between a surveyor and a geophysicist that the surveyors always walked while working, but the geophysicists had a car for transportation.

Needless to say, Joe and I learned otherwise, when we started working in the northern Canadian bush. Father Joe was an excellent tennis player and he also played soccer during the university years which he carried on later here in Canada. After graduation, in 1956, we parted ways; he was called in for officer's training and I started working as a budding geophysicist. Both of us left Hungary after the revolution. We met again in St. Wolfgang, Austria, both of us being part of the Sopron Group.

We arrived in Toronto, on a cold day in January, 1957. During the next four months we studied English, Father Joe excelled again, and he was ready for more studying. In a few years, in 1964, he had his geological engineering degree and became a member of the Professional Engineers of Ontario and a Professional Geophysicist in Alberta, where he worked after graduation. The near surface geology fascinated him, so he started studying again and obtained a masters degree in soil mechanics in 1967.

At this time, our lives once again intertwined. Both of us were working at the same company, on several occasions we had a chance to work together on the same projects in Canada and overseas. He was telling me about his adventure, about time when he was conducting a seismic survey in Guyana exploring for bauxite. The military escort picked him up and his crew, bright and early every morning and off they went to the dynamite depot to get the dynamite for the day's work. Dynamite is used to create the seismic energy. The military stayed with them all day, to make sure that the ever lurking insurgents did not try to take the dynamite. At night, the same procedure, back to depot to store the dynamite, then back to camp to interpret the data or to play soccer with local boys. Joe made it back home safely, with a new adventure and experience under his belt and with a bottle of genuine Guyanese rum which we shared with him listening to his adventure.

Then I joined another company, so our professional ways parted again. He was great at improvising. He was an independent consulting geophysicist, when he had a contract to conduct a marine seismic survey over a part of a lake in northern Quebec, looking for gold bearing structures. He built a raft using 45 gallon drums that was the survey vessel with the seismic gear on the top and a small motor on the back for propulsion. A sudden storm came, the raft partially sunk, Joe and his crew with the rescued seismic gear reached shore in their safety canoe. The work continued in few days with a newly fabricated survey vessel designed by Joe.

He was an excellent scientist and engineer; working under different climatic and geological conditions, he was conversant with all the geophysical methods, backed up by solid geological knowledge. It was a

busy life for us, but he had time to get together with the Sopron Group and for sports including skiing. Then I joined another company, so our ways parted again. Joe was a borne teacher; he became a part-time lecturer of geophysics to surveying students at the Ryerson Polytechnic Institute in Toronto.

During the years together, we had many long discussions about his desire to help and serve people, mentioning missionary work, so it was not much of a surprise for me that he followed his vocation to become a priest, a Jesuit.

We, the Sopron Group were overjoyed when in 1979 started his novitiate. True to form, he started studying again, and obtained his theological degrees. As I recall, he also took one more geophysical course; I know it was not easy one. We celebrated when he received his degrees. His ordination was very special joyous occasion for us. We were privileged to have our own priest. Father Joe baptized our grand children, visited our sick families, and buried our loved ones.

He was with us in our joys and he was there for us when we needed him. He celebrated mass for us, at our summer picnics, our children reading the scriptures and then, he played a mean soccer game with us. Every fall the Sopron Group has a dance the Soproni Bal. Father Joe came to say the grace and stayed with us to talk with the many friends of his.

We saw him the next day after the sickness struck him. We were heartbroken and deeply saddened. We prayed for his health and we were happy when he recovered and came to Toronto.

I recall the many walks we had, summer and winter practicing speaking. He carried on with his priestly work; we were visiting sick Sopron friends, taking the host with us and administering the sacrament of the sick. His health suffered he still came to our Sopron meetings and he came to help us to setting up tables and dishes for the dance. Then, he moved to Hamilton where we had occasions to visit him, he was always so glad to see his Sopron friends. Then, my last visit came, on Thursday, before he passed away. Our journey ended, much too soon.

Father Joe was a beloved priest and a much loved member of the Sopron Group, an excellent scientist, geophysicist, explorer who enjoyed life fully. He made friends everywhere he went, in the northern woods, in the Arctic, overseas. He made us better persons showing us love and compassion wherever, whenever it was needed.

We lost our brother priest, our friend, a colleague. We thank the Almighty that Father Joe, our Joe, Joskánk, was a part of our lives.

Father Joe, Joskánk, your memory will be with us as long we live as long our children and grand children live.

Father Joe, Jóskánk, rest in the much earned peace and pray for us.

Soproni szokás szerint is búcsúzunk toled
Jó Szerencsét! Üdv az Erdésznek!

Jagodits Ferenc,
Aug. 28, 2010