Mandy decided that one important destination while we were in Budapest was to visit the János-Hegy Libegö, which means “John Hill Chair Lift” in English. Our trip to the libegö provided us with valuable experience with public transportation in Budapest and the woes of trying to communicate when there is a broad language barrier. You can read about the public transportation experience in another chapter.

Once we finally arrived at the libegö there was not a soul in sight. We could see the chair lift through the windows to one side and they were moving. The booth where someone would sell refreshments and possibly chair lift tickets had no lights on inside and a metal security mesh was in place. I guess that we should not have been surprised. It was below freezing outside and there was snow on the ground. Who in their right minds would want to ride in an open chair lift up the side of a mountain on such a cold day? We had the answer. Silly Americans.

With no one in sight, I had more pressing matters at hand. I needed to use the restroom. When I returned, I noticed that the chair lift was no longer moving. Mandy informed me that someone walked out from the rear of the building looked at her and then returned. We explored the building and then found our way outside to where the chair lift was located. There was a lone chair hanging from the rafters that appeared to be available for picture taking. I decided to allow this chair to fulfill its created purpose. We waited, explored and called out with hopes of finding someone to help us but we had no success.

While it was cold outside it was only a little warmer in the main, libegö, waiting area. The entry way had a set of glass doors from the outside that led to a small, enclosed, entry area; and another set of glass doors that led into the main, waiting area. With the sun shining into the small entry area it was “toasty” so Mandy used that as a waiting area. While we waited there, we found a sign that listed times. Evidently, the chairlift runs for 15 minutes at the top of each hour. The sign also indicated that it would not operate with less than five people. Actually, it read, “The chair-lift does not defart for less than 5 passangers! The timetable is only valid from at least 5 passangers!” I would hate to see the gas build up if there were fewer than 5 persons for an extended period of time.

We deduced that we had just missed the most recent opportunity and we now had to wait for 40 minutes until the next opportunity. We watched the roadway in front of the building eagerly waiting for the arrival of three more persons so that the gas problem of the chairlift could be relieved and we could ride up the mountainside. We noticed some people milling around but were disappointed when they left in a car. Soon, it was a few minutes before the next trip. Mandy’s optimism had disappeared and she was quite discouraged. There was no one else in sight let alone a total of five travelers so it appeared that the lift would not “defart.”

I decided that I would try to find someone, anyway. I found a way to the back area of the building and thought I heard someone. I called out, “Hello.” in hopes that someone would respond. I went out to where we saw the chairs moving and was able to peer around the building into a large room with the chairlift mechanism. I called out, “Hello.” again but received no
response. I returned to the building to make my way into the back area and repeated my pleading call. I repeated this cycle a few times and glanced at Mandy each time I walked past her. She is half Hungarian and was quickly able to create that special look that we had noticed on so many other people. Mandy was now giving me the Silly American (SA) look.

Finally, I returned to the glassed-in area where Mandy was still soaking up the warming rays of the Sun. She made some kind of comment about how foolish it was for me to be calling out when no one was around and that even if someone were around he probably wouldn’t respond to a dolt yelling an English word. Just then, I noticed that the chairs were moving again. I shared this information with Mandy and started to make my way to investigate. I motioned for her to follow but she was not willing to give up her warm spot for another red herring. She told me to let her know if I found someone. I walked out and peered around the building. Much to my surprise and delight someone was there. I asked if we could ride up and he said, “Yes, seat.” That was good enough for me so I motioned to Mandy to join me. As she approached I asked the chair lift guy about a ticket and he said, “Buy at top.” I thought that we communicated well.

He pointed to two round circles painted on the cement floor that looked like they were in line with the path of the chairs. Mandy and I each stood on a circle as a chair approached and then had a seat when it arrived. When we sat down the weight of all of the extra Hungarian food that I was carrying around my waist caused the chair to sink. No, the food was not in my fanny pack but had found its way through my stomach to my waste. The chair lift operator walked next to our chair to lower the safety bar over our heads. The forward movement of the chair caused every part of my body to move forward except for my toes. My feet were dragging underneath the chair as we started moving forward. I could not pull my feed forward to relieve the increasing stress on my knees and toes because the chair was too close to the ground. To compensate for this I moved my torso forward as the operator was lowering the bar. You guessed it; the bar hit me on the top of the head. I immediately jerked my head backward, which of course, forced the upper part of my body to follow. This caused the chair to lean back slightly, causing even more strain on my knees and toes.

Fortunately, the loading zone was only about 10 meters long before the chair started its upward trek and moved away from the ground. My dragging feet were soon freed from their awkward position. I glanced back to see the operator subtly shaking his head. He had that SA look on his face but I was not dissuaded from enjoying the ride up the hill. My knees and toes instantly responded to their freedom of movement with no further complication. Evidently, the chairs defarted with less than five people after all.

It was not long before we realized why there was no one else joining us on the chair lift. We were above the treetops where the wind was free to move along with no obstructions. Well, I suppose that our faces were an obstruction. While Mandy did not particularly enjoy the chair lift, I thought it was quite invigorating. When we were about half way up the hillside, we noticed that there was a couple in a chair heading our way. While they were still some distance off, we could hear voices. It was difficult to make out the words but from the tone and pitch it was evident that the young lady was not particularly happy with the young man. The talking subsided as they approached our chair and we took the opportunity to wave at them as a polite
acknowledgement of their presence. They both waved back and a few seconds later the voices returned to the same tone and decibel.

At the top of the hill, a friendly attendant greeted us and assisted us off of the chair. He directed us to follow him into the building and we complied. He walked into a large room that had a booth very similar to the one we saw at the lower end of the libegő. The friendly gentleman who greeted us went inside the booth and asked if we were going to ride back down. We indicated that we were and he asked us for 700 HUF. Mandy handed him the money and he pointed to the sign with the departure times. He said that the last ride down the hill would be at 5:00 and pointed out that it was now 2:15. At this time, Mandy had a calling from nature and decided to use the restroom. She had to pay 50 HUF to use the restroom. The one that I used at the bottom of the hill was free.

When we exited the building we began to survey the surroundings to determine where there might be some trails. We noticed a playground and a number of picnic tables nearby. Across the road and up a bank, we noticed a sign that looked like it might be a trail map. We approached the sign and saw a nice system of trails to explore. I began to study the map but noticed that Mandy did not stop. I called to her and asked if she wanted to look at the map first. She said that I should look at the map but that she was going to keep walking. The situation was quite plain. It was rather cold out and Mandy was concerned that if she stopped, her feet might freeze to the ground. I gave the map a cursory look and chased after her.

The snow-covered, wooded area was beautiful. The trail had been well used by walkers and skiers and was very solid. We could walk on the trail of ice much like walking on a trail of wet leaves. We had to take some care but we did not sink into the snow at all. It was clear that there was quite a bit of snow so I decided to be a rebel and get off of the beaten path a bit. I quickly sunk into the snow about half way to my knees. I was quite pleased and asked Mandy to take a picture. A little farther down the trail, I noticed that the snow looked even deeper. I ventured into the unspoiled snow and found, to my delight, that I sunk almost to my waist. I was having a great time. Mandy, however, was just a little cold. She knew that the little boy who masqueraded as her husband was enjoying himself so she endured hardship in support of him.

We continued walking and noticed an occasional bench along the path. The snow was higher than the seats, making the benches less than usable but I am sure that they were very nice in the summer. At this point Mandy wished it was summer so that she could test out the seats. It was not long before the call of nature was upon me again. There were no restrooms out here in the wilderness so I practiced a little snow art. Mandy was not amused, chose to ignore me and continued along the path. I was quite pleased that I had saved 50 HUF and thought that if Mandy were just a tad more adventurous, she could have saved some money, too.

It was not very long before we saw the building again and knew that my cursory glance at the map was enough to follow the right series of trails and return to the libegő. It was about 10 minutes before the next departure of the chair lift so we waited in the relative warmth of the building until it was time to depart. That was just about enough time to warm us up before our faces acted as wind blocks once again. This time, we were the only people on the chair lift going
either up or down. We made the return trip to the bottom of the hill without further incident and with just slightly red noses.