

Wishing all our kind readers a very blessed Christmas!

Minden kedves olvasónknak  
áldott karácsonyi ünnepeket kívánunk!

## A Bright Star

Margaret Fekete Csovanos

I was sitting by a window,  
At the end of a busy day;  
As I looked into the distance,  
A bright star began to sway.

Perhaps, it was my rocking chair,  
Or maybe I was dreaming;  
That lovely star so tenderly  
A light at me was beaming.

It beckoned me and I followed,  
On a road called yesteryear;  
The path was dark and rugged,  
Yet I went without a fear.

It was two thousand years ago,  
A bright star glowed down to earth;  
It led the way to Betlehem,  
To announce the Savior's birth.

Love, joy and peace fill hearts of men,  
Regardless where they are;  
Of those who know the meaning of  
That brilliant Christmas Star.

Taken from „A Varied Bouquet of Flowers“

## The “Miracle Doll” – a true Christmas story

Erika Papp Faber

*In Hungary, Santa Claus (Saint Nicholas - Mikulás) has his own day, December 6<sup>th</sup>, when he brings a switch of twigs for the children, and if they were naughty, that is ALL he brings. Good children receive nuts, candy and perhaps an orange. On Christmas Eve, it is the Christ Child and the Angels who bring the tree and the gifts. One little girl had proof of this one Christmas long ago.*



She took this explanation to heart, and was on her best behavior, from then on. After all, you can't be naughty where there are angels flying around! And of course, she noticed many more “angels” from then on.

She liked her doll Zsuzsi and her dark-haired doll Kati that the Christ Child had brought her the year before, but both were merely rag dolls. They were all right, and could quite satisfactorily be dressed and undressed. But she was longing for a “real” china doll, the kind she had had back home in Hungary.

It never occurred her to tell Mom, since even an eight-year old could see that, in bombed-out Hannover in 1946, there was hardly a grocery store left, never mind a toy store! As it was, most shops were empty because the money was worthless. (If you had connections, or American cigarettes, or jewelry – then you could get anything!) Mom had enough trouble putting food on the table and providing some wood to heat the small room, without being pestered with impossible wishes.

But the young chaplain in First Communion class had explained that one should confidently pray for what one wanted. That stuck in her mind. Then she would ask the Christ Child to bring her a china doll for Christmas! The Christ Child could do that, because He's God, and He's the one who brings the gifts at Christmas anyway.

No one else would have to know about it. Once she was in bed that night, and the light was out, she silently put the matter to Him. She was sure the Christ Child would hear her, and she was a little ashamed of herself when, a few days later, she "reminded" Him of her request, just to be sure.

Christmas Eve finally arrived. For this special occasion, her brother had lit a fire in the larger room, in the three-legged stove (two half bricks made up for the missing fourth leg.) She was shivering and her heart raced as she stepped into the still chilly room with Mom, Dad and her brother.

The Christmas tree glittered in the pine-scented semi-darkness, and the log, which had been so hard to get, crackled reassuringly in the rickety stove. Mom and Dad started to sing the traditional Christmas carol "Mennyből az angyal", but the little girl was so overawed, she could barely sing along. For there, under the tree, was a wonderful china doll! It had short hair, blue eyes, and was smiling.

Happiness and gratitude filled the little girl's heart. The Christ Child had heard her prayer and had really performed a miracle! Here, into the misery of refugee life, He had brought her the world's most beautiful china doll, one that closed its eyes and said "Mama". And this wonderful answer to her prayer was a secret just between the two of them!

Only years later, when she was grown up, did she find out that Mom had gotten the doll and doll carriage from another Hungarian refugee family. Their little girl had many dolls, and she could easily do without one of

them. They were preparing to return to Budapest, and Mom told them they could take any toy from the apartment back home in exchange. That was how, thanks to the Christ Child, the "real" china doll came to be under the Christmas tree in Hannover.

Moving from one place to the next, and emigrating to America left their mark on the china doll. My husband had it restored, and forty years later, it sat under our Christmas tree once again. Its hair was longer and in curls, its dress was more fashionable. Its voice was gone. But it is still dear to me, and I will always cherish its memory as my "miracle doll". Because dolls are meant to be played with, I eventually gave it away to a



little girl with cystic fibrosis. But I made sure she knew the story behind it.

## A „csodababa” Faberné Papp Erika

Nem mondom, szerette a szőke Zsuzsi babát és a fekete hajú Kati babát, amit múlt karácsonyra kapott, de mind a kettő csak rongybaba volt. Szépek voltak, a Zsuzsinak magyar ruhája, pruszlikkal, pártával, amit élvezet volt levenni és újra feladni rá. (1946-ban még a játékbabának sem volt váltóru-

hája!) De neki „igazi” porcellánbaba után vágyott a kis szive, amelyenje otthon volt.

Eszébe sem jutott, hogy Anyukának szóljon, hiszen már egy nyolc éves kislány is láthatta, hogy a tönkrebombázott Hannoverben alig akadt egy-egy élelmiszerüzlet, nem hogy játékosbolt! De még ha lett is volna, a rongyos reichsmárkáért a világon semmi árút sem kínáltak sehol. (Összeköttetéssel, amerikai cigarettáért, vagy ékszerért – az már más!) Anyukának éppen elég gondja volt, előteremteni a napi ételmet és tüzelőt anélkül, hogy ő még lehetetlen kívánságokkal nyúzza.

Viszont a hittanórán azt magyarázta a fiatal sziléziai káplán, hogy bizalommal imádkozzon az ember azért, amit szeretne. Ez szöveget ütött a fejében. Akkor megkéri a Jézuskát, hozzon neki porcellánbabát karácsonyra! A Jézuska azt meg is tudja tenni, hiszen Ő Isten, és úgyis Ő hozza a karácsonyi ajándékokat. Más nem is kell tudjon róla. Ezért este, amikor már a sötétben ágyban volt, megkérte magában a kis Jézust. Biztos volt abban, hogy a Jézuska meghallgatja, és kicsit szégyenkezett, amikor biztonság kedvéért, pár nappal később „emlékeztette” a Jézuskát kérésére.

„Láttad azt a tűhegyi fényt, mintha apró szikre lenne?” kérdezte Anyuka.

Nem volt nehéz szuggerálni, hiszen a csöpp mécses, amit a mindennapi villanyzárlat alatt használtak, kevés világosságot vetett a sötét, pici szobába ahova télire visszahúzódtak, és az ember szeme könnyen káprázott. A nagyobbik kiutalt albérleti szobát, a mi az előszoba másik oldaláról nyílt, Anyuka csak ruhaszárításra használta ilyenkor télen, mert nem volt elég fűtőanyag. (A linóleumnak nem ártott a lecöpögő víz, mert dacára a csukott ablaknak, hamar keményre fagyott a mosott ruha.)

„Láttam. Miért?”

„Mert az bizony angyal volt. Tudod, ilyenkor karácsony előtt sok dolguk van az angyaloknak, kell segítsenek a

Jézuskának. Amikor olyan szikrafélét látsz, angyal repült ott el."

Megszéppent a kislány, és attól fogva nagyon vigyázott, hogy jó legyen, hiszen nem lehet rosszalkodni ahol angyalok repdesnek! És persze sokkal több „angyalt” vett észre ezután.

\*Végre elérkezett a szenteste. Bátyja kivételesen begyűjtött a nagy szobában, a háromlábú vaskályhába (a negyedik lábát két fél téglával pótolta.) Dideregve és dobogó szívvel lépett be Anyukával, Apával és bátyjával a még hűvös szobába.

A fenyőillatos félhomályban ott csillogott a karácsonyfa. és barátságosan pattogott a nehezen szerzett fahasáb a rozoga kályhában. Anyuka és Apa belekezdtek a „Mennyből az angyal”-ba, de az ámulattól alig tudta a kislány végig énekelni, mert a fa alatt ékeskedett egy csodálatos porcellánbaba! Rövid, szőke haja volt, kék szeme, és mosolygott.

A kislányt előtötte a boldogság és a hála. A Jézuska meghallgatta imáját és valóban csodát tett! Ide, a németországi menekült nyomorba hozta neki a világ legszebb porcellánbabáját, ami lecukta a szemét, ha lefektették, és azt mondta, hogy „mama”. És ez a csodálatos imameghallgatás csak a kettőjük titka volt!

A babával járó babakocsit a benne levő párnával és paplannal már fel sem tudta fogni a nagy örömtől. Tökéletesen boldog volt, mint életében soha azelőtt, vagy azóta.

Felnőtt korában tudta csak meg, hogy Anyuka a babát és babakocsit egy ismerős magyar családtól szerezte. Azok kislányának sok babája volt, egyet könnyen tudott nélkülözni. Készültek vissza Budapestre, és Anyuka megígérte nekik, hogy cserébe elvihetnek akármilyen játékot a budai lakásukból. Így került az „igazi” baba a Jézuska jóvoltából a hannoveri karácsonyfa alá.

A sok hurcolkodás, meg a kíváncsi dörögés bizony megviselte a porcellánbabát. Férjem restauráltatta; a haja hosszabb lett és fürtös, ruhája divatosabb, de hangját elvesztette. Viszont nekem mindig ked-

ves emlék marad. Mert babával játszani kell. Ezért idővel odaadtam egy nagybeteg kislánynak, de elmondtam és le is írtam neki a „csodababa” történetét.

## Commemorating October 23rd in Fairfield, CT

Our observance this year fell on Sunday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. As has become traditional, we started in front of the commemorative plaque placed behind town hall by Magyar Studies of America in 2003. The



President of Magyar Studies of America, Zsuzsa Lengyel, introduced the Reverend Alexander Havadtoy, who gave an opening prayer. Visiting Hungarian actor Szíki Károly from Eger said a few words, and then we sang the Hungarian national anthem.

But instead of continuing the program inside town hall, we walked a few yards to the Fairfield Museum, whose Director, Michael Jehle, had graciously offered us their facilities for the occasion. While waiting for the speaker, Fr. Ivan Csete to arrive from Forestburgh, NY, Szíki Károly gave readings from his new book, *Laci bátyám*, dealing with the life of Varga László, a lawyer both in Hungary and in the US, politician, writer, founder of the New York Hungarian theater.

Fr. Ivan Csete, pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Forestburgh, NY (who had arrived in time, but had trouble homing in on the plaque and the Museum), gave an overview of the political situation in 1956. As a participant in Szeged, he was eminently qualified to give an eyewitness account of the events of that historic time. He did this both in Hungarian and in English, providing those who did not live through those days valuable background information.

Timea Bánffy, a former teacher at the Fairfield Hungarian School, recited a poem about the 1956 Revolution. Oliver Valu, a student at the Hungarian School, gave a memorable rendition of an old patriotic song about the flag.

In conclusion, the assembled audience sang the *Szózat*. Re-

*Top: 1956 Memorial in Fairfield, CT  
Middle: Fr. Ivan Csete  
Bottom: Oliver Valu*

# Growing Up Among the Bridgeport and Fairfield Hungarians: Recollections of Jack Szepessy

Bob Kranyik

**Bob K. :** Jack, can we begin with the story of your family?

**Jack S.** My father's family, including my father, Louis Szepessy, were all born in Hungary. My grandfather took care of the vineyards on the Szepessy estate, and my uncle managed the blacksmith shops. They emigrated to the United States and settled in the West End section of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

My mother was born in Connellsville, Pennsylvania where her family owned a farm with dairy cows, chickens, pigs, and other animals. Her name was Rose Magyar. She married my father in Bridgeport, Connecticut. The Reverend Bessemer was the presiding minister. It was his first wedding ceremony.

When I came along in 1928 (I was their first child), we lived on Wordin Avenue, not far from Saint Stephen's School. My father worked for an automobile company located in the area of Bridgeport known as "Bull's Head." The company built custom automobiles on chassis imported from England, France and Germany. Bridgeport was a busy industrial city at the time.

Things slowed down in the automobile business and my father began searching for another occupation. My Uncle Bert was associated with a business that dealt in shoe repair materials, and he invited my father to move to Newark, New Jersey, along with the rest of the family, so that he could learn the shoe repair business.

So, we lived in Newark for a while, and then we returned to the West End of Bridgeport where dad opened his shoe repair business, called "The New Deal Shoe Repair," located at 501 Bostwick Avenue. It was very successful and he made many friends. He was also very active in the local community, which was intensely Hungarian at that time.

**Bob K. :** Jack, I know that your family eventually moved to a wooded area just north of Kings Highway Cutoff in



Jack Szepessy

Fairfield. Can you tell us about that?

**Jack S. :** After a while, my mother convinced my father that we boys (by now there were four boys in the family), needed to live in the country. So, we bought a small four-room house up a dirt road off Holland Hill Road, near the future site of the Saint Stephen's Picnic Grove. At that time, the roads in that area were all dirt roads that ran through the woods. We had a shed and a chicken coop in the back, and plenty of room for a garden. Across the road was a rock cliff, perhaps a hundred feet high, which we boys enjoyed climbing. Eventually, the St. Stephen's Picnic Grove was constructed by the people of Saint Stephen's Church, which was the Roman Catholic mother church for the residents of the West End. There were several other churches nearby, including Holy Trinity Greek Catholic Church, the First Hungarian Reformed Church, Holy Cross Catholic Church built by the nearby Slovenian settlement, and a Hungarian Synagogue named Temple Ahavath Achim

Saint Stephen's Grove was used by several of the churches for their summer picnics. On any given Sunday in the summertime, we were entertained by the *csárdás*, polka, and other dance music, the sounds of which drifted through the woods to our

house. A number of the local factories also used the Grove for their picnics, including the Bullard company and the Max Ams company.

I can still remember Johnny Magyar's band playing in the Grove. They were the same band that played at my parents' wedding. I also remember the Johnny Demshak orchestra playing there on a regular basis. There was a large, elevated dance floor with the band or orchestra playing alongside. The Grove had a kitchen, which we knew as a "*konyha*," and the smell of *gulyás leves*, *töltött káposzta*, *paprikás csirke* and other Hungarian delicacies drifted through the trees.

The area consisted of a number of "long lots" which were oriented north-south, up from Holland Hill Road. These lots had been farmed and were now mostly overgrown. A crystal clear brook ran near our house, where we fished for minnows and caught frogs. Further up in the woods a group of gypsies sometimes camped with two wagons. (Not too far away is a larger area, now covered with a shopping center and a bowling alley, where many gypsies camped in the summertime. My mother would warn my brothers and me to "keep a close eye on your little sister so the gypsy people do not capture her!" This area is still known by the old-timers as "Gypsy Springs.")

**Bob K. :** Your family is a good example of the industriousness, and good will typical of many of the Hungarian immigrants to the United States. Tell me about your brothers and your sister.

**Jack S.** I was the eldest of four brothers, followed by Louie, Tommy and Jimmy. All four of the boys served in the military. Tommy and Louie were with the engineers in the U.S. Army. Tommy served in Korea, and Louie in France. Tommy later studied engineering at the University of Bridgeport. During a midwinter

break, he traveled to Florida where he stayed, establishing a business designing and building the interiors of restaurants and homes. He was very proud to tell us that one of his clients was Mr. Ray Krok, the founder of McDonalds.

Louie worked as a carpenter in the Fairfield area and eventually ran the Trumbull Hardware Store on White Plains Road in Trumbull, Connecticut. Jimmie finished his degree at Central Connecticut State University, as I did before him. He then went on to study at Cal Tech in electrical engineering and had a long career with such companies as Univac, IBM and TRW, retiring from the latter as Superintendent of Building.

Rose Marie was the youngest child in the family, and the only girl. She attended the University of Connecticut in Storrs, and later studied Dental Hygiene at the Fones School, University of Bridgeport. Following graduation from Fones, she worked for our cousin, Dr. Ernie Wohl, who was a dentist.

I enlisted in the U.S. Army after I graduated from high school in 1946, and served in the signal corps in Hawaii. I met my wife, Nancy, while attending Central Connecticut State University. We married after I graduated, and I became an Industrial Arts teacher in the Fairfield Public Schools, from whence I retired after a long career.

Nancy and I have two children and one granddaughter. Before we married, my mother-in-law was not really acquainted with Hungarians, although there were a considerable number of them scattered across Connecticut in the Norwalk and Bridgeport areas, Wallingford, and the northeast in Tolland County.

**Bob K.** : Jack, you and I had that special opportunity to grow up as Hungarian-Americans, in the time when the large number of immigrants from the early 1900's were still around and actively engaged. We were imbued with that Hungarian culture, which grew alongside our American culture. Can you tell us about some of your Hungarian cultural experiences?

**Jack S.** : Since my early childhood days, my dad admonished me to "never forget that you are from a Hungarian heritage." He told me to be proud of that heritage and to maintain the Hungarian connection. I have tried to do that over the years.

I served as Secretary of the Kossuth

Masonic Association, and as Past Master of Lafayette Lodge # 141. I am also a member of the Fidelity Lodge. All of these fraternal organizations contained a good mix of Hungarians and other Fairfield people.

I recall the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution, when many refugees came to our area. Quite a few of them went to see my father, "Mr. Szepessy," who found them jobs at local factories and businesses. I was proud of him for doing that.

I remember meeting Mrs. Tildy, whose husband was a major political leader in Hungary. I belonged to the Boy Scouts at the First Hungarian Reformed Church, then located at the corner of State Street and Hancock Avenue. The Minister was the Reverend Böszörményi. I have never visited Hungary, but my daughter Ellen and her husband, David, have. Maybe I will get to go there, yet. I recall fondly my warm relationship with my Uncle, Bert Szepessy, of New Jersey. He was, among other things, a *cimbalom* player. One time we all went to Zimmerman's Restaurant in New York City, and he was invited to play the *cimbalom*. It was an exciting day for the family. Later on, I acquired a recording of my Uncle Bert's *cimbalom* playing, and we played it at "The Hungarians" adult education course at the Fairfield Senior Center. The music of this quintessentially Hungarian instrument delighted the students.

Like many of my time, I grew up bilingual, speaking Hungarian in our home. I have retained that language throughout my life, and feel that it has enriched me greatly. I still enjoy chatting and joking in Hungarian with friends and relatives who, like me, have been benefited by this wonderful legacy. I would like to end this interview with a story. During my stint in the United States Army, I was walking along the boat basin on Oahu and came across two men sitting on a park bench overlooking Pearl Harbor. I couldn't help but hear their conversation, which was in Hungarian. I proudly said to them, "Hát én is magyar vagyok!" We struck up a conversation. One of the gentlemen was a journalist, the other a professor at the University of Hawaii. I wrote home to my Dad about my experience, and he had the incident published in *Népszava*, one of our Hungar-

ian newspapers. That experience says a lot about my feeling about coming from a Hungarian heritage, and having received the gifts of Hungarian culture and language.

### **Author's Note:**

*Doing this interview with Jack Szepessy has not been quite the typical "at arms length" type of writing assignment. I have known Jack for many years, and have respected and admired him. I can recall driving down Crestwood Road in Fairfield, many years ago and seeing Jack up on a ladder, doing some repair work for Myrtle Sherman, who taught both of us Art in the Fairfield Schools. My wife, Louise, remembers well the woods surrounding St. Stephen's Grove and meeting Jack and his brothers, as she had relatives who were neighbors of the Szepessy family. We share the fond memories of the picnics at St. Stephen's Grove - the music, the food, and the friendship of the Hungarian-Americans. Jack and I still see each other regularly at the Fayerweather Yacht Club, where we occasionally demonstrate for others the Hungarian language gifted to us by our forebears. Jack, it has been a very special pleasure for me to do this interview.*

## **"Hungarian Nights" Plays in Norwalk, Connecticut**

Some time ago, Joseph Balogh, Publisher Emeritus of Magyar News Online, spoke to me about the Kemeny Family of Norwalk, Connecticut. He recalled Sunday afternoons at the Semaphore Restaurant in Wilton, Connecticut where father Sandor Kemeny and daughters Cheryl and Alexandra entertained with Hungarian music. The elder Mr. Kemeny, now 93 years of age, was introduced to the audience recently on a Sunday afternoon at a performance of a new musical titled "Hungarian Nights". It was a sellout show, and Hungarian-Americans from across Connecticut were there along with many other theatergoers. Several representatives of Magyar News Online and the Magyar Studies of America Hungarian School were also in attendance.



## "Hungarian Nights" - *Continue*

Created by Cheryl Kemeny and Mariner Pezza, with music by Cheryl Kemeny, "Hungarian Nights" is a musical in two acts. Cheryl's sister Alexandra Kemeny conducted the orchestra, and mother, Margaret Toth Kemeny assisted with costuming and baking. Husband, Mariner Pezza composed the book.

The story line is complex, "involving love, rebirth, and redemption", and the play takes place in the Carpathian Mountains. It is a musical adventure of gypsies and their music, grand lords and ladies, and love - both forbidden and taboo." There are colorful costumes, scenes on the Hungarian *Puszta* or Great Plain, gypsy wagons, castle walls, and campfires.

A leading character in the show is Sandor Temesvary, played by Christopher Dehn, whose role is as an assistant to Buffalo Bill Cody, asked to travel to Hungary to seek some gypsies for a new show. His work involves him in a number of adventures, which include sword fighting, dancing, and highwayman attacks in Transylvania.

Buffalo Bill Cody is played by Matthew Bunce. The Baroness Eva Temesvary de Andrassi is played by Megan Clark and the Baronessa Illona, Eva's daughter, is played by Melissa Labaddia. They are supplemented by a large cast of characters and support staff.

A special treat for the audience is the playing of Jenő Varga, a Hungarian Gypsy violinist who is a graduate of the Béla Bartók Conservatory in Budapest. His renditions of *hallgatós*, *csárdás* and folksongs made the afternoon complete for the lovers of Hungarian gypsy music.

"Hungarian Nights" is one of many presentations by the Crystal Theatre Performing Arts Center, under the direction of Cheryl Kemeny, who also serves as the Director of the Theater. Our viewers may recall the wonderful musical story of the South Norwalk Hungarian and Italian communities, entitled "Whistleville", which many of us also enjoyed, and which was reported in MNO.

Thank you, Kemeny Family, Cheryl, Alexandra, Margaret, Sandor, and all of your cast and production staff members who participated in causing Hun-

garian art and music to shine in South Norwalk, Connecticut. The greater Hungarian community deeply appreciates your efforts to keep the Magyar spirit alive in the United States.

*Robert Kranyik is a retired professor and dean from the University of Bridgeport, and a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online.*

## Making His Mark Around the World – Maróti Géza

*Erika Papp Faber*

A well-known Detroit landmark, the 30-story Fisher Building, bears the imprint of Hungarian architect, sculptor and industrial designer Maróti Géza. He is responsible for the 3-story barrel-vaulted lobby, containing 40 different kinds of marble, the bronze and granite statues, as well as the fresco adorning it. Another famous Detroit site, the white marble lighthouse of the William Livingstone Memorial, located at the tip of Belle Isle, is also his design.

Maróti, born in Barsvörösvár 1875, began his career as an apprentice, and furthered his education in Budapest and Vienna. He became known through his monumental sculptural compositions. Many of the statues seen on the façade of Budapest palaces were de-

signed by Maróti. Another example of his work is the Zebegény Memorial Park, honoring the soldiers who fell in World War I and the Thirteen Martyrs of Arad (see "Centennial Celebration in Zebegény", Magyar News Online, July-August 2010).

In addition to his work in Detroit, he received many other foreign commissions. Outstanding among these is the stained glass cupola, interior furnishings and bronze sculpture group representing the Greek god Apollo surrounded by Muses, at the theater of the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico



*Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City*

City. Maróti was also called upon to design various exhibit halls and pavilions in Italy, including the permanent Hungarian pavilion at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts.

Adding to his international fame were his reconstruction plans of Solomon's Temple and its golden vessels in Jerusalem.

In 1931, Maróti returned to Budapest, where he taught at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and joined the architectural faculty at the Technical University. He died in 1941.

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## Balaton

*Judit Vasmatics Paolini*

Upon hearing "Balaton" I, like many Hungarian-Americans, picture Hungary's largest lake. I envision colorful sailboats in a regatta. I see Hungarians and tourists alike sailing, swimming, or sunbathing. After all, Balaton is the largest lake in Central Europe not just Hungary. Oh, the water sports and recreation are endless!

Today I am a little wiser. A few years ago, George and I were in Cleveland. I knew the city had a large Hungarian-American population and believed we would have no problem finding a restaurant specializing in Hungarian cuisine. I looked forward to indulging my taste buds. George also loves Hungarian food and relished the idea.

On a warm summer day, after our visit to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, we ventured forth. Riding the metro back to our hotel we asked passengers if anyone could recommend a Hungarian restaurant. A husband and wife suggested eating at "Balaton", which surprised me! I expected her to say *Budapest* or *Gypsy Café*, but not *Balaton*. I always associated it with the lake, not with food.

This couple raved about the menu and provided directions for getting to the restaurant. George and I decided not to return to our hotel and opted to head straight for the restaurant instead. We had no difficulty finding it. Red, bold letters inscribed BALATON on the front of the building clearly signaled we had arrived.

Upon entering the eatery, its interior evoked Old-World charm. The decorations contained Hungarian pottery and hand crafted doilies with folklore designs similar to ones one might purchase in Budapest. In addition, green plants and fresh flowers enhanced this delightful venue.

The menu was abundant with so many Hungarian dishes. One after the other beckoned our taste buds; it was difficult to choose. In the end, I ordered a *Wiener Schnitzel* and George requested a chicken *paprikás*. Our dishes were scrumptious! I savored a *Dobos torta* for dessert, which was truly a special treat!

George and I complimented the owners of this fine restaurant. We were animated in our enjoyment at having had such a delicious **Hungarian** feast! We lingered chatting with the owners about Hungary, its people, and cuisine! I even met a gentleman who left Hungary in 1956! He and I briefly reminisced about our experience, for I too fled Hungary then. He was transplanted in Ohio and I in Connecticut. Meeting him by chance at such an eatery is not surprising...after all, *kicsi a világ!*

Today, when I hear "Balaton", I not only think of sailing or swimming, but also of our delightful visit to Balaton Restaurant at Shaker Square in Cleveland, Ohio.

*Judit Vasmatics Paolini is a member of the MNO editorial board*

## Holiday Recipe

### Roast Duck

1 duck, salt, 2 apples

Thoroughly wash the duck in several water baths.

Dry with paper towels. Salt inside and out. Place the apples in the cavity.

Place in a roaster, pour some water under it, and bake slowly in a medium hot oven. Baste with its own juice every 15 minutes.

When it is done, leave it to cool for 10 minutes before slicing.

May be served with rice or parsleyed potatoes.



### Sült kacs

1 kacs, só, 2 db alma

A kacsát több vízben átmoszuk, majd papírtörölközővel áttöröljük. Kívül-belül besózzuk, és a hasüregbe helyezük a két almát.

Pecsenyesütőbe tesszük, kevés vizet öntünk alá, és mérsékelt forró sütőben lassan megsütjük.

Saját pecsenyesírjával 15 percenként locsoljuk. Miután megsült, szeletelés előtt 10 percig pihentetjük.

Rízzsel vagy petrezselymes krumplival tálaljuk.



# Did you know...

... that the Hungarian word for Christmas - "karácsony" - has been derived from any of at least six different sources, depending on whose interpretation you accept?

One theory is that it came to us through Church Slavonic, via Bulgarian. In some Bulgarian dialects, the reasoning goes, the word "kracsun" denotes the summer and winter solstice. It has a connotation of "stepping over", or "stepping into", as the year turns with the solstice. In Macedonian dialects, "kracsun" specifically means "Christmas".

Another theory is that ancient Slavonic took over the word "karcun" (meaning "log") from the Albanian, thus referring to the pagan custom of lighting a bonfire at the winter solstice.

A third theory is that the word "karácsony" is of Turkish origin. The Turkish tax imposed on the Christians during the Turkish occupation was called "karadz". The Turkish word "on" means "ten", with the idea of tithing. Put together as "karadzson", the word indicated the tax to be handed in at the end of December. It became "karácsony" in Hungarian, and was soon applied to Christmas.

Turning to a Latin derivation, we have two versions: First, that in Romanian, the word for Christmas is "Crăciun", which they derive from the Latin "creatio" - "creation". The second is that "karácsony" came from the Latin "incarnatio" - "incarnation."

The Hungarian version of the derivation of "karácsony" is that it comes from the word "kerecsensólyom", a type of falcon (called a "Saker Falcon" in English, or *Falco cherrug*, to give it its Latin name). In the ancient pagan Hungarian belief system, the Saker Falcon was a symbol of the

great sun as it regained its strength at Christmastime. It was used for hunting, and usually wore leather blinders over the eyes. These falcons would be blessed by the shamans, and when their blinders were removed, they would be released to fly towards the sun. The purpose was to have them ask the help of the heavenly falcon, the Turul, who would bring them the pure light.

The Sakers were released on Christmas day, which was celebrated as a feast, called "kerecsen" after the birds. (Giving flight to the falcons at Christmas was still practiced in Transylvania in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The custom was condemned as pagan by the Church, and was suppressed in the time of Maria Theresia.)

But whatever the derivation - and

you can take your pick - "karácsony" still means "Christmas"!



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