

# Portrait

## Éva Hanzeli

"I was born in Budapest, on the Pest side...a long time ago," was Éva's answer to my first question. She finished high school in 1944, and continued her studies at the Pázmány University of Arts and Sciences of Budapest in the mathematics and physics department. Perhaps her choice of studies was a result of subtle influence from her engineer father. Her goal was to become a high school teacher, so she also attended classes at a Catholic teacher's collage, minoring in embroidery and Hungarian ethnography. German, Latin and Italian languages rounded out her extensive education.

Already, at this early age, Éva showed tendencies of a busy lifestyle: while going to school she also started working. One of her jobs was at the Governmental Restitution Committee where the aim was to pay restitution to the Soviets.

Due to the hopeless political situation, lack of work and severe shortage of apartments, in 1947 she left Hungary with her father and fiancée, Viktor Hanzeli, followed later by her mother and younger sister. Éva and Viktor married in Austria, in the Salzburg Cathedral of the Sound of Music fame. (This story must sound very romantic to her grandchildren!)

From Austria they moved to Paris. Viktor, in great command of the French language, became a journalist there. In 1951 they immigrated to the USA. After a year in New York Viktor got a job at the University of Bloomington in Indiana, where Éva also thought Hungarian for 3 years. Their first two children were born here. The next stop was Seattle with an offer from the University of Washington for Viktor and they made their final home in the Pacific Northwest. Three more children completed their family in Seattle.

"Seattle was a small city when we moved here. There were no Hungarians here," reminisces Éva. Only years later did Viktor run into another Hungarian, Professor Vásárhelyi. Some time later at a Greenlake soccer field he discovered the Seattle Hungarian Soccer Players. This team was formed by 1956 refugees with Zoltán Makó as their captain. After 1956 the city's Hungarian population started to grow.

The next wave of Hungarians arrived to Seattle in the 1980-s due to IRC-s efforts. Éva was never bored. Beside raising their five children and caring for her aging mother she found time to assist the newly-arrived Hungarians with interpreting, translating, taking them to the doctor, dentist or social service agencies. Often she was called to court or hospitals to interpret and she did all as a volunteer. Meanwhile, they were involved in Scouting with their sons, which meant regular involvement for Éva and Viktor, too.

In the early 1980-s, when I asked the Ethnic Heritage Council for advice on organizing the Hungarian community, Éva was an individual member of the Council. That is when I heard of the tours to Hungary that Viktor and two of his University colleagues organized and Éva actively assisted them with the preparations. They held classes for close to a year to prepare the interested tourists for the six-week tours. As a result of the interest generated towards Hungary, Éva and a Finn linguist taught Hungarian language at the University of Washington for a while. Her oldest son, daughter-in-law and youngest son also went on the first tour. It made lasting impressions on them; since then many members of the Hanzeli



family visited Hungary.

In 1983 when Sue Isely and I formed a Steering Committee that eventually led to the formation of the Hungarian American Association of Washington, we also invited Éva. The work lasted almost a year and one of the meetings was held in the Hanzeli home. Éva and Viktor became Charter members of the Association. Professor Hanzeli, who was the chairman of the Department of Romance Languages at the UW until his death in 1991 often conducted our annual elections. Éva is still a member, she reads the *Hírek* and is interested in the direction of the Association. She expressed unhappiness that our events all take place on the Eastside because she can't drive to Mercer Island and Bellevue any longer.

"How do you spend your days?" I asked her. "I do not know but my calendar is full of appointments. Tomorrow I'll give a talk to the local genealogical group in Kent" she said. She is a member of the University Wives Club, a French conversational group, the International Women's Group, she likes classical music, operas and frequents lectures.

She is also active at her church and together with Viktor they were instrumental in establishing the Newman Center, the University's Catholic Church for students. Éva mentioned with pride that one of her grandsons heads the Center. In her early eighties she is still an active mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She still resides in the charming, 1936 Tudor family home where „I have more of everything than I would need, and that is why I can't move" she said. For instance in the dining room, we sat at a massive table, part of a handmade dining set, decorated with intarsia that was a inheritance from Viktor's family. They had it shipped here from Hungary.

She noted with sadness that the Hungarian newspapers' and Internet Websites' language is very sloppy. "One would expect more from educated people" she said.

True, many could take example from her: after 63 years she speaks our mother tongue without mixing in English words. We wrapped up our conversation with nostalgic reminiscing about the delicacies of Hungarian pastry shops, among them the famous Gerbeaud and Hauer pastries of Budapest and the lack of similar goodies here in Seattle.

We wish Éva many happy and healthy years among her large family and numerous friends.

