

Portrait

Ildikó Deáky

The visitor, arriving at Ildikó Deáky's home near Poulsbo is greeted by a carved 'kopjafa', a traditional Transylvanian Hungarian wooden marking, used to mark the grave sites of Hungarians. "My husband carved it", says Ildikó "and it was made in honor of his ancestry, because he was from Csík county in Transylvania. I have been trying to preserve the rooted wooden post from insects for 12 years. We were hoping that traveling Hungarians, upon noticing it, would knock on our doors but unfortunately this never happened."

Too bad, because the touring Hungarian would have found additional treasures inside. One floor is decorated in the traditional Hungarian village style along with treasured folk art pieces.

Ildikó was born in June, 1937 in Budapest. Her father, Tibor Dévai Bíró, was a recognized architect. The Dévai name, indicating noble roots, was eliminated during the Communist regime and the family never reclaimed it, not even later in England. Her mother was a commercial artist who excelled with her beautiful embroideries. Ildikó has a younger sister who lives on Bainbridge Island with her family.

The years prior to World War II bring back peaceful memories for Ildikó, but the war brought troubled times. Her father was about to be deported to Siberia by the Russians when he managed to escape. For weeks they had no news of him, while he hid somewhere in Budapest. Their home was burned to the ground by a bomb and the family lived in the basement for several weeks. It was a dreadful time for a little seven-year-old girl who also suffered a knee injury when the bomb exploded. Etched in her memory is the incident when she saved her father from being clubbed to death by an angry Russian soldier who demanded her dad's watch - one that was already taken from him during his earlier arrest.

A kind relative intervened on their behalf at the 11th District Major's office and they allocated an apartment for them in Lágymányos, South of Budapest's Gellért Square. The family lived there until they escaped from Hungary in late November, 1956.

The Communist regime classified Ildikó's father as a class alien, and higher education opportunities were denied to Ildikó. She dreamed of becoming an architect, so she chose architectural technician school, hoping to gain entry to the university through this route. In spite of being an outstanding student who participated in national contests, she still was not accepted to the university.

She worked for a year, hoping that her place of employment would recommend her for the university. When the revolution broke out in 1956, Ildi and her fiancée decided to flee to the West because of their uncertain future. Her parents then joined them. Near Vitnyéd, they crawled through and walked across snowy fields and reached Austria while the Russians' guard dogs were barking and Stalin flares lit up the night sky. The family wanted to come to America, but the US quotas were closed at that time so they ended up in England. Ildi and her fiancée got married in London in March, 1957 and by September they received their American immigration papers. Her parents stayed in England where her father immediately found employment as an architect and was promoted in his job. That is why Ildi did not recommend that her parents move to the US.

With her husband Attila, a sound engineer, they settled down close to Hollywood, in Culver City. They got in touch there

with other Hungarian colleagues involved in movie making, among them Vilmos Zsigmond, who later won an Oscar, László Kovács and Joseph Mikó. Attila worked at MGM's film laboratories; Ildi raised their children Peter and Barbara. The family joined the large Los Angeles Hungarian colony. Ildikó's homesickness was dulled by her involvement in the Hungarian Scouting where she taught the Hungarian youth language, history, runic writing, and singing as girl scout leader. Her son, Peter, who is a member of HAAW and also lives on the Peninsula, speaks very good Hungarian. Her daughter, whom I haven't met, lives in Portland. "I taught my children Hungarian because I owed it to them. I was

the one who robbed them of the opportunity to be born in Hungary and to grow up there" said Ildikó.

As the children grew, Ildikó enrolled in college and while working at the California Savings and Loan bank she earned her Business Administration degree. At her job, she worked herself up to mortgage loan underwriter position and assistant vice president title. Her interest in architecture and art continued, and she took classes related to them, but she did not earn her degree in architecture. After 24 years, their marriage ended in divorce, but 3 years later, Ildikó found a Hungarian husband once again. During a visit to the Pacific Northwest,

they came upon a house for sale in Miller Bay and the surrounding view charmed them so much that they decided to purchase it. After their retirement in California, they moved into their Washington home. "I live in God's hand now. I always loved the country...as a child we spent summer in the countryside and I have tender memories of the Hungarian village life" mused Ildikó.

In 2000, after 16 years of marriage and a long and painful illness, Ildi's husband died. As a widow, Ildikó lives an active life. She is a board member as secretary at her church and volunteers at the local Food Bank. Occasionally she writes articles for the Hírek. She likes to travel, take photographs, and writes her memoirs for her children and grandchildren. In the last four to five years she started to paint and is a member of the Poulsbo Art League. Her father was a talented aquarelle painter, her sister is also a water color artist, and Ildi paints in oil. Her richly toned, evocative paintings were drying in the living room and dining room, getting ready for her show. The opening was on May 29 on Capitol Hill at a place called "Harem", where she, her sister, and another Hungarian artist show their works during a month-long exhibit.

Ildikó went through many trials during her lifetime but her positive, cheerful, helping spirit and belief in God never left her. She made the views and ideals of Scouting the basis of her own lifestyle and perhaps that is what brings honest, intelligent friends in her path here, away from her beloved country, Hungary. We wish her good luck with the exhibit.

