

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN: THERESA MOLNÁR

By Márta Boros Horváth

The goal of the editors of HIREK and the Board of the Association with this column is community building. For weeks now it has been on my mind, who should be my first interview subject. I wanted someone who has been around the Association, perhaps from its inception, but who is less known to the current, younger generation. After some careful considerations my choice fell on Theresa Molnár. I hope that our readers will find her as remarkable and as interesting of an individual as I do.

Motto: „There is a magical tie to the land of our home, which the heart can not break, though the footsteps may roam.” Eliza Cook



From the front gate a winding, tree-lined driveway lead me to the four car garage and parking area. Theresa came out to greet me and offered me a cool drink. The view of her aw-inspiring garden captivated me, and I asked if I could walk around by myself. With camera in hand I surveyd the 2 and ½ acres heavenly garden, where I saw beauty, loving care, harmony and lots of lots of work. It is the kind of place where one could go to refresh the soul and find peace and tranquility. Later Theresa herself took me on a tour, pointing out various features of her garden, such as the old Indian trail and the different gardens within the garden. After our stroll we set down on the sunny patio among large pots of geraniums, Hungarian green pepper and

tomatoe plants, and she granted me (and our reader) a rare look into her life's journey. I have known Theresa (or Terike to her close friends) Molnár for many years. She and her husband, Alex were two of the Founding Members of the HAAW in 1982. She said with a healthy laugh that she is "a very young 71, and age is like a good wine, it gets better with time!"

The youngest of seven children, Theresa was born in the small village of Rábacsanak, Hungary, near the Austrian border. Her parents were hard working people, neither privileged nor disadvantaged, according to Theresa. The family owned and cultivated a lovely orchard, filled with many different varieties of fruit trees, until the communist government took it away from them. This orchard holds a special place in Theresa's memories, so much so, that her found memories made an indelible impression on her life.

At the age of 14 Theresa left the village to live with her older sister's family in Budapest. There she attended the Budapest Electronic Works' trade school, although she confided

that, "my dream was to go to business school, to university in the county seat of Győr, but my parents couldn't afford to send me there."

It was meant to happen this way. She met her future husband, Alex at the trade school. Theresa was only 16 years old, and Alex was a handsome, blond guest instructor there. "I did not have a schoolgirl's crush on him, even though he was cute. Later we worked together; I as an electrician who even had to climb poles, and I got to know him, his qualities and intelligence," she recalls.

Six months into their marriage, the 1956 Revolution broke out in Hungary. The future seemed hopeless to them at the BP City Light where they both worked. They witnessed the Russians shooting into apartment buildings and hospitals. Every day was uncertain; would they see each other at the end of the workday? Theresa and Alex decided to escape to the West.

They crossed the minefields in the dark of night, and made it to Austria. From there the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle sponsored them, and they arrived in Seattle on Dec.28, 1956. Archbishop Thomas Connolly was the head of the church at that time. Theresa remembers, "We were the only ones among the Hungarian refugees who did not kiss his ring, and it must have made a memorable impression on the Archbishop."

Nevertheless, Theresa and Alex remained in touch with the Archbishop via correspondence until he passed away. His Excellency was always pleased with Theresa and Alex' efforts and progress.

The Molnárs immediately enrolled in English classes at the Edison Technical School on Capital Hill. They knew it was imperative to learn English to get good jobs, and they also considered it their duty to learn the language of their new country. Alex found work immediately at SquareD Electric, but female electricians were unheard of in those days in America, so Theresa held a variety of jobs, including dishwasher and maid until she was promoted to be the 'Service Elevator Operator' at Swedish Hospital. "Boy, did I have to learn in a hurry which way is up and which way is down!" she reminisced with good humor.

Following 25 months of service in the US army, Alex returned to Seattle to work with Todd's Shipyard for the next 15 years. This job sent him all over the US and the world repairing electrical problems on cargo ships, oil tankers, passenger ships, and US Navy ships. With the encouragement of staff and patients at Swedish, Theresa decided to retrain herself at the Metropolitan Business College. "Upon graduation, many wonderful doors opened for me. From that point on, I choose the jobs and I was in command," she says.

In February, 1974 Alex made the move and went into business for himself doing the same thing as at Todd's but eliminating the middle man. This business eventually became a team effort between husband and wife. "The business started a bit slow, but by 1976 I had to quit my good job at Smith and Green restaurant and Hotel Supply where I was accountant/office manager. Alex needed me, and we've been working together ever since!" Theresa describes. Molnár Service Co., Inc developed into a very successful venture. She and Alex formed an excellent working team, balancing and complimenting each other's abilities. Alex's technical skills are excellent, while Theresa's skills from the business collage proved useful in running the office. Her

electrical skills, also, became valuable. She tracked down the parts Alex needed for his repairs and air shipped them to him at various ports around the world. In addition, Theresa learned the art of metal photography (a lucrative business by itself), cared for their son, John, and for the family's home.

In 1985 they purchased their current 2and1/2 acre home with its garden and view of Edmonds' bay. The garden has literally and metaphorically "bloomed" under Theresa and Alex's care. "I was always interested in gardening, I grew up with it, and we always had a lovely garden on a smaller scale," she states. The estate was beautiful when they purchase it but through the years Theresa and Alex made some major rearranging and improvements, such as adding an impressive waterfall with koi pond, Japanese maple garden, Alpine garden, and fruit orchard, of course. Remarkably, Theresa does the actual gardening by herself, "Alex will not pull weeds, but he is extremely handy and enjoys building things." As her parents orchard was special to Theresa as a young girl, this current garden also holds a special place in her life. "[My garden means] everything to me: my health, happiness, peace, harmony, energy, exercise, and plenty of it!" she said.

I erroneously made the assumption that Theresa's life was often lonely when Alex was gone on business trips weeks on end, but she corrected me saying that she had no time to be lonely. Always busy, Theresa has been active in professional organizations, such as the Society of Port Engineers, and the American Business Women. She and her husband were also supporters of the HAAW with donations and beautiful metal photographs that Theresa created in her dark room. Her unique photographs brought in thousands of dollars for the Port Engineers' auctions and they were always a beautiful addition to our raffles.



Now that she has retired from the business, she can devote long days to her beloved garden. She and Alex enjoy spending time with their grandson, Karcsi and adorable baby sister Hayden. They have a lovely daughter-in-law, and their son has his own successful business. However, Rábacsanak and her heritage is never far from Theresa's mind "I am very content with the way our life is now, but we also remember every single day where we came from." Part of this heritage is a love of

nature. She fondly remembers her father sitting in the orchard under a huge walnut tree, "where he rested, meditated and talked to God." She continues, "I am a very spiritual person, even though I only attend church occasionally, but just as my Father, I am closest to God in our garden. This garden is God's creation, and I am just the caretaker of it. And yes, we are blessed many times over."

CLOSING THOUGHTS

It takes extreme dedication and passion to leave a lasting memory and legacy. Artists paint, writers write, Bill Gates single mindedly built a computer empire. Theresa

Molnar's palette is her garden. She has re-created the world of her youth, a memory that she brought with her from the land of her home(land). As the British poet and writer Eliza Cook said it, "There is a magical tie to the land of our home which the heart cannot break though the footsteps may roam."

I thank Theresa Molnar for sharing the story of her life' journey with the readers of HIREK. She is a fascinating, self-made member of our community, one we can proudly call 'one of our own'.