

Portrait

Linda Sue Isely

An Honorary Hungarian.... Most of us in the Seattle area Hungarian community are familiar with the name of Sue Isely, artistic director, choreographer, folk dance teacher of Kisbetyárok, and talented seamstress of countless beautiful folk costumes. In addition, she was the co-founder of the bi-lingual newsletter Hírek in 1983 along with Márta Boros (Horváth) and she was one of the major forces behind the formation of our association, the HAAW, in 1984.

Through the years she has served on the Board in various capacities. We learned to appreciate her and sometimes take her for granted.

I set out to explore who is the person behind the public face. Sue was born in 1951 in the state of Illinois's most fertile county where her ancestors farmed. She has fond memories of spending Sundays at her grandparents farm along with 20-30 other relatives from nearby. This early experience is the foundation that's behind her strong belief in the family unit.

She grew up as a middle child up in Bloomington, in a community of 25-30,000 people. Her mother was a school teacher so education played an important part in her upbringing. She was exposed to lots of music, rhythm, music theory and piano lessons early on. She was also seriously involved in figure skating and doing shows, all through middle school and high school. Her love of "movement", and dance, can be traced back to these influences.

Her mother taught her to sew as a 6th grader and her sewing skills come in handy when she creates the beautiful folk costumes for the entire dance group of Kisbetyárok. Now she also passes her knowledge on to her daughters.

Her college undergrad years were spent at the University of Illinois in Champagne-Urbana majoring in occupational therapy. She worked for 4-5 years as a therapist in the Champagne School District before moving to Seattle to work on her masters at the University of Washington. She earned her masters in both occupational therapy and special education. She learned a lot about curriculum, which came in handy years later when she and her husband, Mario, decided to home school their three children.

Sue started folk dancing in Illinois and was introduced to Hungarian folk dancing by some of the dancers there who visited Hungary and attended workshops of Sándor Timár, the godfather of the Hungarian Táncház movement. In Seattle she met another folk dancer, Bob Cohen and they formed and co-directed a group, Legényes, specializing in Hungarian folk dances. Someone recruited Mario Isely for this group and this is how Sue and Mario met each other through Hungarian folk dancing. They married in February 1982 and have three children.

In the summer of 1982 Legényes decided to show their dancing skills to some of the local Hungarians. Names were picked from the phone book and gathered from Hungarian friends; stuffed cabbage and "körözött" was made along with decorated heart cookies; and the Rainier Brewery show was organized with Linda Teslik, Bob Cohen's wife, as one of the main force behind the event. "Linda had the energy and drive to organize" said Sue. The show was an instant success and things started to roll along from then on. The first issue of

Hírek appeared in the fall of 1983 and the association was officially formed as a nonprofit organization in 1984. Marta Horvath and the late Magdi Connor also got involved with the early organizational work.

Soon after that, Sue and Mario quit Legényes to devote their attention and energy to the Hungarian community's folk dancing and started their work with the children of Kisbetyárok and the adults of Betyárok. Gradually, as more parents got involved with dancing with their children, Betyárok merged into Kisbetyárok, and now it is one, large dancing family.



Sue's work with Kisbetyárok is very involved. As her three children matured, it grew into a family affair: Mario helps with teaching the men and with choreography; Elizabeth assists with the teaching of children and women; Kathryn helps with the middle school girls and choreographs for ladies. The family's Saturday mornings are devoted to folk dance practice. The over 50-member Kisbetyárok practices in Seattle, renting 3 rooms every week. Sue is like a grand conductor, going from room to room with a notepad and a new voice amplifier, managing, teaching, encouraging big and small, beginner and experienced dancers. She is thankful to her helpers outside of her family: her assistant director Karl Pelkan, her assistant Kati Gyulai, and young Monika Ringbloom. Zsuzsa Stanfield helps with administrative tasks and photographs. Yet all of this couldn't happen without Sue's devoted vol-

unteering.

Currently Sue is preparing the group to celebrate their 25th anniversary with a special gala concert, and she asks the Hungarian community to "buy tickets to the concert and bring a friend, too". "Some of the performers are a real treasure" she says with excitement. "This event will represent a slice of Hungary's cultural contribution", she adds.

This picture of Sue wouldn't be complete without mentioning her devotion to her faith and church community. She and Mario are actively supporting the pastor of their small church with their volunteer work. Sue is the church organist and in charge of special programs, Mario is the president of the congregation and both of them teach Bible study. They want to make sure that their children grow up in a faith community and "in a small church, capable people are put to good use" as Sue put it.

As for doing all the various works mostly from the goodness of her heart, Sue remarked that "God blessed me with many blessings and what good would it be not to give it back in some way". And that includes her family, her church, and the extended family of the Hungarian community. We can only add to that, "Isten tartsa meg a szokásodat", which means "May God keep your good habits" for many more years.