

# Portrait

## Veronika Emody

Every function of the HAAW is “branded”, or identified with the banner that bears her handiwork. It is a lovely textile banner, several feet long with the name of our association, decorated with Hungarian and American symbols. When I asked the mild mannered, gentle Veronica about her creation, with her typical modesty she credited one of our former presidents, Kati Vitez, for it. “How did Katy Vitez know that you can make this kind of textile work?” I asked her surprised. “I have no clue” was her reply.

We were eating lunch at the former Everett Market building, in the company of her American husband and his twin brother. “Food to die for”, as Veronica put it, a healthy lunch, made with farm-fresh ingredients, the way Veronica likes it.

She was born in Hungary 65 years ago and endured a difficult childhood. She talked with pride about her father, who was a ten times decorated sharpshooter of the Austro-Hungarian Army, an economist with a PhD and in charge of the National Warehouses and Silos of Hungary. “He was a forward-looking man who championed on behalf of his employees.” He also adored his wife, Veronica’s mother, who was 20 years younger than him. Eventually Mr. Emody was declared an enemy of the state by the communists and lost his job. In 1949 the family tried to escape to the West, when Veronica was about 5 years old, but they were caught by the border guards and arrested by the feared AVH at Szombathely. Veronica was sent to an orphanage while her father was tortured and her mother interrogated by the AVH.

At the orphanage younger and older children, boys and girls shared the same bedrooms and Veronica recalled being bullied by the older boys. “They put hay in our hair at night, and it was very difficult to comb it out”. Her father was kept in jail for three years without being tried and an additional year after his trial. Her mother was freed after two weeks but she was afraid of deportations and turned Veronica over to a foster family. She lived with them on Rakoshegy for 6 years and remembers them with fondness. On the weekends she visited with her mother, who doted on her lovingly. “She took me to various attractions, such as restaurants, movies and the Artista Variete theater.”

Her mother suffered from tuberculosis twice in Hungary. In 1957 Veronica’s family received an unusual legal passport to immigrate to Peru, so they could live in the mountainous climate somewhere. This sort of thing was unheard of in Hungary during the Kadar regime, but in reality Veronica’s uncle was waiting for them in Peru and she thinks that a high ranking communist had his eye on her family’s home, so he helped their application to go through.

In Peru Veronica attended the “Abraham Lincoln” American school, where she excelled in her studies. She was a lonely, bookish child, first in her class after 3 months and first in the entire school after a half year. Upon graduating from high school she received a scholarship to continue her studies in the US at the state university of New Jersey in New Brunswick at Ruthger’s. Armed with her undergraduate degree she returned to Peru and taught for a year at the James Monroe American school, where she had to teach all the subjects in English to her

pupils. She taught for another 6 months in a secretarial school before returning to the United States to work on her Master’s degree at the University of Washington. This is where she and Tom Coyle met. Veronica earned her Masters in anthropology that included archeology and linguistics, and she went back to Peru to work on digs. “It was one of the best experiences of my life, a realization of a dream” as Veronica remembers. “In Peru it is hard not to fall under the spell of archeology. First I wanted to be an Egyptologist, because early Peruvian culture has no clear-cut writing system and I always thought ‘How could one

have a sense of history without writing,?’” but later she realized that there is a lot one can find, for instance from pottery works, knots on ropes which were used for a kind of accounting system by the Incas, from textiles and beans, just to mention a few.

After her work in Peru she returned to the US again, to California this time, to UCLA to work on her PhD, but she did not finish her work and did not earn her doctorate. She and Tom had a church wedding in Peru and a civil ceremony in the US with Tom’s family. They didn’t think they wanted any children. “We were doing kind of well, just the two of us, and we were kind of scared of kids.” Their daughter, Ilonka came when Veronica was 36, and everything

has changed. “We lucked out with her, she was a nice kid, a good girl, smart and pretty also. Veronica chose to stay home with her daughter and taught her Hungarian, too. Ilonka graduated from high school with an associate college degree and so she finished college in two years. She continued in law school, practiced law for 4 years when she and her husband decided to join the Peace Corps. They are in Africa now, in Togo, where Ilonka helps with the newspaper, teaches girls some business, building latrines, helping them to form a co-op, etc., work that is unusual from a young, female, American lawyer.

Veronica’s mother came to live with her and Tom in Everett after her dad died in Peru. She lived with them until her passing at age 94 last summer. Through the years Veronica did translating and interpreting of technical writings, Spanish and Hungarian to English and vice versa for Catholic Community Services, for the courts and other agencies. For a short while she also volunteered at our Hungarian Saturday language school and translated many articles for the Hírek. Her health declined lately, sometimes she needs hospitalization. She is concerned about the environment and is a devoted recycler, and friend to all kinds of animals behind their house. She is a kind, gentle soul, and we wish her good health and a long life.

