

## Suddenly the Channels Opened Wide in Communist Hungary – Part 1

Elisabeth Cook

April 25, 2018

Unification Church Missionary to Hungary



In December 1979, I participated in the first 40-day workshop to be held in Austria, at our center in Gafrenz. Towards its close our national leader, Peter Koch, came to visit us and asked who was interested in studying an east European language. I felt Hungarian would be interesting for me. Two days later, Mr. Koch called me and asked if I would be prepared to study Hungarian in order to go to Hungary as a missionary of our Church. When I started to consider the possibility, I felt such immense hope for the future that I agreed to accept the mission.

Mr. Koch advised us to formally leave the church and break off all relationships with members in order to protect our mission. At that time, Communists regimes were in power throughout the whole of east European countries and nobody could predict what would happen if our mission became publicly known. It was difficult to ‘leave’ the Church but I understood the necessity of having to go ‘underground.’ At the same time, I felt that many good spirits which had hitherto been

supporting me suddenly departed elsewhere, so my feelings toward the Communist regime grew increasingly heavier. It was a bit like dropping out of a beautiful dream into harsh reality.

I was recommended for a language course in Hungary in the summer of 1980, which took place in Debrecen, a city in the east of Hungary. It was my second visit to Hungary because a couple of months previously I’d paid a visit to Budapest together with Ingrid Hauseder, who was also preparing for a mission there. That first visit had not been a particularly uplifting experience, to put it mildly. It was as if I could physically feel the spiritual emptiness caused by thirty long years of Communism (or Socialism, as the east Europeans preferred to call it!). The city looked grey, dull and dusty; the atmosphere was quite depressing and, at that time, little could be sensed of the glamour and charm evident in Budapest today.



*Elisabeth with the two other missionaries to Hungary, Ingrid Hauseder and Martin Putz, and Austrian national leader Rev. Peter Koch (who was visiting them in Hungary)*

The language course in Debrecen went well although in the evenings we usually had to watch historical movies about Hungary in the last century, when it was part of the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. From such documentaries I was able to learn about many painful historical facts that I hadn’t known about

before but I could also see that the Socialists were working hard to indoctrinate everybody about the wickedness of the West – and mainly Austria! I came to understand that one of our difficulties, as missionaries, would be to pay indemnity for the past, in addition to having to cope with the Communist system of the present.

That autumn, I continued my studies at the University in Vienna and, in the following two semesters, I passed enough examinations to apply for a one-year scholarship in Hungary, which they granted me.

My life as a missionary in Hungary began in September 1981 with a cold shower. On my arrival at the student hostel, where arrangements had been made for me to stay, they turned me away. I was shocked. Did this mean that I had to leave the country? Did my scholarship have any validity at all? It took several days to find out that there had been a misunderstanding and that students from western capitalist countries weren't permitted to share accommodation with students who came from Communist (Socialist) countries. So I found a private room in an apartment building ordinarily intended for old ladies.



*Elisabeth Cook as a pioneer missionary in Budapest (with the Danube River in the background)*

Furthermore, the Interior Ministry organized a private teacher, either to prevent me from meeting other students or at least to observe me, before I'd be allowed to join in with the rest of the group. It was hard to determine exactly what was going on because nothing much could be seen on the surface. That kind of isolation together with the restrictions caused a feeling of constant discomfort in me. I had already suffered internally since coming to Hungary – it was a kind of 'out of sight, out of mind' situation in which the Divine Principle and God now seemed so remote that sometimes I asked myself whether it was really me who had been a member of our Church for five years and who had been so enthusiastic about God, Jesus and The Second Coming. I realized I had to build up a new foundation again from zero. Slowly I became able to pray again and to set conditions. Also, I made friends. One of the hardest things for me was not being able to meet with other brothers and sisters. I was aware that two other missionaries from Austria, Ingrid Hauseder and later, Martin Putz, were in Budapest but for security reasons we didn't meet there. We were only able to exchange our experiences much later, at missionary meetings in Austria.

After this first and perhaps most difficult year, my scholarship was prolonged and I was able to enter the University of Budapest. I chose the subject 'Hungarian Language and Literature,' a field of studies belonging to the Faculty of Fine Arts, which the Communist authorities supervised very strictly in order to prevent the development of any new ideas.

Only students whose parents were party members and who had absolutely no history of religious affiliations were accepted. I encountered students from other Communist countries such as Poland, Russia and North Korea on the course. It was a precious opportunity for me to study with these young students and we developed a good team spirit. Even though I couldn't teach them anything about religion then and there, I used to pray that God would prepare situations in the future where that would be possible. Most of my prayer conditions were done whilst walking in the streets or parks of Budapest as the walls in my room were wafer thin. My landlady was already very curious about my unusual way of life and so, if I wanted to continue to stay there, I couldn't do anything strange.

After a year, I felt I knew the language well enough to teach the Principle. From among my friends, I chose the person that I was closest to, a Polish girl named Dorota, who had a pure and honest character. I

invited her to my room and began to explain the Divine Principle to her. As there was no Hungarian translation yet available, I asked her to help me with the translation and together we gradually created a simple, hand-written Hungarian version of the Divine Principle.



*Elisabeth with witnessing contacts (in front, Agnes Nagy who became a core member of the Hungarian church)*

A second guest that I was able to teach was my language teacher, Laszlo. Sometimes, after a teaching session, I would pray with him or Dorota and light a candle in order to create a better spiritual atmosphere. That was too much for my landlady! Candlelight in my room and a male visitor! Her suspicion and curiosity became unbearable so I decided to move into an apartment of my own. Shortly after that decision a student offered me an apartment which I accepted.

I was surprised how smoothly everything went. Dorota and Laszlo would each come over once or twice a week and we steadily worked our way through the Principle. In doing so, I was surprised how much spiritual power I received when teaching the Principle in Hungarian. Of course, in Austria, during my pioneering days, I sometimes gave Principle lectures but I was never very confident; I felt a heavy atmosphere around me. In Hungary, however, the situation was different. I felt free and without any spiritual restrictions. I realized that many people in the Spiritual World had been waiting for this moment and were eager to support those who knew the Principle. We missionaries got a lot of spiritual help once we had laid a foundation and started to teach and witness. I am so grateful for the unconditional support of those good spirits which I felt with me from that point on of my mission in Hungary, right up until the time that I left.

Dorota had no religious foundation and couldn't understand the Principle very well but she moved into my flat, "in order to become as good a person as you are," as she expressed it. So I tried to raise her through practicing prayer and studying the Principle, hoping that the seed in her would grow.

Her parents in Poland were strict Communists yet neither Dorota nor I had gauged their power. One day they visited us and, because they feared that I might steal their daughter and take her to the West, they put her under a great deal of pressure to move out. The next morning, when I woke up, Dorota had already packed her suitcase. She just said, "I have to go. I'm sorry!" I couldn't even say good-bye. I was shocked and speechless. What about all the experiences we'd shared? Were all my hopes, my efforts and everything lost? I cried and cried. Finally, I was able to meet up with one of the other missionaries, Martin Putz, in order to share my situation. Although we knew about each other we ordinarily never met, as we didn't know how closely we were being observed. Yet, in such an extreme situation, it was an incredible relief to meet a brother who had had similar devastating experiences.

Our national leader, Peter Koch, always encouraged us to use our pioneering situation to build up a strong and personal relationship with God and said that we should be grateful for any suffering that we had to go through.

He almost envied us for being able to carry out this unique mission.