
FIRST PERSON

To Hungary, With Love

Laurina Rinsma

I left for Hungary from Australia feeling both excited and apprehensive. Excited, because I was about to satisfy my curiosity by seeing behind what was once the Iron Curtain. And apprehensive, because I had been prayerfully chosen by the organizers of "Youth for Europe" to share my faith and love for Christ in that distant country. This was to be achieved through street ministry, something that I was not at all familiar with, and certainly not comfortable with. Sharing my faith and speaking of my love for Jesus was wonderful if I was doing it before fellow believers on a Sabbath morning. To witness openly before strangers and therefore, to my mind, a hostile crowd, was quite different.

I decided to rely upon my ignorance of the Hungarian language as protection from the very people to whom God had commissioned me to reach out. It's a good thing that God's plans weren't thwarted by my feelings of inadequacy. God made it perfectly clear to me before I even set foot in Hungary that this was His project, and I realize now that my sense of inadequacy and hopelessness enabled God to use me in His ministry to a much greater degree than I ever believed possible.

Our team of 11 Australian Adventist young adults met at the Singapore airport on August 21, 1991. It was the first time most of us had met and there was an instant sense of belonging that I'd never felt with any other people. Everyone was aware of it. We had to spend the night in Singapore and take a connecting flight to Moscow and Budapest the next day. At the hotel we discussed the wisdom of flying to Moscow while

the K.G.B. coup was on. We had heard reports that there were no flights leaving Moscow. Should we go forward in faith? Or would it be a case of "rushing in where angels fear to tread"? We prayed for a long time together, asking God to show us His will. Sometime during that night the coup was quelled, Gorbachev reinstated, and order restored in the Soviet Union. We were joyous and awed by the power and speed of God's answer to our prayers. We boarded Aeroflot flight SU558 knowing we would arrive safely at our destination.

When we did finally arrive in Budapest, exhausted and minus our luggage, I was reminded again of our utter dependence on God. The people of Nemesvamos, a vil-

lage west of Budapest, took us into their homes and gave us food, clothes, and beds until our luggage was located. We worshiped with them in their new church on Sabbath and were amazed at the wonderful gift of music the Hungarians possess. They were warm and hospitable to the point of self-sacrifice, and lasting friendships were forged that first weekend. This wonderful introduction to Hungary made us eager to get to Zalaegerszeg and commence our ministry.

Zalaegerszeg is a town of 70,000 people in western Hungary, and the capital of a district known as Zala. Until recently this district was known to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to other denominations in Hungary as "Black Zala" due to the people's lack of interest in evangelistic programs, and the fact that it was once a Communist stronghold. There was no Adventist church in that area when we arrived. Only one lady was studying the Bible with the pastor of the nearest Adventist congregation located in Nagykánisa, 50 kilometers away. This meant that the task of delivering 25,000 invitations to Tony Campbell's evangelistic program—due to start just two weeks after our arrival—fell upon us.

Each morning we would feast on worship together, sometimes spending up to two hours before going down to breakfast. This was due to both our love for worship and our need to translate everything said and sung into Hungarian for the benefit of the theology students who were staying with us and helping us. The heavy task of translating everything fell naturally on Tibor Berenyi, our Australian/Hungarian team lead-



The Australian team in front of the building where the evangelistic series was held. The author is at the left on the back row.

er. Everyone, including me, learned a "blurb" in Hungarian that enabled us to approach the people on the streets and at their doors with our invitations. After greeting people and telling them, in Hungarian, that we had come from Australia, we would then apologize in almost perfect Hungarian for not being able to speak Hungarian, and then continue, in Hungarian, to invite them to the program. The response was over-

whelming. Being Australian held a certain novelty value, and as Zalaegerszeg wasn't on the tourist map, very few foreigners, if any, had assaulted the town as thoroughly as we did. We were encouraged more and more as we saw evidences of the Holy Spirit working in this town. People were so interested in coming and even more so when they learned that it was a Bible-based program, that it was evident Zalaegerszeg was ready to hear God's good news. Our work soon became a pleasure.

When the pressure to distribute invitations started to ease, we began to concentrate on our street ministry. We set up our puppet theater in the town square, and through our music, drama, puppetry, and clown ministries we were able to reach every age group, from toddlers to old men who seemed to be almost a part of the square. We were also able to reach both the gypsies and the businessmen. Our show was both entertaining and Christian. While people performed, others mingled in the crowd. By giving out their personal testimony card printed in Hungarian, minglers would enroll people in a free Bible correspondence course. Everyone associated us immediately with the evangelistic series that was adver-



Two "clowns" from Australia assist two Hungarian musicians.

tised all over town, and street performing gave us a perfect opportunity to befriend people and personally invite them to the program.

On September 8, at 5 p.m., the hall we had booked for Tony Campbell's evangelistic program with a seating capacity for 350, held almost 1,000 people. The seven o'clock session was the same and a nine o'clock session was added to accommodate those who could not even get in the door for the other two! By the time the evening was over, Tony and his interpreter, Krizta, were feeling faint. The hall lacked oxygen, and six hours was a marathon effort for public speaking. We organized prayer support teams who would alternate between different session times and pray in a room

"Youth for Europe" was created by pastor Alan Walshe, youth director for the Trans-Australian Union. Three teams, each made up of 11 young people, went into Poland and Hungary in August/September 1991, to minister for Christ in the streets. Each team was accompanied by an evangelist, and campaigns were conducted in Warsaw, Szeged, and Zalaegerszeg. One team had originally been destined for Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, but the situation in that country caused the group to be redirected to Szeged, Hungary.

below the hall for both the speakers and the listeners.

We were reticent to praise God for the amazing success of the program's first night. We estimated that our numbers would probably halve by the next evening. Our projections took a battering the next evening when even more people turned up. And so it continued as people brought their friends to hear these wonderful Bible prophecies. We soon learn-

ed to thank God for showing us His will and the power of His Spirit. He also provided an Adventist worker for the congregation that meets every Sabbath now in Zalaegerszeg, another concern that need not have worried us.

In January of this year 29 persons joined our church through baptism. They form the core of the new Seventh-day Adventist congregation in Zalaegerszeg, which now has more than 50 persons attending church services every Sabbath. Many of them have come to Christ in the midst of adverse pressure from family and friends. But their faith is sustaining them. One girl, Judit, meets with a group of young people every Friday evening at her home for vespers.

Now I know that we were sent to Hungary for a purpose—to share God's love. I saw the powerful work of His Spirit in Zalaegerszeg, and I was one of the privileged few who was able to be used by Him. And, of course, this is only the beginning.

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