



friendship force
FORT WORTH

Maria's Story

On the train as we travelled to our exchange in Pecs, Hungary, the train suddenly lurched to a halt and we were told through an English speaking seatmate nearby that we must transfer to a bus since the tracks ahead were under construction. As I struggled across the tracks with two suitcases and a large carry-on., a soft voice said in English, "May I help you?"

These words started a friendship with an amazing woman named Maria Eszes. After over an hour, we again boarded the train and Maria appeared at our seats. It seems that she had missed her transfer to Kemlo because of the alteration in schedule and asked that I join her for a chat as we proceeded to Pecs. In Pecs, I introduced her to my hostess, Aniko. The following night, I discovered that Aniko had invited Maria to spend the night since there was no late train to her village and had invited her to the Welcome Dinner where she enjoyed visiting with FF Club members. She invited us to visit her small town later in the week. When we arrived in Kemlo, she had arranged a private showing of the mining museum and invited us to her apartment for supper.

What an introduction to the post Russian world!. Maria lived in a small austere flat in a cluster of communist constructed apartment buildings. In sharp contrast to her humble surroundings, she had a cozy apartment with one room dedicated to her studio. We discovered that Maria was a talented painter and was a published author. She was fluent in multiple languages: English, Hungarian, Croatian, Esperanto and sang in Chinese and Russian. On weekends she travelled to Budapest to serve as tour guide and interpreter. She was a successful survivor of two strokes and had taken 8 years to recover and begin a new life.

As we hugged goodbye, she insisted that she would be waiting to "help" me once again when my train reached Budapest on my way home. Indeed she was!

With her interpretive skills I was able to arrive at my overnight lodging and she gave me a personal tour of the St. Stephens Cathedral. Thus began a friendship I will continue to treasure throughout the years ahead.