



Photos by Bill Dunlevy

A Hungarian Family Meets America

by Jim Collison



After day's work, John studies English with Imre.



John keeps first handful of "free soil" in pouch.



Women "showered" John's wife with household gifts.

THE TERROR of communist Hungary was behind the Janos Keregyarto family when they arrived in Waterloo, Ia., early this year, but anxious moments still lay ahead. They faced a strange land with little more than hope and a pouchful of earth—the first soil Janos grabbed after crawling through a mine-infested no-man's-land to free Austria.

With his wife Elizabeth and daughter Erika, Janos settled in the Waterloo home of his brother-in-law, Imre Takac, and determined to win a place in his new land. He soon found that he was not alone in his struggle.

Within a week, neighborhood women brought Elizabeth gifts of welcome, and groups in Waterloo and nearby Cedar Falls sponsored "showers" to provide the Keregyartos with household items. A downstairs neighbor, Mrs. Beverly McGuire, gave a surprise birthday party for Elizabeth that dispelled any homesickness she might have felt.

Another neighbor, Chuck Harris, arranged an interview for John—as Janos prefers to be called in America—that led to a job as draftsman with a tractor works. Co-workers taught the refugee English technical terms and one, Leonard Sandvik, tutored him at home in everyday language.

A close relationship developed with fellow draftsman Bill Diehl and his family, and John points out, "This family friendship is very important because it teaches us the traditions of this country. That is as important as language."

The "traditions," incidentally, include such items as ready-made mixes and cosmetics, which Elizabeth views as symbols of the richness and variety of American life. Everyday wonders awe John, too. His supervisor, for example, gave him a lunch pail which to John is part of our efficiency and convenience. But obviously the pail means something more important when he adds, "Everybody carries a lunch pail—even the boss."

Material things, big or small, are not the gauge by which the Keregyartos measure America, however. To them its greatness lies in nights without fear and days filled with hope. And it means a people who offer not just tangible gifts but the more needed favors of friendship and neighborliness.

"We knew of America's freedom," John confides, "but not of its warmth. You have taken strangers like ourselves and made them part of your family and your way of life."

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