

Three years after the Hungarian uprising was crushed by Soviet Russia, two Freedom Fighters tell:

WHAT AMERICA MEANS TO US

From the Budapest of 1956 to America of 1959 is a far journey, and those who made it also had to make an adjustment to a new way of life. Two Hungarian patriots tell how their many American friends helped them build a new life out of the ashes of defeat.



by Bela and Marta Liptak
as told to Irene Corbally Kuhn

THREE YEARS AGO this week the free world mourned as the Hungarian revolt drowned in the blood of its valiant Freedom Fighters. The Soviet military juggernaut crushed fierce resistance, and most of those who survived the massacre were tried by mock courts and imprisoned or murdered. Others simply disappeared into the mysterious limbo which has claimed so many enemies of the "people's state."

Among the few Freedom Fighters spared were Bela Liptak, a 20-year-old engineering student, and 18-year-old Marta Szacsavay, the daughter of a distinguished professor.

Bela fought through the last days of October, 1956, not surrendering to the Russians until Nov. 6. He was imprisoned in the University of Budapest where he had been a student. His knowledge of the buildings enabled him to outwit his Russian captors by crawling through dank water pipes to the Danube, then escaping across the border.

Meanwhile, Marta had been nursing the wounded. When medical supplies were exhausted, she volunteered to cross the border to gather more. She never returned. Apprehended near the border by the secret police, she fled while they were smashing her car.

Marta came to the United States in November, 1956, a month before Bela arrived with another group of refugees. They met for the first time at Bard College in Annandale, N. Y., where they had been sent to learn English. This is their story of what America has meant to them and their hopes for their native land.

WHEN WE ARRIVED in America, our prospects appeared dismal. We had only the clothes we wore, no money, and couldn't speak the language. We were alone. We didn't even know each other.

One of the first things we discovered, though, is that there is no such thing as a stranger in the United States. In Europe, even someone in the next village is a stranger, you know.

Nearly 1,000 of the 1,800 Hungarian refugee students here have been given scholarships by the World University Service, an American organization helping refugee students from all over the world without fanfare. We were sent to Stevens Institute and Skidmore College.

Our scholarships paid for our room and board, but we never saw any money. We worked at odd jobs, anything we came across, and in this way paid for our cigarettes and managed to send packages home. Often, however, there would be days when we didn't have the change to buy necessities. In Europe we had heard of the patronizing American giving his poorer neighbors handouts, and we dreaded this happening to us. But this wasn't the case at all. Our friends respected our pride and never offered charity. They'd give us a small loan and help us in countless other ways that made us glad to have such loyal friends.

During our first days at Bard, something happened that made us all the more determined to succeed in this country. We fell in love. It wasn't easy being separated and penniless, but we knew that if we worked hard in college we could be happily married. In Hungary, as in all Communist-oppressed countries, sweethearts have no such assurances. They must live as if each day might be their last.

We were married last December and honey-

mooned in our first home in the United States, a one-room kitchenette apartment in an old frame dwelling on Strawberry Hill in Stamford, Conn.

When we announced our wedding plans, the girls at Skidmore took over. They gave showers that furnished our apartment. And when it appeared likely that there would be no special wedding gown, they chipped in and bought the material for a beautiful dress. They even made it themselves, sewing love and friendship into every seam.

A professor from Stevens insisted that we stay at his home for the Christmas holidays. He said we "needed the rest," but we know that he was giving us a chance to be together before classes resumed.

THAT SAME kind and generous man earlier had knocked at the dormitory door at Stevens and self-consciously left a package before he fled. It was crammed with good clothing, not hand-me-downs. Even an overcoat. He had noticed the shabby sports coat Bela wore in all weather and was aware of our financial struggles. If we had gone out of our way to thank him, he would have been embarrassed. That's the kind of man he is, and there are so many like him in America.

We've been here three years now. The nightmare in Hungary is behind us—something we can never forget, but no longer so terrifying to us. America is our home now, but some day we hope to be able to visit our families in free Hungary.

We now have an income of \$450 a month from an engineering firm in Stamford, college degrees (Marta will be graduated from Skidmore in June; Bela will earn his master's from New York University at the same time), a beautiful apartment, and each other. Best of all, we have many friends.

When someone asks us what America means to us, we answer gratefully—"Our very lives."

COVER:

Few football heroes get first aid from such fair ladies as those on Charles Dye's cover. To learn what half time is really like, see "Touchdowns Between the Halves" on page 4.

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