



**We wish all our kind Readers a very blessed Christmas!**

**Áldásos karácsonyi ünnepeket kívánunk minden kedves Olvasónknak!**

This an embroidered wall covering. We particularly thank Szalma Kati of Szalma Csárda és Panzió, Esztergom for photographing this piece from their collection.

## Christmas Memories

Childhood memories of Christmas accompany us throughout our lives. These stories were culled from a church bulletin published by the Roman Catholic churches of Torna and Tornaújfalu in 2009. The respondents had been asked about the Christmases of their childhood.



### Fazekas Mária of Torna related the following:

"We were Greek (i.e., Byzantine rite) Catholics. On Christmas Eve, the church bells were rung at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We raced to the brook, to wash ourselves, and then waited for supper. Dad brought in a bale of straw and strewed it under the kitchen table, while telling the story of Jesus' birth. After this we all knelt down around the table and started to pray and sing.

"For supper, there were seven courses, but we ate only a little of each one. There was bean soup, lentil soup, pea soup, boiled potatoes and prunes, as

well as *doboska* with poppy seeds. There was a strict fast, so everything had been prepared without lard or butter.

"After supper, we children lay down to sleep on the straw under the table. When they began to ring the bells for Midnight Mass, we ran down to the brook again to wash. We went to Midnight Mass together. In the morning, our parents strewed small change into the water in the wash basin in which we had washed. We were very happy to find the money.

"On the afternoon of the first day of Christmas, we went to carol under the windows; on the second day of Christmas, the boys dropped in to the various families with Christmas greetings, for which they too received money."



### Szilágyi László of Újfalu remembered this:

"During the war, in 1944, our Christmas tree was merely a pine bough leaning against the wall. We decorated it with gilded nuts from the previous year and

with red apples. We had Christmas wafers too, that Grandma baked in the summer kitchen. Meanwhile, we sang. There were no presents at all. That year, there was no Midnight Mass either."



### Varga Terézia of Torna recalled:

"The Christmas tree was a very poor affair. On it were walnuts painted silver. *Szaloncukor* was cubed sugar wrapped in colored paper. But we loved Christmas very much. In Somodi it was the custom that no one could step into the house before singing a Christmas carol under the window.

"On Christmas Eve, we went singing through the village, until they rang the bells for the second time for Midnight Mass.

"For supper there was only cabbage soup and *bobajka* (see the December 2012 issue of Magyar News Online for this dish). We knelt around the Christmas tree, we prayed and sang. Only after that could we touch the presents."

## A Time-Honored Tradition: Christmas Wafers

*Christmas wafers are a Central European tradition, popular especially among Byzantine rite Catholics. They may be oblong, round or oval, and carry a religious symbol on them. Customarily they are handed around at the beginning of the Christmas Eve meal, with each person receiving either a whole wafer, or a piece of a large wafer.*

*The following description of how they are made is again taken from the Christmas church bulletin of Torna, dated 2009.*

From time immemorial, people have been baking wafers for Christmas in Tornaújfalú. In the 20th century, until about 1920, the wafers were baked in only one place, at the house of the *kántortanító*, the village schoolmaster and cantor. We don't know whether this was the job of the schoolmaster in the rural areas, because there does not seem to be any reference to this. Certainly the neighbors and the more skilled cooks and baking women must have helped, because very many wafers had to be baked even for a small village like ours.

A few days before Christmas, the wafers were carried around the village by the older students in a "*szentelő-kosár*", i.e. a blessing basket. The students would greet the families with a poem they had learned at school. In payment, the schoolmaster and cantor received eggs, beans, poppy seeds, walnuts...

After the 1920's, it was no longer the schoolmaster who baked the Christmas wafers for the village. During Advent, the waffle irons (there were two by then) were taken from family to family, and were almost constantly in use until Christmas Eve...

The batter for wafers was made similar to *palacsinta*, then poured on the waffle iron with a smaller ladle. The waffle iron was then closed, and slid in above the embers. About half a minute later, it had to be turned. Some religious persons said that the wafer baked to the right consistency during the time it took to say one Hail Mary...

Baking the wafers in the family conjured up the Christmas spirit. Although it

seems to be rather monotonous work, one can find joy in it. Especially the children loved to watch the wafers being baked. They liked to set the fire and stare into the flames. They were happy when the wafer stuck to the waffle iron, because that was definitely theirs, warm and crisp. In most places, it was the job of the grandparents to bake the wafers, naturally surrounded by grandchildren.

Even in their grown-up years they fondly recall these days of baking the wafers. To make the mood even more Christmas-y, one can also sing those Christmas carols, which the grandchildren will sing when they go caroling. For those willing to try, here is the recipe (will make 55-60 wafers):

1 lb white flour  
½ qt lukewarm milk  
½ cup lukewarm water  
½ packet of vanilla flavored sugar  
1 egg white  
a pinch of baking soda  
1 Tbsp butter, melted  
Stir together all ingredients and let stand for at least 2 hours. If the batter seems too thin, add 1-2 Tbsp flour. (Before it is baked, the batter has to remain lukewarm, NOT warm, or it will thicken.)



### 1944: The Christmas That Wasn't

*It was 70 years ago that the siege of Budapest began. It seems fitting that we recall those darkest of days, the year when Christmas was not, when no one yearned more fervently for "peace on earth" than the frightened inhabitants of Budapest, huddled in damp cellars.*

Under the heading "*Budapest ostroma*" – The siege of Budapest – the [Encyclopaedia Hungarica](#) lists these cold, stark facts:

"In the course of World War II, on 12-16-1944, the Soviet army's 2<sup>nd</sup> and the Ukrainian army's 3<sup>rd</sup> military units surrounded Budapest, after which the siege of the Hungarian capital began. Close to 200,000 Hungarian and German soldiers defended Budapest against heavy odds. The defenders withdrew to Buda on 1-18-1945, and Pest fell to Soviet control. The German units blew up the Danube bridges. The siege continued for 49 days, with fighting from street to street, house to house, the defenders running out of ammunition, the inhabitants hard hit by the lack of food supplies, and the total lack of public utility services (this meant no water, no electricity, to mention only the most basic needs. Trans.)

"Fifty thousand Hungarian and German soldiers fell, as did 3,000 *csendőrk* (gendarmes) who fought alongside the Hungarian troops, and 25,000 civilians died.

"The siege ended on 2-15-1945. After the battles, 138,000 German and Hungarian soldiers were taken prisoner. Of the close to 40,000 buildings in the capital, 27% were totally destroyed, and 74% suffered damage..."

Those are the statistics; this poem brings the siege down to the personal level:

## Rettegés

*Malomvizi Magda*

Hat hete tart már. Rabságban élünk.  
Le a ruhánkat nem merjük vetni.  
Nem mernénk soha egyet nevetni.  
Éjjel és nappal remegünk, félünk.

Dobban a szívünk, zörgés ha hallik.  
- Itt a katona – suttogjuk fázva.  
- Szükség van tán kvartélyra, fára?  
Vagy pláne nőre? – Belénk nyilallik.

Hogyha bombáznak, ágyúszó dördül,  
Megrendül a ház, ablak megzördül:  
Meg sem rezdül a szemünk pillája.

De kérjük Istent égő ajakkal:  
Védjen meg. Óvjon éjjel és nappal.  
Hogy katona ne lépjen a házba.

## Fright

*Malomvizi Magda*

Six weeks it has lasted already. We live in captivity.  
We don't dare take off our clothes.  
We wouldn't dare to have a laugh.  
Day and night we tremble, we're afraid.

Our heart beats, when there's a knock.  
"The soldiers are here", we whisper, shivering.  
"Perhaps there's need for lodgings, firewood?  
Or even women?" – the pain shoots through us.

When they bomb, when the cannon roar,  
The house shakes, the windows rattle:  
We don't even bat an eye.

But we beg God, with burning lips:  
May He defend us. Protect us day and night.  
Let soldiers not step into the house.

*Malomvizi Magda was the penname of Vajk Magda - aka Dusi - (1895 – 1970), the oldest child of Vajk József and his wife, malomvízi Malom Piroska. Like everyone else in the capital, she, her husband Theiss Ede (a pioneer in the field of mathematical economics) and their 14-year old daughter Amrita spent the siege of Budapest in the cellar.*

## A Child's Christmas in Kárpátalja

*Maria Szaplóczay Schweikert*

*Another fond remembrance of Christmas past, from a rarely-mentioned Hungarian-inhabited region.*



*Maria 5 years old*

I was born at the end of World War II in the eastern part of Hungary which, after the war, became part of western Ukraine (then in the Soviet Union). So I grew up in the *Subcarpathian* region which was quite multinational. The majority of the region (*Kárpátalja*) was Hungarian. The largest minority group was *Rusyn* (Ruthenian) followed by a large population of Jews, and a few other much smaller ethnic groups. It was a very multicultural region, and we all lived in peace. I was 13 years old when my small family could repatriate to Hungary.

Living in Subcarpathia, we followed our colorful Hungarian customs, but were no strangers to the customs of the region either. As a child whose memory goes back as far as 3 years of age, I remember our Christmas celebrations and how we prepared to meet this holy event. In America, the Christmas tree is decorated well before the coming of Jesus; according to our customs, it did not appear in the house until Christmas Eve. And I used the word "appear" intentionally. In our tradition, the Angels brought the Christmas tree while we were in church for the Christmas Eve service. I remember how I wondered about the ability of the Angels to go through the keyhole to our house and place a huge, beautifully decorated tree in our room. The presents were brought by Baby Jesus (not by Santa Claus; his day – actually night – was December 6th when Santa/*Mikulás* left a small present of an orange and perhaps some nuts for the good children. He left them in our shoes that we had put out before we went to bed that night).

Our presents were very modest, especially by today's high tech standards. They were not wrapped due to the fact that we did not have wrapping paper. (I grew up in the 1950s during the Stalinist years when even the most essential things were not available.) When we children came back from church with Grandma (the mothers stayed home to decorate the tree), we were not allowed to go into the room because "the Angels were working on putting up the tree". We were very excited and full of expectation... Then a tiny bell sounded which meant that we could go into the room and see the tree, and what Jesus left for us under the tree.

We gathered around the Christmas tree, sang a few Christmas carols, and then we received our presents. I was about 3-4 years old, and I was extremely happy because I got a rag doll, colored pencils, and a pair of socks. My cousins were older, so they received books, socks, and some other small items. We all received peanuts, and maybe an orange. Those were very rare at other times of the year. My big treat was raisins which we never saw at any other time. (I love raisins, and to this day, I cannot get enough of them, and have a small portion of raisins in my oatmeal almost every day.)

On Christmas Eve day, we had our traditional mushroom soup with vegetables and rice, and since we fasted before Christmas Day, we had fish, cooked dry fruit (apples, prune plums, apricots) which were not bought in

stores. People would dry the various types of fruit while they were in season. After dinner, we had delicious pastry with plum *lekvár* (*szilvás kalács*) which did not call for butter (during fast no eggs or butter were served). The nut roll with raisins (*diós beigli*) was served the next day after a Christmas Day feast of pork and all the usual trimmings.

When we were allowed to move back to Hungary following the 1956 Hungarian Uprising against the Soviet occupation and the Communist regime, life was a bit easier: there was more food, there were more Christmas presents, but the customs were the same. I was already a teenager, so naturally no one had to hide from me who decorated the Christmas tree, and who brought the presents... The church services were beautiful, uplifting, and we thanked God for being reunited with our family that had been split due to the war and the post-war change of borders...

*Maria Szaplanczay Schweikert was born into a Byzantine rite family in Kárpátalja which, after 20 years of Czechoslovak rule, had once again become part of Hungary at the time. In 1944, Kárpátalja was occupied by Soviet troops, and her father spent eleven years in the Gulag (series of forced hard labor camps) because he was an officer in the Hungarian army. (He was returned to Hungary at the end of 1955.)*

*In 1945, Kárpátalja was annexed to the Soviet Union. Maria thus attended Russian schools, and learned perfect Russian. After teaching that language in Minneapolis area colleges for 36 years (24 of them at the University of Minnesota), and interpreting for almost 30 years for various official delegations at international conferences, Maria has just retired. At this writing, she and her husband are moving from Minnesota to Wisconsin.*

## Meeting the "Blue Lady"

*Karolina Szabo*

*Due to her interest in blue-dyeing, our Webmaster flew to Houston to meet a mistress of the art, Anna Dolányi, who had entered several of her own pieces in a prestigious quilting exhibit. Here is the report of her experience.*

My trip was uneventful, other than flying from NYC in a pouring rain, and in three hours I was in sunny Houston, TX. Arriving late in the afternoon, I didn't see much of the city. Even my early evening walk around downtown wasn't exciting – it was just like other city centers, deserted in the evenings (not counting New York, of course!) But the purpose of my trip wasn't sightseeing. I was to meet the "Blue Lady", Anna Dolányi, and see the quilt exhibit. This would be the first time I met her, although we exchanged e-mails for years. Anna is a quilt maker, and she was invited to the 40<sup>th</sup> Ruby Quilt Exhibit at the George R. Brown Convention Center. She is called a "Blue Lady", for in many of her quilts she uses the special blue-dyed fabric, made only in Hungary. (See September 2012 issue of [www.magyarnews.org](http://www.magyarnews.org) about blue-dye.)

We stayed at the same hotel, and I met her there Saturday evening. The next day, we walked over to the Convention Center to view the exhibit. Even someone who doesn't care for quilting would have been amazed at what was shown there. Hundreds and hundreds, large, small, colorful, red and white (ruby anniversary!), blue and white, brown, orange, green, animals, flowers, traditional blocks, you name it – was on display.

Anna had shipped two quilts to the exhibit. One was her own creation, titled "Ocean". It is made out of mostly blues, but other color fabric also was used. Some pieces have a wavy design, which makes it look like water. Some look like metallic gold,

they reminded me of a setting sun's reflection in the water. Hundreds of pieces were sewn together by hand and quilted by hand, by Anna's hand.

Anna also designed a quilt, a "Hungarian Jewel", which was made out of 66 squares, with the authentic images of a Kalotaszeg fireplace (*cserép kályha*) tiles. Fifty "foltvarró" quilters worked on it to get it ready for the exhibit. Following Houston, the quilts will be shown in Chicago and Portland, ME and other cities in the U.S. The piece is made with a traditional French technique called *boutis*. Double white cotton material is used. After the design is stitched in the double fabric, a special needle is used to pull a thread or strips of cloth between the two fabrics to stuff the design, which makes it look three dimensional.

Ms. Dolányi founded the "Magyar Foltvarró Céh" (the Hungarian Quilting Guild) 25 years ago; for this she received the *Jewel Pearce Patterson Scholarship Award*. The *Céh* has 800 members currently; in Hungary the number of quilters is around 2-3,000. Anna, together with 21 other award-winning quilters, was invited to this year's exhibit to honor Jewel Pearce Patterson\*. Some of the quilts were donated for sale; the proceeds were to be donated to the ALS (Lou Gerhig Disease) Foundation.



*Details of the "Hungarian Jewel"*

I can't leave out the "Field of Stars" quilts. An American astronaut, Karen Nyberg, who was in space for five months, made a piece in space. After returning to Earth, she and NASA started a Star Block Challenge. Quilters were invited to make a 9.5" X 9.5" quilt square, with any shape or color as long as it included stars. Thousands of pieces came in and were sewn together and it is displayed at the Convention Center this fall.

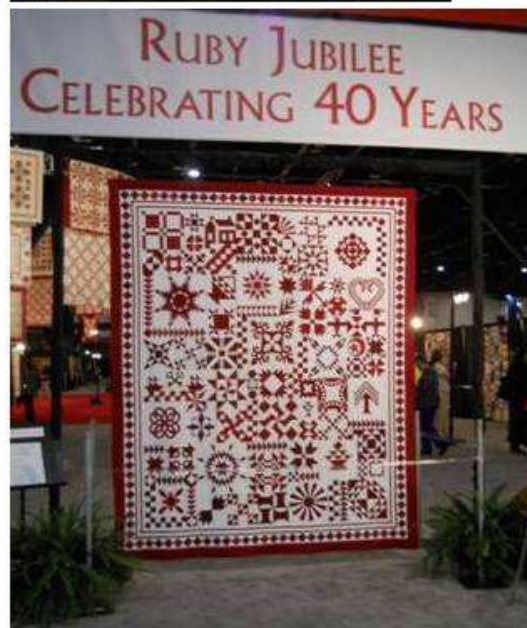
At the end of the day, with aching feet, we sat down and waited for the raffle result. The quilt that was the first prize (which neither of us won, by the way), had been made by three U.S. quilters in white and blue, and was called "Together". For the blues, the ladies used the Hungarian blue-dye (*kékfestő*) fabric. I would have preferred more blue than white, but it was still a masterpiece.

Of course we took some time to walk downtown Houston. We did some shopping, and dining.

This four-day trip was amazing. I made a friend for life, and memories for life, and an urge to make my own quilt "*Kicsiny falum*" (My Little Village) that I have been planning for a long time (pieces have been cut for 10 years). I am ever so thankful to Anna, and to my family who made this trip possible for me.

*\*(Jewel Pearce Patterson, an influential quilting teacher and designer, who co-founded the [International Quilt Association](#), died on her birthday, on Tuesday, November 22nd, 2002. She was 92.)*

*Karolina Szabo is Webmaster of Magyar News Online, and proud grandmother of two young girls.*



*Photos: Convention center, Playing dogs quilt, Anna Dolanyi with the "Ocean" quilt, Field of Stars quilt, Ruby Jubilee, Detail of the "Hungarian Jewel" quilt*

## Curious at Christmas

Elekes Attila

A film covers the shining celestial blue, only frost creaks, perhaps the sun has died, but inside there's *kalács*-warmth and resin-smell of pine, tinkling of bells and old-time peace.

Should at the door of this happily song-filled, present-opening little family now a wandering carpenter knock, shaking the hoarfrost from his beard, asking advice: which way, how to travel? - his ancient Ford coughing in the snow, and in it a young, Madonna-faced wife, who still carries her child in her belly – and would not say a word, but would look in your eyes –

would you let them into your garage?



## Karácsonyi kíváncsiság

Elekes Attila

Hályog borult a fénylő égi kékre, csak fagy recseg, talán meghalt a Nap, de bent kalács-meleg és gyantaszag és csengetyűszó van és régi béke.

Ha most erre a boldogan dalos, ajándékokat bontó kis családra rázörgetne egy vándor asztalos, szakálláról a zuzmarát lerázva, talán tanácsért: merre, mint utazzon? - a hóban ott köhögne ócska Fordja s benne madonna-arcu ifju asszony, aki gyermekét még hasában hordja – és nem is szólna, csak szemedbe nézne ...

a garázsodba beeresztenéd-e?

*Elekes Attila was born in 1927. Despite his youth, he saw action in World War II. Afterwards, he enrolled in the College of Dramatic Arts in Budapest, but was expelled from there and later from the Technical University as well because his father had been an army officer. The family was deported as "class aliens" to internal exile. After the 1956 Revolution, Elekes left Hungary with his wife and settled in Milan, Italy where he taught Hungarian language and literature. He died there of a heart condition in 2001.*

## Kodály Zoltán

Olga Vallay Szokolay

*Although the fanfares of his 125<sup>th</sup> "birthday" had sounded a few years ago, we feel it is appropriate to celebrate the great Hungarian ethnomusicologist, pedagogue and composer, **Kodály Zoltán**, any time, but especially in December, the month he was born.*

Great minds are typically ahead of their times, misunderstood by the general public. The ears of 20<sup>th</sup> century middle-class audiences, used to 19<sup>th</sup> century melodic Italian operas, catchy operettas, waltzes and the Strauss family's easy-to-listen-to music, needed a long time to get accustomed to the unfamiliar keys of ancient folk music where Kodály's creative genius was rooted. Commonly, Gipsy fare was believed to be "folk music"; however, most of it was "manufactured" by contemporary pop composers. *Csárdás* songs with their fresh tempo usually had lyrics praising army life, wine and women, while the sorrowful slow tunes (*hallgató*) expressed laments of the forlorn. They were easy to learn and to sing along with the roaming Gypsy fiddler at taverns and restaurants.

In the midst of this came someone fascinated by real ancient folk music that had been preserved by peasant tradition in the small villages of historic Hungary. The melodies were not in the Western world's usual keys of major and minor. Seemingly esoteric keys of *Dór*, *Frig*, *Lid*, *Mikszolid* that do not conclude in the traditional "Do" (as in "Doe, a deer, a female deer...") but leave you wondering. We could hear a fine example of that in *The English Patient*. In one scene the protagonist, Almásy, standing by the window listens to a record of an old folk song. His English paramour asks what it is: "Arabic?" "No", he says, "It's an ancient Hungarian tune. My *Dajka* (nanny) used to sing it to me and I recorded it later." (The scene can be enjoyed on YouTube, the song is called "Szerelem".)

Kodály Zoltán was born in Kecskemét on December 16, 1882, to Kodály Frigyes and Paula (née Jalovetzky). His father was a railroad official and his position necessitated the family's moving first to Galánta (now Galanta, Slovakia) in 1884, then to Nagyszombat (now Trnava, Slovakia), when Zoltán was 10 years old. There he studied piano, violin and viola and sang in the choir of the cathedral. He also taught himself the cello to fill in when a member of his father's domestic quartet did not show up.

He started composing early: at 15, the school orchestra played an overture of his. The following year he wrote a Mass for chorus and orchestra.

After high school, he enrolled at the University of Sciences in Budapest in 1900, studying Germanic and Hungarian literature. But his attraction to music lured him over to the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music two years later. He received a diploma in Composition in 1904, in

Music Education in 1905. During this time he met fellow composer Bartók Béla who became his close life-long friend. The two students developed an interest in Hungarian folk music. Together they started field-trips to the Hungarian countryside, collecting folk songs and recording them on phonograph cylinders.

After having obtained a PhD from the Academy of Music with a thesis titled “Strophic Construction of Hungarian Folk Song” in 1906, Kodály went to Paris to study. There he was greatly influenced by the music of Claude Debussy and Brahms.

When he returned to Budapest in 1907, he started teaching at the Academy and continued collecting folklore while composing string quartets, sonatas for cello and piano and other works. These compositions were original in form and content and were a perfect fusion of the Classical, late Romantic, Impressionist and Modernist Western European style, with his in-depth knowledge and admiration of Hungarian folk music.

With Bartók, he organized concerts with young musicians in 1910. In spite of widespread criticism of contemporaneous critics, these concerts mark the true birth of Hungarian music. For both composers, folk-song arrangements became a refined art. Many songs faithfully set a traditional tune to a simple accompaniment, while more elaborate works blend native elements with advanced contemporary idioms.

In this period, Kodály married the talented musician Gruber Emma (née Schlesinger, later Sándor) who was close to 20 years his senior, yet their marriage lasted until her death almost half a century later.

Kodály and Bartók’s works, de-emphasizing European musical culture and glorifying Hungarian musical traditions, were not immediately accepted by the establishment. Folk music was branded as “unrefined” and “uncultured”.

Still, the unfriendly reception did not stop Kodály from incorporating actual

folk melodies in many of his compositions. The two of them published two significant books on the topic of Magyar folk music and the professional level of those earned the authors the critics’ recognition as well as worldwide acceptance in the field of *ethnomusicology*.

Kodály Zoltán’s real musical success started in 1923 when his new work, *Psalmus Hungaricus* was performed at a concert celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the unification of Buda and



Pest. The work was based on Hungarian melodies.” Following this success, he traveled all over Europe to conduct performances of this masterpiece.

One of his early, most successful and best-known works, a folk-based opera, *Háry János*, was premiered at the Hungarian State Opera in 1926. Patriotism was on the rise after Trianon and the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, thus audiences welcomed Magyar topics and heroes. The opera was also performed in some European countries but, for some reason, not in others.

This prompted Kodály to extract an orchestral suite from the opera, notably including the *cimbalom*, a traditional Hungarian version of the hammer dulcimer. The work became a popular piece in the classic repertoire worldwide.

While his compositions were gaining acceptance and success, Kodály de-

veloped an interest in music education for children. In some controversial articles, columns and essays he criticized schools for teaching poor quality music and even that only in the secondary grades. He pushed for better teachers, better curriculum and more class time devoted to music. Starting in 1935, he launched a long-term project to reform music instruction in schools by actively creating a new curriculum and new teaching methods. Concurrently he also wrote new musical compositions for children. The resulting publication of several highly influential books had a profound impact on musical education both at home and abroad.

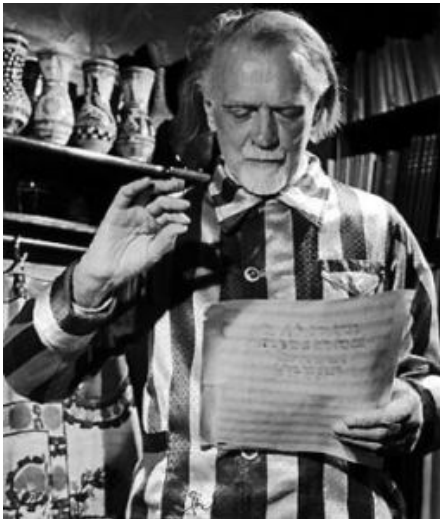
The Kodály Method is a crystallized summarization of international research in teaching children music. It makes them aware of the rhythm of their own movements, such as walking, running, marching, clapping, while they listen to music or singing. It applied easy-to-sing pentatonic scales (a five-note scale), hand signs – not unlike sign language – for identifying notes, and adopted the “movable-do solfège” before introducing the staff and notation. Nowadays these techniques are widely used, improving intonation, rhythm skills, music literacy and the ability to sing complex parts. Remarkably, the Kodály Method has been shown to improve performance in other academic areas outside of music, such as perceptual functioning, concept formation, motor skills as well as reading and math!

Most of his compositions originated in his love and research of folk songs.

In his young years, between 1905 and 1920, he wrote mostly instrumental and chamber music such as String Quartets, Sonatas, Duos, Trios. Orchestral compositions like the *Háry János Suite*, *Dances of Marosszék*, *Dances of Galánta*, *Concerto for Orchestra* and the *Peacock Variations (Felszállott a páva)* were products of the 1930’s.

His operas: *Háry János* and the *Transylvanian Spinning Room (Székely fonó)* were produced in 1926 and 1932, respectively. Among his choral-orchestral works, the *Missa Brevis*

(1942-44) and the *Budavár Te Deum* (1936) enjoy significant recognition.



After 48 years of the most harmonious marriage, in November 1958, Kodály's first wife, Emma, passed away. Unable to handle loneliness, the ageless septuagenarian remarried. This time he turned the wheels of time in the other direction and wed his 19-year old student, Péczely Sarolta, who remained his March-December companion until his death on March 6, 1967 in Budapest. Kodály believed that music belonged to everyone. All through his career, he worked extensively to bring music to the people, starting with music education in schools. He introduced a method of sight singing, based on folk songs. It became a huge success and became popular even outside of Hungary. His legacy led to vast improvements in musical instruction throughout the world to the present day.

Along with Bartók, he pioneered the integration of folk music and elevated the international status of Hungarian music through dances and folk songs, thus leaving an indelible imprint on the musical world in general, and on Magyar music in particular. From Hungary, to the whole world, with love!

*Olga Vallay Szokolay is an architect and Professor Emerita of Norwalk Community College, CT after three decades of teaching. She is a member of the Editorial Board of Magyar News Online.*

## Christmas Among the Pre-Christian Hungarians

*Erika Papp Faber*

*It is amazing what an unexpected ancient folk custom lies behind a simple, common greeting!*

The winter solstice was among the most important holidays for pre-Christian Hungarians. December 21<sup>st</sup> marked the peak of darkness, when the shortest day of the year was followed by the longest night. Thus for them, the day marked a turning towards light, pointing towards the renewal of spring.

The ancient Hungarians brought with them their "sun-birds" - "*kerecsen sólyom*" ("saker falcons") - and medieval inquisition records testify that it was on this holiday that they were blessed by the shamans and then flown for the first time. This was called the "*kerecsen* (or *karacson*) festival" and it was outlawed when Christianity was adopted at the time of our first king, St. Stephen.

But it is not that easy to exterminate long-rooted beliefs, and the name of the festival continued to be applied when observance of the birth of

Christ replaced the pagan festival.

So when you wish someone "*Boldog karácsonyi ünnepeket!*", you are harking back some 1,200 years to an ancient Hungarian practice!

*Erika Papp Faber is Editor of Magyar News Online.*





# Disznóölés: from Pig to Pork

Karolina Szabo

*The killing of the family pig is still an important winter event. Karolina recalls for us the whole process as she remembers it from her childhood. The photos are recent, taken this year at Nemesgörzsöny, Veszprém megye.*

Preparations went on for days at our house. My Father was getting ready all he needed for a big day, the day he slaughtered the pigs. He sharpened the knives, got straw for singeing the pig's bristles. Mother was washing the big pots and pans which were only used for that occasion. My brother brought down from the attic the willow *teknő* (tub). We had many of those; the old gypsy who spent many a winter in our barns carved them. He made many different sizes for my parents in lieu of rent: giant ones held the bran for the animals, others were for mixing the *kolbász* and *hurka* meat, others for salting the pork. Mother also got one for kneading bread, smaller ones for washing clothes, a tiny one for bathing the little ones. She also got a small one that we called *melence* to make the *kalács* dough.

We kids also had a chore to do. We cleaned the garlic. Neither of us wanted or liked to do that. Our hands smelled of garlic for days; and because we had to do it with our hands, it stung under our nails, but we had to do that, because we were good for nothing else.

Slaughtering a pig was a big day in our house. My Godfather stayed for the whole day to help my Father, and my Godmother came too, to help my Mother. My Father asked Godfather and some of the men in the neighborhood to hold the pig down. We were woken up 6 o'clock in the morning by the squealing of the pig. We stuck our heads under the pillow, and when it was quiet, we got dressed fast and

ran outside. By that time a big stack of straw was burning, under that was the pig. My Father turned it left, right, legs up in the air, until all the bristles were singed off.

Godfather had no children, but he loved us tremendously, especially to tease us. He pulled off the pigs' hoofs and tossed them to us saying – here is a warm ring for you. We of course were happy to put them on the tip of our fingers because by that time we were freezing, since the pigs were always slaughtered on the coldest day of the winter.

Schools didn't close in honor of the pigs; we had to go to school. By the time we got home, most of the work was done, especially the hard part and the outside work.

Lots of things had happened in between. After the singeing was done, they washed and scraped the pig's skin and washed it again with boiling water, until my Father saw that it was clean enough. Then the animals were moved onto a big, strong table. That is where my Father did all the cutting. He was a butcher for that day, and he was very good at it. So much so, that many of the neighbors and my uncles asked him to help them out when it was their turn to kill a pig.

He cut up the belly, took out the inside. The intestines and stomach went to the women. They cleaned them, turned inside out, washed them, scraped them, and scrubbed them until they were squeaky clean. At that time one couldn't purchase casing, it had to be done that way.

Father removed the liver, lungs, and other organs. He cut a piece of meat too, and handed it to my mother. In between, they couldn't forget the *barack pálinka!* In the cold weather, something had to warm the body from the inside.

My Father was very good at cutting up the pigs. He carved out the ham neatly. He knew what part was good for what: some for *kolbász* meat, some went in the big pot for boiling that was for a *hurka*. He sliced the bacon into slabs, of some he pulled off the skin. That bacon would be cut up and fried to make lard, the other would be salted and smoked. The skin was boiled and used for *hurka* or headcheese.

My sweet Mother was working in the kitchen. She was getting the breakfast ready, *dinsztelt máj* (sautéed liver and pork) with a pickle and freshly made homemade bread. The food, whisky and the warmth felt good to the men, but more work still had to be done. For my family, my Dad slaughtered two pigs that took a long time.

Soon the work was done outside, and they came inside in the kitchen. My Father was grinding the meat for the *kolbász*, Godfather was cutting up the bacon for lard. By the time we got home from school, they were all inside. My Mother just took the *pecsenye* (cutlets) out of the oven and we were ready to have lunch. After lunch my Father was ready to make the *kolbász*. He mixed just the right amount of spices which smelled absolutely wonderful! My Father had the old-fashioned *kolbász* stuffer: a metal tube with a narrow end. He stuffed the meat in the tube and, with a wooden cylinder, pushed the meat into the casing that my Godfather put on the narrow end. One of us kids was needed at this point. The one who was picked had to stand next to the filled casing, and if there was any air in it she had to stab it with the needle to let the air out. My Father hung the *kolbász* on a rod for overnight to dry it a bit.

In the meantime, Mom was making the soup, *tóros káposzta*. She also boiled the stuff for the *hurka* and headcheese, and she sautéed the onions and boiled the rice. We had a very festive closing, my Dad's

brothers and their families came over for dinner. That was a tradition in our family.

But the work wasn't done yet. My Dad and Godfather were stuffing the *hurka*. A kid was needed for that job too, to tie the ends of the stuffed casings. There were not too many volunteers, the day was getting late and we were tired. Godmother was washing the dishes; my Mother was putting them away. My Grandparents were older and they were tired too, soon they were leaving. We children washed up and went to bed.

My parents were still working; my Father was putting salt on the ham, bacon and some meat that he would smoke for later consumption. (No one had freezers at that time.) Finally, my parents went to bed too, to rest some before continuing the next day.

Next day came soon enough. Mother heated up water to wash all the greasy pots and pans. Godmother was there again. She was frying the bacon. I was glad there was school that day. I didn't like the smell of frying bacon. I even stopped at my girlfriend Piroska's house to be sure all was done by the time I got home.

My Mother packed some *kóstoló* (samples) of *kolbász*, *hurka* and *tepertő* for my uncles. She asked me to deliver that, I guess she thought she could trust me.

This day was almost over too; my Father lit the fire in the smokehouse, the *kolbász* was already there, and in two weeks the ham and *szalonna* (bacon) would be hanging there.

My parents had a lot of work these two days; but the meat, *kolbász* and lard were secured for the family for a year.



*Captions: singeing the pig, dad teaching his son how to do it, help arrives: uncle and nephew, old-fashioned hurka stuffer, adding spice to the hurka meat, sausage (kolbász), hurka*

For us children it was almost like a holiday. Even in my older age I remember how the day went, I still can smell the aroma of the spices in my nostrils, and I am thinking of my parents, my hardworking Father who taught us to be honest and respectful, and *Édesanyám* who taught us to love.



*The willow tekő (tub)*

# Hungarian Szaloncukor

*(This recipe is courtesy of the Cleveland Hungarian Museum to Főszakács Béla of the William Penn Life)*

2 ½ cups sugar  
6 Tbsp milk  
6 Tbsp water (or coffee or orange juice)  
2 ½ Tbsp unsalted butter  
Flavoring or essences (raspberry, lemon, rum, vanilla, etc...)

Melted chocolate to cover candy pieces – for best results, use the kind especially made for candy-making (optional)  
Combine the sugar, milk, and water in ceramic pot over the stove burner. Bring to a boil over medium high heat, stirring slowly. When it begins to boil, reduce the heat to low and let it simmer without stirring for 3 minutes. Pour into a heat-proof glass dish. (Don't stir the pot – it will cause the sugar to crystallize!) Add the unsalted butter, and the desired flavoring(s). Stir with wooden spoon until mixture turns white and stiff. Pour the stiffened mixture onto a damp cotton napkin or kitchen towel and form into rectangle. Let it stiffen a bit more, but before it becomes completely hard, cut into small squares or rectangles with a wet knife. (Rectangles are easier to wrap.)

Traditionally this was the only way szaloncukor was made. Covering the candy with chocolate has become popular only in the last 20 to 30 years. The plain or chocolate-covered pieces are wrapped first in rectangular pieces of white tissue paper – with frilled ends – and then colored foil is wrapped around the center of each piece, leaving the frilled edges exposed. Recipe yields about 30 to 35 pieces.

For chocolate version, add a level Tbsp of cocoa powder and a half tsp of vanilla along with the butter.



## Kicsi a világ – It's a Small World

*There are advantages to being Hungarian – and it's not just that we speak (what we think is) a secret language!*

Last February, Miklós and Zsuzsa Szokolay, visiting from Hungary, took a Caribbean cruise on one of the Carnival Freedom ships with her relatives. When a waiter in the din-

ing room overheard them talking Hungarian, he said he was from Békásmegyer and they were served the best and largest portions of food while another Magyar at the casino bar treated them to their favorite drinks.

They had a delightful time taking several side trips – tours of islands and towns on the way. Knowing that those are typically pricier than the cruise itself, I asked them how they could afford the attractions. They answered that they had some preferential treatment by the head of the tour organization who was from Sepiszentgyörgy, Transylvania, and his sister still lives at nearby Szentivány, where Miklós's mother was born and raised.

It's a small world, indeed, on land or sea when it comes to Hungarians... OVS



## Magyar News Online

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## Did you know ...

... that some streetcars in Budapest are decorated for Christmas?

Every winter Budapest is covered in festive holiday decorations, and among the most striking are the city streetcars, several of which are covered in 30,000 or more bright, blinking, blue and white LED lights.

Started in 2009, the festive tradition is a delight and, best of all, anyone with a regular ticket can ride the Christmas streetcar while enjoying the holiday spirit.

There are 96 miles (155 km) of streetcar routes.

For photographers, with long exposure photo, these streetcars transform into time-traveling cosmic vessels.

On the Pest side of the city, the #2 streetcar runs alongside the Danube and this is the best way to see the Parliament building up close, and the panorama of Buda Castle across the river.



*Eva Wajda is a member of the Magyar News Online Editorial Board.*

