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THE EXPOSITOR

Hungarian Rhapsody: Helen's Hungarian Heritage Recipes capture flavours of Hungarian Heritage.

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There are books and albums for preserving memories and photographs of past and present events, as well as images of loved ones. But how do we recapture the taste and aroma of homemade delicacies, favourite meals or celebration dinners?

Easy for some, with cookbooks and family recipes for quick reference, not a problem for most of us. Imagine, however, that the creative chef and her secret recipes has most ingredients and methods for preparation stored in her head, with only bits of information jotted down on scraps of paper and the backs of envelopes, sometimes in **Hungarian**, or Swedish, German, or even Russian.

"That was the problem in our case," Clara Czegeny told me.

"My sisters and I were in the habit of phoning our mother, from Alberta, with requests for ingredients of familiar recipes, and mother would always include a mild rebuke, namely, we should have paid attention in her kitchen when we were girls at home."

When I suggested that "Helen's **Hungarian** Heritage Recipes" must have been the direct result of solving the problems, Clara assured me, 'yes,' but it happened in rather a round-about way.

"We, the family, wanted to give mother a surprise party for her 80th birthday, Jan. 14, 2006. Last October I suggested that we put together a collection of her **Hungarian** recipes and offer them to the invited guests.

"Originally, we had planned to have five books printed, one for each of the girls in the family," Clara said. "Knowing that friends and relatives would bring gifts to the party, we asked instead that they make a 'Love Gift' donation, for a fund designed to support a young missionary and his family in Hungary on behalf of our church, Evangel Pentecostal Church, on Fairview Drive in Brantford."

Clara told me that 55 books were printed, but after extra orders began arriving from friends in California, Ohio, Sweden and Australia, another 50 books were ordered. Her mother adds, "and the cheques kept pouring in, so that we ended up sending \$1,100, that's 137,000 florins in **Hungarian** money, enough for a period of four months living expenses for the missionary family."

Although written, compiled and edited by Clara, her introduction in the book states, "Helen was the translator, the teacher, the master chef, chief editor and consultant."

Clara acknowledges support and thanks to sisters Elizabeth Hart and Anne Lindsay and their families, assisting with testing and tasting, and to Uncle Nick Czegeny.

Clara thanked her daughter, Evangeline, for her great contribution to the overall look of the cookbook, with its charming floral cover and illustrations, including colourful photos, the graphics and colour matching. Evangeline is a graphic artist and webmaster.

Published by Clara's, Dream Machine Publications, the book was printed by Hurryprint in Brantford. Included in the contents is a brief history of Hungary and foods, a bio of chef Helen, a checklist for successful baking, and the development of **Hungarian** cuisine.

It was when Clara and I spoke on the phone, setting a date for the interview, that Clara warned me not to eat lunch because her mother planned to offer samples of some of her favourite recipes. Naturally, I was glad to heed the warning and expected a tea party with home baking. Instead, to my surprise and delight, Helen had set the table for dinner, a three-course meal, followed by an astonishing array of dessert treats.

The traditional **Hungarian** chicken, or "hen" soup featured the delicate homemade snail noodles. The chicken paprika was served over another variety of noodles, with extra sauce on the side. The cucumber salad, served with an extra dollop of sour cream, to bring out the flavour of special herbs, was delicious.

Where to begin describing the taste and texture of the cakes and pastries! The **Hungarian** names rolled easily off the tongues of Helen and Clara as they identified each dessert, with me recognizing kifli, poppy seed and walnut cake, and tiny jam-filled croissants.

I'm told that the French croissant is believed to have originated in Hungary, and then taken to France by the chef, one of many who were imported to Hungary by Royalty and wealthy citizens, adding famous French cuisine to the native dishes. There are also Austrian and Turkish influences to be detected in the internationally famous cuisine.

Helen says she first learned to cook when she was six years old, wanting to surprise her mother, she says. "Even now, I always have six or seven types of baked goods in the freezer, in case someone comes in for coffee or tea."

She makes all her own pasta, showing me the variety, each type intended for specific recipes, with some noodles requiring hours of patient shaping by hand.

"We were all taught to make the tiny snail noodles," Clara said, "working with a small hand-held scraping board. And mother would say, the ones that unravel are the ones Clara made, so we'll put those in her soup," she laughed.

"**Hungarian** ladies in Brantford all get together to make those noodles, which are sold at the **Hungarian** Club on certain days, and are in great demand."

As for Helen, her serious training as an exceptional cook began when she was 12, taught by her great aunt, who was the wife of a High Court Magistrate.

"We lived in a small town located 240 km east of Budapest," Helen said. "It's a beautiful area, with great fields of poppies grown for their seeds, with guards posted to protect them from theft."

"I wanted to become a teacher, but the war started, the Russians invaded and set curfews, so I couldn't attend teachers college in a nearby city. Our village actually changed hands between the Russians and the Germans, nine times."

Helen Szabo met and married Alexander Czegeny, who, she says, told her to forget about teachers college, because, "she would be teaching their children."

"In 1947, we moved to Sweden, and our daughter Elizabeth was born. We lived in Sweden for six years."

Helen learned to speak, read and write Swedish and to this day she reads Swedish newspapers on the Internet, as well as **Hungarian** and Russian ones.

"But the climate didn't suit us, with the summers too chilly to grow my tomatoes and peppers," Helen said, explaining their move to Canada in 1953, settling first in Montreal, where Clara was born. There were many other **Hungarian** expatriots with shops selling traditional specialties. There was a temporary move to Brantford to work in tobacco and third daughter, Anne, was born here.

"We settled in Brantford and my husband worked as a machinist at Massey's for many years and supervised the building of our house. He seemed to know so much about construction although he had attended agricultural school in Sweden."

Always an ardent gardener, Helen took over all the outside work following her husband's death seven years ago.

"I even caught her resealing the driveway," Clara smiled, "and sometimes I find her dressed like a spaceman, spraying the fruit trees or fertilizing the garden."

Helen loves her flower garden, but all the vegetables and herbs and fruit are preserved and canned in her well-appointed kitchen.

Nevertheless, the talented chef assures me that she always takes time to set the table and sit down for a complete dinner every afternoon, one of the secrets to staying healthy and active.

"Helen's Hungarian Rhapsody of Recipes" **truly captures** the unique "Flavours of Hungary" and Hungarian Heritage.

For more information regarding Helen's Hungarian Heritage Recipes, you can go to the web site, www.dreammachine.biz

CHICKEN SOUP

CSIRKE - TYUK LEVES

Winter is the time for chicken soup when the wind and snow whips around the yard and windows get all steamed. Smells that you will recognize in later years with a tug on your heart. There is no soup as good as the soup mother made when we were young.

HINT: The secret to keeping the soup glassy and clear is to simmer the soup, never boil. Again, it does take longer, but it is well worth it. The results are beautiful. Also, use unpeeled yellow onions for Hen Soup because the peel imparts nice gold color to the soup.

1 3-4 lb mature hen
4 qts. water
3 carrots
3 parsley roots with tops
1 rib celery
1 chicken oxo cube
1 onion, unpeeled
1 tbsp salt
1 tbsp black pepper
1 piece kohlrabi, in season

Bring hen water to a slow boil. Skim foam from top with small cup-size sieve. Slowly simmer chicken soup until meat is fork tender, about 2 hours. Add vegetables and seasonings. Continue simmering over lower heat until vegetables are tender, about 1/2 hour. Strain through sieve slowly into soup tureen so that soup stays clear and golden. Serve meat and vegetables and soup along with **Hungarian** noodles like fine Laska or Csiga.

CHICKEN PAPRIKAS - CSIRKE PAPRIKAS

One of the classics of **Hungarian** cuisine. Lots of paprika and cream give this a very subtle but distinct flavour. A frequent Sunday lunch at our house.

5 lbs chicken, 9 pieces
2 onions, chopped
1 tsp salt
4 tbsp shortening
1 tbsp paprika
1 1/2 cup water
1 tsp pepper

1/2 pint sour cream

1 tbsp flour

1 tbsp lemon juice, fresh

1/4 cup water

hot, red peppers (optional)

Cut up chicken into desired pieces. Heat lard and saute onions until translucent. Add paprika, then add chicken pieces and stir until coated with paprika and onion mixture. Add water to cover chicken 1/2 way, and then add pepper and hot red pepper. Cover and stew until tender, about 30-45 minutes.

Make a slurry -- Habaras; sour cream with small amount of flour -- whisked with water. Add lemon juice to give that extra tang! Blend in and bring to boil. Serve immediately with dumplings - Nokedli.

DUMPLINGS - GALUSKA - NOKEDLI

2 cup flour

1/2 cup cold water

3 eggs, beaten

1 tsp salt

Mix all ingredients and mix with spoon. Do not over mix. Drop by spoonfuls into boiling salted water, cook until dumplings rise to top. Drain, rinse in cold water, and add to Chicken Paprikas or use as a side dish for many stew pork or meat dishes.

CUCUMBER SALAD WITH SOUR CREAM - TEJFELES UBORKASALATA

This cucumber salad is by far one of the most delicious and refreshing salads you can eat. It has a wonderful cucumber flavour that is enhanced by the garlic and sour cream. Originally this was a summer salad to accompany roast meat or chicken dishes. Now that we have cucumbers available all year round we can enjoy this dish all year. We used a mandolin to slice the cucumbers thinly enough to see through! I remember that cool cucumber smell and spray coming from the piles of sliced mounds.

2 large cucumbers

1 tbsp vinegar

1 tsp salt

1 tbsp water

1 clove garlic

1/4 tsp pepper

1 small onion

1/4 tsp paprika

pinch sugar

Peel cucumber; slice thinly, also the onion. Sprinkle with salt and set aside for 1/2 hour. Then squeeze a few handfuls at a time (discarding liquid). Place the squeezed cucumber into a bowl with the vinegar, water, sugar and pepper. Mix thoroughly. Sprinkle paprika on top before serving.

Variation: Add sour cream to vinaigrette, then add squeezed cucumbers to mixture.

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Illustration:

- Photo: Brian Thompson, The Expositor / Helen Czegeny shows some of the home-made pasta noodles she makes, along with her daughter Clara who helped out on the cookbook project.
- Photo: Brian Thompson, The Expositor / Helen Czegeny with a number of dishes and treats featured in her cookbook Helen's **Hungarian** Heritage Recipes.

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