

Prof. Ziva Novak

Professor Janos Herczeg, the most thorough person I know

It was one year after Slovenia became independent. Hopes were high. It was the time of elections in USA; Clinton was elected for the first time. Hopes were high. It was 1992 and I spent 3 months as a visiting professor at the Semmelweis Medical University in Szeged from October to December. Professor Herczeg was the one who met me after the Alpe Adria meeting that was held in Szeged. I remember the sad feeling when all my colleagues were going home back to Slovenia, and I was left there alone. Professor Herczeg helped me thru difficult times; first he took me to the place where I stayed for three months. He allowed me to work in his office. It was there where I wrote the first edition of our book *Pregnancy and delivery management*, together with Professor Marjan Pajntar. I had lectures for students and even once for the respectful public at the Academy of Science. Professor Herczeg was so kind to introduce me to all. I felt among friends.

I do not really remember when I first met Professor Janos Herczeg. Perhaps it was at the time of lecture on prostaglandins sometime in the seventies; I remember Professor Herczeg discussing – as always - with great knowledge and enthusiasm. I admired him for being so thorough in everything he did. During my stay in Szeged I taught him to use computer: as I was “a very good teacher”, he, the pupil, became better than me in no time! I still only use the basics; he however was, besides everything else, able to produce lovely computer pictures, of which I have one at home. It had to be printed in a special office arrangement, because ordinary computers and printers could not support that amount of data.

Professor Herczeg knew I would feel most lonely during weekends. Coming from Slovenia, country with beautiful high mountains, where I like to hike and ski, it was a shock to me realizing I would not be able to indulge in my beloved sports. He thought of everything and introduced me to a tennis teacher; a very nice kind man, who did not speak any English.

My Hungarian was non-existent. But, nevertheless, we understood each other perfectly and I learned tennis, which I never played before, with all the eagerness to please my Hungarian tennis teacher. Of course my positive memory tells me he was very pleased with me; he also invited me to his home and I could finally, through his son, express my gratitude in words (English).

I made a very big mistake thinking I could read from a dictionary and then pronounce Hungarian words properly. I once went to buy stamps. I learnt at home how to pronounce it; when I came to shop, nobody understood. I just pointed stamps and got them. But I was stupid and persistent and made another mistake. I am too ashamed to tell the story here. It was only months after the event that somebody told me what a huge mistake I had done. I am still sorry and apologize to all who remember.

So I stopped learning Hungarian language and instead of this found 79 words, that sound the same and mean the same in Slovene and Hungarian (e.g. karma, malha, repa, torta, and vihar). I found 69 words where there is one letter (sound) difference (palca – palica); 41 with two letters (sound) differences (halom – holm), 35 with more than 2 sounds difference but still recognizable (cel – cilj); every day language words used in Slovenia but of Croatian, German or other origin (gazda, pleh, ara) and 21 words written the same, meaning something quite different (moka: meaning a joke in Hungarian and flour in Slovene).

Professor Janos Herczeg also took me to his home, many evenings and Sundays I spent with his family. I met his wife Agnes and daughters Titike and Agika. In his study, I was impressed by paintings – a typical one of Hungarian landscape, which I have in Ljubljana, still reminds me of many talents of Professor Herczeg: not only talents, but his persistence and perfectionism when starting something new. With my family I returned to Szeged in 1993 so my two sons could meet the Herczeg family and we all had lovely time together. Afterwards I met Professor Herczeg occasionally again for the Alpe Adria Perinatal Congresses.

Nevertheless, my greatest thanks go to Professor Herczeg for all his kind thoughtfulness during my stay in Szeged: thank you and all the best!

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