

Clarissa Howe - DSS Scholarship Report – 2020

I meant to write a thank-you note to the Cleveland Hungarian Development Panel weeks ago, so I was very glad to receive this gentle prompt from Peter Száffko at the Debreceni Nyári Egyetem. Without sounding overly sentimental, one of the reasons I even started learning Hungarian was to honor my grandfather, who was born on the East Side of Cleveland to Hungarian parents. He was never allowed to learn the language and I am so grateful to be able to say that I can now speak – albeit imperfectly – the language of my ancestors. To receive a scholarship from the very community that my own family comes from was all the more meaningful. There’s a fairly decent chance that someone from that group of benefactors even knew the Ferencz family!

As for the course itself, while I naturally would have preferred to be able to take classes in person and be in Debrecen, the online course was an acceptable substitute given the ongoing pandemic. Judit Molnár, my teacher, admitted that she hadn’t taught such an advanced level in quite a few years, but was very adept at tailoring the material to our needs. I found it just difficult enough to be interesting without being overwhelming. The fact that we spoke Hungarian pretty much exclusively, including to discuss course logistics and the like, meant that I was able to get a good deal of speaking practice in along with the grammar and vocabulary exercises in the textbook. I left class every day feeling a bit exhausted but satisfied that I’d learned something. When it was all over, I was sad to say goodbye to our small group, but tired enough from the challenge to welcome the break.

The culture courses were also a pleasant surprise. I have to be honest and say that I wasn’t particularly thrilled about having to wake up so early even on a Saturday (classes started at 7:30 London time), but it was well worth the effort. I was pretty under-informed about certain aspects pertaining to food, music, and literature, so these classes gave me a great overview of some of the things I “should” know. My favorite was probably the class on Hungarian folk music. Some of those tunes are pretty darn catchy and I found myself writing down certain titles during class and then learning the music and lyrics by heart on my own time afterwards. In fact, I think my incessant humming of “Hej Dunáról fúj a szél” might be starting to wear on my husband’s nerves...

All in all, I enjoyed the classes at the Debreceni Nyári Egyetem and look forward to hopefully being able to attend classes there in person next summer. Failing that, I’ll be happy to sign up for another online course as well.

Thank you once again to the Cleveland Hungarian Development Panel for their support. I know that my grandfather, whose knowledge of the language was limited to knowing that the stores advertised on the local Hungarian radio station that played in his grandparents’ kitchen back in the 1930s were located on “Buckeye Road-ban”, would be very proud at the progress I have made in part thanks to this course.

Sincerely,
Clarissa Howe