

I wrote my motivation letter for Debreceni Nyári Egyetem about the Hungarian word “hiányérzet,” which alludes to the feeling that something is missing. I had used it to describe the realization that I had been experiencing “hiányérzet” until I said my first word in a foreign language. From that moment I was sure that I had understood the word, but I could not have been more wrong. From the moment I stepped off the plane I felt so welcomed in Hungary. Rather unexpectedly, I found a home in Hungary this summer. Something about it really spoke to me. I looked around and just felt as though I had lived there my whole life. Despite having no ancestral ties to the land I felt connected to it somehow and hope to someday make it a lifelong home.

I was so excited to start this program that I arrived three days early to Debreceni Nyári Egyetem so I could attend the trip to Hortobágy where I got to get an inside look into some Hungarian history and the life of a Hungarian cowboy. I made friends quickly and bonded with the other students who were looking to learn Hungarian. Despite being jet lagged I felt wide awake during the trip in an attempt to take in all of it. It look so peaceful and serene.

The following Monday I started classes. I spent the night before class watching FRIENDS in Hungarian trying to pick out any words I knew or learn one that might be useful for class. From the second I sat down in class and started speaking I had a huge smile on my face. I got addicted to the language and after each lesson I would call my Hungarian friends and leave them messages reciting all the new sentences I had learned. I only knew how to say my name and that I was American, but I was so proud to be learning and already able to connect to them in a small way. I studied extra after class and I was one of the only ones in my class who ever fully completed their homework. I loved every minute of my Hungarian classes. I have a penchant for difficult languages, but the teachers made it easy to remember the words outside of class. I fully immersed myself and I started watching my favorite TV shows over again in Hungarian scribbling vigorously. We would play games and do drills in class and I would sit on the edge of my seat trying to win. I signed up for all the extra excursions and classes I could afford. I took phonetics, cooking, bike tours, and culture classes. I made friends with the Hungarian girls that were in charge of our program and I went into the city of Debrecen everyday with them to explore a new restaurant or try a new food. I am usually not good at trying new foods and tend to stay with American cuisine and other foods in my comfort zone, but I really challenged myself in Hungary to try every new food I could and it really paid off. I was introduced to gyoulash, palacsinaks, and some other Hungarian dishes.

With Debreceni Nyári Egyetem we traveled to Eger on the weekend and I got to try Hungarian wine and see the old castle. I loved learning all about Hungarian history being able to practice my new language skills. I bought big bottles of wine to give to my new friends and to bring some home for my family to enjoy.

Thanks to the generous scholarship from the CHDP I had enough money leftover after the program to spend three weeks traveling around Hungary. I went to Balaton, Bekescsaba, and Budapest. I visited with my Hungarian friends both old and new who were all ecstatic to hear my new language skills. I could see just how much it meant to them to have a friend that was interested in learning their language. Perhaps the most touched was my best friend Nóra who I go to school with in China. I went on vacation with her family after the program and I know she

was nervous because her family speaks mostly Hungarian and not a lot of English. She was worried I would feel left out if they spoke Hungarian all the time or her family would feel left out because she had to speak English to me all the time. To prepare for this trip I met with my teacher every day after class and he helped me come up with a list of useful phrases and common things I would need to say and put them on flashcards for me so I could communicate with her family using the cards to express anything I needed. When I met her family I could immediately tell that they were a little stressed out and nervous to start speaking English right away, but I showed them my flashcards and my textbook with all the words I had learned and I could see them slowly start to relax. We spent a week together and I was amazed with all the progress I had made in such a short time. We played board games together every evening and I learned how to communicate what I wanted in Hungarian and how to ask people to move my pieces around the board. I loved every minute of my time in Hungary and being able to share it with the amazing people I met at Debreceni Nyári Egyetem and the Hungarian friends I had made previously made my time there really special. It was an experience I will never forget.

I would like to take this time to truly thank the CHDP for their generosity. Thank you for taking a chance on me. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to learn more about the world around me and get exposed to new experiences. Thank you for supporting me in my dream to study and learn more about Hungarian language and culture. And finally thank you for making my time in Hungary the most enjoyable experience of my life. I really appreciate all the kindness the CHDP showed and I hope to be able to continue to work with the CHDP in the future.

Since the program has ended I returned back to my Master's degree program in China and have been continuing my study of Chinese language and teaching English as a second language education. However, I really connected with one of the teachers at the summer school and I have continued my Hungarian language study in private lessons with her every week. I hope to return to Debreceni Nyári Egyetem next year and be able to sign up for the full four weeks. I miss Hungary every day and really hope to return and call it my home someday. Thank you again for your generosity and support. I would not have been able to have this life changing experience without the CHDP.