

The Barber from Budapest

& other stories



A MEMOIR WITH RECIPES

Liz Posmyk

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Parsley Lane Press



A PERCENTAGE OF THE ROYALTIES FROM THE SALE OF THIS BOOK
WILL GO TO THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION

Published in 2016 by Parsley Lane Press, Canberra, Australia.
parsleylanepress.com

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Cover design by Liz Posmyk.

Cover photograph by Amanda Kelly Photography.

Author photograph by Peter Buckley.

Photographs and items on the cover are from the author's private collection.

Map produced by flat EARTH mapping.

Printed and bound on environmentally friendly paper by Elect Printing, Canberra.

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Creator: Posmyk, Liz, author.

Title: *The Barber from Budapest & other stories : a memoir with recipes* / Liz Posmyk.

ISBN: 9780646957968 (paperback)

Notes: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Subjects: Posmyk, Liz--Family.

Cooking, Hungarian.

Hungary--Biography.

Austria--Biography.

Canberra--Biography.

Malua Bay (N.S.W.)--Biography.

Dewey Number: 641.59439

For my beloved parents, András and Irén, and their forebears
- preserving their stories for generations to come.



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Andr s in Europe circa 1940s.

Prologue

ON THE FIRST of May 1945, people in the *város* (town) of Sátoraljaújhely in northern Hungary gathered to mark the Labour Day holiday. Men, women and children of all ages were laughing, singing and waving as a procession and marching band made its way down Kossuth Lajos *utca* (street).

As he stood on the pavement looking on, András felt his stomach grumbling. He had not yet had breakfast and was more than a little hungry. Being a national holiday, all the shops were closed, and he wondered what he might find to cook for himself. Across the street, he noticed several signs pinned to a gate. Among them: *friss tojás, friss vaj* (fresh eggs, fresh butter).

He made his way across the road, opened the gate, entered the *údvár* (courtyard), and knocked on the door of a small cottage. A lady greeted him with a smile and asked, 'What can I do for you, sir?' After he explained what he wanted, she welcomed him into her home, and offered him a seat at her table.

From that moment on his life would change.

Part One



Reminiscences - András



The day the snow fell in October

HALF A METRE of snow fell on the day of my birth.

That was a rare occurrence for Austria-Hungary in the autumn of 1916. It was the year that my parents were living in a big house on my uncle's vineyard in Budafok, on the outskirts of Budapest.

I suppose you could say that my life began well, because I arrived on the day on which the Thirteen Martyrs of Arad are commemorated.

Known in *Magyar* as the *Aradi vértanúk* (blood witnesses from Arad), they were among the *honvéd* (officers and men in the Hungarian Army) who fought for freedom during the Revolution of 1848 when Hungarians rose up against the Habsburgs.

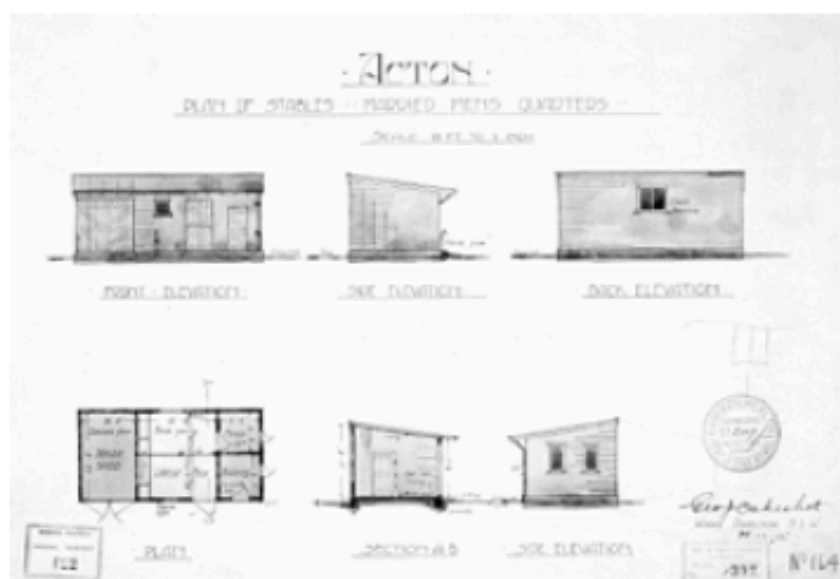
Forces of the Austrian empire, with the help of allies from the Imperial Russian army, eventually crushed the revolt. The Hungarian military leaders subsequently surrendered to the Habsburgs, who proved to be merciless, and condemned them to death.

Part Two



Recollections and musings - Liz

RECOLLECTIONS AND MUSINGS - LIZ



Plans for the Buggy Shed/sables at the married men's quarters in Axton, approved December 1912. Courtesy ANU Heritage.

The Buggy Shed as it is now.



A winter's walk 2013

THERE'S AN ICY stillness in the air as I set out for a walk around the West Basin peninsula of Lake Burley Griffin. Although it is past noon, the sun is still hiding under a doona of thick clouds.

I'm wearing sturdy boots, and am rugged up like an Eskimo. Looking around, I see a few ducks, a swan, a lone cyclist, and a couple of women power walking in their lunch break. Everyone else must be indoors, most likely near a heater.

I love being here – the area in which I was born, and where I once lived with my family. I was just a youngster when my feet first touched the ground in this place. Yet, even after a lifetime, there is a strong sense of belonging.

I stop to admire jonquils, daisies and eucalypts, and the first of the wattle – clusters of golden powder puffs that herald the coming spring.

Along the water's edge I come across a narrow, winding track, still muddy from recent rains. It is shielded from the road by a line of old buildings and shrubbery.

High up in a tree, there is a weathered old birdhouse. I wonder who put it there.

Around the corner and up the hill is the old Buggy Shed.

Exposed to the elements, and decaying for years, it now boasts a shiny new roof and freshly varnished weatherboards – a makeover for its one-hundredth birthday. A milestone for a building in this city methinks.

The little shed is deserted and the door is locked, so I peep through the dust-tainted windowpanes to see if I can recognise anything.

Mould-speckled curtains hang, barely, on the westerly window. Against the blackened timbers of the roof trusses there is a thick cobweb, suspended like a hammock. The remnants of a wild beehive are stuck to the wall. Rotting sarking dangles in the corner of the corrugated sheeting, and old electrical conduit hangs from the beams.

Is it my imagination, or can I hear the faint sound of children's laughter being carried on the breeze – reminiscent of the tinkling of bells on a wind chime echoing from the past? I raise my head and prick my ears, before I realise that the noise is coming from the childcare centre nearby.

Looking around the property, I feel a hint of sadness. In reality, there is nothing tangible depicting my family's presence here.

Few who pass this way would imagine that the building was once home to a family of refugees and that its old walls hold so many untold stories.

Part Three



Recipes



Semolina dumplings make a hearty and delicious addition to soups, particularly clear chicken soup or meat and vegetable broth.

SEMOLINA DUMPLINGS

Daragaluska

- ½ cup fine semolina
- 1 free-range egg, lightly whisked
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 to 2 scant teaspoons of unsalted butter, softened

In a bowl, blend the semolina together with the egg and baking powder until it resembles a paste-like consistency. If the mixture is too runny, add a little more semolina. Set the mixture aside for 20 minutes.

Form small oval dumplings (about the size of an almond in the shell) from the mixture, using a dessertspoon for size. Gently scrape the dumplings off the spoon into a saucepan of gently simmering water. Cook the dumplings for about 10-15 minutes, until they are tender and cooked in the centre. They will rise to the top as they cook.

Test one by cutting it in half to see if it is cooked through. Lift the dumplings from the water with a slotted spoon, and serve them with soup*. Leftovers can be refrigerated overnight.

Makes approximately 12.

*Meat or chicken soup (*Húsleves zöldségekkel*) see page 258

I have always loved cabbage - especially my mother's braised red cabbage with apples. This dish sits well with creamy mashed potatoes, and pork chops, or schnitzel.

Just as feather doonas are très cool, braised red cabbage now features on the menus of many fine restaurants across Australia. We knew about it long before it was famous.

BRAISED RED CABBAGE WITH APPLE

Párolt káposzta almával

½ head of red cabbage, sliced into thin shreds
2 small brown onions, finely chopped
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
6 cloves
3 bay leaves
½ cup apple cider vinegar
2 green apples, peeled and thinly sliced

Heat the oil in a large sauté pan and cook the cabbage and onion only until they soften - do not let them brown. Add the salt, sugar, cloves, bay leaves, vinegar and apples.

Cover, lower the heat, and simmer gently for 40 minutes, or until the cabbage is tender. If needed, sprinkle a little water over the cabbage to prevent catching (or use a heat diffuser or SimmerMat on the hotplate). Serve warm.

This recipe makes 4 hearty serves.

Note: leftovers can be refrigerated overnight and reheated the following day.

And last but not least, my absolute, hands-down favourite are these cocoa snails, which have a way of wrapping themselves around you. They should be eaten fresh from the oven, preferably with good coffee.

COCOA SNAILS

Kakaós csiga

10g fresh yeast or 1 teaspoon dry yeast
2 teaspoons sugar
½ cup lukewarm milk (soured), or buttermilk
2 cups plain (all purpose) flour, sifted
½ teaspoon salt
1 free range-egg, lightly whisked
2 teaspoons unsalted butter, melted
a little extra milk for brushing

For the filling:

3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
2 tablespoons cocoa powder, sifted
3 tablespoons pure icing sugar, sifted

To make the cocoa filling, cream together the cocoa, icing sugar and softened butter.

Grease the base and sides of an 18cm round baking tin and line the base with baking parchment.

Make sure your kitchen is warm, and free from draughts.

If you are using *fresh* yeast:

Work up the fresh yeast by crumbling it into a jug. Sprinkle it with the sugar and the lukewarm milk or buttermilk. Add 2 teaspoons of the flour and mix until smooth. Set this mixture

in a warm place, such as a sunny windowsill, until it foams and a sponge rises to the top of the jug.

Combine the flour and salt in a mixing bowl. Make a well in the centre; add the whisked egg and the yeast starter, **or the dried yeast granules**. Mix well, and then using your hands, work the mixture until it forms a soft and puffy dough.

Alternatively, use a stand mixer to work the dough.

Place the dough back into the bowl, sprinkle with a little flour and cover the bowl with a clean tea towel. Allow the dough to rise in a warm place for 35-40 minutes, until it has doubled in bulk. Meanwhile preheat the oven to 180°C.

Punch down the dough. Turn out onto a lightly floured board (or bench) and pat it down, or roll it out gently, to a rectangle of ½cm thickness. Using a spatula, spread the prepared cocoa filling over the dough, and roll up the dough carefully, as you would a Swiss roll. Cut into slices 1½cm thick, and place the slices tightly (cut side up) into the prepared baking tin. Brush the top of the *csiga* with melted butter.

Bake in a moderate oven 180°C for 30-40 minutes, sprinkling with milk during baking, until the *csiga* are lightly browned. Cover them with a clean tea towel, and allow them to cool slightly before serving, dusted with icing sugar. If there are leftovers, they should be stored in an airtight container.

Makes 10.



‘Every day is a gift,’ my father would say.

Looking back at my family’s humble beginnings – the lands in which they were born, the hardships they endured and the troubled times they lived through – that wise mantra has always held deep meaning for me.

“This uniquely personal and touching memoir underlines the important role of migrants in Australia’s culture and culinary growth. Liz Posmyk, a talented food writer and cook, has crafted a beautiful book – both a personal tribute to her own heritage, as well as a valuable legacy of traditional family recipes. It is an important addition to Australia’s food history.”

Sally Hammond. Author, food and travel writer.

“More than a cookbook, this is an amazing story. A privilege to see inside an immigrant family’s life. One that makes you see your own in a different light. I can’t wait to bring these family recipes to life in my own kitchen.”

Hilary Burden, journalist and author.



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ISBN 978-0-646-95796-8



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