

Visit to Hajdunanas by Lilly Stevenson
Presented to the Kirk Session of Dalbeattie Oct 2012

Norman phoned me this morning and asked if I would talk for a few minutes about our visit to Hodunanas outlining the highlights of the trip for me. Well that was going to be hard as everything about the trip was wonderful and the hospitality and friendliness we received was out of this world.

Aron who is the Assistant Minister to Hodunanas Reformed Church of Hungary met us at Budapest. He took us to Hodunanas, which was a trip of about 21/2 hours.

He took us to the Care Home that they run and we had a wonderful meal. Then it was off to the Spa where we were staying.

The next morning Friday, and every morning we had breakfast at the Care Home and went to the weekly Church Service that the School has at 7.45 a.m. This service lasted an hour and the behaviour of the children was fabulous. No wriggling about or talking. There were presentations given to the children for success in sport and a drawing competition. It had been Creation Week and the children had done drawings to do with the creation of the world.

We were taken into the school that is also run by the Church where we saw the drawings. One of the things we noticed was that although Hungary is a land locked country most of the drawings had the sea in them. After coffee in the staff room we went into a classroom where presentations were being made to the children on protecting the environment. Janet also gave a presentation on Dalbeattie. Again the behaviour of these children was impressive and the noise level in the corridors at break time was remarkably quiet.

We had our first meeting with Aliz who was a 38 year old English teacher. Aron and Aliz translated for us. Aliz is responsible for 10 other teachers and is the Headmistresses right hand woman so I was shocked when she told me her take home pay was £360 per month.

Aliz took Janet and I to see the children in the Kindergarten where they were preparing to have their lunch. Again the noise level was unbelievably quiet. After we left there we were walking back to the school when 4 children came running across to the fence wanting to talk to us and practise their English. Janet showed them pictures she had on her phone of Dalbeattie and surrounding area. These children just thought we were fabulous.

Aron took us a tour of the Care Home and we were kindly invited into a ladies room. She was so happy to talk to us. The thing that impressed me there was that the nursing staff were all qualified nurses. Probably again not on very high wages. One elderly gentleman was desperate to talk to us and gave us postcards on Hodunanas and a photograph to Ian of him and his wife with his address on the back.

Friday night we were invited to the Mayors' home for a meal. Tibor is also a Member of Parliament. They originally had been dairy farmers but he had given it up meantime because of his political commitments. What a wonderful home they had built themselves. Again a fabulous meal of wild boar and wild duck that Tibor himself had shot was served. Outside they had a range with a hot plate and two ovens, another stove and a barbecue all fired with wood. There was also a wine cellar, which reminded me of an air raid shelter. On top of it they had covered it in soil and had made a super rockery. Earlier in the day Tibor and Aron had taken us to a 35acre farm that was rented by the Council and where Paprika, Aubergines etc. were grown. The people farming the land were unemployed and the idea behind it was to give them work whilst still receiving unemployment benefit and when the produce was sold at the local markets and shops they received a share of the profit. It was also hoped because of their experience they would be able to get full time work or perhaps start up a venture for themselves.

On the Saturday we went to a farm with 3000 animals. 1700 were milking cows, 900 beef, and 400 calves. What impressed me greatly was the cleanliness. No need for wellingtons as we were shown round this large acreage. The cows are not out in the field but are allowed to freely walk around the large sheds they were kept in and their food brought to them. They employed 70 staff including a full time vet. We saw the cows being milked and then the milk going into large cooling tanks then into a milk tanker that took the milk to Romania.

The children at the School had a table top sale on the Friday afternoon. Along with their items they sold shortbread and Lauries tablet Norman had brought for them. They raised 11000 florints and on the Saturday afternoon took this money to the Bird Sanctuary at Hortobagy Eco Park. We went along but I have to say we had mixed feelings about this as they were interfering we felt with nature.

Sunday was Church Service where Norman preached the sermon. This was a family service and the Church was pretty full. Presentations were made to Norman and Norman made presentations to them. Again I was impressed with the behaviour of the children. Afterwards we had a meeting with the elders who are elected for 6 years. They were very interested in our Church and the work we as elders did. We asked if they would like a twinning with our Church and they were very enthusiastic about the possibility of taking it forward.

Sunday afternoon was free and we made use of the Spa facilities or just had a lazy afternoon. In the evening we met with Aron, Gabor the Minister, Aliz and the Chief Elder for a meal in a restaurant. There was a great discussion on how we were going to progress things from now on. It is hoped a delegation from Hodunanas will come to Dalbeattie to meet with our congregation. I am sure we will be able to return the hospitality and friendship we received.

Monday morning it was off to Budapest. At night we met with two young ministers Balazs and Tamas who are heavily involved with Eco congregations in Hungary. Again they paid for our meal and a most interesting discussion took place.

When we got back to our hotel Gesa the young man I had hosted in March came to meet us. Gesa had just become a father for the first time and hadn't been able to meet us for a meal as he was visiting his wife and son in hospital. I was so pleased to see him again and we both gave one another a huge hug. Gesa is looking into bringing some teenagers in July to Dalbeattie to work on some environmental projects in and around the town.

I am sure we all know how respected Norman is around the world but to actually see it in action is unbelievable. He was even interviewed by Hungarian television and I am sure he could give you the link if you would like it to see his interview and us all as we visited the various places we went to.

There is so much more I could tell you about our visit and the enthusiasm of everybody we met but we would be here for hours.