

Motherland dilution

100% Hungarian - Julia (born Budapest 1938)

Magyarország postage stamps.

The red-white-green flag with a bent-cross crown.

Budapest on the Danube, the Fisherman's Bastion

Gellert baths, Lake Balaton.

Cornflowers and poppies in fields of wheat.

Geraniums in window boxes, storks on chimneys.

Painted folk pottery, jugs and plates.

Fine *Herendi* porcelain. Tiled ovens.

Embroidered cushions, tablecloths, aprons, linen, felt.

Pleated skirts, women in scarves and red boots.

Hungarian dances, *czardas*, Bartok, Kodaly -

the nostalgic lyrics of gypsy music.

Name Days for everyone, birthdays not important.

St Nicholas day first, then Baby Jesus bringing gifts

on Christmas Eve, us all singing carols

around the tree draped with *szalon cukorka*,

delicious caramels in pastel tissue and silver foil.

Everyone playing rummy, criticising authority

and services. Always political jokes, and business ones –

If a Hungarian enters a revolving door behind you,

watch out - they will come out in front.

A difficult language rich in swear-words
and earthy proverbs - *only oxen drink alone*.
Like ox piss means you are all over the place.

Women in the kitchen cooking, cooking, over-catering
rich food – cream, sour cream, lard, sausages, *kolbasz*, salami.
Layered cakes and strudel from *Gerbaud* or *Ruszwurm*.
Strudel pastry stretched paper-thin on large tables.
Poppies, grinding poppy-seed, poppy-seed cakes, *bejgli*.
Walnut trees, shelling walnuts, walnut cakes.
Chestnut trees, falling chestnuts, coal braziers,
roasted chestnuts, fingerless gloves, chestnut puree.
Cherries hung over ears, cherries in conical paper bags,
cherry strudel, cold cherry soup.
Raspberries on fingers, raspberry syrup.
Picking gooseberries, gooseberry fool. Apricots, plums,
palinka – layered crepes sprinkled with nuts and jam.

Paprika, *goulash*, stuffed capsicum, sauerkraut, cabbage rolls.
Pigs' trotters and heads in aspic.
Potato salad, potatoes with parsley, fried parsley.
Cucumber salad, dill cucumber, dill with cottage cheese.
Fried *langos* with garlic. Plum dumplings in breadcrumbs,
cauliflower with breadcrumbs and sour cream.

Drinking *tokay*, Bulls Blood, wine with soda-water.
Strong coffee, weak tea with lemon.
Smoking, lots of smoking, everyone always smoking.

50% Hungarian - Helen (born Perth, 1962)

Bollotonn and kitchit and rrolling rrr's.

Soft yeast-sour scrolls with brandy and cream

smoky salami with potatoes and eggs.

Exuberant spring sewn onto cushions -

forest green, blood red, deep black, cornflower blue.

Thick ham and bean soup for New Year's Eve

fried yeast dough smeared with salty garlic

pancakes stacked with walnuts and sugar.

Wild gypsy violin for all that is lost.

The ambitious complexity of Liszt.

Dark wild horseman, hairy and volatile

like my uncles. The laughter of green eyed

aunts frying cabbage with square cut noodles.

Sweet golden wine and the blood of bulls

the bitter zinc of poppy seeds in pastry

morello cherries and apricot jam.

Heavy plum dumplings rolled in sweet crumbs

dark rusty paprika, meatballs in sauce.

Flax coloured linen, woven for princes.

My emphatic *Nagymama*, shaking her head -

her twisted handwriting, struggling to exclaim.

The inventiveness of Biro and Rubik.

My slightly used Learn Hungarian CDs

my never used red passport – *utlevel*.

Christmas Eve around the tree, all singing.
Parquetry, rugs, dark antique cupboards.
My merry-eyed *Nagypapa* smoking
in the dark. Time bending fairy tales
of kingdoms and roosters and sorry regret.

25% Hungarian

Sofie (born Sydney, 1990)

Coatings for pork and plums with crumbs on plates.
Rings of regal red on faded cloth.
In the space where memories are hiding
the other plates are hidden
between pictures of people I do not know.

But I can smell it – chipped crockery and
damp windowsills near a fireplace tall
with towers and trinkets, too high for me to touch.

Tin birds and pine pins, cushions and candles.
Miniature men with matching moustaches
carved from morbid fairy tales.

The threads of embroidery are coming undone -
these new pillows are too white to be Hungarian.

Banjo Paterson Writing Award 2013 – Second place (*Motherland dilution*)