

**Hungarian American Students Exchange Programs.
The Contribution of the Woodside Priory School in Portola Valley, California.**

I am Soma Fuller. I am Levente Lovász. We are the lucky ones who enjoy a full year scholarship this year at the Woodside Priory School in Portola Valley in their Hungarian Student Exchange Program.

Soma:

What is the Woodside Priory Student Exchange Program and how we and other Hungarian students in the past and in the future get here to study for a year, to get immersed in American, and in fact in International culture?

What is this Program? When, how and why did it start? As many of you know the Woodside Priory School was founded by Hungarian Benedictine Monks 55 years ago in Portola Valley. The founder Monks fled communist suppression in Hungary after the Second World War. After years of dispersal in different parts of Europe and the United States they gathered in Portola Valley to establish a Religious Community and a School.

The school started in 1957 and very quickly became a well-known private school in the area. The connection with the mother country, Hungary was very limited during the 1960s and 70s, due to the tension between communist ruled Hungary and U.S. But during the 1980s things started to become less tense and connections were established between educational institutions in Hungary and the Woodside Priory School. The idea of establishing a Hungarian Student Exchange Program started to take shape. At the beginning students arrived to the Priory through personal contact. Father Christopher Hites, who was the Headmaster of the Priory for the first 15 years and was also the Pastor of the Hungarian Catholic Mission during the 80s, started the Program.

After 1989, when political changes swept over the communist block the relationship and contact between Hungary and the Priory became easier and Priory's Student Exchange Program started to take a more definite shape. In 1994, after Father Christopher's retirement, Fr. Maurus Németh took over the leadership of the Hungarian Catholic Mission and the Student Exchange Program.

In honoring the Hungarian Founders of the Woodside Priory School, the Administration awards a one-year scholarship to TWO selected students from Hungary each year. The students are being selected with the assistance of Father Maurus who is coordinating the program. The students are selected based upon their academic, personal and social merit.

Levente:

I feel very lucky for being selected for this scholarship and that I can be a part of the Hungarian Mission and the Priory Community. As Hungary provides us a different living environment, first when I landed in the United States I felt intimidated by looking into other people's eyes and I was shy myself. Since I did not know the Priory Community and the Hungarian Mission well, I did not know how people will trick me, how it is going be like, how different it will be from Hungary. My first impression at the Priory was

good. People were helpful and kind to me. Whenever I did not know anything, there was always someone who could help me figuring things out. Because the Priory values the idea of hospitality, teachers and student are really welcoming and never leave anyone out (of the community). Priory provides the students many opportunities to get know numerous cultures through Chapel talks, various kinds of food that are served at the restaurant, and so on. The dormitory has almost only international students from the 5 continents. Dormers study, eat, sleep and basically live together 24 hours of the day. The Priory is a great place for getting to know and sharing our and others' culture.

Soma;

Speaking of personal experience, first of all, I feel honored and lucky to be selected for this scholarship. I studied at the Benedictine High School in Pannonhalma for four years, and I experienced there a totally different educational system. Here, in the Priory, all are welcome. We have students from all over the world (14 countries, from Japan to Nigeria), and the community is extremely welcoming. At the Priory, Hungarian (and in general, European) exchange students can experience the American culture, see a different lifestyle, make life-long friends, and last, but not least improve their English. In fact, the community of the dormers is more like a big family.

On the other hand, the Priory emphasizes the diversity; foreign students are highly encouraged to represent their own culture. This program provides a tremendous possibility to get to know other cultures, lose the prejudices and share the best of our Hungarian culture. The greatest supporter of this Preservation, Promotion and Transmission of our traditions and culture and the exchange program, is the Hungarian Catholic Mission. The Mission warmly welcomes the students and asks them to help in the programs; while the students become more and more involved in the life of the Mission they can understand what being a Hungarian abroad means. Nevertheless, the goal of this exchange program is to get to know a different culture, to gain the good things and values of this culture, and when we are back in our mother country, to share these values there, trying to improve our country and society.

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