

## Remarks at Hungarian American Colalition's 14th Annual Gala Dinner

April 25, 2018

Thank you Andrea for those very warm words and kind introduction. I am deeply honored by this recognition from the Hungarian American Coalition – an organization I have admired since its founding by my dear friend Edith Lauer whose recent loss of her beloved husband, John, has saddened us all. They were a couple made for the ages. We are all blessed to have known them both.

As Andrea and I were discussing this evening's program she asked me how being Hungarian had made a difference in my life. As I pondered this question a bit I realized that being Hungarian was the very core of my being – it shaped all my morals and values and drove my ambitions and my dreams. I love telling friends that I am Hungarian. I am proud of a heritage that so closely mirrors many American ideals. Famous and gifted Hungarians and Americans in the arts, sciences and public service have contributed in both countries, enriching culture and society. And there are many parallels in our histories – in our fights for freedom and recognition of Human Rights.

Hungary is a remarkable country. For decades over the centuries it has been occupied and oppressed. Yet it has retained its language and culture intact. Maybe because Hungarians are stubborn?

But the people of this small country are also amazingly creative – from the fun and frustration of the Rubik cube, to the small ballpoint pen – which is “*mightier than the sword*”, to the power of the hydrogen bomb and to Microsoft Word! Hungary has more Nobel Prizes per capita than any other country in the world. The Hungarian legacy of music, literature and science is what the HAC works to preserve and to celebrate.

My parents were Hungarian immigrants – neither of them had more than an eighth grade education. But my love of science and curiosity about the world around me, and my love of music were developed in my Hungarian upbringing. My dad taught us to work hard, remember to help others, and always do our best. He pointed out that “*To be Hungarian is not enough, but it may help!*”

My mom loved music and was an excellent cook. She and I would listen to the radio (no TV in those days – believe it or not!) as we were doing chores around the house or preparing meals in the kitchen,. I still know almost all the words to songs of the 30's and 40's – which astonishes my friends – and I could instantly recognize a sonata by Liszt or a Bartok symphony My mom taught us to dream and to love music, dance and literature. She instilled the Hungarian spirit in us..

My brother and I were raised during the Depression and we were poor. But our home was filled with love and lots of friends. They all helped each other as much as they could – even sharing precious food obtained with food stamps at times. Evening card games around the kitchen table were frequent as were Sunday picnics in the Metro Parks where we would have Salona bread and the children would wade in the waters of the Chagrin River. We had so many lovely customs – the special meals and activities at Christmas, Easter and name days. My husband still remarks that he never knew there were so many customs in any country!! Even the magnets on my refrigerator door remind him every day that he married a Hungarian – “*You bet your goulash I'm Hungarian*” – and “*Kiss me, I'm Hungarian*”. It always works, because he does!

My parents knew that an education was the route to opportunity in this great country of ours. They taught us to be true to our values, and to always treasure our Hungarian heritage. Those values shaped my life and are why I admire and respect the work of the HAC so much. Providing internships and scholarships to young people is truly important, especially when programs are across borders and cultures. This experience helps us to appreciate diversity of all kinds, in nature, in people, in cultures and in religions.

Education provides us with the tools to have a rewarding career and to enrich our lives through the arts and through a deep appreciation of the beauty and wonder of the world around us. Freedom is fragile if citizens are ignorant. But with freedom goes the responsibility to give back to our communities in whatever ways we can. That is the principle of volunteerism and philanthropy which is so core to the American way of life and is almost unique in the world.

I was molded by the great American melting pot and I did pursue the American dream. I had a fine education, was inspired to pursue a career in science, had

mentors (all men in those days), worked for a wonderful company, and have had an absolutely fabulous and rewarding career and personally happy life.

Throughout these years, volunteering and giving my time and resources to worthy projects was always a high priority. I believe passionately that there is no greater gift in life than to give to others. You find yourself rewarded in far greater proportion than what you have given.

Winston Churchill once said “*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.*”

I am truly grateful for this honor tonight from the HAC. It humbles me to be in the ranks of so many distinguished individuals who came before me and are here this evening. I thank you all – and most especially want to acknowledge the love of my life and biggest supporter, my husband Dr. Glenn R. Brown and my family and friends who are with us this evening.