

# REFUGEES

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*Where  
Are They  
Now?*

THE  
HUNGARIAN  
REFUGEES,  
50 YEARS ON



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

GUEST EDITORIAL BY UNHCR GOODWILL AMBASSADOR **ANGELINA JOLIE**





# The 50th Anniversary of the HUNGARIAN Uprising

**T**HE LAST WEEK OF OCTOBER 1956 was one of the most dramatic in the second half of the 20th century. Two entirely separate crises erupted, both of which had important and long-lasting ramifications for the future course of the Cold War and the relationship between the two emerging Superpowers – as well as for the development of the United Nations.

On 23 October, while the British, French and Israeli governments were in the middle of a secret three-day meeting in Sèvres, near Paris, which would lead directly to a momentous upheaval in the Middle East (the echoes of which still resonate today), a group of engineering students in the Hungarian capital Budapest decided to hold a demonstration – not about the situation in Hungary, but about Poland.

News had been swirling around Budapest about unrest in several other Soviet satellite states: riots in East Germany, rumblings in Prague, and above all a serious revolt in the Polish city of Poznan in June, which had been crushed by the army.

The Budapest students had heard rumours of further unrest in Poland and decided to demonstrate in support of the Poles. Word quickly spread through the city, and people started coming out of their shops, factories and houses to join the march.

Thus, to some extent, the 1956 Hungarian Revolution began by accident – although tensions had been simmering for some time. The country had suffered considerable economic hardship and a succession of vicious purges during a decade of communist rule. Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in February 1956 had sent ripples of expectation across Central Europe, and one large demonstration with distinctly anti-communist overtones had already taken place in Budapest itself a couple of weeks earlier.

As 23 October progressed, tens of thousands of people poured on to the street – and the initial demonstration very quickly turned into something else altogether: a full-scale revolt against the regime and its Soviet masters.

Twelve days later, on 4 November, the Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest. The city endured days of heavy shelling and street battles, and Hungarians started to flee at the rate of thousands a day to neighbouring Austria. By the time the borders were fully sealed, some 180,000 Hungarian refugees had made their way to Austria and 20,000 had headed south into Yugoslavia.

Within days of the exodus starting, an extraordinary operation sprang up in Austria, not only to care for the refugees, but to move them out of the country almost as fast as they arrived. In the end, 180,000 were resettled from Austria and Yugoslavia to a total of 37 different countries – the first 100,000 of them in under ten weeks. The performance of the Austrians, the aid agencies and the resettlement countries was truly remarkable.

The 1956 uprising and its aftermath helped shape the way humanitarian organizations – not least UNHCR – were to deal with refugee crises for decades to come. The episode also left an indelible mark on international refugee law and policy.

But the people it marked most of all were, of course, the Hungarians themselves – both those who stayed and those who left. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Revolution, REFUGEES magazine has interviewed seven Hungarian refugees who subsequently settled in seven far-flung foreign lands.

They range from one of the biggest names in the global computer industry to a retired garage mechanic. But they have all, in their own way, spent the last 50 years carving out successful new lives which belie the notion that refugees are a “burden” on their host states.

As UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Angelina Jolie remarks later in this issue of the magazine, 50 years is “a blink of the eye in human history.” In the world of refugees, a huge amount has been achieved over the past half century – but as the response to the Hungarian crisis reminds us, a certain degree of spontaneity, altruism and pure generosity of spirit seems to have been lost along the way.



**THE FATEFUL PROTEST IN BUDAPEST'S BEM SQUARE ON 23 OCTOBER 1956.**

MITI FOTO / B. SANDOR / HUN1956



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**Cover** A Hungarian girl who lost her parents during the escape to Austria in Nov. 1956.

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**Back cover** Hungarian refugee children.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT:

10M/HAT0085; UNHCR PHOTOS 103, 102, 92, 99, 80

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# REFUGEES

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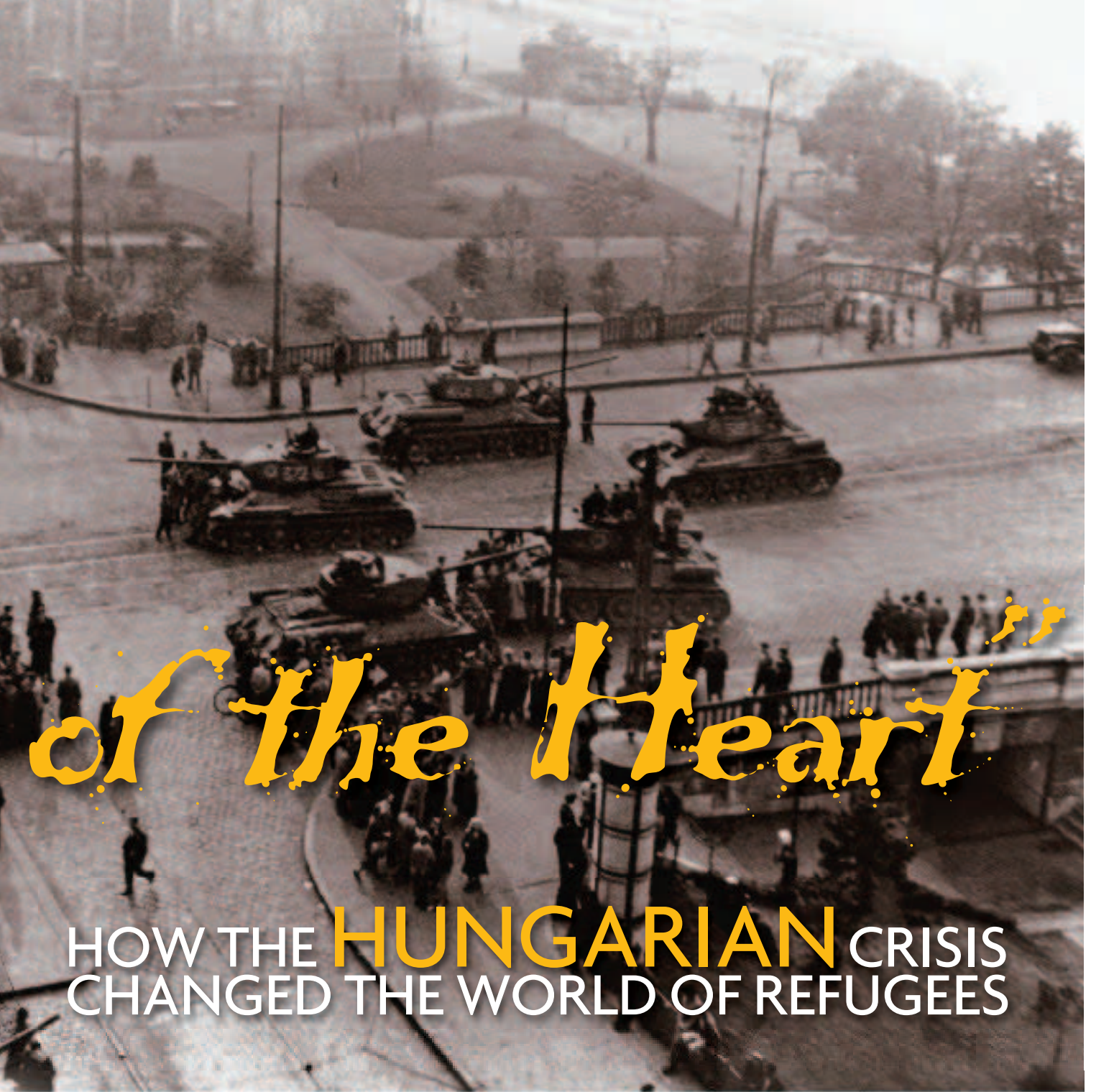


BY RUPERT COLVILLE

**B**Y THE EVENING OF 23 OCTOBER 1956 – the first day of the Hungarian Revolution – the parliament building, the headquarters of radio Budapest and various other key buildings had all been surrounded or occupied, and shots had been fired into the crowds, apparently by secret police agents. A couple of symbolic acts – the toppling of a huge statue of Stalin, and the appearance of Hungarian flags with holes where the hammer-and-sickle insignia had been – raised the stakes dramatically.

“The sight took my breath away,” writes Andrew Grove – a 1956 Hungarian refugee who subsequently co-founded the computer giant Intel (see interview on p.12) – in his autobiography. “Those flags were permanently altered. The act seemed unequivocal and destined to provoke a reaction of some sort... I felt we had crossed a line of no return.”

For a few days, from the point of view of many Hungarians, it all looked very promising: large sections of the Hungarian army either joined the rebellion or handed over their arms; the hated secret police had their backs to the wall (many agents were hunted down and lynched); and on 29 October came the astounding



# of the Heart

## HOW THE HUNGARIAN CRISIS CHANGED THE WORLD OF REFUGEES

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news that the Soviet military would be withdrawn from Hungary next day.

### DISTRACTED BY WAR

HOWEVER, ALSO ON 29 OCTOBER, AN ENTHRALLED outside world was suddenly and dramatically distracted from what was going on in Hungary, when the news broke that the Israelis – in accordance with a secret agreement with the British and French signed five days earlier in Sèvres – had invaded Sinai and were racing towards the Suez Canal.

The Cold War had now sprouted two hot spots in the space of a week. The United States was concerned the

war could spread and refused to back Britain, France and Israel. Perhaps encouraged by the tangle the Western powers were getting themselves into in the Middle East, the Soviet leadership quickly and quietly reversed its decision to withdraw from Hungary.

### THE SOVIETS RETURN

THE SOVIET TANKS RE-ENTERED BUDAPEST ON 4 November, 12 days after the demonstration that had turned into a revolution.

Hundreds of buildings were badly damaged or destroyed over the next week or so, as Hungarian fighters put up spirited but ultimately hopeless resistance.

**Far left:** Two huge geopolitical crises, plus a US presidential election, compete for the world's attention on 3 November 1956. The following day, the Soviet army moved back into Budapest.



AP/HUN-1956



UNHCR/2/AUT-1956

**Clockwise from top:** The decapitation of Stalin's statue, on the first day of the uprising; A 16-year-old youth is interrogated in Budapest after being caught trying to escape into Austria; Refugees are hauled across a canal separating Hungary from Austria.

The precise death toll is not known – perhaps more than the official figure of 2,500 Hungarians killed. Thousands of others were arrested or simply disappeared, and several hundred were executed.

As refugees started pouring across the border into Austria, they had one thing in their favour: the outside world, by and large, was extremely sympathetic to their plight. It was the first major crisis to appear on television as well as in newspapers and on cinema newsreels. And people were shocked to see the scenes from Budapest, as well as the forlorn figures traipsing across the bleak, snow-covered border.

And there was also, most probably, a feeling of guilt. The Hungarians had risen up. They had heard themselves applauded and encouraged on western radio stations such as Radio Free Europe, Voice of America and the BBC. Many believed the West had promised to come to Hungary's aid.

The aid did arrive, but only once they had become refugees.

#### ALL HANDS TO THE PUMP

IT WAS AS IF A DAM HAD BROKEN. A TRICKLE OF people had started crossing the border into Austria in the last week of October. The following weekend (4-6 November), 10,000 crossed. By 16 November, the total had risen to 36,000 and by the end of November, it had soared to 113,000. A further 50,000 in December took the total to 164,000 in just over nine weeks. By the spring, when to all intents and purposes the movement ceased, 180,000 had entered Austria and another 20,000 had sought asylum in Yugoslavia.

Entire classes – even entire schools – were crossing the loosely guarded border. Students, teachers, doctors, famous athletes and footballers, farmers, architects and labourers all started streaming into Austria – mostly in the Burgenland region, around the city of Eisenstadt. A train driver is said to have set off from Budapest and just kept going until he was the other side of the border. Men, women and children crossed swamps, forded canals, walked through forests, and picked their way across snow-covered fields trying to avoid patrols and search-lights.

Robert Quinlan had arrived in Vienna some 20 months earlier as a student. The 29-year old American packed a lot in during his first year overseas: he met and married a British concert pianist, and he witnessed the rebirth of Austria in May 1955 as a result of the signing of the State Treaty that gave it back its independence after ten years of occupation by the four victorious Allied powers. The treaty came into effect in July 1955 and the last occupying troops were withdrawn that October, only one year before the Hungarian Revolution.

Vienna was still recovering from World War II, with plenty of bombed-out buildings waiting to be repaired. And there was still a slight scent of the international intrigue that was later captured so evocatively in the celebrated film "The Third Man."

"It was an era when good Scotch could still make things happen," Quinlan recalls, mentioning a Soviet officer whose help was sometimes sought and earned using this method.

Quinlan was offered a job with an American NGO called the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC), which later changed its name to Catholic Relief Services. NCWC was working with the UN refugee agency – itself only five years old – helping integrate some of the refugees left over from World War II. The agency was also working on resettling refugees

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abroad – the tail end of a massive post-war programme that had seen more than one million refugees resettled between 1947 and the end of 1951.

When the Hungarian Revolution broke out, Quinlan was stationed in Salzburg, charged with processing 150 ethnic Germans from Yugoslavia – some of the millions of *Volksdeutsche* who had been forced to flee their homes in Central Europe at the end of the war. His deadline to finish dealing with the 150 cases was the end of the year. Resettlement is often a slow and painstaking business. But it doesn't have to be, as Quinlan was about to discover.

As the tanks entered Budapest on 4 November, the outside world reacted with great speed, despite the competing Suez Crisis. They were not prepared to intervene inside Hungary, but they were – it transpired – prepared to do a great deal for the Hungarians who got out.

One of the principal movers and shakers was the Austrian Interior Minister, Oskar Helmer. On 4 November, Helmer sent an urgent cable to the headquarters of UNHCR and of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) asking for help, both in the form of financial assistance and in assurances that most of the refugees would be quickly moved on out of Austria.

#### ORGANIZING THE RESPONSE

IN VIENNA, A COMMITTEE WAS IMMEDIATELY set up comprised of Helmer and his staff, UNHCR, ICEM, and the League of Red Cross Societies (LRCS), as well as a number of local and international NGOs. The LRCS would be the prime mover on the assistance front, and would also

assist ICEM with registration, documentation and transport of refugees out of Austria. UNHCR would deal with the over-arching legal and protection issues, as well as integration of those who remained in Austria.

Helmer also wanted UNHCR to be the overall coordinator – or “lead agency” – a role that was subsequently confirmed by the General Assembly, which passed a number of important resolutions over the next few days and weeks. (The Security Council, by contrast, was paralysed on both the Hungarian and Suez fronts by the competing interests of its veto holders).

On the face of it, UNHCR was not in the best position to handle such a task. For one thing, it was only a temporary organization with a mandate that was due to expire in 1958. Secondly, it was without a High Commissioner – in July the first occupant of the post, Gerritt van Heuven Goedhart, had died of a heart attack while playing tennis, and his replacement, Auguste Lindt, was not elected until December. Fortunately the Deputy High Commissioner, James Read, and the agency's other senior staff proved more than capable of handling the challenge.

It was the first modern relief effort, and, after an un-

**Austrian border guards, villagers and volunteers helped tens of thousands of Hungarians cross into Austria.** As time went on, border controls tightened and smugglers played an increasingly prominent role in enabling people to escape.

*It was the **FIRST** major refugee relief operation of its kind, and the rule book was only **PARTLY** written.*





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**Top:** The first ship carrying Hungarian refugees to the US arrives in Brooklyn, New York in January 1957.

**Right:** A refugee waves goodbye to friends leaving Austria for their new country. UNHCR urged resettlement countries not to ignore the sick and disabled refugees.

derstandably chaotic start, it proceeded remarkably smoothly. In the eyes of the donors, and virtually all the historians, the three coordinating agencies and many of the NGOs that worked with them put up an exceptional performance.

Refugees arriving at the border were cared for by local villagers or by the Austrian authorities. They were then quickly transported to centres where they were registered and then moved on again, to camps, hotels or private accommodation. NGOs, including the Austrian branches of the Red Cross and Caritas, were there to help them along the way.

Agencies rushed in staff from all over the world, and many others were hired locally. According to Quinlan, who was himself quickly relocated by NCWC from Salzburg to Vienna, there were a number of factors which the Austrians and the aid agencies were able to exploit: there were plenty of suitable facilities – all the camps and barracks that had been recently vacated by the American, British, French and Soviet occupying forces; there was also an abundance of qualified

personnel available locally – including many Hungarian speakers; and there were existing networks of aid agencies that had already been working on resettlement and integration issues.

So the core of the relief effort was in place.

Nevertheless, it was still the first major refugee relief operation of its kind, and the rule book was only partly written.

For one thing were these people refugees, and did UNHCR have a mandate to deal with them? Yes, said the Austrians. UNHCR agreed, and so – without much argument – did the states. Article 6B of UNHCR's Statute seemed clearly to cover the situation. But, according to the definition in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, weren't refugees only the product of events that took place prior to 1951? And didn't refugees have to be assessed individually?

*During the first NINE WEEKS,  
a phenomenal 92,950 people  
were resettled from AUSTRIA  
by boat, bus, train and plane.*



IOM/HYU0037/YUG-1957

IOM/HAT0313/AUS-1957

UNHCR/NY/AUT

### BREAKING NEW GROUND

UNHCR'S CHIEF LEGAL ADVISOR, PAUL WEIS – described by High Commissioner Lindt as “surely the best expert on refugee law in the world” – drew up an argument that satisfied the legal criteria relating to the cut-off date in the Convention definition. In addition, UNHCR's Statute was used as the basis for deciding that a group arriving en masse, such as the Hungarians, could be recognized ‘prima facie’ – an extremely important development in international refugee law and practice. And one which has benefited tens of millions of refugees since then.

In the meantime, instead of agonizing over the mandate and issues surrounding the definition, in Austria – and, a bit later on, in Yugoslavia – everyone simply got on with the job of assisting and resettling the Hungarian refugees as best they could.

The historian Louise Holborn describes the beginning of the massive emergency resettlement operation – a mere three days after the Soviet army stormed into Budapest: “On 7 November, the French Red Cross

flew a plane to Vienna loaded with medical supplies and brought refugees back to France. Some British private groups, and later commercial aircraft companies, on their own initiative and at their own expense, shuttled their planes between Britain and Austria for the British Red Cross, bringing 7,500 refugees to the UK by 14 December. On 8 November the first special train, from Switzerland, moved more than 400 refugees. And in the following days, buses from Sweden and trains from Belgium and the Netherlands returned with refugees to those countries.” Money and relief items were also coming in quickly.

By 28 November, a total of nine European countries had already taken 21,669 refugees. By 31 December, a phenomenal 92,950 people had already been transported out of Austria. By the end of the operation, a total of around 180,000 out of the 200,000 refugees in Austria and Yugoslavia had been transferred on boats, buses, trains and planes to 37 different countries.

Many states were reacting with tremendous pragmatism – tearing up their own immigration rules, or finding ways round them, in order to take as many people as fast as possible. Canada, for example, accepted some 38,000 people with minimal screening, and relaxed its ban on resettling people in the winter months.

**Top:** Hungarian refugees on board a train waiting to leave Osijek, in former Yugoslavia, in 1957; meanwhile (above) another group, bound for Switzerland, board their bus in Vienna.



## RESETTLEMENT OF HUNGARIANS FROM AUSTRIA AND YUGOSLAVIA, OCTOBER 1956 - JUNE 1959

It also took an entire university forestry department of some 500 students and teachers and set them up in British Columbia. The United States passed a special law which allowed it to take people on temporary visas, rather than go through the usual full, formal (and very time-consuming) process up front.

Australia raised its restrictions on taking elderly people, and Sweden actively looked for tuberculosis (TB) cases. Later, the other Scandinavian countries, as well as some other European states, also helped take the people who were suffering from TB or other similar disabilities (a group known as the “hard core,” who in normal times were extremely difficult to resettle). Helping the hardcore was one of Auguste Lindt’s priorities once he started as High Commissioner.

Sometimes the momentum wavered. Both Helmer and Lindt at various times gave states an extra push when they felt the sense of urgency starting to dip. Providing asylum, said Helmer at one such moment, wasn’t just a duty – it was “a matter of the heart.”

### CLOSING THE CAMPS

LINDT, FOR HIS PART, WAS DETERMINED THAT the Hungarians should not end up like the tens of thousands of hard-to-settle refugees left over from World War II who were still rotting in camps across Europe.

In an unpublished UNHCR interview in 1998, two years before his death, Lindt said that one of the things that had frustrated him most was “the horrible camps of the ‘old’ refugees. I knew that they existed, but to see as many as three generations of refugees [who] were still living in camps – that was terrible. To think of adults and children who had never lived a normal life.” Later, he announced to states “We must clear those camps!”

One of his proudest accomplishments was, indeed, that by the early 1960s none of the Hungarians were still in camps. They had either been resettled (180,000), integrated in Austria (some 7,900) or in Yugoslavia (675), or had repatriated voluntarily (11,273).

### BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

AND HE HAD GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO ENSURE that the repatriation was indeed voluntary in each and every case. In the process, he had befriended Tito – who had taken the very courageous step, for a communist leader, of accepting Hungarians fleeing a Soviet intervention – when they had a secret meeting on a Yugoslav island some time in 1957.

The conditions in the camps in Yugoslavia were far worse than in Austria – Lindt was particularly shocked by one of the camps Tito sent him to see. “Most of the refugees on the Adriatic [coast] were living quite com-

Principal source: UNHCR Progress Report to General Assembly, 14 Sept. 1959.

\* March 1958 figures from Louise Holborn, “Refugees: A Problem of Our Time,” p. 414-5.

† Elsewhere, a final figure of 38,000 is ascribed to Canada and 15,000 to Australia. Thousands of refugees moved on to a second resettlement country – in particular from European countries to North America.



ICM/HAT001/AUS-1958

posed. In 1963, the Hungarian government issued an amnesty that allowed many refugees to come home and visit relatives they had not seen for at least seven years.

UNHCR, and the international refugee protection system it is supposed to uphold, came out of the Hungarian refugee crisis greatly strengthened. The 'prima facie' notion was used again almost immediately for the benefit of some 200,000 Algerians who were fleeing into Tunisia and Morocco, and then became the basis of numerous operations elsewhere in the world over the following decades. The Hungarian operation also set a number of new operational standards that are still followed today – not least in the vital area of coordination.

"It was amazing," says Robert Quinlan – who played no small part himself, running a team of 44 people frantically processing overseas cases in the ballroom of a Viennese palace. "It was one of the great examples of burden-sharing. The secret of the Hungarian operation was this solidarity and cooperation."

Auguste Lindt was particularly pleased with the way the crisis helped open up the rest of the world to the refugee protection system, instead of confining it just to Europe. "I found it would be good for the UN," he said in 1998, at the age of 93, "and [Secretary-General Dag] Hammarskjöld agreed with me, that we step out of Europe – and the refugees can exist everywhere, and the High Commissioner will deal with all of this... It was a big step." ■

**Could this be the hoped-for visa?**

A photogenic refugee family awaits news of their resettlement in the summer of 1958.

fortably in former hotels. But Gerovo was different. It was located in the mountains, in an old camp once used by the Germans – completely isolated..." The refugees were very frustrated and complained to Lindt that they were being treated like prisoners. "It really was a terrible camp," he recalled, adding that he managed to get the rules relaxed at least to the extent that they could go for a walk outside the camp perimeter.

But on the resettlement front progress was rapid, and UNHCR was able to pronounce the Hungarian refugee problem in Yugoslavia completely "solved" by January 1958.

Lindt visited Gerovo one more time: "I was invited by the government to witness the departure of the last Hungarian refugees. It was extraordinary. Everybody was singing, the men were whistling, the women for the first time in months had curled their hair. It was a fantastic experience, incredibly joyous."

Lindt also quite quickly won round the new Hungarian regime, which agreed to most of the repatriation conditions he pro-

*The international refugee PROTECTION SYSTEM emerged from the Hungarian refugee crisis greatly STRENGTHENED.*

# Fifty Years On

Huge refugee crises – especially ones that happened a long time ago – tend to be described with a broad brush: 200,000 Hungarian refugees, 180,000 resettled to 37 countries. A dash of politics, some descriptive ‘colour’ to liven it up a bit.

But who were these people exactly, and where are they now? The story doesn’t stop once the resettled person steps off a ship and becomes a statistic.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, REFUGEES magazine decided to find some of the Hungarians who were resettled all over the world half a century ago and ask them about their experiences at the time and – in many ways more importantly – what has happened to them since.

Even though one of them insisted “Hungarians don’t like to travel,” we found Hungarians all over the planet.

Did they find the much-touted ‘durable solution?’ The answer (in these seven cases at least) was a resounding yes. All



seven – in their very different ways – have made a success of their lives: whether it has been by pioneering organic farming in Canada, or mending cars in Colombia; writing novels in Switzerland, or editing newspapers in Austria; working with computers in Wellington – or making computers work in Silicon Valley.

And perhaps the most striking thing about their experiences fleeing Hungary in 1956 is... how many of them are still occurring today: people paying smugglers to get them out, families being split, the loss of identity documents; children alternatively frightened and excited by new experiences (several interviewees mentioned how they had never seen a banana until they arrived in Austria); the physical hardships, the sense of loss – and the enormous difficulties involved in starting a new life, in a new language, in a new country.



## ANDREW GROVE

AGED 70 – CO-FOUNDER  
OF INTEL COMPUTER COMPANY,  
SAN FRANCISCO, US

**A**NDREW GROVE WAS BORN ANDRÁS GRÓF in Budapest in 1936, the only child of a Jewish couple who ran a dairy business.

In 1942, as World War II intensified all across Europe, Grove’s father was drafted into the army and sent to the Russian front. The following year, he was reported missing. After Germany invaded Hungary in 1944, Grove and his mother Maria went into hiding in the countryside, using false Serbian names to help them survive.

After the war, and Hungary’s “liberation” by the Soviet Union, life remained difficult. Jews still faced discrimination. In addition, his father, who returned emaciated but alive from the labour camps at the end of the war, was suspected of being a little too bourgeois by the communists.

On 23 October 1956, Grove – by then a 20-year-old chemistry student – joined his fellow students demonstrating in support of the Poles. In his autobiography “Swimming Across,” he describes his feelings: “After all the years of sullen, silent May Day marches, there was something magical about a large spontaneous demonstration. I kept looking round, soaking it all in, feeling that I was in a dream.”

Grove’s initial enthusiasm turned to apprehension and then downright fear when the Soviet army re-took Budapest by force in November. “It was quite dangerous to be a species on which there was open season in Budapest after the revolution,” he told REFUGEES. “Hor-



COURTESY ANDREW GROVE

rible things were happening for 10 years and the idea of being taken away in a truck was ominous. It became clear I needed to leave.”

As people everywhere were rounded up, he and a friend headed to the Austrian border by train, dodging police checkpoints, and buying directions from a smuggler. “I was petrified as I walked through dark fields never to return,” Grove says. He made it to the Austrian border

with two layers of clothes to protect him from the cold, his school briefcase and the equivalent of about \$20.

From Austria, Grove was taken by train to Germany before setting out for the United States under the sponsorship of the International Rescue Committee, one of the big American NGOs working on resettlement alongside UNHCR, the Red Cross and the Intergovernmental Committee on European Migration. “It was the place to go, the place of the future.”

In his autobiography, he recounts how the true enormity of what he had done hit him as the old troop-carrier on which he was travelling sailed past the famous White Cliffs of Dover: “The momentousness of everything suddenly hit me: leaving Hungary for the first time, seeing England. Each event by itself would have been unthinkable just a couple of weeks ago. Now they were happening in quick succession. I was overwhelmed.”

After a rough journey through mid-winter Atlantic storms, Grove arrived in New York in January 1957, and was initially placed in an old prisoner-of-war camp in New Jersey, before moving out to stay with some relatives.

Despite the inevitable difficulties, with language one of the largest obstacles, Grove felt accepted in his new country from the start. “I was not begrudged because of my nationality which was refreshing.”

Even though he has never been back to Hungary, Grove still remembers the things he missed most after he fled: “the immediate micro environment, the city, his college and opera friends, the street cafés, Hungarian espresso.

But worst of all, he had also left his parents behind. One of the driving forces during his first years in the US was his desire to find the money and means to bring his parents to the US. In 1962, a year before he received his Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of California at Berkeley, he managed to get them out of Hungary. His father got a job as a clerk, and his mother as a cashier/wrapper in a Californian department store.

After Berkeley, Grove joined Fairchild Semiconductor – pioneers of the integrated circuit. Then, in 1968, Grove and two other ex-Fairchild employees established their own company, Intel, which has subsequently become one of the most successful and influential companies of the computer age. Beginning as its operations manager, Grove has since served as the microprocessor giant’s president, CEO, chairman – and most recently as “Senior Advisor.” He has also written a number of books and become one of America’s leading theorists and teachers of business management.

“I didn’t get smarter crossing the border,” he says, but believes if he had remained in Hungary, it would have been next to impossible to achieve the success he has enjoyed in the United States. At best, he says, he might have become a productive chemist. “I am fortunate I got out and have been able to live in a country that accepted me and gave me the opportunity to achieve, and to build a first class technology company.”

Looking back 50 years after the Hungarian revolution, Grove told REFUGEES he is disheartened by the “generations and generations going through the same struggles.” He finds it deeply depressing to witness the successive waves of refugees and displaced people in the world as if they were “the multitudes of Hungarians replayed and repeated.”

Nevertheless, the life-story of one of those Hungarians, András Gróf, can act as an inspiration to refugees and immigrants everywhere. It is also a powerful antidote to the common view that refugees are a burden on their host society.

– Lilli Tnaib

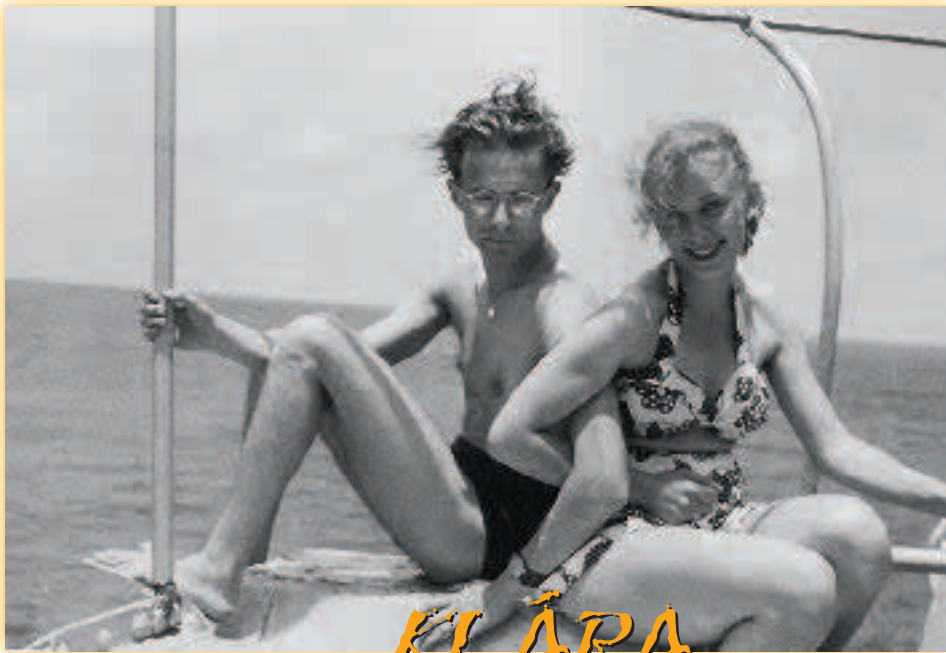


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**Left:** Andrew Grove with his parents in Hungary, in 1955, a year before the revolution.

**Below:** Grove recently retired from being Chairman of Intel Corporation.

*Grove finds it **DEPRESSING** to see the plight of the Hungarians **“REPLAYED AND REPEATED”** in subsequent waves of refugees elsewhere.*



PRIVATE COLLECTION, K. SZENTIRMAY

# KLÁRA SCHÉDA

AGED 69

RETIRED COUNSELLOR,  
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

**K**LÁRA SCHÉDA was 19 years old when she crossed into Austria with her fiancé Paul Szentirmay on Christmas Eve, 1956. She is now 69 years old, lives with her second husband in Wellington, New Zealand, and speaks English with a strong Hungarian accent.

She still vividly remembers the day their ship finally arrived in the harbour at Wellington. It was a Sunday. She was four months pregnant and they had had a rough five-week voyage from Holland. The Suez Canal was still closed because of the crisis in the Middle East, so they had been forced to take the much longer route via the Panama Canal.

"In New Zealand, nothing happened on a Sunday. Absolutely nothing." Including disembarking refugees from boats. "So we sat out in the harbour, and just looked at Wellington for one and a half days. It



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black list."

They set off for the border just before Christmas. "By that time, they were closing down the borders again. So we were just dressed as if we were going for a walk. I had my favourite handkerchief, my favourite poem and a handbag. And that was all."

They hired a smuggler. "Paul paid all the money we had on us – plus his camera – and for that he guided us across the border. Although we heard the dogs and the shooting, we actually managed to cross the line."

In Austria, they were placed in a student hostel in Graz, where Klára was told that since they were not married they would have to live in separate hostels.

"Then I said 'I'm engaged to Paul.' They said 'Well, we don't recognize engagements.' And so they were really nice – because they could see that I was not just bluffing. So they actually bought us the rings and I had a wedding in Graz. They even gave us a two-week honeymoon in a beautiful hotel."

They wanted to go to America, where a distant relative lived, but biology – and US resettlement policy – intervened. "I was young and naïve, so I became pregnant while we were in Graz. And America didn't want anybody who was married and pregnant. So we stayed there until about April, because nobody wanted us. And then there was South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

"In South Africa, they told us, Paul will have to supervise the black people with guns; but Paul will have the gun and the black people will work – and that didn't appeal to Paul all that much. Then Australia: they said it was full of snakes and things. That didn't appeal to me!

"New Zealand, they said, was everlasting spring and a beautiful country, and we believed it and we came to New Zealand." They lied about the weather? "Absolutely! Absolutely! Some places may have everlasting spring, but not Wellington!"

*It was terrible to be PREGNANT  
and have your first child  
in hospital, without having any  
knowledge of the LANGUAGE...  
I was so SCARED.*

Indeed, shortly after their arrival, it started to rain. "It rained for nine weeks. I'm not kidding. I was so depressed, I cried. I hated it."

Initially Paul got a job in a beer factory. And Klára worked in a button factory until shortly before giving birth to her daughter (also called Klára) "nine months and ten days after getting married in Graz."

"It was terrible to be pregnant and have your first child in hospital, without having any knowledge of the language or your mother to hold your hand. I was so scared."

Although Klára is deeply grateful to New Zealand for taking her in, the initial reception by the general population was not very promising: "They didn't like foreigners. The first English sentence I learned was "Bloody foreigner!" Honest. And I didn't know what I was saying. I had to look it up in the dictionary. They absolutely hated us."

Klára's second daughter was born in 1959. Partly because of her domestic situation, she lagged a long way behind Paul on learning English. "I was 21 years old, with two babies, not speaking the language. That was terrible – it really was." The first years were hard, but gradually things began to improve as they moved out of their hostel and into a large six-bedroom house, where they rented out rooms with full board to fellow Hungarians. "I washed and cooked for them, and ironed for them, and cleaned for them. I don't want any pity – but I had no washing machine, with two small children and nappies. And we had no hot water!"

She finally learnt English from a Russian woman, who spoke seven languages (but not Hungarian). They remain great friends to this day. Another stimulus was the fact that she loved reading and had exhausted the local stock of Hungarian books.

Paul became a librarian. Klára worked for a market research company for seven years, ending up as their Computer Input Manager (in the days when few people had ever seen a computer). She then spent nine years with IBM, until she was in her mid-forties when "I decided I'd had enough of figures and machines." After a short break, she started a new career as a counsellor to alcoholics and drug addicts.

She and Paul split up in the late 1970s, but remained good friends until he died. He became Hungary's first post-communist Consul, and was succeeded by their daughter Klára, who – as the current Honorary Consul – is very involved with the 50th anniversary of the Revolution that led to her being conceived in a student hostel in Graz. The younger Klára also runs a bilingual Hungarian/English newspaper.

"I do the cooking column in it," says her mother.

She lives in a house that she and Paul Szentirmay built after buying a plot of land (or 'section') with the help of the state. "It is in the old part of Wellington, and we have a little creek at the bottom of the section, and – oh, it's a dream! I have been living here since 1962, and I'm sure I'll only leave it in a box. I just love it here. I really do!"

– Rupert Colville

**Far left:** Klára and Paul Szentirmay during their voyage to New Zealand. A Dutch couple on the ship had lent them swimming costumes.

**Far left, below:** Klára feeds the birds in her garden in Wellington.



UNICEF/©. VALDINIESO / COL-2006

## FERENCZ GÁBOR

AGED 69

**GARAGE MECHANIC,  
BOGOTA, COLOMBIA**

earlier taken him from his native Hungary to Italy via Austria. He knew nothing then of the country that would become his home for the rest of his life.

"Before I arrived here, I had never heard of Colombia," he remembers today in his small house in the south of Bogota. "When they asked me if I wanted to live in Ecuador, Venezuela, Brazil or Colombia, I liked the sound of the name Colombia and I thought it would be hot here. They also said I could go to Canada, but I didn't like the idea because of the cold. The winters in Hungary were very, very cold."

The youngest of three brothers, Ferencz Gábor had lived with his family in the small town of Győr, not far from the Austrian border. When the Hungarian Uprising began in October 1956, Gábor – who was a member of the local Youth Movement – took part in the protests against the Communist regime and demonstrated in front of the secret police headquarters in Győr.

By the beginning of November, the revolution had spread all over Hungary. To this day, Gábor remembers the subsequent scenes of violence against the protesters as the most terrible moments he has ever had to live through.

"The soldiers opened fire. Then they came after us with sticks," he says. "There was blood everywhere and many wounded people – including girls and pregnant women. I helped those whom I could. After that,

**Left:** Ferencz Gábor, a demonstrator during the 1956 uprising, at his home in Bogota.

**F**ERENCZ GÁBOR was 21 when he arrived in the Colombian capital, Bogota, in December 1957 – the last stop on a year-long odyssey that had



they came after me. I hid with a friend and left town at three in the morning because I knew they were looking for me.”

Initially, Gábor took refuge in a small village on the Austrian side of the border where he stayed with other Hungarians in a makeshift camp. A few weeks later, he moved on to Vienna before heading south to Italy, where he spent a year in Rome. He has fond memories of his time in Italy, the proudest of which is of the day when he and other Hungarian refugees were received by Pope Pius XII.

**Resettled refugees** in New Zealand listen to a fellow Hungarian playing the violin in a Wellington club in the late 1950s



PRIVATE COLLECTION, K. SZENTIRMAI

“He gave us his blessing and thanked us for our courage,” he remembers.

In all, ten mainland Latin American countries received Hungarian refugees – ranging from more than a thousand in both Brazil and Argentina to the single person who went to Ecuador.

Gábor remembers being offered a place in Australia and Canada, but deciding instead to become one of the 220 Hungarians who ended up in Colombia, where he

arrived in December 1957. He can still remember his first day in Bogota.

“We were ten families and two other single men from Hungary,” he says. “The bus left us at the corner of 8th and 9th Streets. I was surprised that Bogota was not as hot as I had imagined. However, it wasn’t as cold as Hungary. The first thing I did was look for work. It was not easy because I spoke no Spanish – but I did speak Italian, more or less. They understood what I was saying but I did not understand them.”

A trained mechanic, he found work in garages and factories and even tried running his own car-repair shop for a while. Life in Colombia has not always been easy, he says, and there were many times when the money stretched no further than one meal a day. Two years ago, UNHCR – which still assists several elderly Hungarians in Colombia – gave Gábor’s wife a sewing-machine with which she is now making clothes for sale.

But economic hardship has not been the worst aspect of his life in exile. Fifty years later, the emotional anguish of losing all ties with country and family still reverberates.

“My mother almost died of pain when I left,” Gábor says. “I was her youngest child. She died ten years after I arrived in Colombia

and my brothers blamed me for it – they said I had broken her heart. But what could I have done? I could not have gone back. One of my companions went back a few years after the revolution, and they killed him. A few years later my father died, and then in 1982 my eldest brother died in a Communist jail.”

Ferencz Gábor has not been back to Hungary since he left half a century ago, and has never seen his family again. Married to a Colombian woman, Rosalba Silva, he has a daughter who lives in Cali and two grandchildren who are now the centre of his life.

“I miss my country a lot,” he says. “But to go back? Maybe for a visit – I would like that one day. But to live there? No. I am an old man now, almost seventy. They welcomed me here, thank God, and this is my home.”

– Gustavo Valdivieso & Marie-Hélène Verney

*My mother died ten years after I arrived in COLOMBIA and my brothers BLAMED me for it – they said I had BROKEN HER HEART.*



# AGOTA KRISTOF

AGED 71 – NOVELIST,  
NEUCHÂTEL, SWITZERLAND

**A**GOTA KRISTOF was 21 when the Hungarian uprising started. She lived in Készeg, a small town near the Austrian border. Her husband, who was a history teacher, went to Budapest to join in the demonstrations. His wife had no choice but to stay at home and take care of their four-month-old daughter.

“It was quite violent – especially against the Soviets. We were chanting ‘Go home!’” Kristof recalls. After the Soviet army re-entered Hungary, the situation deteriorated. “There were tanks at every corner ... nobody dared go out.”

Her husband was summoned to the Communist party headquarters, together with two of his colleagues, and ordered to help calm down the situation. They refused and were arrested. However, because the prisons were overcrowded, they were soon released.

One of her husband’s colleagues subsequently committed suicide by throwing himself under a train. The other was sentenced to two years in jail. At the end of November, her husband decided they would have to leave the country.

Their smuggler – a man called József – was a childhood friend. They handed over all their savings, as did the ten other people in their group. “People who were about to leave Hungary gave him all the money they had, since it was worth nothing in Austria,” explains Kristof.

After walking through a forest for two hours, they reached Austria. Kristof believes that the authorities

were “satisfied that we were leaving. To them, we were the scum of the earth. The Soviet guards couldn’t care less – the smuggler knew them quiet well and got them drunk.”

They were found by an Austrian border guard and taken to a small village which was already packed with Hungarian refugees. Then they were transported by bus to Vienna, where they were housed in a military barracks and slept on “straw mattresses on the floor... around twenty people in a single room.”

It was the first time she had travelled abroad and they were utterly destitute, as they had been unable to bring any belongings apart from diapers for the baby and some dictionaries. They were to-

tally dependent on external assistance. Like everyone else, they needed to move on from Austria, and so her husband started looking desperately for a new country that would take them.

On 8 December 1956, they arrived in Switzerland with other Hungarian refugees aboard a special train. Initially they were lodged in more military-style barracks, but bit by bit they began to get their life in order.

Those who were willing to study were first of all sent to Zurich, and then parcelled out to various other Swiss cities. Agota Kristof began her new existence in Neuchâtel, near the border with France. But, for the second time in her life, she had missed an opportunity to study.

On the first occasion it was the Soviet tanks, and her husband’s fear of ending up in a jail, that had prevented her from taking a degree in literature at the University of Budapest. The second time, her husband had again stood in her way. “I missed going to university because of him,” she says. He spoke both French and German, and handled all the family’s official business. He was much older than her, and more available, since she had to look after their baby. Their exile was accentuating the unbalanced nature of their relationship.

He signed up to study biology, while she took a job in a watch-making factory to feed the family. Despite the hard work, she smiles at the memory of her former colleagues: “They were really, really welcoming. I had many girlfriends.”

Kristof, who already knew some French, obtained a grant from the city of Neuchâtel to take some language courses. At the factory, she took up writing again and jotted down notes which she copied out neatly at home in the evening.

She divorced her first husband, and then in 1963 married a Swiss photographer, with whom she had two more children. Although she enjoyed looking after her

**Left:** Agota Kristof in Készeg, Hungary, in the late 1940s.

**Below:** In her fifties, Kristof became a successful novelist.



BNS, BERNE © VÉRONIQUE BOTTEON

Even when I wrote in  
**HUNGARIAN**, I was  
pretty **DARK**.  
Crossing the border just  
made everything **WORSE**.

family, her new life – in the countryside – did not bring her happiness. She had no means of transport, and as a result felt deeply isolated. It also meant she had little opportunity to carve out a career.

She began writing more and more. “I used to write a lot before, but by that time I had started to write in the evening, when the children were asleep... to begin with, in Hungarian. Then, gradually, I began writing in French.”

In 1968, she returned to Hungary for the first time. The situation was tense because of the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. “I was happy to see my relatives... but I had no wish to stay any more,” she says. One experience in particular came as a shock to her: “I did not recognize my younger brother.”

She divorced her second husband as well, but her artistic career was taking off. She wrote plays for the theatre and for radio. More importantly, she was also writing novels, including a trilogy – *Le Grand Cahier*, *La Preuve* and *Le Troisième Mensonge* – which was published between 1986 and 1991 to international acclaim.

Her exile has shaped her writing in a number of ways. Firstly, it complicated her development: “I lost about 15 years of writing,” she says. But the distance from her homeland also deeply influenced the themes and style of her work.

The darkness of her prose, the violent and harsh scenes depicted in some of her texts, are “to a significant degree, inspired by real events.” But they are also, she admits, part of her character and not just products of her experience. “Even when I wrote in Hungarian, I was pretty dark... it was in me already. Crossing the border just made everything worse.”

In the early years, suicides were common among the Hungarian refugees. After the excitement of the uprising, the exiles were faced with the collapse of their dreams, and the monotony of daily life: “There was a really deep feeling of loneliness. And the language, and the work we were offered... it was really hard,” explains Kristof. She sums up those feelings in a sentence typical of her simple, direct prose-style: “If it was for this, then it was not worth it... I will always regret it. I would have preferred to stay.”

Despite her success, and the awards that have come with it – including the 1987 *Prix du Livre Européen*, Agota Kristof still feels bitter about the way her career developed: “It came too late... I was 50 when I published my first book in French.” More than three decades had passed since she first took up writing in Hungary, at the age of 13. It all took too long.

– Cécile Pouilly



## FRANK ANDRASI

**AGED 58 – ORGANIC FARMER  
AND ENTREPRENEUR,  
QUEBEC, CANADA**

**F**RANK ANDRASI left his childhood home in Baja – a small town about 35 kilometres from Hungary’s border with Yugoslavia – just after Christmas, 1956. He was eight years old.



COURTESY F. ANDRASI

While neither of Andrasi's parents was a political activist, there were still reasons to fear targeted retribution as well as the casual depredations of the advancing troops. "My mother was quite a rabble-rouser. I heard that she threatened to slash her wrists if they made her carry the red flag on May Day. There was always somebody's uncle or somebody's cousin who badmouthed the regime as I was growing up, and they were disappeared."

Andrasi has vivid memories of the night they crossed the border. "I was woken up in the middle of the night, and with a tractor they drove our two big suitcases and ourselves sitting on the wagon and left us in the middle of nowhere. My father was quite white in the face. I was told to be quiet. The moon had come out and the fields were covered with snow. Subsequently I found out that we had walked through a minefield separating Hungary from Yugoslavia."

His father had been in the army detachment that had laid down the mines three years earlier. "It was difficult for him to orient himself with the snow, and with trees that used to be there - that were no longer there. I realized later that taking his family into the

minefield was a very, very stressful event for him."

The family spent a year in Yugoslavia, moved by the authorities from place to place in trains, sometimes even crammed into cattle trucks. They never quite knew why they were moving or where they would end up next.

"Sometimes the places where we stayed - in retrospect - were beautiful, like fairyland hunting castles," he recalls. "Of course with no plumbing, no heating. Sometimes we were housed in military-style barracks or in unheated, flimsy buildings on the shores

of beautiful, beautiful, little lakes where you could skip a stone half a kilometre. As a little kid, I had a grand old time!"

His parents did not.

"The food was really, really difficult. I realize that my mother - even though she was pregnant - and my father would share theirs with me because I was always hungry. They were having the hardest of times. The space between the floor and the door in these beautiful little cottages was enough sometimes to allow a cat to come in, so the winds blowing off the hills caused us a great deal of distress. I remember guards shooting a wolf that walked into the corridors of one of the building complexes."

His mother suffered a nervous breakdown around the time his younger sister was born in November 1957. "We were confident she was going to be born in Australia, because that was the word that was on my parents' lips: 'Australia, Australia.'" Instead, she was born somewhere - neither he, nor she, knows precisely where - on the banks of the Danube, the great trans-European river that also flowed close to Andrasi's home in Baja.

As far as Andrasi can remember all their dealings were with the Yugoslav authorities, never with aid agencies. "The biggest frustration was that we could never speak to the United Nations personnel who were accepting refugees." By the time they were able to discuss destinations, "Australia was booked solid. So Canada became our new destination."

In December 1957, almost a year after they first arrived in Yugoslavia, they went by train to Italy "where we waited for our papers to be completed before we got on the steam ship." Despite the difficulties, nine-year-old Andrasi was having the time of his life.

Things got even better once they boarded the cruise ship *Vulcania*: "Wow! The food! The banquet hall - I had never seen such luxury in my life. I could order ice cream, or anything. I just loved it! My parents of course were seasick, throwing up all over the place. Ten days

**Left:** Frank Andrasi, aged seven and a half, on the day of his First Communion. **Below:** With his wife Maria in Quebec.



COURTESY F. ANDRASI

*The MOON had come out  
and the fields were covered with  
SNOW. Subsequently I found  
out we had walked through a  
MINEFIELD.*

in the winter time in the North Atlantic...I'm sure there are better times to take that voyage, but I was absolutely enthralled."

Most of the passengers on the *Vulcania* were emigrating Italians. "My wife, whom I met almost ten years later, actually came across on the same ship, except about six months before. She was an Italian immigrant."

After disembarking in Halifax, they briefly lodged with a family before moving to an isolated village by a big steel mill. Later, they moved again, to Montreal in the province of Quebec, as Frank's father looked for work. The family was only just getting by: "One of my memories is that my father walked to work for a month so that he could buy me this red school bag that caught my fancy. He saved the money for the bus fare and walked three miles both ways. I was very touched."

When he was only 19, Andrasi married the 18-year-old Maria di Genova. "I graduated in psychology, worked in Montreal as a social worker – and then I went nuts and bought a farm with my wife and some friends, and we became pioneers in growing organic food."

When he first moved on to the farm in Acton Vale, 100 km east of Montreal, the neighbours looked askance at the young urban Hungarian refugee with his Italian immigrant wife, practising funny organic farming habits that in those days were still very much associated with hippies and radical vegetarians. "The locals were scratching their heads for a long time, until they started to see vans coming and loading up at the farm. And then when I got a better car than they did,

they started to think 'Oh, maybe organics are not such a bad thing.'"

Since then, organic farming has moved on a long way. Andrasi and the other pioneers – including his business partner, a fellow Hungarian refugee called John Herr – were to some extent making up the rules as they went along. "The first organic certification system was born in my living room. We sat down, about a dozen of us. We were all defining and laying down the standards for the next generation."

As well as spending many years working on organic certification issues, Andrasi has branched out in other areas: he set up one of the first distributing companies for organic meats in Canada. Part of the farm is now given over to the cultivation of medicinal herbs, and recently there was a brief flirtation with "Kosher organic poultry."

He believes that the dramatic mental shifts he and his wife were forced to make as a result of changing countries, cultures and languages "have perhaps made us more sophisticated – we had to try harder than the locals in order to blend in."

"Ironically, we regularly hire the latest wave of immigrants – mostly from Central and South America... and when I tell them that 'Me too, I'm an immigrant!' they say 'Nooo!' And I say 'Look at your children. In ten years, in 20 years, your children are going to have farms like this and they're going to hire immigrants... and they still don't believe me!'"

– Rupert Colville



# PETER MARTOS

AGED 58

NEWSPAPER EDITOR,  
VIENNA, AUSTRIA

ACTUALLY we wanted to stay in Hungary, until my father somehow found out that my brother was quite likely to be arrested. So we decided to flee, together with a neighbour who knew the border fairly well. We set off on 30 December 1956. We drove to a village near the frontier with Austria, and crossed the border on foot after dark on New Year's Eve.

"Unfortunately we got lost and walked around for hours in the snow and the cold. Then we could see spotlights, and heard dogs barking – all the adventures a child could wish for. I found it all very enjoyable – my parents probably less so.

"I stepped on a trip-wire that set off an alarm in some distant guard-house. Luckily we weren't caught. Eventually, as we were lost, we lay down next to a silo and fell asleep. As dawn was breaking, someone shone a flash light in our eyes, blinding us. Fortunately it was a member of an Austrian border patrol: we had, it transpired, already crossed over into Austria.

"At that time, being a refugee meant being welcome in Austria. Without reservations.

"When someone first arrived, he got something warm to eat, was then taken to the authorities and to the village school. He was fed, his personal details were

registered and then he was transported to one of the refugee camps – whichever had room.

“After a short while, once the official formalities had been completed, you got this blue passport, the Nansen Passport – in accordance with the UN Refugee Convention – and you were a recognized refugee. In some cases, it only took three or four days. For others, maybe a few weeks.

“The four of us, plus the neighbour – so, the five of us – had only two suitcases and a big backpack. That was all we managed to bring.

“The grown-ups were able to do some sort of work during the final period in the refugee camp. We received

whose only ‘crime’ had been to flee, and who – in the opinion of the Hungarian state – hadn’t committed any other wrongdoing.

“Emotionally, it was a very different matter. I had thought I’d go back there and look at everything with a certain amount of anger. Instead, I became very nostalgic and broke into tears three or four times. I went to see the house we had lived in, and found everything had advanced at least three generations. In 1956, this was a Stalinist country, well developed in heavy industry, but otherwise totally backward. Austria was a paradise by comparison. And now in 1971, Austria was of course more developed. Nevertheless, the changes



**Learning the language –** like these young Hungarians in Austria in 1958 – is key to refugees’ swift and successful integration in their asylum country.

assistance, including an apartment through the joint efforts of a US relief organization and Caritas Austria. We also received some initial financial aid – a small amount – and after that you just had to work.

“Shortly after the following Christmas – at the beginning of January 1958 – they said ‘He should go to school, that is where he’ll learn the fastest.’

“I didn’t get a report card at the end of the first semester. But at the end of the year, I got a normal report card – with the exception of German, which was blank. That was in third grade. In fourth grade, I was just like any other pupil – by then I could already speak German quite well.

“During the early years, there was hardly any contact with home. Gradually, during the early Sixties, everything began to relax. In 1963, an amnesty was passed for all people

that had taken place in Hungary greatly exceeded my expectations.

“Most Austrians welcomed us in an open and friendly manner. The more other nationalities started coming to Vienna, the more I got the impression that the Hungarians received preferential treatment – were greeted with particular friendliness. As a native Hungarian,

*At that time, being a  
REFUGEE meant being  
WELCOME in Austria.  
Without RESERVATIONS.*

I was treated very well in Austria. Something that cannot always be said of people of other backgrounds.

“Thus, if a theoretical study existed as to why people sometimes accept foreigners and sometimes do not... I think if you are doing badly yourself, you are willing to take in a foreigner more readily than if you think you have a lot to lose. In other words, prosperity acts as a brake on asylum policy.

“I don’t know how I should describe myself. Various labels are valid. I am someone who was born a

Hungarian – and became an Austrian. I’m a Hungarian Viennese. But I’m not a Hungarian living in Vienna. And I am also not a former Hungarian, who is now an Austrian.

“I am both. Thus, I haven’t so much assimilated, as integrated myself.”

– Interviewed by Roland Schoenbauer

PETER MARTOS is now a senior editor at the Austrian daily newspaper “Die Presse.”



COURTESY P. FRANKL

# PETER FRANKL

**AGED 53 – MATHEMATICIAN  
AND JUGGLER, TOKYO, JAPAN**

PETER FRANKL was three years old when the Hungarian uprising took place – and he was one of those who did not leave immediately. In fact, he did not become a refugee until a further 23 years had gone by.

“My father and mother were thinking about going,” he says, “but finally they didn’t have enough courage to do it – also they had two small children. My uncle did leave in 1956 with his family and ended up in England as a dentist. His son was 18 years old and participated in the revolution, so there was some danger he might be persecuted.”

As Hungarian Jews, Frankl’s family had already suffered a great deal prior to 1956. “My mother was one of the few survivors of Auschwitz,” he says. “Her parents and her sister all died there.”

Frankl’s father was director of a large hospital. However, at around the time Frankl was born, he was stripped of his post and forced to spend a few months in the army, after it was reported that he had insulted one of the Communist party leaders. He was later rehabilitated, but in a lesser post as head of the dermatology department.

At the age of six, Frankl started to learn German as well as Hungarian, beginning a life-long fascination – and facility – with languages. At school, Russian was on the agenda, and by his mid-twenties he spoke Hungarian, German, French, English, Russian “and pretty good Swedish and Polish.”

The Swedish happened more or less by accident: “I was 17 or so. In Hungary you had the impression Sweden is somehow the freest country in the world. And there were all those beautiful, blonde Swedish girls. It was almost kind of a joke: I was speaking with a friend. I told him I wanted to learn Spanish – and he said why don’t you study Swedish?”

But the languages were merely a hobby. Frankl’s field of study was mathematics, and in 1975, at the age of 22, he received a scholarship to go to Paris, where he stayed for seven months. The experience both broadened his horizons and left him feeling trapped. In order to go anywhere other than France – to the UK to see his exiled uncle, or to visit Italy on his way back to

Hungary – he had to have a letter from the Hungarian Embassy, which they refused to give him.

While in Paris, some fellow mathematicians who were impressed by his work offered to help him stay on, but he feared that if he failed to return to Hungary, his father would lose his job again.

Three years later, with his father now retired, another opportunity arose when Frankl was allowed out of Hungary to attend a conference in Montreal. With the help of some friends from his Paris days, he travelled on to France where they had found him a position with the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS).

After arriving in France on a tourist visa in 1979, Frankl went to a police station and requested asylum. He was then directed to the UNHCR office in Paris. After three months in limbo – “the three most difficult months in my life” – he was granted refugee status. Even though he had a job with one of the most prestigious government research institutes, until he was recognized as a refugee he could not get a work permit or receive his salary.

Once recognized, Frankl’s life changed dramatically for the better. “The best thing was that I was free. You could go wherever you wanted. The only thing important for [the CNRS] was that you should do your research and publish some papers.”

Frankl started to pick up invitations to travel to universities and institutes all across the world. England, Germany, Canada, Stockholm – where he was able to practise his Swedish – and the US. With his refugee passport, travelling to Western Europe or North America was relatively straightforward. But elsewhere, visas were much more problematic. “For India, I had to wait three months. For Japan, each time I came I had to have a special invitation letter.” It wasn’t until he acquired French citizenship seven years later that the visa problem was finally solved.

The languages were still stacking up. A three-month stint at the University of Tokyo in 1982, was to sow the seeds of another momentous change in Frankl’s peripatetic existence. He took to Japan. “I liked this country, because I decided this was the place where the people were friendliest to me. At the time there were very few westerners living in Japan, so I was a kind of curiosity.”

He finally settled there in 1988. In 1992 – by now fluent in Japanese – Frankl published the story of his life so far. “Notes of a Wandering Mathematician” sold around 50,000 copies. In its wake, Frankl appeared on numerous TV programmes, and became something of a celebrity.

Another important element in the unusual persona that he was carving out for himself in Japan, was a skill he had picked up when he was still a youth in Hungary – the ability to juggle.

He started to juggle in the street, and



also campaigned on behalf of other Japanese street entertainers. He even made juggling part of his university lecture routine. “If I see the people are a little tired, I just take out some objects and juggle for about five minutes.”

His mathematical, linguistic and juggling skills cemented their relationship in the form of an educational TV programme, called “Mathematica,” that Frankl presented between 1998 and 2004.

“It was for school children, so there was some juggling and some funny things incorporated in the programme. Maths is not very visual, but somehow we made it quite popular.”

Since the programme ended, he has not been idle: “I give lectures all around the country, about all sorts of subjects: how to study maths, how to study languages, about human rights.”

Frankl has added Spanish, Chinese and Korean to his collection. Eleven languages in all. And he is the author of 25 books.

Peter Frankl, Hungarian refugee and French economic migrant in Japan, remains a little restless: “I’m still travelling a lot – recently I went to Gabon, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos...”

– Rupert Colville

**Far left:** Peter Frankl with his mother, two years before the Hungarian Revolution.

**Above:** Frankl, later in life, performing on the streets of Japan.

*Peter Frankl, HUNGARIAN refugee and French ECONOMIC MIGRANT in Japan, remains a little RESTLESS.*



# Solving the Global

BY ANGELINA JOLIE

**O**NLY HALF A CENTURY AGO – a blink of the eye in human history – there were at least 40 million refugees and displaced people in Europe: the product of Hitler’s Germany, Franco’s Spain, Mussolini’s Italy, and, later of the colonels’ regime in Greece, and the Soviet subjugation of Central Europe, including Hungary.

These countries are all now member states of the European Union, and it is almost inconceivable they would produce refugees today. So inconceivable, that their citizens have the luxury of forgetting what it was like to be governed by a tyrannical regime, or to be tortured for your political beliefs.

In America, Martin Luther King had to be assassinated before racial equality became anything like a reality.

Earlier this year, *REFUGEES* magazine (No. 142) carried a photograph that seems to me in many ways to sum up this amnesia about a thousand years of warfare, tyranny and repression. It shows a couple, in bikini and swimming trunks, sitting contentedly on their towels under an umbrella on the beach. There is only one other person visible on the beach. He is black and he is dead – an immigrant or a refugee, sprawled across the sand at the high-water mark. We’ll never know who he was or why he ended up there, and the couple on the beach apparently couldn’t care less.

It is a pretty sad picture. Sad for the anonymous man whose corpse washed up, like so many others, on a Mediterranean coast a few years ago. Sad for the couple, sitting under the umbrella with their picnic box and suntan oil, that they can’t see the stark reality lying a few yards further up the beach. Someone’s son, someone’s brother, or someone’s loved one. In fact you, or me, if we had been born at another time, or in another place.

## THE MEANS TO ACT

THE UN REFUGEE AGENCY, UNHCR, for which I act as a goodwill ambassador,



Angelina Jolie travelling with a group of newly arrived Congolese refugees in Tanzania.

has an annual budget of around US\$1.2 billion. That sounds like a lot of money, but there are dozens of companies that make profits many times that amount each year. UNHCR has a constant struggle to get its US\$1.2 billion, which it uses to help and protect some 20 million people.

As the year progresses, UNHCR invariably has to cut more and more projects

affecting the world’s most disadvantaged people. It tries to avoid cutting the projects for the most vulnerable – the refugee women projects, the education projects, and the HIV/AIDS projects in refugee camps. But sometimes even these are affected directly – and they are almost always affected indirectly: not enough staff, not enough secondary education and even not enough food

# Refugee Crisis



catalogued deaths of people trying to get into Europe over the past decade or so and that is probably far short of the real total. Many have also died trying to get to the US and Australia. But we don't notice. We are simply affronted by their audacity. How dare they try to eat at our table? How dare they come to build our roads, clean our hospitals and office blocks, wash the dishes in our restaurants and make the beds in our hotels?

“It is a scandal, in such a **rich world**, that we are not even finding a way to help **feed refugee families properly.**”

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres put it very succinctly recently. He said that the special status of refugees – people fleeing persecution or war – is being jeopardized by the battle over whether or not we want economic migrants.

## HOW WE ARE FAILING

THOSE OF US WHO ARE STILL WELL-disposed towards refugees, and are shocked to see them turned into hate figures in order to win elections or sell newspapers, are failing. We don't want uncontrolled movements of people across our borders, but we are not prepared to invest financially or politically – or even emotionally – in finding solutions in the regions they come from. We will put band aids over the most gaping wounds, because they look a bit ugly. But we won't pay for a full cure, and we won't invest much effort in prevention either.

Of course, solutions are not easy.

in some refugee camps, especially in Africa. It is a scandal, really, in such a rich world, that we are not even finding a way to help feed these families properly.

We are then scandalized when they show the audacity to try to enter our territory – to travel in search of a future. In the process, they mingle with economic migrants who are also on the move. They

fall into the hands of smugglers, who push them into overcrowded boats or hide them in the backs of containers, or tell them to walk across minefields or scale barbed-wire fences in the middle of the night. Lots of them die and are buried anonymously, like that man on the beach in the Mediterranean.

There have been more than 7,000

“Individually or collectively we do in fact have the power and means to make a difference.”

However, the transformation of Europe from being the fulcrum of the two most destructive wars the planet has ever seen into a 25-member club whose members cannot even conceive of going to war with each

other should give us some clues as to what would alleviate the world’s refugee and migration problems.

**MORE MARSHALL PLANS PLEASE**

REFUGEES ARE THE VISIBLE symptom of our failure to produce more Marshall Plans – but they are relatively easy to deal with. What’s needed are: more resources invested in the regions the refugees first move to, so they don’t feel they have to move on unless they really want to; and more resources for countries where peace has been established. The first years are incredibly fragile, and returning refugees need help to get them-

selves back on their feet. They don’t need much, just enough to allow them to help themselves.

Agencies like UNHCR should really not have to struggle to scrape a few tens of millions of dollars together to help rebuild shattered nations – like Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia and South Sudan. A quick and efficient rebuilding of a war-torn nation helps anchor the peace in firmer soil and brings amazing dividends in terms of regional stability and economic prosperity that are to everyone’s advantage.

Ignoring simmering conflicts is equally damaging and hugely expensive. Think Bosnia, think Rwanda, think Afghanistan, where more investment and more thoughtful international politics in the 1980s and

*This article first appeared in Global Agenda, the*



UNHCR/T. MAKEEVA/RUS-2003

# Angelina Jolie joins UNHCR’s

*And invites you to join too.*

**This autumn, Angelina Jolie is launching UNHCR’s new Emergency Response Team initiative.** She has also become the first signed-up supporter of the ERTeam – as it is known for short – and urged others to join up as well.

“I have had the privilege to meet and work alongside UNHCR staff in some of the most remote and inhospitable areas of the world,” said Ms. Jolie, who has visited more than 20 countries, from Sri Lanka to Sierra Leone, in support of her role as UNHCR’s Goodwill Ambassador. “The dedication and commitment of these colleagues day in and day out to help refugees is an inspiration.”

When people have fled their homes, and are destitute, hungry and vulnerable, they need help rapidly. UNHCR’s Emergency Response Teams are on stand-by round the clock to respond to any major refugee crisis, anywhere in the world. Within hours, planes are loaded with vital supplies, and highly trained members of the ERTeam jump aboard, armed with expertise that can save countless lives. They are often one of the first on the scene – for



example during the tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake, as well as in huge refugee crises such as Rwanda and Afghanistan.

**IT’S VITAL TO BE PREPARED**

Emergency Response Team members have to hit the ground running, often in extremely stressful and chaotic situations. That is why, when they volunteer to go on standby for the ERTeam, these already experienced staff have to undergo nine days of intensive training in practical skills such as camp design and management, telecommunications, off-road

driving and first aid. They are also trained how to handle a wide range of security issues, including dealing with armed militias, and how to react if you are held up at gunpoint or even kidnapped or taken hostage.

The course, which takes around 40 people from across the world, is held three times a year. By the time they have completed it they are physically and mentally prepared to face some of the toughest and most challenging situations in the world.

Over the past two years alone, teams have been deployed in

the early 1990s might have changed the course of history for all of us. Osama Bin Laden thrived on our neglect of Afghanistan. Things are looking better in all these countries now, but at what a cost, and how many millions of refugees to show us where we went wrong? Not to mention more than two million dead in those three countries alone.

I have been to some of these countries, or to their neighbours, where most of the refugees remain. It is a truly humbling experience, a shocking eye-opener. It has made me realize that we are all – myself included – behaving like the couple sitting under their umbrella on the beach, gazing studiously out to sea.

Yet individually or collectively we do in fact have the power and the means to make

a difference. I believe we are all looking for the same thing – a stable world, a stable economy and the ability to progress as people and as nations. We want a better future. We do not want to continue to repeat the mistakes of the past.

*ANGELINA JOLIE is an Academy Award and Golden Globe-winning actress and has been a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador since August 2001.*

Pakistan, 2005.



UNHCR/AL REDDEN/PAC/2005

magazine of the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

# Emergency Response Team



Chad, 2004.

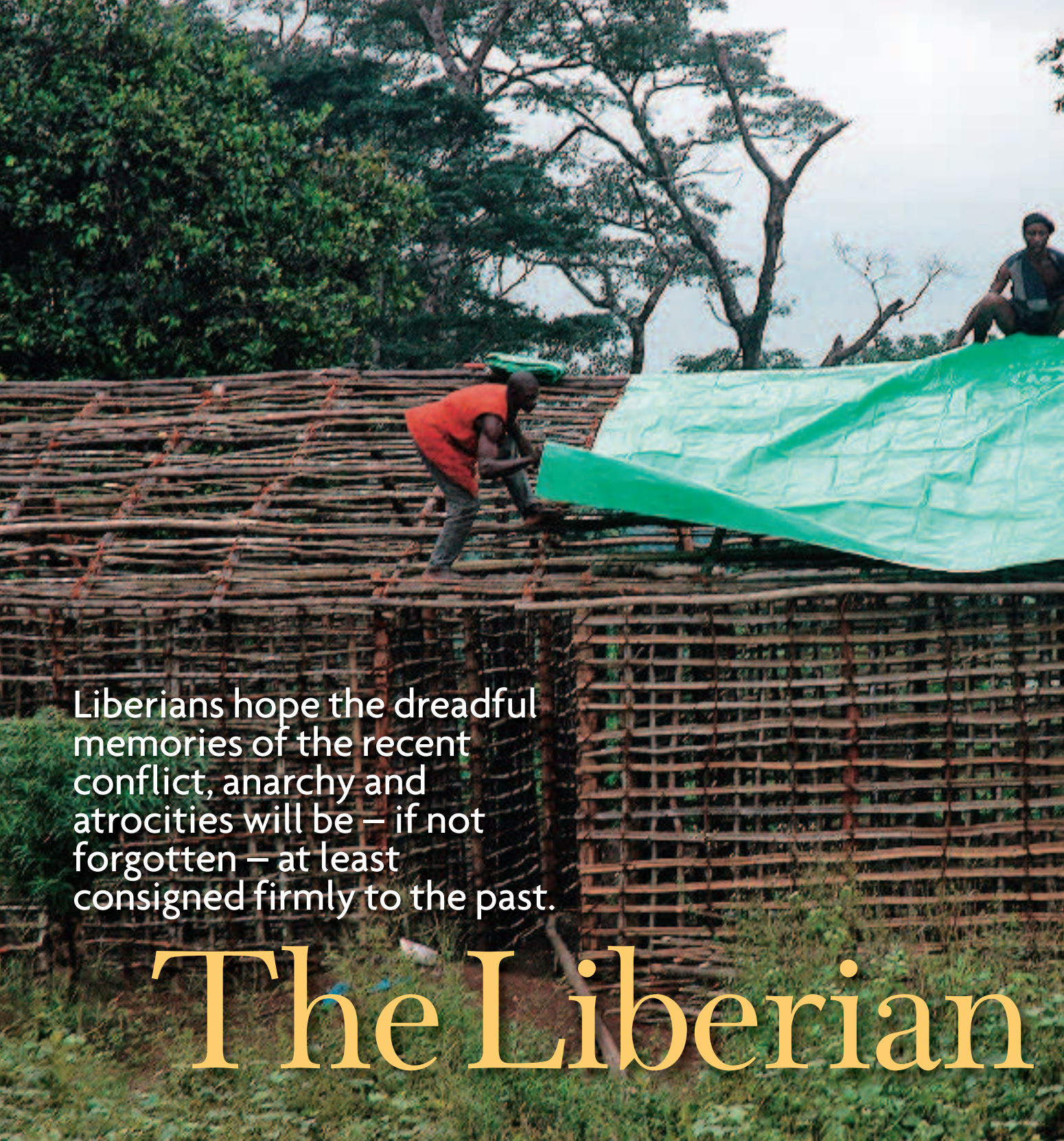
UNHCR/E. PARSONS/7CD/2004

more than 20 situations, including Darfur and Chad, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, East Timor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Indonesia's Aceh province after it had been devastated by the tsunami. Most recently, UNHCR ERTeams have been deployed to help hundreds of thousands of displaced Lebanese, both inside their home country and across the border in Syria.

Would you like to stand alongside UNHCR's staff, to make sure they have the training, equipment and supplies they need?

Angelina Jolie has been quick to lend her support to this important Emergency Response Team operation as its first supporting member behind the frontline. You too can sign up online at [www.erteam.unhcr.org](http://www.erteam.unhcr.org), thereby helping to bring swift and vital aid to refugees whose communities have been devastated by war, persecution and disaster.

*“Join me today in standing alongside the Emergency Response Team” – Angelina Jolie*



Liberians hope the dreadful memories of the recent conflict, anarchy and atrocities will be – if not forgotten – at least consigned firmly to the past.

# The Liberian

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BY ANNETTE REHRL

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**W**HEN, IN 2002, armed rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) group swept down from northern Lofa County like a hurricane, leaving in their wake a trail of death, violence and

massive destruction, the citizens of Boiwen decided enough was enough.

Initially the men in this village in southwestern Bomi County had elected to hide in the bush until the rampaging torrent of drugged, savage youth had passed through the village, burning, looting and raping every female in their path

in their usual way.

However, the villagers soon changed their minds, realizing they had no effective way of staving off the pending social cataclysm that was approaching their community.

Instead, they decided to send the old people, women and children on ahead to



# Dream

Wilson Corner camp. Most of the men followed soon afterwards, leaving behind only a handful of very brave people to take care of their huts and fields in and around Boiwen.

Tens of thousands of other equally – and justifiably – scared Liberians fled towards Monrovia between 1999 and 2003, to seek

refuge in one of the 35 camps and spontaneous settlements for internally displaced people (IDPs) that had sprung up in and around the capital.

Those living near a border often chose to save their lives by heading through the jungle to Sierra Leone, Guinea or Côte d'Ivoire – countries which, one after the

other, experienced their own domestic upheavals related, at least in part, to the complex regional dynamics caused by the collapse of civilization in Liberia.

Others – many of them fed up with the constant toing and froing they experienced during a decade of civil wars – grabbed their belongings and headed further afield to more stable countries like Ghana or Nigeria.

## BLESSED SOIL, TORRID HISTORY

A JOURNEY THROUGH LIBERIA TODAY confronts the visitor with conflicting images and raises more questions than it provides answers. Deep green forests, a soil known for its riches – diamonds, gold, timber, rubber in abundance. A nature so generous that all you have to do is drop a seed and watch it grow.

“This country is so blessed,” says a UN peacekeeper from Pakistan. “They have



**Left:** Returnees rebuilding their house in Lofa County – one of the most destroyed areas in Liberia. **Above:** Maimu IDP camp near Monrovia. The last of the camps was closed down in March 2006.

UNHCR/E. COMPTE VERDAGUER/LBR•2005

UNHCR/E. KANALSTEIN/LBR•2004



**UNHCR staff** discuss protection issues with a Liberian judge at a rural courthouse. The country's justice system was shattered by 14 years of civil war.

UNHCR/E. COMPTE VERDAGUER/LBR/2005

rains and fertile soils. They never need to be hungry. Nature is so generous here, in comparison to the dry region in Pakistan where I come from. Our farmers have to work so hard to survive.”

Yes, say Liberians – without much conviction. Our country is blessed. And yet... They list tribal differences, and cite the envy and insatiable greed for power and wealth which have blighted their country for much of the 150 years since it was founded by returning American slaves in 1822. The country's deep-seated problems culminated in 14 terrible years of evolving civil wars between 1989-2003 – three in all, dubbed World Wars One, Two and Three by the local population.

Lofa County, in the far north, on the border with Guinea and Sierra Leone, was once the bread-basket of Liberia. But in early 2005, despite two years of peace, it still looked like an open wound. Every village

was destroyed. Almost every building that was still standing had been looted, mosques had been burnt to ashes, schools swallowed up by the jungle.

Further south, a similar picture in Gbarpolu, Bong, Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties: abandoned wells, gutted market halls, and a third of Liberia's mainly rural population packed into IDP camps, occupying empty public buildings in downtown Monrovia, or living rough along the beaches and in the outskirts of the capital, waiting for better times.

#### GRADUAL RECOVERY

NOW, THREE YEARS AFTER THE AUGUST 2003 Peace Agreement was signed in Accra, and half a year after Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took office as the first ever democratically elected female President in Africa, Liberia is showing signs of gradual recovery.

Over the last year, Lofa County received nearly 45,000 returning refugees and over 120,000 former IDPs. In all, 74,000 returnees decided to come back to Liberia with UNHCR's help between the start of the repatriation operation in October 2004 and July 2006. A further 200,000 or more spontaneous returnees have gone back home on their own since 2003.

The return of Liberia's population is considered by the new government, as well as by donors and the UN and other agencies, as a clear sign of confidence in the future – despite all the gaps and immense hurdles that must now be confronted. A new chapter seems finally to have opened. “What we need now, is jobs, jobs, jobs,” President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf keeps on reminding the international community.

But the task is truly daunting. And the social scars will not heal fully until some of Liberia's remaining demons have been

Almost every building that was **still standing** had been **looted**, mosques had been burnt to ashes, schools **swallowed** up by the **jungle**.

# Today, there seems to be a new sense of **confidence** in the air despite the many **immense** challenges still facing this **war-ravaged** society.

confronted head on – that, at least, is one point everyone agrees upon.

Reconstruction efforts will need to stretch far beyond rehabilitating damaged roads and public buildings. Society itself has to be reconstructed from its foundations upwards. People who have experienced so much mayhem and suffering, and witnessed so many atrocities, have to find a way to reconcile and forgive and begin to forge a new common national identity.

## DAUNTING TASK AHEAD

SOME 85 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION need jobs. This figure includes thousands of former fighters, many of whom want to be accepted back into society, and into their families, although they are still – understandably – the object of intense public mistrust.

As the experience of many other devastated countries has shown, a number of crucial issues have to be addressed simultaneously, if a positive momentum is to be created and maintained.

President Johnson Sirleaf has been touring the world to raise funds and lobby for Liberia, while taking a tough line on corruption and trying to fulfil her election promise to restore electricity to key areas of Monrovia after 17 long years of darkness.

Meanwhile, the recently established Truth and Reconciliation Commission aims to cast another kind of light on the atrocities committed during the wars, inviting Liberians to testify and share their grievances.

## THE CAMPS CLOSE

ON 31 MARCH 2006, AN IMPORTANT landmark was reached when all the IDP camps were officially closed after 321,745 people had been assisted by UNHCR to go back to their communities of origin.

Today, even Boiwen's citizens are back home. They fled together and they left Wilson Corner camp together. In accordance with the villagers' own list of priorities, UNHCR has reconstructed their 'palaver' hut (a type of communal centre), installed a well and encouraged them to take part in an agricultural project.

The children of Boiwen are going back to school, and though the war wounds are still visible, life seems to be gradually returning to normal. The boundaries of that normality are explored by a group of children staging a play on their graduation day: they decide to use the opportunity to address one of the community's current pressing concerns – the sad fact that while some villagers are engaged in farming cassava, other people sneak along at night to steal their crops.

So, how exactly should one deal with a cassava thief in a country where mob justice is still considered acceptable, because trust in the police, the court system and all forms of authority was shattered long ago and has not yet been restored?

The drama group came up with a ground-breaking solution: instead of being lynched on the spot, their thief was brought before the town chief, who then consulted with the elders and the various involved parties. In the end, he was ordered to reimburse the family and sentenced to perform communal work.

This enlightened proposal would appear to bode well for the future. However, Boiwen, like thousands of other villages in Liberia, does not yet have a functioning local police force. Nor is there a clinic anywhere close. The Superintendent – the highest local authority of Bomi County – recently complained that dozens of schools need to be built or rebuilt, and that children are at risk of sexual violence and abuse when they have to get up at 4:30 a.m. and walk for two hours to reach the nearest school.

## STEP BY STEP

EVEN THOUGH LIBERIA'S RURAL POPULATION is very willing to play a part in reconstructing the country, their long-term economic prospects are far from clear. At the moment there are hardly any income possibilities with the exception of small businesses, mostly consisting of women who walk for hours, day after day, to sell whatever merchandise they can lay their hands on.

However, most Liberians appear to have

decided to stand firm against anyone who would like to spoil the new spirit of optimism that is gradually taking over Monrovia and the rural areas. The inhabitants of the capital – even those still living rough along the edge of the beaches – make every effort to appreciate the achievements of the new government and to exercise patience.

"We're trying, small, small," says Thomas Kamara, a former refugee in Guinea. In this part of West Africa, "small, small" implies things could be better – but could also definitely be worse.

"It will take a long time to rebuild this country. We cannot expect too much too soon," he adds, emphasizing that despite the individual hardships almost everyone is still facing, Liberians are tired of war. "I've been a refugee for 13 years. The best decision I made last year was to come back home. We want to live our life in peace."

Back in Lofa County and other return areas, farmers have started harvesting and local communities are banding together to reconstruct schools and houses, while women's groups focus on small businesses. Communities are assisting each other with their daily needs and look ahead, rather than back at their painful past.

And today, in general, there seems to be a new sense of confidence in the air despite the many immense challenges still facing this war-ravaged society.

It is the confidence of the people of Liberia that one day they will be more prosperous than they are now. That they will have clean, safe drinking water, and light in their houses. That they will have jobs and their children will go to a nearby school. That when they are sick, they will be treated by doctors in clinics.

It is the belief that they can once again live side by side and at peace with their neighbours, and the dreadful memories of the recent conflict, anarchy and atrocities will be – if not forgotten, because it is impossible to forget such things – at least consigned firmly to the past.

It may still sound like a dream. But there is now at least a fighting chance that the dream will come true. ■