

## In memoriam Hegyesi Gábor

### *Hegyesi Gábor emlékére*

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I have walked a long path with Gábor and am going to miss him. While his journey is now over, he'll remain a colleague, companion, friend and role model to many people in several countries. It was in 1988 that we first met. I was introduced to Gábor and Kati (Talyigás Katalin) by Magdi (Ritoók Pálné), who was taking English lessons from me at the time. Magdi, a top psychologist based at the Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE) in Budapest, was aware that I'm a social worker and much of our lesson time was focused on vocabulary and texts suited to the social sciences. Magdi thought I would like to meet a group of people who were working to get social work established as a university-level course of training in Hungary, hence the introduction to the dynamic duo. Dramatic changes were underway in Hungary.

Kati, Gábor and I clicked immediately, and it turned into something far bigger than a one-off meeting! Instead, I was drawn into the world of these far-sighted professionals and, within a short time, was part of the team working under the leadership and sound guidance of Ferge Zsuzsa. Besides our focus on current events and working together to establish a social work curriculum, Gábor and I shared in common that we had both had social work qualifications and had a connection to Australia. This was to prove significant in later years. Meanwhile, we were very busy indeed, and there were breakthrough developments such as the intensive workshop in Sopron, where the nascent social work curriculum for a post-socialist Hungary was fleshed out in detail. The first course of study was launched in 1989 at the Illyés Gyula Pedagógiai Főiskola in Szekszárd, now part of the University of Pécs.

We continued to work with colleagues from Debercen, Esztergom and other places to help build social work studies all over the country while at the same time developing the curriculum and team for social work studies at ELTE. Students began studying social work at ELTE in 1990, and Kati, Gábor and I were working together on the faculty and in setting up the Esély Családsegítő Központ (neighbourhood centre) in Budapest's Seventh District, which provided direct services to people while also being a field work placement setting for social work students. It was an exciting time.

Gábor was energised and engaged beyond his work at ELTE and contributed to building the profession nationwide, and to curriculum development, publishing and the building of international linkages. The first volume of *A szociális munka elmélete és gyakorlata* (Social work theory and practice), edited by Gábor and Kati, was published in 1994 and became a key Hungarian text for social work students. In all the years ahead, he never stopped producing great papers and articles, exploring the various facets of social work and human services, and the important role that civil society and the non-profit sector can play. I also learned more about

his remarkable aptitude as a teacher – over the years, I have met many students who regarded him as a key influence on their professional development.

I moved back to Australia in 2002, and my friendship with Gábor and Éva (Hegyesiné Orsós Éva) entered a new phase. Having a daughter and several family members living in Australia, Gábor made sure to visit the country every few years. On these trips he always took the trouble to catch up with me in Sydney. These meetings were very special indeed, enabling me to retain a personal connection with him and Éva, and through them with colleagues, friends and events in Hungary. A highlight came only a few years ago, when Gábor took the train to come and visit me in the Australian countryside, where I now live. We had three unforgettable days on the farm, and in addition to getting right down to helping me with the daily chores of country living, we talked about everything under the sun, as had been our custom since the 80s. I wasn't to know it, but it would be the last time we were able to debate and 'solve the world's problems' together in person. I do wish I had said to him then what later came foremost to my mind upon learning of his passing – *Jobb lett a világ azért, hogy benne éltél, Gábor barátom.* Gábor, my friend, the world is a better place because of your being. May he rest in peace, while his works and memory live on.

Ronald Woods, 16 May 2025