

# GREAT-GRANDPA'S

# BIG

# SURPRISE

**By Renie Szilak Burghardt**  
(Based on a true story)

*How could Katie talk  
to Great-Grandpa if  
she couldn't speak  
Hungarian?*



*“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love” (Colossians 2:2).*

Grandma, is your dad really old?” Katie asked. Katie’s great-grandpa was coming all the way from Hungary to stay with them. This would be her first time meeting him.

“Compared to my age, he’s not that old, but compared to your age, I guess he is,” Grandma said. “Why do you ask?”

“Oh, I was just wondering,” Katie said. “I bet he has lots of good stories.”

“He does,” Grandma said with a smile. “But he doesn’t speak English. I’ll have to translate for you.”

Katie hadn’t thought about that. “Well, can’t he learn English?”

“Learning a new language isn’t easy. It can take a long time,” Grandma said.

*I have time*, Katie thought. “Maybe I could learn Hungarian! Would you teach me, Grandma?”

Grandma smiled. “I would be happy to.”

“How do you say, ‘Grandpa, I love you?’”

*“Nagypapa, szeretlek. Na-dj Pa-Pa, ser-et-lek,”* Grandma pronounced slowly.

*“Nagypapa, szeretlek,”* Katie repeated until it sounded right.

Katie had a Hungarian lesson every day for a month. She learned how to say *Hogy vagy?* which means “How are you?” She learned *köszönöm*, which means “thank you.” Grandma was right. Learning a new language was hard work! She didn’t know enough Hungarian to have a conversation, but at least she could tell Great-Grandpa she loved him.

At the airport Katie bounced on her feet. She stretched her neck, trying to see when Great-Grandpa would come through the gate. Next to her, Katie’s grandma bit her lip and twisted her hands. She hadn’t seen her father in 40 years. They had been separated during World War II. Katie had heard the story many times. Eventually her Grandma was brought to the United States, while Great-Grandpa had stayed in Hungary. At last they would be reunited.

Finally, a tall silver-haired man walked toward them. When he saw them, his face broke into a wide smile. “*Lányom*,” he said to Grandma. They were both crying as they hugged. *I know that word!* Katie remembered. *Lányom* means “my daughter.”

Soon Great-Grandpa stood in front of Katie. He leaned down to hug her. He had blue eyes just like Grandma’s.

*“Nagypapa, szeretlek,”* Katie said in her best Hungarian.

Great-Grandpa’s eyes filled with tears. “I didn’t expect my great-granddaughter to tell me she loves me in my own language. I love you too.”

Katie stared at him in surprise. Great-Grandpa was speaking English! “Grandma told me you couldn’t speak English,” she said.

“Your grandma didn’t know,” Great-Grandpa said. “I always prayed that one day your grandma and I would be together again. So when I found out she was in the United States, I began to study English. I was preparing for when we would be reunited.”

Great-Grandpa had learned English because he loved his daughter, and Katie had learned Hungarian because she loved her Great-Grandpa! She took a deep breath. This was the hardest phrase she’d learned. “*Örülök hogy, el tudtál jönni*,” she said. “I’m glad that you could come.” It seemed to make Great-Grandpa happy to hear his own language.

Great-Grandpa smiled. “Me too.”

“I don’t know how to say very much in Hungarian,” Katie said, a bit shyly. “Would you teach me more? Maybe we could have language lessons together.”

“I’d like that very much,” Great-Grandpa said. ◆

The author lives in Missouri, USA.



*“Look beyond our differences in age, culture, and circumstance to nurture and serve one another.”*

Sister Bonnie L. Oscarson  
Young Women general president

*“Sisterhood: Oh, How We Need Each Other,” Ensign, May 2014, 121.*