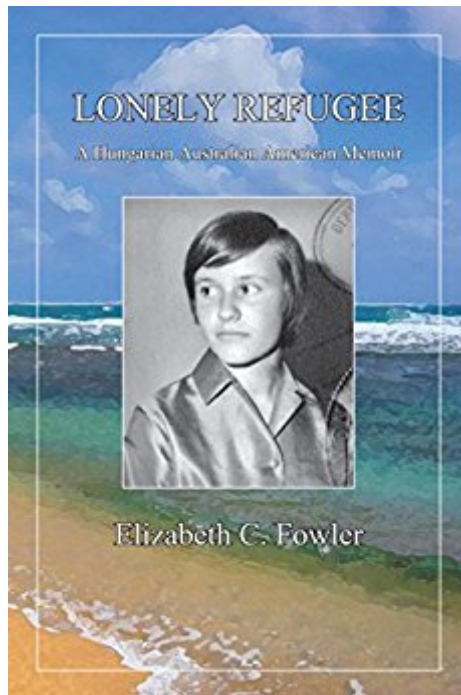




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Lonely Refugee: A Hungarian Australian American Memoir



Synopsis

How would it be to grow up feeling separate, a Hungarian outsider in Australia, only to be uprooted as a teenager to start all over again in Seattle? Follow Fowler on her journey growing up in a large, traumatized Hungarian refugee family in mid-20th century Sydney. See how she found consolation in her love of music and the Australian landscape. The stability she built for herself in Sydney crumbled when, as a teenager, her family immigrated again, this time to the United States. At nineteen, she wed a physician, unwittingly carrying her unhealthy family dynamics into the marriage. She became even more entangled when she embarked on her own all-consuming medical career. Pregnant with her first child, she vowed to free her family from the cycle of neglect and isolation she had experienced. Seeking help for the first time from counselors, teachers, and friends, she was able to find mature love, rewarding work and spiritual solace. Elizabeth C. Fowler is a physician, leadership and life coach, spiritual director, and blogger (elizabethcfowler.blogspot.com). She is a devoted mother of two, and a doting grandmother who is proud to be called "Gaga Lisbeth." • She resides in lovely Seattle and still longs for tropical beaches.

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Customer Reviews

A descendant of immigrants (my paternal grandfather emigrated from Slovakia, my maternal great-grandparents from County Mayo, Ireland), I read with rapt fascination author Elizabeth Fowler's meditation on her family's escape from war-torn Hungary to a refugee camp, then on to Sydney, Australia, with the final destination America. As chronicled in her impressive debut, "Lonely Refugee: A Hungarian Australian American Memoir," Fowler illuminates the wrenching experience of being a "bloody New Australian," the discrimination her immigrant family faced and overcame, and the joys of her Sydney girlhood in discovering her muses: the arts and nature. She crafts a story both political and personal that is very relatable to our current times. The second youngest of six, Elizabeth shares the challenges her parents faced establishing a knitwear company in Sydney and the tensions it created between them. We see the delight she experiences in tagging along with her older siblings, playing practical jokes and exchanging bus money for candy, only to be walloped upon returning home. There's a simplicity and beauty to the writing that conjures up the biographical novel "Cheaper by the Dozen," except with more serious and poignant overtones. "Lonely Refugee" maintains its momentum propelling the reader into memoirist Fowler's struggle to develop an identity separate from that of her parents and siblings. Her humor shines as she tells of her life-changing encounter with a free-thinking nun at her all girls' private school or encountering a flasher in a Parisian subway tunnel during her study abroad program. Upon her arrival in Seattle, the teenage Elizabeth enters college and meets the boy-next-door. She falls hook line and sinker. Set against the backdrop of the late 1960's the memoir explores Elizabeth's own evolution as woman, wife, and mother as she tries to balance each of these roles and succeed at every one of them. The memoir examines the role generational trauma often plays in each of our lives, where the next generation must address the burdens and challenges faced by their parents, resolve them in their own lives, and break the chain for the next generation of offspring. Through courage, grit, and self-deprecating humor, Fowler arrives on the other side, inspiring us all to cast off our cages and seek resolution and contentment.

I was drawn to this book because I have a sister-in-law whose parents fled Hungary during the 1956 revolution. Fowler structured her memoir as vignettes that touch on formative parts of her life. She convincingly conveys what it is like to grow up as an outsider, always different than the majority population. Without bombarding us, Fowler makes a subtle point--even though you may superficially look like the people of the place to which you immigrate, it is no guarantee of acceptance. Fowler

has a knack for making details come alive on the page. I especially like those in the parts of the book about her childhood around Sydney. Through her stories, some humorous and some painful, we gain the gift of a bright and curious girl's perspective on life. Fowler successfully takes the reader with her whether she's soaring in her ballet class or struggling to get parental love and attention in a large immigrant family. Later parts of the book speak volumes about being an immigrant and a woman in a world that doesn't necessarily appreciate either.

Fowler's writing strikes a universal chord with vivid stories about pursuing a grueling career in medicine, raising a family, and navigating a troubled marriage. You wonder, will things turn around for this immigrant? Is life really better in the U.S.? Fowler has the cred to answer these questions, and in a way that reveals a bigger truth. Sometimes answers are best found from looking within, rather than searching afar. Thankfully they do.

What an honest and heartfelt story of one woman's life growing up in a family of Hungarian immigrants living in Australia. She shares her intimate struggles with feelings as an outsider - in school, in her family, in her country of birth. The author gently invites you into her life, her cherished memories, her passions, and her journey to be true to herself. She is an inspiration to all who 'meets' her through her sharing and writing and is someone you would want as a life-long friend. I highly recommend this book to anyone who enjoys being invited into the inner musings of others as they struggle, grow and celebrate through their lives..

This book takes you into the inner world of a woman who grew up in a country that didn't welcome her, and in a family who struggled to show their love for one another. The author writes with both gentleness and honesty about her experience. What was most striking to me was her amazing ability to be introspective, the clarity with which she learned to navigate her world, and the inner strength she found to overcome a very lonely childhood. This is a wonderful story of self-discovery and growth, as well as an intimate view into the experience of a twice-immigrated family.

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