

Lomb Kato passed away in 2003. I received this letter on Jan 26, 2011

Dear Stephen,

This year we are going to celebrate the 102nd birth anniversary of Kato Lomb in the Foreign Language Library in Budapest . Our discussion topic will be the importance of reading in foreign language learning and Kato Lomb's international influence. I would like to ask you, if you don't mind, to send us a few words of your impressions about your personal meeting with her. We'll read it for the audience! I would kindly appreciate your contribution to this event that aims to commemorate her enthusiasm for languages and to spread her idea of reading in foreign languages.

best wishes

Mihály Hevesi (Language Learner and Teacher, Translator, Publisher)

This is what I wrote and sent to Mr. Hevesi, who informed me that it was read at the ceremony:

I taught a short course in Pecs about 15 years ago, for just three weeks. After class, one of my students suggested that while I was in Hungary, I should find out about a professional translator and interpreter, Lomb Kato. The student told me that Lomb Kato was considered to be a "national treasure" in Hungary: she spoke 17 languages. My student had read Lomb Kato's book, "How I learn languages" in Hungarian and told me some of Dr. Lomb's history. She volunteered to call Dr. Lomb and set up a meeting, which of course I agreed to. I met with Dr. Lomb four times while I was in Hungary, making special trips to Budapest just to see her, and just chat.

What I learned about Dr. Lomb is in an article and included in one of my books. What I didn't say in those writings is that the time I spent with her was magic. (By the way, we spoke English. Her German was better than mine, her French was better than mine, her Spanish was better than mine, and she had begun working on Hebrew!) I felt I was in the presence of someone truly different, someone truly wonderful, an avatar sent to inspire the rest of us.

I recognized immediately that Dr. Lomb was an amazing source of information about language acquisition. Eager to show off, I casually mentioned to my colleagues, professors at various Hungarian universities, that I had been hanging out with Lomb Kato, expecting them to be impressed. Not so. The universal reaction was dismissal. "Oh, she's just different, her brain is different." I doubt that any of them had met her or had read her book in which she claims that this is not so.

It's one thing to be a polyglot when you grow up with the languages and/or spend years in other countries, and/or start very young. Lomb Kate had NONE of these advantages, and as we all know did much of her language acquisition under very difficult circumstances. I

had been disappointed with my own progress in Hungarian when I met her, and was starting to get a little depressed about it: The language was impenetrable and there seemed to be no place to get comprehensible input.

After a couple of sessions with Dr. Lomb, I was inspired. Certainly, if she could improve in Russian in Hungary during the war, when it was publicly forbidden, and make significant progress in Japanese and Chinese while living in Hungary, I could make some progress in Hungarian when it was all around me.

I started to look for new ways to get input. I gave my students the option of having coffee with me, and, for credit, giving me Hungarian lessons in small groups. It worked. The same professors who dismissed Lomb Kato's accomplishments were very impressed and surprised at my rapid progress in Hungarian.

Dr. Lomb made sure the inspiration would stick: When we said goodbye, after our last session, her last words to me were: "Stephen, you're so young. (I was 54 at the time) So many years left. So many languages to acquire."

The inspiration has lasted to this day. Since that time, I have been involved in second language acquisition every day of my life. Just like Dr. Lomb, a great deal of my pleasure reading (in fact, nearly all of it) is in other languages, and I have been consistent in getting input whenever I can, in whatever language I can. There is no better way to get insights into the language acquisition process, to be advanced, intermediate and beginner in different languages at the same time.

I join with so many others in honoring this wonderful woman and her heroic life.