

Hungary Refugees Adjust Well in U.S.

ST. LOUIS (UPI)—The young doctor making his rounds at Barnes Hospital would easily pass for a native-born American.

His speech bears no trace of an accent. Only the name is a giveaway: Dr. Bela Denes. He's Hungarian.

"People are often naturally inquisitive about the unusual name," Denes said.

"I tell them I'm from Hungary, and they'll say either 'Where is that?' or 'Is that one of those Communist countries?' Then I have a little explaining to do."

Denes was 9 when he and his twin brother and parents fled Budapest after the collapse of the anti-Soviet uprising in 1956. He represents one of the more than 30,000 Hungarian refugees admitted into the United States in the wake of the bloody suppression of the revolt.

In addition to the chunky build that is said to characterize the Hungarians, Denes typifies many of the former refugees in that they have assimilated into American society.

Unlike the immigrants of the early 1900s or the displaced persons of World War II, many of the Hungarian refugees of 1956 feel no need to live and work in closely knit ethnic neighborhoods. They believe they can blend comfortably with the American mainstream.

The refugees 20 years ago arrived at a time American urban areas were expanding into the suburbs. Many refugees moved straight into suburbia and bypassed the older city neighborhoods where immigrants traditionally settled.

While exceptions exist in some cities, notably Cleveland and Chicago, the former Hungarian refugees in most metropolitan areas are widely scattered, even though there are many of them. Denes lives in rural Jefferson County, south of St. Louis, and drives 50 miles round trip daily to his hospital.

Denes notes that a frequent complaint of organizers of Hungarian cultural, social and religious activities is, "Where are the '56ers?" Quite possibly they are at American cultural, social and religious activities.

The former refugees' most frequent contact with fellow Hungarians is likely to be with relatives. Denes, whose parents died a few years ago and whose brother Alex, is a doctor in Phoenix, Ariz., visits his mother's relatives in nearby Belleville, Ill., every Sunday.

"We speak Hungarian only, and it enables me to stay fluent in the language," Denes said. "Otherwise virtually all my friends are Americans. They're the ones you happen to work with or went to school with or whatever."

He emphasized he sees no reason to and does not hide the fact he is Hungarian.

"I'm proud of my native land," he said. "In fact, at every opportunity I get I like to explain to Americans my background and how I came to be here."

The revolt began Oct. 23, 1956, with student protests in Budapest against the Communist regime and the Soviet occupational forces in the country. The uprising spread nationwide, and for a few days the Russian troops were being withdrawn from the country.

However, on Nov. 4, 1956, a Sunday morning, the Soviet Union launched a surprise attack on Hungary with about 6,000 tanks and tens of thousands of troops to crush the revolt in a matter of days.

Many of the revolutionary leaders who were not among the 200,000 persons to flee the country were executed. No accurate casualty figures from the revolt ever have been released.

Denes said he harbors no resentment toward this country for failing to come to the aid of the Hungarian freedom fighters in 1956.

"Realistically, I don't expect the United States to go to war over Hungary," he said. "If Hungary is ever to become free of Soviet control, it will have to do it by itself."