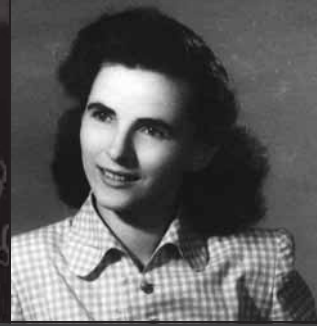


eternity's new story



Hungarian National Dress made by Mrs Gyenge, Mrs Eva Castley Collection, National Museum of Australia. photo: George Serras

Above right: Eva Castley. photo: courtesy of Eva Castley

Friends will be familiar with the Eternity exhibition at the National Museum of Australia. This exhibition looks at the lives of 50 people, ordinary and extraordinary, living and dead. The stories are grouped in 10 themes based on emotions – separation, mystery, joy, loneliness, hope, thrill, devotion, fear, passion and chance.

The Eternity exhibition has been gradually including new stories. One story added in December into the theme of Fear was that of Eva Castley. The object through which Eva's story is told is a magnificent Hungarian national dress. This story is a window onto the fear that is part of many migrants' experience as well as the fear experienced by so many during war.

Eva's family was originally from Transylvania. During the war, the family hoped that they would be safer if they moved to Budapest. Unfortunately, they found themselves in the midst of conflict and their family home was bombed and destroyed. Eva and her mother were trapped and buried in the ruins of their home for eight days without food or water and little hope for rescue. It was during these eight days that the dress was first imagined.

→ *My Mother tried to keep my will to live burning by promising me wonderful gifts if we ever came out alive. One of these – for me the best – was the promise of a Hungarian national dress (according to my Mother it would be 'the most beautiful national dress there ever was').* Eva Castley, 1987

Russian soldiers finally heard Eva and her mother tapping and dug them out of the ruins.

Eva emigrated to Australia in 1948 and her mother followed in 1951. While the family carved out a new life in Australia there was little time to think of dresses or the past, but finally, over 20 years after it was promised, Eva's mother set about making the dress that they had dreamed of.

The dress took almost two years to complete. It has 26,470 beads all individually hand stitched. The headdress has a lace veil made from the dress-apron of Eva's mother's own national dress. As the dress came together, Eva and her mother sat and relived memories – joyous, terrifying and hopeful. They spoke of their lives in Transylvania, Eva's childhood in the Carpathian Mountains, the terror of the war and their hopes and fears arriving in a new country.

→ *I think with each bead mother sewed in some of our home sickness, heartbreak, nostalgia and longing after a country, culture and life that no longer existed in our homeland behind the Iron Curtain.* Eva Castley, 1987

The dress was only ever worn once at a charity gala dinner in Tasmania in 1974. It has been a part of the National Historical Collection since 1987. It is wonderful that some of the treasures from the Museum's collection are now emerging to fill and enrich our permanent exhibitions at Acton.

Sophie Jensen
Land and People program