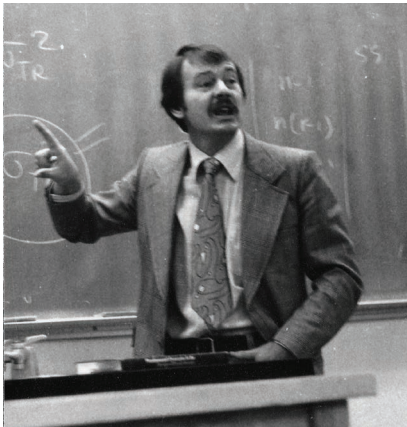


Remembering Tony Kozak

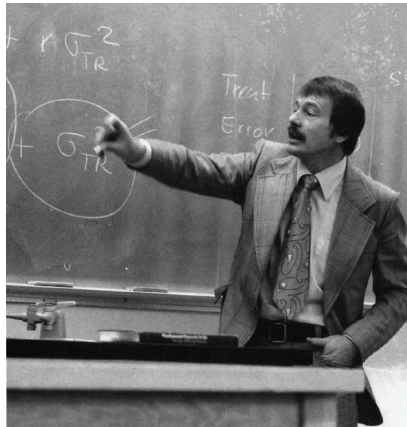


On the tennis courts, at the card table, in the classroom, or at the IBM punch card machine, Tony Kozak was a force to be reckoned with.

Born in Tiszapüspöki, a small hamlet on the plains of Hungary, Tony always had a knack for numbers. By the time he was in his teens, he was gainfully employed as the bookkeeper at the local wine cellar. Despite a misspent youth on the soccer pitch and almost being expelled from school for refusing to acknowledge Stalin's birthday, Tony did well academically. Well enough, in fact, that he was streamed into a university track, no small feat in Soviet Hungary. After a conscripted stint in the army, Tony settled on the Hungarian Forestry School (now the University of West Hungary), located in Sopron.

It is here that he met his classmates, his brothers and sisters in arms, his fellow travelers. It is here that he said goodbye to his life and family in Hungary to become a political refugee. It is here where bonds that remain unbroken after 60 years were forged. It is the story of the Sopron Division of the Faculty of Forestry at UBC.

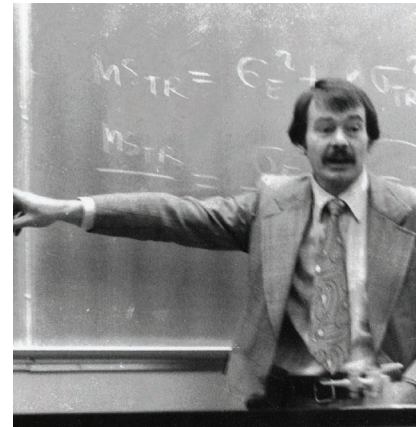
Like many other uprisings, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 precipitated student action across the country. In Sopron, the Student Revolutionary Committee took charge of the municipality, orchestrating runs of supplies and munitions to the capital, Budapest, where most of the fighting was taking



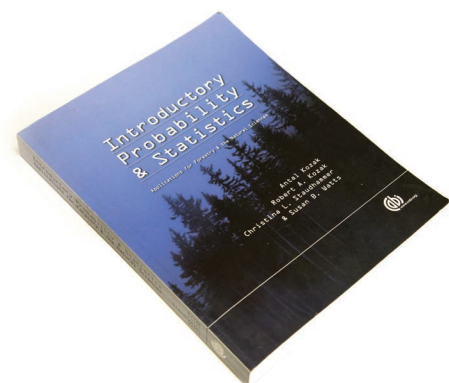
place. Indeed, for two weeks in October, it looked as though the Hungarian freedom fighters would emerge victorious. But in early November, masses of Soviet troops were mobilized across Hungary, including in western Hungary. As their tank divisions barreled down the road to Sopron, there was only one option left.

Some 250 forestry students, as well as 50 professors and their families, fled across the border to Austria. While there, Dean Kalman Roller put out a call to several countries to see who might accept this group of refugees. The Government of Canada's interest was most definitely piqued and they hastily made arrangements with the Faculty of Forestry at UBC to continue providing the Sopron students with a forestry education, first in Hungarian, then gradually transitioning to English. This was an offer that could not be refused. The Sopron Division of the Faculty of Forestry at UBC was born.

At first, life in Canada was very challenging, and took a great deal of adjustment for a group of kids in their early twenties – learning a new language, navigating a foreign culture, studying new ecosystems, working part-time to make ends meet, and so on. Tony started life here with nothing more than a leather coat from The Hudson's Bay, a crisp five dollar bill, and a pack of smokes. But he loved Canada – not just its majestic landscapes and the opportunities it afforded – he loved the



very idea of Canada. One of the people he admired most was Jack Pickersgill, Canada's Minister of Citizenship and Immigration during and after the Hungarian Revolution. That he had the wherewithal to broker a deal which brought an entire school of foresters to UBC in a matter of days is nothing short of a miracle. But the fact that he had the foresight to understand the long term benefits that Canada would reap – not the least being the adoption of European sustainable forest management practices – can only be described as visionary. Under Pickersgill's watch, some 38,000 Hungarian refugees sought asylum in Canada immediately after the uprising, an unprecedented migration and one that has forever changed both immigration policy and the multicultural mosaic that is Canada. His actions were a shining example of just how easy it is to solve a humanitarian crisis with a little bit of generosity, some imagination, and a whole lot of compassion. For Tony, this left an indelible mark, and helped shape his





worldview as a caring, kind, honourable, and unflinchingly honest person. More importantly though, it motivated him to become, in the true spirit of the word, a *citizen* of Canada.

And it shaped him in all facets of his life. It inspired him to succeed. Tony worked relentlessly as a student at UBC, completing his BSF in 1959 and his PhD in 1963. Shortly after finalizing his doctorate, he was hired on as a Professor in the Department of Forest Resources Management, one of only two Sopron alumni to achieve this distinction. He spent 36 years as a faculty member and took pride in serving the longest combined term as an Associate and Acting Dean between 1977 and 1998. Through it all, he found time to play a ferocious game of tennis several times a week and regularly partake in epic sessions of *ulti*, the national card game of Hungary. But nothing gave Tony more satisfaction than raising a family and watching his two children grow up and succeed in his adopted homeland. His son followed in his academic footsteps, while his daughter works in Vancouver's theatre community, something that he never fully comprehended, but always respected. Tony retired in 2001, but continued to come in to the Forest Sciences Centre – his home away from home – several times a week, advising graduate students on statistical issues until as recently as last year and routinely enjoying coffee and maple-glazed doughnuts with staff and faculty.

An influential and always dogged scientist, Tony is best known for his pioneering forest mensuration work on developing tree taper volume models, which have been fitted in many countries and for many tree species around the world and have now come to be generically known as "Kozak Taper Equations". He began work in this domain in the late-1960s as one of UBC's first computer programmers (remember FORTRAN?), and continued until 2004, when he wrote the aptly titled article, "My Last Words on Taper Equations" (he wasn't kidding). As a graduate supervisor, his legacy includes four generations of biometricians whose analytical chops have been heavily influenced by his expertise in modelling and experimental design, as well as his philosophies underlying the careful use of data. Tony capped his research career off as the lead author of a book entitled, "Introductory Probability and Statistics: Applications for Forestry and the Natural Sciences". While this experience proved rewarding in the end, writing it was a long, drawn-out affair, so much so that Tony asked that a copy of the book accompany him to the grave (it did).

But it was teaching that Tony loved the most, and he was much adored by generations of forestry students. Scores of students will recall his atrocious jokes, his inability to pronounce the word "variable", and his wicked exams. Some will

remember (and perhaps even use) the lessons on statistics that he imparted. Others will reminisce that he was always the first Professor to show up at the undergraduate social events, and not averse to buying you a beer if you asked. But none will forget the dedication and respect and passion that he showed for students. As Associate Dean, students knew that his office was a safe space, a place where anything could be discussed discretely and confidentially, and where problems – no matter how big or how small – could be resolved. For his efforts, in 1992, he was awarded the Killam Teaching Prize in recognition of his commitment to teaching and mentorship excellence. This was Tony's proudest career achievement.

Dr Antal (Tony) Kozak, Professor Emeritus, died peacefully and surrounded by family on June 22, 2017 at the age of 81 after a short illness. He will be dearly missed by colleagues, friends, family, and the generations of students that he cared for so deeply. Those who wish to honour Tony's memory can donate to the Tony Kozak Scholarship in Forest Measurement at UBC (<https://memorial.support.ubc.ca/tony-kozak/>) or raise a glass of mediocre Scotch to the last Soproner to exit the building.

Story by Robert Antal Kozak, who inherited his father's good looks and, as Associate Dean, Academic in the UBC Faculty of Forestry, currently resides in the position that was first held by Tony. A celebration of Tony's life will be held later this fall at UBC.

