

## Meet your Industrial Hygiene Consultant: Elizabeth Jakab

### Where were you born?

Born as a Hungarian minority in Transylvania, currently Romania, in a beautiful small town near the [Carpathian Mountains](#).

### Education Background

Master's in Science, with Chemistry major. Her education and specialty in the U.S. are in Hazardous Chemicals and Hazardous Waste Management. In Romania she worked for a few years as a high school science teacher and analytical laboratory chemist.



### What brought you to Seattle

During her youth, Romania was one of the most oppressive Eastern European countries under the rule of the infamous dictator, [Ceausescu](#). There was strict control, discrimination against minorities and certain social groups, great survival difficulties, and no reasonable future.

Set on starting a new life in a “free” country, Elizabeth with her then husband escaped Romania to spend a year and a half in a refugee camp in Austria; the first Western European country they could reach. They applied for US immigration through a legal application process, then arrived as refugees with only the clothes on their backs once accepted. An agency from Seattle offered sponsorship, which mostly consisted of lending them the airfare to reach the U.S. Those seed funds were long ago repaid, but she fell in love with the Seattle area, made it home, and has remained ever since.

### Work Life

As a new immigrant, Elizabeth improved her language skills through a variety of entry level jobs, then worked as a Chemist in the aerospace research industry. It was there that she made a concerted effort to raise her English to a professional level. Using Post-it-notes to label instruments, she learned the English words while her coworkers helped her with correct pronunciations. It was also here that she realized that she really wanted to work with people rather than instruments. On an assignment to support the environmental health and safety of the company, she recognized the good fit and went back to school. She studied environmental and health protection and attained certification in hazardous chemical management.

A fork in her career led to an opportunity to mix current passions with her old love of education kicking off a new career working with school districts focusing on environmental health and safety. She loves this area, including the risk management aspects, and enjoys the great variety in the work solving distinctive problems and meeting diverse people almost every day. To increase awareness of the area, her efforts are centered on building a reasonable and sustainable Safety and Health Culture in our member districts. A preventive culture that permeates every aspect of school life and leaves the reactive afterthought mentality to problems in the dust. During these later work years, she is noticing a positive shift in attitudes, which is bringing great satisfaction.

## Personal

While building her new life in US and working full time in various public and private sector work environments, Elizabeth raised two wonderful boys who are now successful men – the fulfillment of her “American Dream”.

To balance her left and right brain, she switches from the more technical and science-based activities at work to creative expressions in her private life, which include painting, photography, paper crafts, jewelry, and soap making. Reviving traditional baking recipes, collaborating with her equally creative husband, and traveling when possible round out her life.

Elizabeth fluently speaks two languages, Hungarian and English. She has studied and used three others, Romanian, French and German. Just don't quiz her on the later three.

She volunteers for and is on the Board of the Hungarian American Association of Washington, an organization promoting cultural understanding. Her favorite areas are organizing visual art exhibits and providing interpretation/translation services. These activities help her to give back while remaining connected to her heritage of origin.

