

THE STORY OF CANADIAN HERO<sup>1</sup>  
**DR. LOTTA HITSCHMANOVA**

**Red Unitarian Promise**

Unitarians believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person

**Blue Promise**

Believe in your ideas and act on them

Adapted for Spirit Play by Joy Silver

- light blue felt underlay with markers to place the continents of the world
- continents of the world with markers for story countries and cities
- legend cards for continents and for story countries and cities
- little Lotta and sister, Lilly dolls
- Mother and Father dolls
- Lotta Hitschmanova adult doll
- Helen Backhouse Doll and her letter describing how she worked for Dr. Lotta
- 2 Nazi flag pennants
- pile of miniature clothing
- pile of miniature quilts
- miniature sewing machine
- miniature iron
- miniature radio
- photo of the Unitarian Church of Ottawa picture
- list of the four promises that the USC makes to countries that it helps
- photo of 56 Sparks Street Office picture
- photo of the bronze bust of Dr. Lotta in the USC Office
- 6 round canisters of seeds
- Italian, French, English, German, Spanish, and Czech cards that say “hello” in each of these languages
- model of a of beet and a carrot
- USC truck
- cargo ship

**Storyteller’s note:** There is not enough space on the map to allow all the objects to be placed according to where they were used in the story, so you will find that some of them will be placed according to the given directions. Also, the oceans are not marked for the purposes of a little less clutter!

Watch where I go to get today’s story.

*Go to social responsibility shelf and choose the DR. Lotta Hitschmanova Story basket*

There are a lot of things in here. There is this.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Joy Silver, Beacon Unitarian Church, Coquitlam BC. (Draft #1, May 2009)

*Take out the light-blue underlay with the compass rose and some colored bits of fabric.*

I wonder what this story could be. It already has coloured bits of felt fastened to it, and look, here a picture marked with an “N”. And now I see all these little bits of coloured shapes all over the blue. I wonder what all this means.

*Move your hand over the underlay and discover that there are little blue stitched knots all over the surface.*

Perhaps something else in the basket will give us a clue.

*Take out the colourful shapes of the continents, and carefully lay them out anywhere on the underlay. Touch and name the oceans, the continents and the marked countries.*

Oh, I my, these colourful shapes look familiar. I wonder if they could be places in the world and this blue underlay is the ocean, and these colourful places of felt are islands. I wonder if these stitched knots are markers all over the underlay. I wonder if they are a clue where to place the felt shapes.

*Move each continent into place using the thread markers and according to the photograph: North America, (green) into place first, and then South America, (red), and continue in order with Europe, (yellow), Asia, (crimson), Africa, (orange), Australia, (purple), and Antarctica, (white).*

Well, this does look like the world map. This story seems to be about the whole world. Some of the land is marked. I wonder what these colourful shapes mean. Let’s see if something else inside the basket will give us a clue.

*Take out the two legend cards and place them side-by-side underneath the compass rose.*

Here are two cards that give us some clues: One has the title, Continents of the World with names of continents to match the colours. Let’s see if we can identify the shapes with the names on this legend. *(Match each continent name in turn with the corresponding shape and move you finger around the shape.)*

The other card has cities and countries marked on it with numbers to guide us to that city or country. There are a lot of names of places. Perhaps we will discover how to use this legend as we find out what the story is about.

*Take out the figure of Lotta Hitschmanova, and stand her on Central Canada*

Yes, I know this story. This lady is a very famous Canadian Unitarian. Her clothes are very important to her story. This is the uniform that she wore in her work for forty years. She wore it because people always respected a uniformed person and let her go where no women had been allowed to before. She didn’t belong to a traditional army. She created

an army of workers all on her own. Her name was Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova. People called her Dr. Lotta.

*Take out Lotta's younger sister, mother and father from the basket and sequentially touch each person, including older Lotta on Prague, Czechoslovakia. Then place mother, father and sister at the bottom, centre of the map. Hold onto Lotta.*

*Stand the cards that say, "hello" Czech, Italian, French, English, German, Spanish one behind the other at the top right-hand corner of the map. Point to each story object as your refer to them. Find the legend key for Czechoslovakia to point to it on the map.*

Little Lotta and her sister Lilly were born in Prague, Czechoslovakia to very kind, Jewish parents. Their father and mother were very well educated and made sure their girls had the best education in many languages including, Italian, French, German, Spanish and English, and of course they studied their own Czech language.

*Place Lotta in Sorbonne, France, (use legend).*

When Lotta graduated from school, she went to France to study more about the languages she could speak. She became a Doctor of Philosophy, which means she can research, write and speak very knowledgably about what she has studied. That's how she came to be called Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova. Next, Dr. Lotta studied how people run their countries and how to write for newspapers and report to radio stations about what is going on in the world. *(Move Lotta back to Prague.)*

*Place a Nazi Swastika on the city of Prague and one on Berlin in Germany.*

Lotta returned home when her father needed help in his business. His managed a malt making factory. Malt was used for converting cereal grain starches into sugars for use in making adult beverages. At this time, the radio news was announcing a very scary warning that a new government in Germany was going to round up all the Jews in Europe and get rid of them. The Jews all over Europe feared for their lives and families. Many tried to escape to a safe country, including Lotta.

*Move Lotta to Marseilles, France, (use legend).*

Lotta managed to get away safely to Marseilles, France, but her parents and her sister did not. Sadly, Lotta could not go back to look for them. It could cost her life.

*Remove Lilly and parents back to the story basket.*

Lotta got a job translating letters from prisoners of war, but there wasn't much for people to eat during the war, because people were not at home growing much food. They were away fighting against the Nazi armies.

*Lay out the carrot and beet in the position of the South Indian Ocean. Pick each vegetable up as you refer and gently trace its shape, then lay it back on the overlay.*

All Lotta could afford to eat was the few rationed carrots and beets for the adults, and one day she fainted from her hunger.

*Put out a USC truck on Marseilles.*

This white truck belonged to the American Unitarian aid people who had gone to France to help the war victims. It had a chalice symbol on it to let people know that a kind, organization of Unitarians was there to help them escape from terrorism of the Nazis.

It was a truck like this, (point to the truck and its Unitarian Chalice Symbol) ,and some Unitarians who came to rescue poor Lotta. They took her back to their station and fed her properly and looked after her until she had her strength back.

*Move Dr. Lotta to Lisbon, Portugal. Place the cargo boat in the Atlantic Ocean between Europe and North America.*

After being rescued in Marseilles, France by American Unitarians from starvation, Dr. Lotta wanted to immigrate to America. In 1942, (*she is now 51 years old*), Dr. Lotta was able to escape from Europe by sailing for forty-six days on a banana cargo boat, bound for New York from Lisbon, Portugal, packed with other refugees.

*Move Dr. Lotta across the Atlantic Ocean to New York, (use legend).*

However, although the USC was started in the United States by the Unitarians, the concern about the persecutions was not generally shared by the American government that had placed strict quotas on Jewish refugees. They would not accept Dr. Lotta's application to stay in America.

*Move Dr. Lotta to Montreal, (use legend).*

After delivering a USC report to Boston, she quickly departed for Canada, which, unlike the United States, had granted her permission to stay if she wanted to. She did hope to return to her country after the war. So in the meantime, Dr. Lotta got many meaningful jobs helping with different war services including raising and sending money for to help Czech children who had lost their parents in the war.

After Hitler and the Nazis were defeated, Dr. Lotta learned that her parents had been killed by the Nazis. She decided to stay in Canada. She found that her sister Lilly had moved to Israel. Later on Lilly relocated to Canada.

*Move Lotta to Ottawa. Stand the picture of the First Unitarian Church of Ottawa on the city of Ottawa, and then for sake of space, move the picture to the top centre of the map. Point to each of the cities that are referred to.*

Dr. Lotta had by now joined the Ottawa Unitarian Congregation in their efforts to form the Canadian branch of the USC along with five major Canadian cities: *Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, Winnipeg and Vancouver.*

After finding meaningful work in Canada with the Ottawa branch of the USC, the American USC helped Lotta to establish a Canadian USC office in Ottawa in 1945.

Dr. Lotta, strongly believed, unlike the American USC, that the receiving countries should have their own supervisors who knew best what their people needed and the best personnel to do it. Three years later, by mutual agreement, the Canadian USC became independent of the American USC, and also opened its doors to all religious faiths who wanted to help. The Canadian USC has carried on this tradition right up to today.

*Place the picture of the USC office, 56 Sparks Street, next to the Unitarian Church of Ottawa. Point to each of the places referred to, using the legend).*

*Place the quilts, clothing that requires mending, and the sewing machine to the left of B.C, Canada. Place the iron on top of the sewing machine. Touch each of the items as they are referred to.*

Dr. Lotta set up her Canadian USC office at 56 Sparks Street, Ottawa. She and many others helped to call for volunteers to gather clothing in church basements, clean it, repair it and iron it before sending in large truckloads send to refugees in from other wars in France, Korea, Africa, and Central America, and Vietnam.

*Place Helen Backhouse, (doll with the white hair), in Quebec, and next to Lotta). Place the envelope of Helen's letter next to her. Open the envelope and read the letter at the referred to place. Then put the letter back in the envelope.*

Thousands of people wanted to help. Helen Backhouse was one of those wonderful people. When Helen lived in Quebec, one of her jobs was to drive her family VW van to help out the USC. Here's her story:

“I know that the Lakeshore church in Pointe Claire, Quebec was very involved as I was part of the involvement. We collected, washed, mended and packed clothing for a number of years. I used to go with our VW bus to church sales and pick up all the left over used clothing. Sometimes there was just room for me to get into the van and drive it using the outside mirrors to see. Besides all the packing, there were a number of women who knitted for children and others who made baby items, and these were brought to the church to be included in the boxes. As Pointe Claire is quite a large pharmaceutical manufacturing area, donations were given to USC. These did not go to the church but came to our house as it was felt that they would be safe there until picked up to be flown to the destination point. The church school made quilts to send to Korea, lots of fun and involved more than the children. Fathers using sewing machines were a great hit with the kids.”

*Take out the radio and place it in front of Lotta.*

In order to get all Canadians involved in helping with the aid effort, Dr. Lotta would go to the CBC radio station in her city of Ottawa, and talk to families from Newfoundland to British Columbia, (*point to each of the provinces.*) Thousands of families sent money, collected clothing and helped clean, sew and iron the clothing so it looked fresh again for someone who really needed it. The USC became one of Canada's first international aid organization, and everyone who listened to the CBC radio knew Dr. Lotta's voice and her office address. 56 Sparks Street in Ottawa. (*point again to the picture of the USC office and circle your finger around the 56.*)

*Play tape recording of one of Dr. Lotta's radio appeals.*

*Take out the USC Promise Card.*

Dr. Lotta and the USC made four very important promises to people they helped in the world:

We will be good listeners when offering help.

We will serve with a kindness and understanding.

We will help people to use their own resources to have a happy life.

We will say goodbye when we know the people can manage on their own.

*(move your finger back and forth across Canada and overseas to the other countries the USC supported in getting back to a good life after their wars.)*

Lotta Hitschmanova served as USC's leader for 40 years, crisscrossing the country and the globe to educate Canadians on the plight of people around the world who were living in war-ravaged or developing countries overseas. Canadians responded with enthusiasm.

*Lay the seed boxes out in front of you, stacked in rows of two.*

For more than 60 years, the USC has continued to help the poor, first in Europe, then in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Eventually people stopped needing food and clothing sent to them. What they did need was help in growing their own food, so that they could feed their families themselves. Sometimes in droughts and famines farmers would lose or have to eat the seeds that they wanted to plant their fields with. Sometimes big companies would control the kinds of seeds that farmers would have available for planting. USC has helped farming families to save their own seeds and to conserve them in their own homes and in community seed banks. This way, farmers will always have available the seeds they need to plant next season, even in times of drought, or even when big companies try to control the types of seed that are available.

*Point to the stack of seed boxes, and show the contents of each. Name the seeds.*

*Lay one seed box in each of Central America, South America, India, Africa and East Timor.*

Trained USC staff in partner countries would go to the people in the world who were having trouble with sustaining their own life-style by growing their own food, and helped them collect and save the best seeds in special containers and put them in a special building called the seed bank. When hard times come for the farmers, they can have access to their locally-adapted seeds which are better able to withstand wind, rain and drought, and which don't require a lot of chemical fertilizer. They won't have to rely on the big seed companies, which often sell seeds that require farmers to use chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

*Pick up Dr. Lotta and move her around the world as you speak.*

The USC volunteers also teach the people to be take care of their own leadership of how they want their communities to be for all the families. Dr. Lotta established 150 aid programs in 20 countries around the world.

*Set Dr. Lotta back down at 56 Sparks Street, Ottawa*

USC started with strong support from Unitarian Congregations across Canada. Now, Canadians of all faiths, send money to help with this important work. Thanks to the courageous leadership of a little woman from Czechoslovakia who came to Canada – all by talking to Canadians on the radio about the work at 56 Sparks Street, Ottawa.

*Show the Order of Canada Medal around Dr. Lotta's neck.*

For her work of 60 years, Dr. Lotta was called by the Governor General of Canada to be given the Order of Canada award. This is the highest award for great achievement in making a difference in the lives of others. Dr. Lotta became a venerated symbol of how one person can make a difference in the lives of many.

*Take out the picture of Dr. Lotta's bronze bust and stand it to the right of the Unitarian Church of Ottawa.*

If you go to Ottawa, you can go to # 56 Sparks Street, open the big, tall door that leads to an elevator, and go up to the 7th floor and knock on Suite 705. There in the entrance way is a great bronze carving of Dr. Lotta to greet you with seed boxes all around her and a map of where all the USC volunteers go in the world to help.

Very happy volunteers will show you the letters and phone calls from around the world from people asking for USC advice and assistance.

Dr. Lotta passed away in 1990 when she was ninety-one years old. Her legacy lives on. For those who heard her heartfelt appeals for help, her name still evokes a sense of

commitment and pride. Even today, in memory of this great woman, people still make pilgrimages to 56 Sparks Street, Ottawa.

(Sit back now and focus on the children's faces, take a moment before presenting the wondering questions.)

### **Wondering Together**

#### **Related Materials for work time opportunities**

*I wonder if you know anyone who has met Dr. Lotta? Perhaps one of your grandparents did.*

*I wonder if someone you know used to help with the USC work.*

*I wonder if any of your families donate money to help the USC do its work in the world.*

*I wonder what it was like for Dr. Lotta and her family not to be safe in their own country.*

*I wonder how she learned all those languages.*

*I wonder if Dr. Lotta's sister helped with the USC work when she moved to Canada.*

*I wonder how the USC partner staff learned all they had to know about helping to create seed banks with the people of each country.*

*I wonder what Unitarian promise this story is about.*

*I wonder if I will meet any of you in the USC office one day when I go to Ottawa.*

*I wonder if one day you might like to help by being a USC volunteer.*

*I wonder what the most important part of this story was.*

*I wonder if there's any part of the story that could be left out.*

*Seeds of Hope Map of the world to explore*

*Seed sorting canisters and tray to make a food bank*

*Photos of successful communities to make a booklet or collage with*

*Doll-making material to create farmers and USC volunteers*

*Radio scripts of actual appeals from Dr. Lotta that could be read to partners.*





The Story of Dr. Lotta  
A Unitarian Source Story about  
**The Blue Promise:** Acting on your beliefs  
Wondering Together

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