

## From the Editor

We had been traveling swiftly east in arguably one of the sleekest trains of its time during the early morning of April 4, 1995. I remember this date, because I looked down at my Ironman digital watch face to check the time. 4/4, it read. Noted. As we traveled further and further than ever before away from the place I called home, the train slowed to a pedestrian pace. I gazed out the window, looking for the reason. We stopped, briefly, and there was a call for passports. We had entered Hungary. As the Austrian train pulled forward again, the pedestrian pace continued. Those old tracks couldn't take the speed.

What lay ahead for us were experiences that would physically mold our plastic, young brains: scores of people at the station in Budapest, begging us to rent their spare rooms, wide open boulevards with hardly any traffic, and garish, Western fast food restaurants that attracted seemingly the only life left out on the streets. While allowing a complete stranger to wrap strands of my long hair with colorful embroidery thread, she pulled me quickly and briefly from our stoop into a darkened alley to hide from police; she had no license to be working as a street vendor, but these were desperate times. The apartment we chose – offered by a wizened old man – was \$10 a night for the two of us, accessed via a rickety cage-style outdoor elevator. With no laundromat, we washed our jeans in the bathtub. Budapest – indeed, every one of the former communist countries – was a ghost town.

The lessons I took with me from my time spent east of the former Iron Curtain were lasting. Prague, Kraków, Warsaw, former East Berlin, and the East Side Gallery. All that I had read about up to that point did not prepare me for reality. History lessons in high school were lacking desperately in context. Seeing the world for myself was the context I needed to evolve as a human. But, the longer I traveled, the lonelier I felt – these spaces felt post-apocalyptic. No one had prepared these populations for life after communism. The Band-aid had been ripped off, exposing all that was lacking to thrive in a democracy.

And then, while ambling down a narrow street in Budapest, I came upon a leather shop. It stopped me in my tracks. Here was something familiar. Here was something I held in common with the shop keeper. What grounded this artist would ground me as well: leather. His shop window was full of beautiful, wet-molded, framed art: large, voluminous trees, faces of all walks of life, and a few abstracts as well. Fine, thin leather had been softened and pushed and pulled until they represented his intentions. I stood for a few minutes, snapping a few photos with my precious film, feeling the ground firmly under my feet, grateful for this discovery.

We live in a time that threatens to destroy what is left of human connection. It is dangerous to give radical thoughts too much mental bandwidth, as they tend to polarize and isolate. Leather work has always predicated itself on thoughtful, methodical processes that require us to slow down, much like those Hungarian train tracks, forcing us to work and think at its pace, not ours. It is for this reason that I most look forward to our shows, because there, leather is our common language, reminding us – leather workers from all over the world – of our commonality.

See you in Sheridan.

*Charlie*

## LEATHER CRAFTERS' JOURNAL

Charil Reis • Editor

charil@leathercraftersjournal.com

Ralph Solome Jr • Production

ralph@leathercraftersjournal.com

Brian Stelzel • Circulation

brian@leathercraftersjournal.com

Dave Skinner • Media

### *Leather Crafter's Journal*

(ISSN 1082-4480) is published bi-monthly (6 times per year).

Administrative office is located at:

315 S. Oneida Ave., Suite 104

Rhineland, WI 54501-3777

Phone: 715/362-5393

Fax: 715/362-5391

Email: info@leathercraftersjournal.com

www.leathercraftersjournal.com

One year subscriptions payable in US dollars: \$36.00 (USA); \$44.00 (Canada); \$64.00 (Other Countries). PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Rhineland, WI 54501, and additional mailing offices.

Address Changes must be made at least six weeks prior to the ON-SALE date. Send address changes, including old and new addresses, to:

PO Box 673

Rhineland WI 54501-3777.

We cannot be responsible for copies which are not forwarded by the Post Office. Duplicate copies not guaranteed.

© 2026 Leather Crafter's Journal, Inc. All rights reserved. Articles and photos are welcome and will be handled with care, but we cannot be responsible for their safety. Follow the writers' guidelines for electronically submitting articles at [www.leathercraftersjournal.com/contact](http://www.leathercraftersjournal.com/contact). When mailing, enclose a SASE with correct postage for return of unsolicited material. Name and address of writer required on all letters to the editor. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and length. The opinions expressed in articles and letters are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the publisher.

POSTMASTER:

Send address changes to:

Leather Crafter's Journal

PO Box 673

Rhineland WI 54501 USA