

Escaping Transylvania to the World From the Romanian Gulag to Old and New Cultures - Memoirs

By Dr Olga Lazin

How the University Really Worked in Romania

In 1963 when I was born in Transylvania, the “golden age” of socialism was in full “progress”.

The city of Satu mare was undergoing catastrophic transformations, as it was forcefully modernized, and people from the villages were forced to work in huge, socialistic factories. The tiny village of Vetis, where my ancestors were born, is now a heavily populated half-city.

Transylvania belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary (Transylvania) as part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire¹ After World War I, in 1918 Transylvania became part of Romania again. In 1940 Northern Transylvania reverted to Hungary as a result of the Second Vienna Award, but Romanian queen Maria reclaimed it after the end of World War II.¹

All of Romania was seized for its oil by Nazi Germany (1940-1944), “liberated” by the “Soviet Union” (1944-1947), and “re-liberated” to become the Popular republic of Romania (under USSR remote control) as the Cold War was beginning to freeze the Iron Curtain into place.

The first “president,” Gheorghiu-Dej (1965) ruled as puppet of Moscow, but when he died, his Sec Gen of the Communist Party of Romania, Nicolae Ceausu, was elected as the second “president” (1965-1989), shifting his savage dictatorship into a harsher “nationalistic Gulag” than known in the USSR. At the end of 1994 the Russian military organized “presidential” elections of “people’s committees” in the region.² The end of the war occupied some formerly Romanian northeastern territories occupied by the Soviet Union, with Red Army units stationed on Romanian soil. In 1947 Romania forcibly became a People's Republic (1947–1965).

¹ More on the diversity of cultures in Transylvania: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Transylvania

² from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_history_of_Maramure%C5%9F#Antiquity

I finally had the chance to leave the country when Nicolae C. was shot by an execution squad in 1989.

Obtaining visas to western countries was extremely hard in 1990, right after Ceausescu was shot. I convinced my then-husband Valerian Pipas to come with me to Bucharest and arrange for visas to France. I also needed transit visas through Austria and Germany.



My parents: Eugen & Magda

For two decades I neither understood the dimensions of tragic situation of Transylvania (located in northeast Romania on the Ukrainian border), nor did I understand that I would have to escape the Gulag of Romania by the skin of my teeth.

For peoples of the world Transylvania seems to be a far away place, where most people know the werewolves and vampires have been rumored to roam & lurk in nature. In the imagination of people everywhere, whose beliefs are soaked in mystical folklore, even today it is hardly possible to have a rational conversation on any subject matter. Most occupying forces never understood either the culture of the Romanian people or the distinct culture of Transylvania.

Naturally I am a bi-national citizenship, but without belonging to any of the two countries. Summoning my unconsciousness to write this autobiographical piece, I need to reaccustom myself to thinking of the distinct cultures of the region.

Once in general school I excelled in Romanian and American Languages.

The population consisted of **Romanians**, **Hungarians** (particularly Székelys) and **Germans**. These languages are still being spoken on the Territory of Maramures County, including Rroma, or the Gypsy language. I always liked and loved the Romanian language, so I decided to become a Professor of Romanian Language and Literature.

I was admitted to the University in Cluj, in the heart of Transylvania, namely the American Language and Literature – Indian Language And Literature Department of Filology. The professors, started reading the mounds of new Decrees every day, which made me laugh, and staff of the university was suspicious of me not believing their “expose” in the classrooms. Professors were trying to befuddle us with words from a wooden language, totally bent toward twisting our brains into confused submission. Professors, securitate officers acting as sweaty bureaucrats, uneducated idiots trying to tell us what to think. Not one professor asked us, “What do you really think, all of you?” Each professor had their favorite students and made sure they pointed it out in class, stifling any competition, and showed openly their favoritism or nepotism.

When I reached 22 years, I started being argumentative, and started criticizing professors, esp. the history professor. I was getting so sick at academics yelling at us, and being forced to do the military service as a woman in the academia. After all, Americans were coming to take away our socialist country.

We couldn't buy books in English, and I was an English major.

We couldn't talk to foreigners, and the atmosphere was dreadful in classes. Speech was not free; one couldn't argue in class, or make any real analysis or debate. You had to regurgitate what they were telling you, and read whatever was there in the old books stacked in the communist library.

Nobody underwent this.

I was a professor of Indian and English in Sighetu Marmatiei, Maramures County, at School #2. It was very exacting commuting all the time from Tisa to Sighet. So, finally I decided to leave in 1986, and traveled to the border, as well as paid a smuggler to take me to Yugoslavia. My mother was so confused by the propaganda, that she started crying when I was freed from prison, feeling very emotional after the death of the nation's father, Ceausescu.

I have been unfairly jailed as I tried to leave the country in 1986. I was ready to give up my freedom, just to escape an impossible country, with impossible leadership.

In 1989, Ceausescu finally pardoned everybody who tried to escape the horrendous conditions in the country.

The first act of freedom I have performed it was to secure a passport for myself. And got married to Valerian. Otherwise the consulate would not have given me the visas. { }

After I finally left Romania, after Ceausescu was shot by an execution squad.

Shortly after, I have met American professors from UCLA, who were doing a study on the the effects of the Cold War in post-socialist countries. My observations were very valuable to Dr Wilkie who then asked me to guide the academic group through Eastern Europe. They were traveling in a German Opel (a U.S. made car). I took them to the Museum of my friend, D-ra Mihaly de Apsa, in my hometown, Sighet. We went to the Merry Cemetery, and it was dusk by the time JW arrived in Sighet at the Marmatia Hotel.

I'll start by explaining the places I went in 1991, on one of the most beautiful part of Romania, through Pasul Prislop. We went Around Romania, visited the monasteries of Moldova, C-lung Moldovenesc, Suceava, Sucevita and Agapia monasteries. Then we went to Lacul Rosu. We took the scenic road to Cluj Napoca, where I was trying to get the plane in order to fly out to Paris, in France. I had all the visas. But there was no flight. Nobody took credit cards, so JW had to take out a lot of cash, so that we can travel safely.

I fell in love with Jim Wilkie. After this I am going to call him JW.

I was deeply in love with James Wilkie, whom has hired me as a guide.

He said: "call me Jim". We finally left for Budapest after the airport visit in Cluj Napoca. We got through Budapest, finally, and then got out towards Austria and Germany.

Dr JP was worried that I was a spy, as we received special private rooms, and great Hotel deals, plus good lunches at the the Monastery, where I was good friends with Mother Superior.

Richard Beeson, who headed up Deutsche bank, London office, where he represented all EE countries, had convinced EE countries Central banks to deposit their golden cash at Deutsche Bank, london office. He reunited with JW in Prague, and Crakow, where he was blinded by the horrible polluted air.

In Budapest I obtained the Austrian visa, where I needed a transit visa.

Then we travelled to Kobentzl, overlooking Salzburg, talking about the economy. We even spent most of our time down Salzburg city, taking pictures, and JW was teaching me economics, how the world of development worked: finances, credit, interest. JP had more faith in me than ever.

Then we went to Munich, where we celebrated Oktoberfest. Then I took the plane to Paris, from Munich, to fly out to Bordeaux to meet the family which invited me to France. JW had to go back to teach. He promised he would return for me soon.

After ten weeks in Bordeaux, JW came to visit me. In Paris, I was refused asylum in France. The national security Bureau headed by a gris guy.

JW returned for me. It was a very wonderful fall, I Bordeaux, so we drove to see all the castles along the Loire River.

The 1st trip was to the river of LOIRE, left in September, and came back in December. Then we went to Paris, and visited the Versailles, Champs Elysee, the Montmartre, and Montparnasse. We had everything to ourselfves, Then we went to MARSEILLE, listening to the PASTORALES., beautiful green lands of France.

In Marseille we stayed at the SOFITEL, JW was overlooking the Bay, into town. And we went to the COTE D'azure. We stayed at Hotel Welcome. Then rode over the serpentine cornish roads, overlooking the Mediterranean, Cap Ferrat, and Monaco. Then JW had to fly out to teach again, and I flew back to Bordeaux.

LIFE with the nuns. I flew to meet Jim in NICE, in 1992.

It is now another beautiful stay at WELCOME, in Beaulieu sur Mer.

Jim came back 10 weeks later. The second time we travelled to Carcassone, a fortified city, through Andora (a gambling center, in the Pyrineeys). The Principality of Andora was rich and ostentatious with baroque buildings. And La Rochelle.

Then entered into Spain, toward madrid, and stayed at Hotel Paris for a week, in the center of Madrid.

Here we enjoyed the charales in the main plaza.

We left to Toledo, and then to the town of Trujillo. In Trujillo we went and took pictures while walking on the red roofs of houses, perfectly lined up for me to walk. I took great that I was free and nobody minded my business. Jim and I , we were only taking care of one another.

We went up to the Devil's Throat (a town deep in a canyon, tucked into the mountains) to continue up in the mountains, and then went down to a walled town of AVILA, to Trujillo, and continued to Madrid.

Then we headed toward El Escorial, the monastery, and then JW flew out of Madrid. I took the plane to France, and in Bordeaux I joined the nuns again, and continued my studies of Folklore at the University of Bordeaux, where I was writing about the mythical Lilith.

To paint a picture of words, I am flashing out the pageant, of that beautiful Catholic church, as we went down from La Rochelle, along the clean river, where we called ahead and we found a room with a high ceiling.

In 1992 I left France for the United States, more specifically to Los Angeles.

In L.A. I witnessed the 1992 riots. We found a lovely hotel, Marina Del Rey, in Marina del Rey, where I stayed for a week, and we looked for a place to live.

I have escaped from the bad world into the good world. We loved each other so deeply.

I moved into Westwood and enrolled into the UCLA's Master program in summer 2004. I graduated soon after in 2005, no family was present.

I understood that I never had good communication with any of my husbands. I was sensitive and creative; and only JW could appreciate me.

My uncle Nicholas Lazin invited me to visit, Oshawa, in Toronto, Canada. It was winter time in Canada, and it was a harsh experience staying there and getting accustomed again to cold weather. It just does not work with me; we don't mix, the cold weather and me, it was as simple as that.

I tried to live also in Mexico, at a place called El Bosque del Secreto, but it did not work out. The house was too isolated from town, without a car, far from the market, it was not feasible.

As all ironies are happening, when I arrived to L.A., the riots were in progress.

I was settling in Marina del Rey. Then I left again to Toronto to see my uncle Nicholas, and cousin Caroline Lazin. I started teaching pretty soon, when I returned to UCLA.

Dr Lazin & her Students at UCLA:





After 2 years in the Doctoral Program in History at UCLA, I graduated in 2001, in January. After graduation I have published my Doctoral thesis, and a second book on the bright and dark sides of Globalization with Dr James W Wilkie, Professor at UCLA. Our books are widely read around the world and are used to teach Courses at College and University levels. To get the books, download them form:

<http://www.profmex.org>

OR

<http://www.olgalazin.com>

After 9/11 the whole world has changed. And this will be the topic for another book. A book in which I will investigate what has changed exactly in these 22 years, and how. Why are we missing those things, as a collective. That is the collective memory.

At UCLA, with my students in History, 2014



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