Twenty-four young writers from the East on upheaval, change and those things that always remain the same
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INTRODUCTION

THE DISCOVERY OF A NEW GENERATION
The fall of the Iron Curtain changed the world. This international essay competition has given young people the opportunity to express their thoughts on a period of revolutionary social and political change. The “post-Wall” generation lived through an upheaval which was unthinkable just a few years before. In their essays, they capture the confusion of an age where certainties no longer exist and a new orientation is sought.

The contest did something for us judges too. It showed us that a generation of twenty-year olds can be audacious and at ease in assessing the world around them. They are articulate, bold and refreshing; they speak of hardship and conflict, yet they express hope, maturity and inner strength. Reading these essays was surprising and moving; judging hundreds of entries was hard, but rewarding work.

Our young contestants represent a vast area which, for many, remains a terra incognita. Reading through their essays, one understands that political borders and geographic distance are less and less an influence on how thoughtful young people perceive the world. Today’s twenty-year olds are free of dogma and open-minded. They expect success and are ready to study and work hard for it.

Our task is to listen carefully, to understand their aspirations and hopes, and to believe in their success. We need to create a framework for them to prove themselves, be successful and reach higher ground. That is why this competition was organised and that is why you have this book in your hands, a book which brings together the twenty-four essays of the “Born in ’89” finalists.

I want to thank my fellow judges who have worked on this project with enthusiasm and dedication. Our only regret in this challenging endeavour is that many more fine essays could not be included in this publication. Congratulations to all who participated!

ANDREI KURKOV
JUDGES

ANDREI KURKOV, born in Leningrad, USSR, and now living in Kiev, Ukraine, is one of the most successful contemporary writers to emerge from the rubble of the former Soviet Union. His novels have been translated into twenty-five languages and include "Death and the Penguin", "Penguin Lost" and 'The President’s Last Love'.

KEVIN KLOSE, Dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, was previously President of National Public Radio and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. For many years, he was a Washington Post journalist and served as its Moscow correspondent in the 1970s.

NENAD POPOVIĆ, founder and editor of the Durieux Publishing House, Zagreb, which under his leadership has become a primary port of call for young, innovative and bold writers from former Yugoslavia. Many of the talents he discovered have become internationally successful writers.

SLADANA BUKOVAC, writer and journalist, works as a cultural affairs broadcaster for Croatian television and is now finishing her latest novel.

QUENTIN PEEL, currently head of the Financial Times bureau in Berlin, was previously the paper’s foreign affairs editor and Moscow correspondent. He maintains a deep fascination and affection for the region and regularly lectures at universities in Russia.

VELISLAV RADEV has had extensive journalistic experience in Eastern Europe and spent over twenty years at the BBC as editor, producer, reporter and broadcaster, serving for a number of years as Deputy Head of the Russian Service.

DANUTA WALEWSKA, columnist and long-time business writer for the Polish national daily Rzeczpospolita, has an abiding interest in the region’s younger generation.
FOREWORD

For those of us who grew up in a Europe cut in half by the Iron Curtain, the joy and relief over the events of 1989 will be with us forever.

Twenty years on, the EBRD set out to take the pulse of the region in a way unfamiliar and unusual for an international financial institution. We organised an essay competition for young writers, called our endeavour “Born in ’89”, and set out to hear from a new generation. We wanted to learn about their experiences and aspirations, their beliefs, hopes and disappointments. And, with nearly 600 essays received, we were richly rewarded for our effort.

Not only did the number of participants exceed our wildest expectations. It was the quality, variety, depth and originality of the entries which surprised and even moved us. The result was a rich kaleidoscope of life, insight and experience – from Rijeka to Karaganda to Vladivostok, and capital cities in between.

Our competition, which we organised in partnership with UniCredit and support from the Financial Times, would not have been a success without our outstanding judges. Their enthusiastic reaction to many of the contributions belies the difficult job they had in selecting the finalists from many worthy essays.

I would like to thank those who have made “Born in ’89” happen. My sincere appreciation goes to the contestants, with special tribute to those who have been selected for this publication. I believe that you, the readers, will be stimulated and rewarded by these young voices. We at the Bank hope to hear much more from them in the years to come.

THOMAS MIROW, PRESIDENT, EBRD

The events of 1989 changed not only the lives of people living East of the Iron Curtain but also the lives of those to the West. In a single stroke, Europe was divided no longer – yet the process of overcoming decades of separation has not always been painless and easy and is, to some extent, not yet over.

That is why we wanted to hear the voices of the generation that was born in 1989. Being in their twenties, an age of hopes and feelings, the authors of this fascinating collection of stories can help us to understand what has been achieved, what is missing and what can be done differently. Beyond facts and figures, these voices offer us emotions and speak to our hearts as much as they do to our minds.

Alongside the EBRD and the Financial Times, UniCredit is a proud partner of the “Born in ’89” contest. This is because of our European identity and long-term commitment to Central and Eastern Europe. In a way, UniCredit is itself a child of 1989, as the Group’s involvement and investments in the region became possible thanks to the opening up of local economies and society. Over the years, we have become part of the region.

We would like to thank all those who made the “Born in ’89” project possible – and especially the judges for their outstanding work. We wish the generation of ’89 broad recognition and great future success.

ANTONELLA MASSARI, HEAD OF GROUP IDENTITY AND COMMUNICATIONS, UNICREDIT
Casting my mind a long time back, I have to say that, of course, I had a wonderful childhood. The sort of childhood that happens only once in a lifetime. Full of toys, Meccano kits, and constant pleas of “Daddy, buy me this one, I have been dreaming of it all my life.” Naturally, I did dream for the whole of my five (or however many it was at the time) years. Today, my mother often says that I waste my money on rubbish, and know nothing of the effort it takes to earn it. She tells me that I can’t remember the 90’s, when for the whole summer we had nothing to eat other than marrow roasted with potatoes which we grew at the dacha, when we had no money to buy bread, and paid our school fees later than everybody else in my class. At class meetings, I stood up and recited a sentence I had long since learned by heart: “My parents haven’t had their salaries paid for a long time, we will pay later.” Of course I had a carefree childhood. Perhaps that’s why today my mother tells me that, to provide for me and my brother, she spent almost fifteen years working in a factory, never thinking about her career. In the summer, we had to survive until the next payday. Daddy kept thinking up new names for marrow and potato stew – “Fantasy Fricassee 34!” he would call out. I would sit down to supper and try to decide how this one differed from the one we had for breakfast and lunch. I understand now that only the names were different. A week later, the fantasy fricassee would acquire a different number, and I would experience it as an exquisite new creation. As I said, I was a very good child.

Of course I had an amazing childhood. While my parents were picking marrows or digging for potatoes at the dacha, my brother and I played in the sandpit with not a care in the world. One day Daddy brought home some sand and stones to build us a playhouse, but then quite different problems emerged and the playhouse had to be abandoned. But the sandpit remained, and it was just as remarkable as our childhood.

When I got a little bigger, it turned out that my parents wanted their son to become a programmer and go to work in America or Germany. I had to learn English and give a lot of thought to the future. I believed that the day would certainly come when I would see Paris, London and Venice. I fell in love with the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben and St. Mark’s Square that I saw on television. My Europe was fabulously beautiful and fabulously close – no further than the length of my arm stretching out to the control panel. Whenever my imagination took me flying over Paris in my glider, daddy would sigh that in the past everything had been much simpler, and much more stable. Today, he is still a university lecturer, still does his science and has never once gone abroad since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

I found out about the Fall of the Wall in my German class. Then came a teenage fascination with rock and Pink Floyd, who sang about “another brick in the wall”. At the time I thought how lucky that the song was not about me, since I was living in another time, and living in Europe. I listened to rock, I spoke English, I wore second-hand clothes which, if the sellers were to be believed, they had brought straight from England, and at a pretty steep price.

In Ukrainian and history classes we were often told that Ukraine is the geographic centre of Europe. Actually, this seemed quite incredible. It seemed that all you had to do was to get into a train one evening, and you would get out at a London station the next morning. You would get out, take off your imaginary hat, smile and say “Have a nice day!” to the first person you saw. That was the Europe of my childhood.
Has anything changed since then? Basically nothing. I acquired a passport and several visas. Whereas in the past I could change countries by pressing a button on the television panel, now I could do it by turning the wheel of my rented car.

We who were born in ’89, have remained children forever. We grew in the shade, deprived of light and fertile soil, but with a huge store of freedom in our lungs. When we became the children of ’89, even the Universe which emerged after the Big Bang became as nothing compared to the universes which emerged here after the Great Fall. The Wall gave up the ghost and fell on our heads as our first cry was heard in the maternity ward – but no one explained this to us. “Live on earth as if it were paradise,” unknown teachers said to us, and we believed them. We were all like growing trees which had to push through the whole thickness of the concrete of history and the blood congealed on it. Year after year, we unfurled our leaves, pushed to the outside, greened in the summer and waited for the thaw in the winter. We didn’t know how to live without that fallen wall pressing against our backs. It was our dead mother, and we were its living children. Its weight made us strong, its barbed wire and broken glass taught us to fight and bare our teeth. For a long time we, its children, were afraid to emerge from the shadow of its camouflaging colours. But time passed, and one day it took its heavy hand away and whispered to us from the world beyond: “Fly, my dears, there is nothing more to hold you.”

Immediately we rushed for the trains, feverishly packed our suitcases and leapt into the first available planes to make sure that when we woke up next morning, we would be in Europe. But then it turned out that we didn’t know in which hand to hold the fork at lunch, that we were dirty and unkempt, and that our English left much to be desired.

Europe saw the blooming young Ukraine of our dreams, with flowers in her hair, as a morose, taciturn woman in a threadbare coat. Life had not stood still for twenty years on the other side of the fallen wall. New walls kept falling – new countries joined the Schengen Agreement and a common currency appeared. We, the young, green trees, suddenly understood that we had emerged into a big and shady forest. It was time to reach for the sun, to grow to the crowns of the tallest English, French and Italian trees. They bowed over us and told us in whispers what to do and how to do it. There had been a time when they too were small and fragile. But we, the children of the Wall, had something to teach them too. We knew what it meant to force our way from the centre of the Earth to the surface, we knew how hard it was to earn money and we knew with absolute certainty what we wanted and what price we were willing to pay to get it. The priceless experience acquired during the twenty years of life under the fallen wall would now be our passport to Europe.

But the Wall has changed me. In spite of my age, I have now managed to become a reasonably successful Ukrainian journalist. I have the Wall to thank for my character and my single-mindedness. And I am proud that I can say about myself and about others like myself that we are the children of ’89. Today, we are emerging from the shadows knowing what needs to be done to make sure that our children will live in New Europe. We are maximalists and fatalists. For us, “Europe” means “destiny”. It will be the best destiny for everyone – the Serbians and the Albanians, the Germans and the French, the Ukrainians and the Poles.

I have said that I had a wonderful childhood. This is why I will do everything to make sure that my children stay in Ukraine. A European Ukraine. We will spend our holidays in London, and our weekends in Athens or Rome. And while my children contemplate the Acropolis or the Coliseum, I will say quietly to myself “Thank you, Wall, for everything.” “Dad, is it true that our life used to be the worst in the whole of Europe?” my son will ask, pulling at my shirt. And I will answer “Don’t listen to them. It was an amazing time.”

’89

We, the children of ’89, are already standing at the door of the Europe of our childhood, where everybody smiles at one another and wishes each other a good day, the Europe which has no borders and no walls. The last wall is the border of the European Union. But there will come a day when even that will dissolve. It will not fall, crushing yet another generation underneath. It will simply smile and, taking French leave, it will disappear.

This is why we have all really had a wonderful childhood.

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ИГОРЬ АНДРЮЩЕНКО
ДНЕПРОПЕТРОВСК (УКРАИНА)

01
Возвращаясь на много лет назад, хочу сказать, что, конечно, у меня было замечательное детство. Такое детство, которое бывает только раз в жизни. С машинками, конструкторами, с веchnыми просьбами: «Папа, купи мне вон ту игрушку, я всю жизнь о ней мечтал». Конечно же, мечтал все свои пять (или сколько там их тогда было) лет. Сегодня моя мать часто говорит, что я трачу деньги впустую и не знаю, какой ценой они зарабатываются. Она говорит мне, что я не помню девяностых, когда мы все лето ели только жареные с картошкой кабачки, выращенные на даче. Когда не было денег купить хлеба, а за школьное обучение приходилось платить позже всех в классе. Во время собраний класса я вставал и говорил давно заученную фразу: «Родителям зарплату не платят, мы позже сдадим».

Конечно, у меня было беззаботное детство. Может быть, поэтому сегодня мать говорит мне, что ради нашего с братом благополучия она едва ли не пятнадцать лет работала на заводе, совершенно не думая о карьере. Летом нужно было дожить до следующей зарплаты. Папа придумывал названия для рап из кабачков и картошки. «Каляка-малыка номер 34» – говорил он. Я садился за ужин и пытался найти отличия от того рапа, которое мы ели на завтрак и обед. Сейчас мне понятно, что разными были только названия. Через неделю «каляка-малыка» меняя номер и становилась для меня новым изысканным блюдом. Я был очень хорошим ребенком.

Конечно, у меня было невероятное детство. Пока родители собирали кабачки или копали картошку на даче, мы с братом беззаботно играли в песочнице. Папа когда-то привез камней и песка, чтобы построить домик, но позже у него возникли совсем другие заботы, и о доме пришлось забыть. Зато осталась песочница, такая же замечательная, как и наше с братом детство.

02
Когда я чуть подрос, оказалось, что родители хотят, чтобы их сын стал программистом и уехал работать в США или Германию. Мне приходилось учить английский и много думать о будущем. Я верил, что когда-нибудь обязательно увижу Париж, Лондон, Венецию. Я влюбился в увиденные по телевизору Эйфелеву башню, Биг Бен и площадь Сан-Марко. Моя Европа была сказочно красивой и сказочно близкой – всего лишь на расстоянии вытянутой до пульта руки.

Каждый раз, когда я мысленно летал на дельтаплане над Парижем, папа вздыхал, мол, раньше все было намного проще, намного стабильнее. Он до сих пор работает преподавателем в университете, занимается наукой и ни разу с тех пор, как железный занавес упал, не выехал за границу.

О падении Стены я узнал в седьмом классе на уроке немецкого. Потом было подростковое увлечение рок-музыкой, были Pink Floyd, которые пели об еще одном кирпичике в стенах. Тогда подумалось, что песня эта, к счастью, не обо мне. Я ведь живу в другое время, я живу в Европе. Я слушаю рок, я знаю английский, я хожу в одежде second-hand, которую, если верить продавцам, привезли из Англии – и это чертовски круто.

На уроках украинского языка и истории нам часто говорили, что географический центр Европы находится в Украине. И это было просто невероятно. Казалось, достаточно сесть вечером на поезд, чтобы утром выйти где-то на лондонском вокзале. Выйти из вагона, снять воображаемую шляпу, улыбнуться и сказать «Have a nice day!» первому встречному. Вот такой была Европа моего детства.

03
Изменилось ли что-то с тех пор? В сущности – ничего. У меня появился паспорт и несколько открытых виз. Если в прошлом страны менялись нажатием на кнопку пульта телевизора, то теперь – поворотом руля арендованного автомобиля.

Мы, рожденные в 89-м, навсегда остались детьми. Мы росли в тени, лишенные света и плодородной земли, но с огромным запасом свободы в легких. Когда 89-й стал нашим отцом, даже Вселенная, которая возникла после Большого взрыва, превратилась в ничто по сравнению со вселенными, возникшими в нас после Большого падения. Стена испустила дух и упала нам на головы одновременно с первым нашим криком в роддоме – но этого никто нам
Мы, молодые и зеленые деревца, вдруг поняли, что проросли в большом и тенистом лесу. Теперь настало время пробиться к солнцу, вырасти до уровня крон самых высоких английских, французских, итальянских деревьев. Они наклоняются над нами и шепчут, как и что делать. Когда-то они были такими же маленькими и хрупкими. Но нам, детям Стены, тоже есть, чему их научить. Мы знаем, что значит пробиваться из самого центра Земли на поверхность, мы знаем, чего стоят заработанные деньги, и мы абсолютно четко понимаем, чего хотим и какую цену готовы отдать за это. Бесценный опыт, полученный за двадцать лет жизни под упавшей стеной, — вот наш пропуск в Европу.

04

«Игорь, ты точно становишь программистом и уедешь работать в Штаты!», — часто повторяли мне мои родители. И добавляли, подумав: «Или в Германию».

Но Стена сделала меня другим. Сегодня, несмотря на свой возраст, я успел стать достаточно успешным украинским журналистом. Я обязан Стене своим характером и целесустрением. И я горжусь тем, что могу сказать о себе и о таких, как я, — дети 89-го. Сегодня мы выходим из тени со знанием того, что нужно сделать, чтобы наши дети жили в Новой Европе. Мы — максималисты и фаталисты. Европа для нас — синоним слова «судьба». И это будет лучшая судьба для всех — сербов и албанцев, немцев и французов, украинцев и поляков.

Я уже говорил, что у меня было прекрасное детство. Именно поэтому я делаю все, чтобы мои дети остались жить в Украине. Европейской Украине. На каникулы мы будем ездить в Лондон, а на выходных летать в Афины или Рим. «Стена, спасибо тебе за все, что ты для меня сделала», — прошепчу я, когда мои дети будут рассматривать Акрополь и Колизей. «Пап, правда, что раньше мы жили хуже всех в Европе?», — спросит сын, держа меня за рубашку. «Не слышу никого. Это было замечательное время, милый», — отвечу я.

89

Мы, дети 89-го, уже стоим у дверей Европы нашего детства. Европы, где все улыбаются друг другу и жалеют хорошего дня. Европы без границ и стен. Последняя стена — это граница Евросоюза. Но придет день — и она растворится. Она не будет падать, придавивая собой еще одно поколение. Просто улыбнется и по-английски, не прощаясь, исчезнет.

Потому что у нас всех было действительно чудесное детство.

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A few months before I was born my mother started thinking of proper names for her future child. One of the first things that came into her mind was “Democracy”. Yes, it certainly would have been an unusual name, taking into account that during her whole life my mother had followed the norms of communism, participating in demonstrations, learning the rules of the Party and maintaining the image of a good, stable member of society. However, even my family, which was never really interested in politics and remained rather neutral, knew that there was something different, another system that many believed to be corrupted and inhumane: capitalism. And then, the year 1989 came. Fervent speeches from that time tell us legends about democracy, opportunities, freedom. However, is this what we actually received after two decades?

Behind every change or transition of social order stand millions of human destinies. To me, the first years of the new democracy are a blurred memory of electricity shortages and empty shops. My father would get up every morning at five o’clock and stand in endless lines in order to get his little daughter milk for her breakfast. My grandmother would sit near the stove with me, because this would be the only warm place during the hours without electricity. This is how my country, Bulgaria, and its people welcomed the new system.

Over the first few years, Bulgarian society was hopeful for the future. We did not let the lack of basic goods destroy our beliefs in the government. Everyone felt insecure, just like the child that goes to school for the first time, ready to learn new things but not knowing if he is strong enough to cope with all the changes. But all I remember are happy people, who joked about the inconveniences and who waited. They waited for the real change to come.

But time passed and nothing much happened. Capitalism was not what the Bulgarians had expected. After all, what is the point of having your own private coffee shop when some newly emerged oligarch would come to you every month and take a significant part of your income? Transitional Bulgaria was a country controlled by underground criminals who had nicknames like “Wolf” and “Nero”. They had heavy mobile phones, traveled in huge cars and were completely unpredictable in their actions. Anyone born in 1989 Bulgaria would see these criminals walk into trendy clubs and restaurants, so boisterous, self-confident and incredibly rude. My generation would listen to warnings from teachers and parents: “Do not go anywhere near these people, they are dangerous.” These oligarchs were surrounded by explosions, murders and terror. And little children like me knew to stay away when someone dressed in black got out of his jeep with a facial expression that looked like a school bully coming to get your lunch money.

These people made everyone more cynical. Instead of democratically expressing its desires and opinions, Bulgaria buckled down and decided to survive once again. My classmates and I would tell each other jokes about the government and the oligarchs, jokes that we had heard from the adults and which we did not fully understand but which made our parents laugh loudly and bitterly. This was the time of over-exaggerations in everything. The majority’s favorite music was pop-folk, sung by artificial looking women, made of silicon, peroxide and heavy make-up. The texts of these songs were absurd, a constant cavalcade about money, tragic love and brutal sexual hints. It all seemed like a mockery of the real world. People were governed by the underground mafia and entertained by dollish women that
were only reminiscent of real human beings. This is how I remember Bulgaria in the nineties: loud pop-folk music, angry men in black and, in the middle of this, normal people who laughed through clenched teeth and waited for the good things to start happening.

As the 1989 generation grew up, we developed a common trait: no matter what we say, no matter how cynical we may be, our actions are guided by hope. Many of us choose to go abroad, where things are different and this hope may turn into reality. Others stay in Bulgaria, believing, just like our parents did in 1989, that change might come. However, young people today are aware that we cannot wait for the government to fix everything. We know that it is people who have to strive for a better future because we do not posses the mentality of the previous generations who grew up in the communist reality, where prudence and conformity were the most valuable traits a citizen could have. Those born in 1989 are old enough to remember our acceptance in NATO in 2004. We were those who congratulated each other on Bulgarian EU membership in January 2007. My generation was marked by transition but it was transitional by itself as well.

As we made our first steps, the newly created Republic of Bulgaria was trying to walk by itself, adopting a new constitution and adjusting to new rules. As we became rational individuals, our country was developing its own consciousness. And since the generation of 1989 was bound to be more internationally-oriented than its predecessors, Bulgaria was aiming towards globalisation as well, realising that being a part of a large community demands some sacrifices but brings a lot of profits. My generation refers to itself as both Bulgarian and European. We have realised that after years of excess and extremities in politics, the country and its citizens must aim for balance. We accept nationalism but not chauvinism. We love Bulgaria the most and yet we do not consider other states as foes but as friends. Generation ’89 dreams of a balance that we know is possible, but we are not sure how to achieve it. But we’ll keep on trying until we obtain it. After all, changes don’t bother us; we are the children of transition.

As I was listening to Zhelyu Zhelev, President of Bulgaria from 1990 to 1997, during his speech on Bulgarian transition in front of my university colleagues a few months ago, I kept on thinking whether we really emerged from this period. If so, then why are we constantly reminded of communism? Why do our parents keep mentioning, sometimes with great nostalgia, how much easier life used to be before democratic changes? To me, as long as the ghost of the past hangs over us, we will remain in distant 1989, always insecure about what will happen from now on. And this is what my contemporaries and I are trying to fight against. It is not that we are repulsed by our past or by the beliefs that older people still have of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. But by rethinking what could have happened we are not moving on, we are not achieving anything. We are tired of useless political discussions and corruption. We do not want to feel ashamed after every monitoring report that the EU gives on us. Not all of us are thieves and illegal immigrants. But this is the image we created for ourselves because we did not raise our voice. However, this is what my generation is trying to correct. All the young people I know went to vote in the last parliamentary elections, even though the rest of the population was still reluctant to participate. But this is a beginning, a little change that would start a bigger process in the development of the national consciousness that Bulgaria seemed to lack during transition.

I would like to sum up twenty years in a few sentences, which is hard, even impossible, so I am not even going to try. However, I can predict what the future would hold for us: more difficulties and more optimism. The “children” of 1989 would be making their first steps as young adults, trying to overcome all the prejudice and rejection a transitional generation might receive. And we will, just like we passed through electricity shortages, underground crimes and fake democracy, until reality starts to reflect our hopes.

kilriel@abv.bg
I went up to the attic today to put away an old pair of shoes. My eyes were drawn to an old dusty notebook with the words ‘Personal Diary of Violeta Tsvetkova’ on the cover. But that’s my mum! Let me see what she has written! I picked up the diary throwing a furtive glance around. After all this was personal territory! I opened it at random and began reading:

**6 JULY 1969**
*Today we arrived at the pioneers’ camp in Lesicharka. We had cow’s butter, cheese and cured sausage for breakfast. We were given accommodation in what used to be a school building, sixteen beds to the room.*

**10 JULY 1969**
The squad evening is coming up in a few days and today we had a rehearsal. I will be singing a Russian song and my friend Sylvia will recite a poem about the Bulgarian Communist Party.

**20 JULY 1969**
I came back home from camp two or three days ago. It feels boring in town already. I wish I could go to my granddad and grandma’s village. It’s quite exciting there; I can go with my grandma to the collective farm and help her process the harvested tobacco. In the evening she lets me go to the park with friends. We buy ice cream then take a seat on a bench and tell each other fanciful stories till late.

**1 AUGUST 1969**
They have had olives delivered to our shop. We all went there to queue, me, my sister, mum and dad, because they would only sell one kilo to any one person.
I closed the diary and it occurred to me that my mum had been ten at the time. It all seemed so strange to me. Why would everyone in the family go and queue up rather than just one of them do the shopping? Why would they sell only one kilo of olives each? What is a ‘pioneers’ camp’? What is a ‘collective farm’? It felt like my mum had lived on a different planet. I put the shoes away, picked up mum’s diary and went back downstairs. I took out an old diary which I myself had kept a long time ago and found the pages I had written when I, too, was a ten-year old:

**6 JULY 1999**
*Played on computer. Had lunch and played on computer some more.*

**10 JULY 1999**
*Stayed up late last night in front of computer. Woke up around lunchtime today. Had a quick bite and back to computer.*

**20 JULY 1999**
*Hungry. Bought crisps and nibbles and settled in front of computer.*

I closed my diary. The conclusion was tragic. The children of my parents’ generation were brainwashed. They were singing songs about the Communist Party; they did not have the abundance of groceries we have today; they used to queue up in kilometre-long lines for things which should have been available at their table every single day. However, they had the opportunity to spend their spare time in many different ways.

Today, we are no longer ideological zombies but slaves of our computers; we shop by computer, we socialise by computer, we make friends by computer and we even make love by computer! We eat crisps and hamburgers, we smoke cigarettes or grass, we drive our cars at ferocious speeds. We, who were born in 1989.

And yet, we are also the ones who shall help our country get back up on its own two feet after the testing years behind the Iron Curtain. We are also the ones called upon to save the earth from ecological catastrophe. We are the future Oscar and Nobel Prize winners. You are our past, we are your future! So, do not look down on us with scepticism. Do not judge us too harshly. Our journey has only just begun. The journey of those born in 1989!

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**ТОМИНА АТАНАСОВА**
**ГР. РУСЕ, БЪЛГАРИЯ**

Днес се качих на тавана да оставя старите си обувки. Погледът ми привлече една стара прашна тетрадка, на която пишеше: „Личен дневник на Виолета Цветкова“. Та това е мама! Я да видя какво е написала! Взех дневника и се заозъртах крадешком. Все пак това е лична територия! Отворих напосоки и зачетох:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 ЮЛИ 1969 Г.:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Днес пристигнахме в пионерския лагер в Лесичарка. Закусихме краве масло, чай, сирене и шпеков салам. Настанихме ни в сграда, която някога е била училище – по 16 легла в стая.</td>
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<tr>
<th>10 ЮЛИ 1969 Г.:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>След няколко дена е вечерта на отряда и днес репетирахме. Аз ще пея руска песен, а приятелката ми Силвия ще каже стихотворение за Българската комунистическа партия.</td>
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<tr>
<th>20 ЮЛИ 1969 Г.:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Върнах се от лагера преди 2-3 дена. Скучно ми е вече в града. Искам да отида на село при баба и дядо. Там е много интересно – ходя с баба на ТКЗС-то и там обработваме набрания тютюн. Вечерта тя ме пуска в парка с приятелки. Купуваме си сладолед, сядаме на пейка и до късно си разказваме измислени истории.</td>
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<tr>
<th>1 АВГУСТ 1969 Г.:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>На магазина са пуснали маслени. Наредихме се аз, сестра ми, майка и татко, защото дават само по 1 кг на човек.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Затворих дневника и си помислих: тогава мама е била 10-годишна. Всичко тук ми звучеше много странно. Защо се нареджат всички в семейството на опашка, а не пазарува един? Защо дават само по 1 кг маслини? Какво е това пионерски лагер, какво е ТКЗ? Имам чувството, че майка ми е живяла в друг свят. Оставих обувките, взех дневника на мама и съзах с него вкъщи. Извадих моя стар дневник, който някога си бях водила, и отворих на страниците, писани от мен, когато съм била също 10-годишна:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Дата</th>
<th>Забележки</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 юли 1999 г.:</td>
<td>Играта на компютъра. Обядвах и пак играта на компютъра.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 юли 1999 г.:</td>
<td>Снощи до късно бях пред компютъра. Днес се събудих към обяд. Хапнах набързо и пак пред компютъра.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 юли 1999 г.:</td>
<td>Гадна съм. Купих си чипс и солети и седнах пред компютъра.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Затворих моя дневник. Равносметката беше печална – децата от поколението на моя родители са с промяти мозъци – те пеят песни за комунистическата партия. Нямам това изобилие от хранителни продукти, което имаме днес – редят се на километрични опашки за нещо, което би трябвало ежедневно да присъства на трапезата им. Но те са имали възможността да прекарват разнообразно свободното си време.

Днес ние не сме зомбиращи идеологически, но робуваме на компютъра – пазим компютъра, по компютъра пазаруваме, по компютъра обсъждаме, дори правим любов по компютъра! Ядем чипс и хамбургери, пушим цигари или трева, караем с бясна скорост колите си. Ние, родените през 1989 г.

Но ние сме и тези, които ще изправим страната си на крака след тежките години зад железната завеса. Ние сме тези, които са призвани да спасят Земята от екологична катастрофа. Ние сме бъдещите носители на Оскар и Нобелови лауреати. Вие сте нашето минало, ние сме вашето бъдеще! Затова не гледайте скептично на нас. Не ни съдете строго. Нашият път тепърва започва. Пъят на родените през 1989 г.!

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16
IT SHOULD BE EASIER TO GO TO YOUR NEIGHBOUR THAN GO TO THE MOON.
CHALLENGING THE PLAYGROUND
Great opportunities are always referred to as great challenges. Challenge to recognise it, dare to face it, and be ready to put it into action.

A SHORT TOUR AROUND HISTORY
In 1990 Lithuania took on one of the biggest challenges in its entire history: it dared to re-establish its independence with the many consequences that that entailed. It strived to sustain energetic, economic and political independence from its former master and to steer its economic ship towards a playground with different rules – those of the market economy. Even though some fundamentals were still missing, the course of events had become just too fast to remain a passive observer. The European Union welcomed Lithuania as one of ten successful accession countries in 2004 and provided the most important inputs – a sense of stability and recognition. However, this brought over-confidence and a limited, yet relatively enormous cash inflow (one might term it an in-flood). After revelling in this feeling for all of three years, the economic crisis (aka the financial/mortgage crisis, the Great Depression) revealed a bursting bubble of over-optimistic expectations and the behaviours to go with it.

For some people, this is nothing but dull history. For others it is life, moments that one has to live through, remember, understand and respect. There are those who were ready for change, predicted it or simply were ignorant to everything that was happening, meaning that change brought no surprises. Second, there were people who were taught to be a part of society, whose ideology was subsequently destroyed; the rules changed and those who were quickest to adapt managed to benefit. Third, there are people even now in pursuit of their identity, still feeling the proximity and remains of the past, yet now struggling in a tenuous present. Whew, sounds complicated. But here we are: experiencing the winds of change blowing straight into our faces and striving to persuade our parents that this time everything will be different. They listen to us, they agree, they nod, and try to believe that this time everything will be different.

BEHIND THE VEIL OF FINANCE
I remember myself as a seventeen-year old pulling my mother by the sleeve to the bank and explaining the advantages of investment funds. My mother was suspicious. Pointers from a school-age daughter based on bank leaflets and web pages did not sound promising. Moreover, we had lived through a period of Ponzi “banks”, when the financial system looked like a big lottery pot filled with red balls though the winning one was blue. And subsequently, we saw life savings which had been worth a decent two-room flat stolen and then returned by the government decades later, in a sum now equal to a decent month’s salary. My mother, arguably, felt she had the right to be suspicious. The changes were constantly invading her personal budget. After buying her daughter’s first school shoes with roubles, the medium of exchange was replaced with vouchers, only then to be replaced by the litas. This meant that there was always an adequate supply of waste paper for the heating system; there was however less and less belief in the financial system. But she listened, she agreed, she nodded and she invested. And we were lucky – the investment was cashed out at the very beginning of THE year – i.e. 2007.
TAKing A DIFFERENT look
My mother cashed out and I cashed in. In the very beginning of THE year. The timing of my investment resulted in the philosophical “why!?”. Philosophical, yet encouraging. So I tried to find an answer and still keep looking for it in my studies towards a BA in economics and business. And though I have not found the answer, university has helped me to recognise other essential truths. First, if you have a question, ask it. If you take an exam, you should be rewarded for your knowledge, not for the way you dress, look or behave. This is the complete opposite of what was happening at Lithuanian universities. I witnessed my brother dare to challenge and then struggle, having to repeat his exams eleven times and then deciding to continue his studies in another university. After this, I decided to pursue my bachelor’s degree in another country, at another university which plays according to Western rules. So I still keep surprising my parents and their friends when they realise that there is nothing wrong with contradicting authority (the university administration, in my case). In a constructive and reasoned way, of course.

Another thing that at first seems mysterious to my older relatives is that you are the sole master of your future. So if you have to do an internship, you have to put effort into finding it. In addition to this, there is no job waiting for a student in advance, right after the graduation party. This is the complete opposite of the playground of just twenty years ago. Then, life was a well-planned game with the controls in government hands. No need to choose, search, plan and worry. Not surprisingly, some people miss it, some hate it. The problem is that being independent means being able to choose; yet choosing means thinking and considering the choice made. Whew, lots of work to do.

LEARNING TO FLY
A soul in tension that’s learning to fly
Condition grounded but determined to try
Pink Floyd

But here we are. Learning to choose from those that did not have a chance to do. Learning to trust from those who trust nearly no one, sometimes not even themselves.

Nevertheless, we are happy. There are many serious reasons to be so, but I will now subjectively choose two. The very first one is that the past is still too close to us. It is still etched into our memory, education and heart. We live in a house built during “heroic” times, we have been taught by ideologically confused people, yet we love them unconditionally and drink green tea sweetened with honey in the evenings. The scar of the past gives us an advantage: we know how it SHOULD NOT BE. The past is here not to threaten – it is here to teach, so take the best out of it and remind yourself that it must not repeat itself.

One last word: the future holds promise for us. The European Union gave us stability and recognition – two important elements that create a belief in ourselves, in our ability to achieve and change the country for the better. Moreover, it serves as an example of how it SHOULD BE. And finally, free movement of goods, capital, services and people lead to better education and business opportunities. Opportunities that come hand-in-hand with challenges.

The challenge is to implement this change from “should not be” to “should be”. The playground changed, yet the values have remained the same.

We are ready to recognise it, to dare to face the challenge. We are ready to take action.

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SERGEI BARINOV
RAMENSKOE, RUSSIA

A WORLD WHERE ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE...

Dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall

REMEMBERING HOW IT BEGAN...

I was one-and-a-half years old when the Berlin Wall came down. But my earliest clear memories are when I was between two and a half and three and a half. In other words, the world of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain, a world which had ceased existing in the autumn of 1989, made no impression on my consciousness. I don’t recall the smell of it. Or its songs. I don’t remember what the sunsets were like in that world.

The war in Afghanistan and the Cuban Missile Crisis did not figure in my world. Neither did rationing nor queues. There was no arms race, and spectres of the American secret services did not lurk behind every bush. For many years the chief “security man” was Dmitry Kharatyan in the unfading “Deribasovskaya Street”.

My world was shaped to the gentle whistling of “Wind of Changes” (1990), the “Solidarity” marches and the inauguration of Waleśa (1989), the adoption of the “Law on Elections of People’s Deputies of the USSR” (1988) and the ratification of the START-2 Treaty (1993).

My world had many hopes. And a lot of faith. At first we believed in the West. Then in democracy. Then the “liberal dream”. Then federalism. Many simply believed in God – some sincerely, some out of fear, some out of a feeling of newly-awoken historical memory.

THROWING OFF THE SHACKLES

Then everything suddenly changed. People previously known as democrats were labelled blabber mouths. Or sometimes dregs. Those who had been building “the liberal dream” were accused of thieving, or corruption, or destroying the army.

The word “sovereignty” was replaced by a new idol: the concept of “verticality”, soiled with the soot and the blood of the “Lame Horse”.* Instead of the impossible, unthinkable “Russia will not go to war!” came the usual: “We’ll finish them off in the toilets”.*

It suddenly turned out that the people who had come to extract petroleum from the continental shelf, which Russian oilmen had been unable to reach with their Brezhnev-era equipment, were thieves and scoundrels. It pained me to watch a nearly fully-fledged Russian government committing outrages which, a hundred years earlier, would not even have occurred to Tsar Nicholas II, who you would have thought was much less versed in matters of economics than my contemporaries. In the Caucasus the Russian Empire had for many years put up with the English, because the authorities understood that the technology and the investments brought by the “damned infidels” were vital to the Empire.

What else did my world believe in? It believed in change. That was, if you like, our world’s most fervently-held belief: “Changes”. We had waited so long for change, we wanted it so passionately, that at a certain point we stopped paying attention to the trends and essential nature of the changes that were happening – change for its own sake! This flywheel was coming loose and going out of control... ultimately it fell off its axle and flew out beyond the confines of our understanding. And then, obeying the law of the boomerang, it came back and hit us on the cranium.

This was no atom bomb. Or hydrogen bomb. Or neutron bomb. It was worse than napalm and carpet bombing, worse than atypical pneumonia and swine flu. It was as if some kind of new virus, unidentified by any equipment, had penetrated the hearts of the people who lived in my world. People who previously would go to the barricades or vote at elections. People who grudgingly watched prices going up and soldiers dying in Chechnya, but nevertheless continued

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2 “[We’re waiting for] Changes”. Song by Viktor Tsoi (1986).
* The “Lame Horse” was a night-club in the city of Perm. It burned down on 5 December, 2009, in a fire allegedly caused by people igniting fireworks. There were 150 fatalities. [Translator’s note]
** Phrase used by Vladimir Putin, 24 September 1999, referring to settling scores with Chechen “bandits”. [Translator’s note]
believing, yearning, being involved... Now all those have been, as it were, replaced. Convinced communists and right-wing radicals, destitute miners and successful young business people have all coalesced in a shared impulse of spineless apathy. The wave of popular anger which for a short while boiled up against Chechen fighters in 1999 then transmuted itself into universal “approval” of the change of regime, and subsided. People retreated into deep apathy about everything that was taking place.

A PEACEFUL SKY ABOVE THE RUINS OF THE IRON CURTAIN
My world also believed in PEACE. In the Cold War period the Soviet Union had taken part in over twenty open military conflicts. For forty-five years (from 1945 to 1991) the weapons of the “world’s most peaceful nation” had been in action in every part of the globe except Australia and Antarctica. Soviet military units were stationed in Cuba and Hungary, Algeria and China. Our soldiers were in combat in Afghanistan and Ethiopia, in Egypt and Vietnam. Nowadays these things are spoken of with something like pride. But in my world people were not proud of such things. We preferred not to mention them.

Russia had had to go to war at the very outset of the most recent chapter of its history. Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia, the Trans-Dniester region, Abkhazia, then Chechnya... The collapse of a multi-national state, which had taken many by surprise, had provoked a wave of extremist movements in ethnically disputed regions and exposed concealed grudges and unresolved conflicts.

If the world had stayed as it was, everything could have been different. A confident Soviet military machine would have drowned Karabakh in blood; would have threatened Georgia with its missiles and forced it to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (a familiar theme, isn’t it?), and made Moldova recognise the Trans-Dniester republic.

But the world had changed, back in 1989. Our previous devout confidence in the incontrovertible rightness of the might of Russia has been replaced by a hunger for peace and tranquillity. The fatigue felt by the two generations born during the Cold War, a fatigue caused by being on edge twenty-four hours a day and by daily improvements to the machinery for running down to bomb-shelters, has fallen off our shoulders like a boulder that has buried underneath itself the pent-up nuclear potential of a former super-power. Buried it for ever, or so we thought at the time...

A WORLD WE HAVE LOST?
Why have we not managed to hold on to those dreams? Did we tire of change and upheaval? Did we want order and certainty? Or did the cap simply not fit?

One would like to believe that we simply got tired. We were little boys writing our first poems when the ricochets of the world’s crises, and its protracted political decay, brought the young Russian democracy to a state ripe for a heart attack. We saw the lost expressions on the faces of our parents. Some, who in ’91 had marched with the tanks, were incredulous: “What, then, were we fighting for?!” Others, who had opposed the “capitalist infection” with all their strength, were equally incredulous: democracy really seemed to have gone off the rails, and nobody had any idea what was to be done with it.

No follower is more grateful or more accessible than a crowd in panic. Give it an external target, an enemy outside, a reason for uniting – and it will follow you to the edge of the world. Our parents were led, and then there came the period of post-financial crisis euphoria, when it was difficult to find anyone in Russia who sincerely believed that we were heading in the wrong direction. In some ways that resembled the beginning of my world, but... the recoil was completely different.

The fall of the Berlin Wall unleashed such a wave of energy, searching and creativity that people took fright at the upsurge, even, it seems, the people who embodied it. But I do not believe, cannot believe that this energy has dissipated. Even if those who dismantled the Wall, or signed START-2, are unable to climb up onto the barricades, the world of the past cannot come back. Too much has changed in those twenty years. We have passed the point of no return. A whole generation has grown up for whom the notion of the Cold War is no longer an axiom received with mothers’ milk, but a kind of feverish babble that cannot exist in a healthy society. If you were to offer us a new Iron Curtain today, the storm would repeat itself. Its seeds have been sown in our hearts by those who, twenty years ago, climbed up onto the Wall beside the Brandenburg Gate. Sown by the music of Bach, whose suites were played by Mstislav Rostropovich beside the ruins of the Wall in the sunshine on the 11th of November 1989.

By feasting on live music. We shall. Live.

azazel-rus@mail.ru

СЕРГЕЙ БАРИНОВ
РАМЕНСКОЕ (РОССИЯ)

МИР, ГДЕ ВОЗМОЖНО ВСЕ...
(Посвящается двадцатой годовщине падения Берлинской стены)

ТЫ ПОМНИШЬ, КАК ВСЕ НАЧИНАЛОСЬ...
Когда пала Берлинская стена, мне было 1,5 года. Мои первые отчетливые воспоминания находятся в промежутке между 2,5 и 3,5 годами. Иначе говоря, мир холодной войны и железного занавеса, мир, который перестал существовать осенью 1989-го, в моем сознании не отпечатался. Я не помню его запаха. Его песен. Не помню, какие в том мире были закаты.

В моем мире не было Афгана и Карибского кризиса. Не было талонов и очередей. Не было гонки вооружений и призраков американских спецслужб за каждым кустом.

А главным «эзбистом» долгие годы были Дмитрий Харатьян в неувязывающей «Дербиасовской».


В моем мире было много надежд. И много веры. Сначала верили в Запад. Потом в демократию. Потом в “либеральную мечту”. Потом в федерализм. А многие просто верили в Бога. Кто-то искренне, кто-то – от страха, кто-то – из чувства проснувшейся исторической памяти.

СБРОШЕННЫЕ ВЕРБИГИ

А потом вдруг все изменилось. Тех, кого раньше называли демократами, стали называть болтунами. А то и подонками. Тех, кто строил «либеральную мечту», обвинили в воровстве, коррупции, развалье армии. Вместо слова «суверенитет» тотемным стало понятие “вертикали”, перепачканное сажей и кровью “Хромой лошади”. А на место невозможного, немыслимого в российской истории «Россия воевать не будет!» – вернулось привычное “В сортире замочим”.

Те, кто раньше приходил к нам добывать нефть на шельфе, недоступном российским буровикам с их технологиями позднебрежневских времен, вдруг оказались ворами и прохвостами. И я с болью наблюдал, как новая и уже достаточно опершакая российская власть творит бесчинства, которые сто лет назад в голову не могли прийти императору Николаю II – казалось бы, гораздо менее искушенному в вопросах экономики, чем мои современники. Власти Российской Империи годами терпели на Кавказе англичан, понимая, что технологии и инвестиции «проклятых басурман» стране жизненно необходимы.

Во что еще верил мой мир? Он верил в перемены. И это, пожалуй, была самая истовая вера этого мира: «Перемен!»2 Их так заждались, их так страстно ждали, что в какой-то момент перестали обращать внимание на направление и суть этих самых перемен – лишь бы все менилось! Этот маховик раскручивался, становился неуправляемым... и в конце концов сорвался с оси, вылетев куда-то за пределы понимания. А потом в строгом соответствии с законом бумеранга упало по темечку.

Это была не атомная бомба. Не водородная. И даже не нейтронная. Это было хуже напала и ковровых бомбардировок, хуже атиличной пневмонии и свинного гриппа. Сложно какой-то новый вирус, не идентифицируемый ни одним прибором, проник в самое сердце тех, кто населял мой мир. Тех, кто до этого шел на баррикады и голосовал на выборах. Тех, кто скрыпя сердце следил за ростом цен и гибелю солдат в Чечне – и все-таки продолжал верить, хотеть, делать... Теперь их всех как будто подменили. Убеждённые коммунисты и правые радикалы, обезделенные шахтеры и увечные молодые бизнесмены – все слились в едином порыве какой-то безвольной апатии. На короткий миг волна народного гнева вскипела против чеченских боевиков в 1999-м – и, трансформировавшись в дружный “одобрям” сменившейся власти, спала. Люди ушли обратно в глухую апатию по отношению ко всему происходящему.

2 “Хочу перемен” – песня Виктора Цоя (1986).
МИРНОЕ НЕБО НАД ПРАХОМ ЖЕЛЕЗНОГО ЗАНАВЕСА
Еще мой мир верил в МИР. Советский Союз в период «холодной войны» принимал участие более чем в двадцати открытих военных конфликтах. За сорок пять лет (с 1946 по 1991) оружие «самой миролюбивой нации в мире» успело проникнуть во всех частях света, кроме Австралии и Антарктиды. Советские военные части стояли на Кубе и в Венгрии, в Алжире и Китае. Наши солдаты сражались в Афганистане и Эфиопии, в Египте и Вьетнаме. Сейчас об этом говорят едва ли не с гордостью. Но в моем мире такими вещами не гордились. Предпочитали не вспоминать.

России тоже пришлось воевать, с самого начала своей новейшей истории. Нагорный Карабах, Южная Осетия, Приднестровье, Абхазия, потом Чечня... Распад многонационального государства, неожиданный для многих, спровоцировал волну экстремистских движений в этнически спорных районах, обнажив скрытые обиды и нерешенные противоречия.

Останься мир тогда прежним, все могло быть и по-другому. Уверенная в себе советская военная машина утопила бы в крови Карабах; пригрозив ракетами, заставила бы грузин признать независимость Абхазии и Южной Осетии (знакомый сюжет, не правда ли?), а молдаван – Приднестровскую республику.

Но мир изменился тогда, в 1989-м. На смену прежней святой уверенности в непобедимой правоте отечественного оружия пришла жажда мира и спокойствия. Усталость двух поколений, рожденных в годы холодной войны, – усталость от круглосуточно натянутых нервов и от ежедневных отработок техники добегания до бомбоубежищ – свалилась с плеч таким пудовым камнем, что погребла под собой весь нерасщепленный ядерный потенциал бывшей сверхдержавы. Как нам тогда казалось – погребла навсегда...

МИР, КОТОРЫЙ МЫ... ПОТЕРЯЛИ?
Почему мы не сумели сберечь все эти мечты? Устали от перемен и потрясений? Захотели порядка и определенности? Или не по Сеньке оказалась шапка?

Хочется верить, что все-таки просто устали. Мы были мальчиками, писавшими свои первые стихи, когда рикошеты мировых кризисов и длительный внутриполитический распад довел молодую российскую демократию до предынфарктного состояния. Мы видели потерянные лица наших родителей. Одни, шедшие в

девяносто первом под танки, недоумевали: «За что же мы боролись?!» Другие, всеми силами сопротивлявшиеся «капиталистической заразе», недоумевали не меньше первых: демократия вроде бы действительно сдалась, а что теперь с ней делать – непонятно.

Нет более благодарного и доступного последователя, чем растерянная толпа. Дай ей внешнюю цель, внешнего врага, мотив для объединения – и она пойдет за тобой на край света. Наших родителей повели, и было светлое время постдефолтной эйфории, когда в стране сложно было найти человека, искренне убежденного, что эта страна идет не туда. Чем-то это было похоже на начало моего мира, но... откат получился совсем другой.

Падение Берлинской стены детонировало такой всплеск энергии поиска и созидания, что этой освободившейся волны испугались, похоже, сами ее носители. Но я не верю, не могу поверить в то, что сама волна затухла. Даже если те, кто ломал Стену, кто подписывал, не смогут снова встать на баррикады – пролетный мир уже не вернется. Слишком много изменилось за эти двадцать лет. Пройдена точка невозврата. Выросло целое поколение ребят, для которых само понятие «холодной войны» – не витая с молоком матери аксиома, а горячечный бред, невозможный в здоровом обществе. Предложите нам сегодня новый «железный занавес» – и буря повторится снова. За зерна посеянных в наших сердцах теми, кто двадцать лет назад взобрался на стену у Бранденбургских ворот. Поселя музыкой Баха, создателя которого играл Мстислав Ростропович у поверженной Стены сочельным днем 11-го ноября 1989 года.

Глоток живой музыки. Будем. Жить.

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In fear and trembling, I think I would fulfil my life
Only if I brought myself to make a public confession
Revealing a sham, my own and of my epoch...
From “A Task” by Czesław Miłosz

I am twenty years old. I will be twenty-one in January 2010. My last birthday party was on the modest side. I am now planning something rather grander, and hoping that it will be held in my new apartment.

I was born a few days before the Round Table. My mother tells me that it was a harsh winter, lit by a bright January sun. I also know that when I was still in my mother’s womb I grew fast and always had hiccups late in the evenings. Of course I grew fast – it was a time when pregnant women got a larger meat ration.

By the time I was one, you could easily buy this and that in privately owned shops. That was a real achievement – to have been born at the end of one political era and the start of another.

Returning to today, how do I see myself and my professional, private and social life? What helps me and what hinders me in realising my plans and goals?

My life is a permanent confrontation of the two attitudes described in Zbigniew Herbert’s Elegy of Fortinbras. On the one hand I am the lyrical Hamlet, prey to emotions and raptures. My feet aren’t firmly planted on the ground, and I believe in “crystal notions”. This Hamlet who inhabits my person is a frequent theatre- and cinema-goer and can travel from Cracow to Warsaw simply to see a live performance by Agnieszka Grochowska, Marcin Dorociński or Piotr Adamczyk, or the “Phantom of the Opera”. This Hamlet, both Herbert’s and my own, is constantly searching for the meaning of life, booking cheap theatre tickets and travelling by cheaper trains, hurriedly reading news about the lives of celebrities, eager to touch, feel and experience everything. This Hamlet I carry within me dreams desperately of becoming an actor, makes various attempts in this direction and keeps hoping for success.

But I am also the Danish prince Fortinbras – a rationalist, a ruthless critic, an expert at managing his own tiny kingdom. Frequently, just like the prince, I wish I did not hunt chimeras or face dilemmas, that I was able to plan pragmatically and in a concrete way, and manage my future in a different way.

But I find it hard to grasp that two plots of land had to be sold to buy me my small undecorated apartment. It is hard to be a Fortinbras in real life. Sometimes, it is better to keep quiet. There is not a lot I can do, I have so many things so close to my heart, and perhaps my growing-up experience is best described by a quote from Czesław Miłosz’s poem “Calling to Order”:

You could scream
Because mankind is mad.
But you, of all people, should not

When I started in high school, I was full of optimism. I thought I had a career ahead of me which was just like a door, and all I had to do was to turn the handle. I thought I was very much needed by people and by institutions. I know now that it isn’t as simple as that.

After I graduated from the best high school in my town, it was time to choose (the best) university course. But what did that really mean? It meant the most prestigious. Of my former classmates, fourteen are studying law. I didn’t want to do that, I tried to find fulfilment as an actor, but that didn’t work. It so happened that I ended up studying journalism and social communication. I see my future in this profession, or at least I quietly hope to find it there.
How do I see my role in the media? I don’t think I would make a good editor-in-chief, and even less a correspondent or a copywriter, especially as at the moment I don’t see myself as deriving any satisfaction from it. I know for certain that work in the media and for the media is very hard. It involves frequent work in the evenings or at night and a lot of stress, and it is easy to become tired and discouraged. So far, I prefer to be on the receiving end of the media message. But my dreams remain. To become a presenter, to work in a women’s magazine, fulfil myself as an actor. Let us wait and see what fate brings. But I do know that nothing comes easily. That you must have determination, enthusiasm and persistence in making your way. Unfortunately, I often find that these are things I lack. Do any of you wonder where this uncertainty and indecision come from? I am a bit scared of the future and sometimes I feel too much social pressure of the kind that says that only success counts in life.

There is one thing I am absolutely certain about. I want to work in my native country. I am very attached to Poland, in spite of its bad roads and its regrettable education system. I also don’t like it that people of my age and a bit older go abroad where their career consists in packing sweets in a factory. I see this as exploitation, not earnings.

As a woman in my twenties I know that the media are increasingly failing to act as a source of information, are not objective and do not tell us the truth about things as they are. The audiences for talk shows, long-run series and much advertised audience-participation quiz shows – noisy, boisterous and, shall we say, “sumptuous”, are growing all the time. I don’t find those shows entertaining. Media specialists rely on the psychological mechanisms of projection and identification, knowing that at any one time thousands of viewers will be identifying themselves with the heroes of various programmes and forgetting their own grey and monotonous lives. During the adverts, we are taught that happiness is the ceaseless accumulation of worldly goods.

As a consumer – listener, viewer or reader, I too absorb all this stuff. The sensationalism, gossip and scandal peddled by the media envelop me closely, often showing only the seamy side of life. It seems to me that commercial stations frequently do not entertain, but instead numb the minds of their viewers, selling them second-rate programmes. It is very hard to have a true and wise existence amidst it all. I have many gnawing fears and doubts. One wants to achieve so much, yet at the same time there is the feeling of being “called to order”. When you are twenty, you fear lack of fulfilment, fear an even greater blurring of values and feel anxious about your own financial success, especially since my parents don’t have a feeling of total professional satisfaction. The life of my generation has coincided with the era of big business, overproduction, shopping malls full of hundreds of international stores and nightclubs. But we need to ask ourselves: is that the way to fulfilment?

At this point, I would like to digress. I am troubled by my generation’s wish to present itself in a certain way, especially in the large cities. You must dress in a certain way (best wear only designer clothes), behave in a certain way, etc. Today, a young man in black drainpipes, a diamond-patterned top, Ray-Bans on his nose and a Macintosh on his lap, sitting in a fashionable cafe in Bracka Street in Cracow, seems to be better than his different-looking, “unfashionable” friends. This does nothing for integration, because you start to judge people by their appearance, by how they behave and how much they have in their wallets. It is terrifying.

Even if I do end up working in the media and appear before the public, I would still like to have a family and have time to devote to it. But I am terrified at the thought that my private life would then become “accessible” on gossip sites and in the tabloids, and that other people would tear me to shreds. I don’t make use of such pastimes, and am greatly opposed to them.

Now that I am twenty I badly want to believe that the objectionable aspects of the media – their commercialism, gossip-mongering and hypocrisy are only a temporary aberration. I would like to be able, in twenty years’ time, to write an essay about how I could not have been born at a better time. I am a millionth part of a society which hopes to change the world at least to some extent.

I want to exist in that world “in fear and trembling”, like the hero of “A Task”.

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W twrodzie i drżeniu myślę, że spełnilem swoje życie
Tyłko gdybym się zdobył na publiczną spowiedź
Wyjawiając oszustwo, własne i mojej epoki…
Czesław Miłosz „Zadanie”

Mam dwadzieścia lat. W styczniu skończę 21. W ubiegłym roku urodziny były raczej skromne. Teraz planuję urządzenie huczniejszych i mam nadzieję, że będzie to w moim nowym mieszkaniu.

Urodziliśmy parę dni przed Okrąglym Stołem. Z opowiadań mamy wiem, że była wtedy sroga zima i świeciło ostre, styczniane słońce. Wiem też, że będąc w brzuchu mamy roślami szybko i późnym wieczorem miałam zawsze czekawkę. Jak mogłam szybko nie rosnąć, skoro kobiecie w ciąży przystugiwało przecież więcej mięsa na kartki?

Gdy miałam roczek, to spokojnie można było kupić co nie co w sklepach komercyjnych. To był sukces! Urodzić się na przełomie ustrojowych epok.

Jak widzę dziś siebie, swoje życie zawodowe, prywatne i społeczne? Co mi pomaga, a co przeszkadza w realizacji zamierzeń i celów?

Moje życie to ciągła konfrontacja dwóch postaw z „Trenu Fortynbrasa” Zbigniewa Herberta. Z jednej strony jestem poetyckim Hamletem sklonnym do wzruszeń i uniesień. Nie stąpam twardo po ziemi, wierzę w „krystalowe pojęcia”. Ten Hamlet mieszkający we mnie często idzie do teatru lub kina, potrafi jechać z Krakowa do Warszawy, aby na żywo zobaczyć Agnieszkę Grochowską, Marcina Dorocińskiego, Piotra Adamczyka czy też musical „Upiór w Operze”. Ten herbertowski, mój Hamlet poszukuje ciągle sensu życia, rezerwuje tańsze bilety w teatrze, jedzie tańszym pociągiem, pospiesznie czyta informacje z życia gwiazd. Wszystko po to, aby czegoś dotknąć, przeżyć, doświadczyć.

Ten mój wewnętrzny Hamlet wściekłeb marzy o aktorstwie, próbuje swych sił w tej branży i ciągle ma nadzieję, że może to jest dla niego.

Z drugiej strony jestem duńskim księciem Fortynbrasem – racjonalistą, bezwzględnym krytykiem, specjalistą od kierowania swoim, małośkim państwem. Często – tak jak książę – chciałbym nie ulegać mrzonkom ani rozterkom, planować praktycznie i konkretnie, inaczej zarządzać swoją przyszłością. Trudno mi jednak myśleć, że kupione dla mnie małe mieszkanie w stanie surowym, wymagało sprzedaży dwóch działek. Jakże trudno być w życiu tym Fortynbrasem! Lepiej przecież czasem milczeć. Nie mogę zrobić wiele, tak mnóstwo spraw jest w głębi serca i jedynie cytat z wiersza Cz. Milosza „Przywołanie do porządku” może odma to moje dorastanie:

Krzyżałbys
Bo ludzkość jest szalona.
Ale komu, jak komu, tobie nie wypada.

Kiedy szlam do liceum, byłam pełna optymizmu. Uważałam, że stoi przed mną kariera przypominająca drzwi, przy których wystarczy nacisnąć klamkę. Myślałam, że bardzo potrzebują mnie ludzie, instytucje… Ale już wiem, że to nie takie proste.


Jednego jestem pewna. Chcę pracować w swoim ojczystym kraju. Jestem bardzo związana z Polską, mimo złego stanu dróg czy niefortunnego systemu oświaty. Jednocześnie nie podoba mi się, że ludzie w moim wieku i nieco starsi wyjeżdżają do Anglii i robią karierę układając w hurtowni cukierek. Mimo zdaniem to wyzszy, żaden zarobek.

Jako dwudziestolatek wiem, że media coraz częściej nie pełnią roli informacyjnej, nie są obiektywne, nie przekazują też prawdy o zaistniałej rzeczywistości. Coraz więcej ogarniają się ze względu na te wszystkie talk – shows, wieloodcinkowe seriale, rozreklatowane teleturnieje z udziałem publiczności, produkcje telewizyjne, gdzie jest głośno, hucznie i powiedzmy „obficie”. Mnie to nie bawi. Medialni specjaliści bazują na psychologicznych mechanizmach projekcji i identyfikacji, wiedząc, że tysiące teledysków w tej właśnie chwili idą podobne się z bohaterami wielu programów zapominając o tym, że w ich życiu jest szaro i monotonnie. Ogładając reklamy jesteśmy uczeni, że szczęście polega na permanentnym pomnażaniu dóbr materialnych.

Będąc odbiorcą – słuchaczem, teledyskiem, czytelnikiem – sama to wszystko pochłania. Sprzedawane przez media sensacje, plotki, skandale, afera ciasno mnie otaczają i pokazują świat często od podartej podszewki. Uważam, że stacje komercyjne często nie służą rozrywie, a jedynie ogłupiają odbiorców, sprzedając im programy niskich lotów. Trudno w tym wszystkim tak prawdziwie i mądrze istnieć. Wewnątrz są liczne, drżące mnie obawy i wątpliwości. Chciałoby się tak wiele. Tak bardzo ma się jednak wewnętrzne poczucie „przywołania do porządku”. Mając te dwadzieścia lat pojawia się lęk przed niespełnieniem, lęk przed jeszcze bardziej rozmitym brakiem wartości oraz silną obawą o własną satysfakcję finansową, tym bardziej, że moi rodzice nie do końca czują się spełnieni zawodowo. Życie mojego pokolenia ze względu się z wielkim handlem, nadprodukcją, galeriami z setką świadowych sklepów, nocnymi klubami. Pytanie tylko – czy to jest droga do spełnienia?

Jednocześnie nasuwa mi się pewna dygresja. Męczy mnie wśród mojego pokolenia tzw. lansowanie się – szczególnie w dużych miastach. Obowiązuje określony styl ubierania się (ciuchy najlepiej tylko firmowe), zachowania itp. Dziś dwudziestolatek ubrany w czarne rurki, w sweterku w romby, z Ray – Banami na nosie i Macintoshem na kolanach, w którejś z modnych kwajek na ulicy Brackiej w Krakowie wydaje się być lepszy od swoich innych, „niemodnych” kolegów. To nie sprzyja integracji, bo zaczyna się oceniać ludzi po wyglądzie, po tym jak się zachowują i ile mają w portfelu. Przerząające.

Zakładając, że uda mi się pracować w mediach, występować przed publicznością, jednocześnie chcę nie rezygnować z założenia rodziny i posiadania dla niej czasu. Jednocześnie przeraża mnie możliwość, iż moje życie prywatne będzie „dostępne” na wszystkich polarach plotkarskich i w brukowcach. Wtedy inni ludzie nie pozostawia na mnie suchej nitki. Ja nie korzystam z takiego rodzaju rozrywki i jestem jej wielką przeciwniczką.


A ja „w tworze i drżeniu” chcę w nim zaistnieć, tak jak bohater wiersza „Zadanie”.

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EVERYTHING THE COMMUNISTS TOLD US ABOUT COMMUNISM WAS A COMPLETE AND UTTER LIE. UNFORTUNATELY, EVERYTHING THE COMMUNISTS TOLD US ABOUT CAPITALISM TURNED OUT TO BE TRUE.

ON 9 MAY 1989, THE USSR CELEBRATED THE FORTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS VICTORY IN THE WORLD WAR II.

ON 10 MAY 1989 NIKITA SERGEEVICH BOLGOV WAS BORN.
Let’s be candid. Nikita (whose name was chosen not in honour of Khrushchev, the man who unmasked the cult of Stalin, nor the film director Mikhalkov, but for no special reason, by a sort of coincidence) was indifferent to the lifting of an Iron Curtain somewhere at the end of June.* Only much later would he become aware of the consequences of that. At the time the writer of this essay was only in his second month, and he was interested not in the symbolic cutting of barbed wire between Hungary and Austria, but in his mother’s milk. Let us try to forgive him this untimely political indifference.

Your narrator was scarcely a year old when the first McDonald’s opened in the USSR – one of the harbingers of the changes to come. A short while later, in March, the Soviet Union ushered in its first and last president, Gorbachev, who was destined to effect one of the country’s most significant revolutions. This regular “Che Guevara” with the birthmark on his bald head was underestimated at first. That was a mistake. On 25 December of that year the USSR lowered its flag and on the 26th the country ceased to exist forever.

I perceived the shots fired at the Russian White House in October 1993 with the lack of concern typical of a four-year-old boy. My little-boy soul harboured no fears, or perhaps, at the very most, an aftertaste of the inexplicable anxiety on the faces of my parents. My world was a world of richly illustrated encyclopaedias, frequent changes of location, eternally green grass, cloudless sky and festive music. The adults surrounding me were amazed by my unchildishly broad view of the world, they loved me and spoiled me.

I bore the cross of the school curriculum with scarcely a stumble, although, several times, I felt like abandoning it halfway through. One of the truths with which we were gradually instilled was a hatred of the future. Because tomorrow would be harder than today, you have to reckon with that. Learning your lessons will get you high marks but will not give you freedom. You’ll have to study again. Nobody was bothered by the fact that you were supremely indifferent to Bohr’s quantum theory when the day’s agenda included an interesting novel by Dickens. The holidays were an exception, but the inevitability of the future was already casting its frightening shadow on the present. My school teachers did what teachers did in other schools: they tried to force us to believe in the importance of something that was actually unimportant. Naturally I rebelled, saying that in my future life, the life for which we were supposedly preparing, I would never have use for the corpuscular theory of light or relativistic mechanics. And the more years that have passed since then, the more convinced I am that I was right. But the authority of the elders stifled my voice, and I had no choice but to get my top grades punctiliously and maintain the reputation of a disruptive honours student.

My mother had unconsciously nurtured in me a hostility towards television. Overcome by adolescent nihilism, I was astonished at the influence that the presenter’s voice had over her. When the box showed a dismembered corpse I was totally indifferent, whereas my mother was immediately upset. I was rather irritated by what seemed to me to be the excessive emotionalism of her reactions to other people’s tragedies, when she would repeat, “In the world you mustn’t think only of yourself.” Hello? Why should actions by robbers affect me if I had not taken part in them and was not a victim? Why should I care about the fighting and bloodletting among alcoholics in communal flats? Thousands of mini-dramas were taking place every minute, what was that to me? Well, I was typical of my generation and, as is the rule for each generation, worse than my predecessors but better than my successors.

I am neither philosopher nor academic, no apples fell onto my head, nor did I dream about the periodic tables. I am unfit for the role of the prophet Moses, I was not chosen to receive the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai and drag the Jews behind me through the desert. But, just as a palaeontologist can reconstruct the appearance of a prehistoric reptile from a single little bone, I also can take a single attribute and recreate images dear to my heart. And those images were totally unconnected with political documentaries. What seemed important to adults hardly affected us.

While the country was agonising over shoot-outs between bandits or property rights, and the first careerists were hanging themselves by their neckties, thereby harvesting the fruits of the financial crisis, we were concerned with completely different things: Disney cartoons, video games on a PlayStation, Kinder Surprise chocolates, and the fear of being seen with a cigarette between our teeth during break-times at school. Our minds were, for the moment, dominated by the dictatorship of MTV. For us, a badge of honour meant

* On 27 June 1989 Hungary and Austria opened the Iron Curtain that separated the two countries for more than forty years.
having a moped or taking our parents’ cars for a spin, as they do in America. We admired the aggression in the music of “Rammstein” without understanding their lyrics. We brewed alcoholic drinks in iron jars and for some reason thought that the word “bitch” was a compliment (“Girl, you’re a bitch. Oh yes, a mega-bitch. A real bitch!”). It was we who, when we wanted to fly at the behest of love, persuaded ourselves that we would grow wings thanks to ultra-thin materials and “Red Bull” energy drinks. Being genetically programmed for idolatry we celebrated the victory of the football club we supported with such excitement as if it had been our own personal achievement. We went to nightclubs long before reaching the age of majority and when we came home from the party would say “Huh! It was full of under-age people”, ignoring the fact that we were under-age ourselves.

Yes, change was in the air. We felt it not so much on the practical level as intuitively, through our sensibility. My grandmother used to tell me stories about one country when I was already living in another. My heroes were not Yuri Gagarin or Vladimir Vysotsky but Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Lee, who came into all our houses on pirated videos, speaking Russian with the nasal twang of Mr Volodarsky, the man who dubbed everything. In a way, that repulsive voice also embodied the age. In the crowded smoke-filled video-cinemas it created the atmosphere of an absurdly comfortable underground life, quite unlike being at home.

That was one of the peculiarities of what was called “perestroika”. We had not yet left our earlier experience behind or learned the new ways. Deep down we all knew that piracy was bad, but nobody paid attention to that, and products of that kind were openly on sale in shops in every town in Russia. You have to admit there was a positive side to this: cinema that had previously been banned was available to the widest possible public. I clearly remember how proud we were to be watching age-category 18+ films at the age of twelve. How terrified we were by Ridley Scott’s “Alien”, how we laughed at the scabrous gags in “Police Academy”. Grandmothers and grandfathers were horrified (“Such filth, look!”) but we were in seventh heaven. To put it simply, our generation had finally got its hands on entertainment of a kind that our predecessors had only been able to dream of (and therefore greatly overvalued).

With us, the generation of ’89, there are plenty of paradoxes. We daydream about sports cars and then, stuck for hours in traffic jams, we have warm memories of our old mopeds. We demonstrate against globalisation, but actively enjoy its benefits. We idolise musicians whose works in a couple of years will not be seen even in clearance sales.

The deeper the faith, the more intense the disappointment. The communist utopia taught us that. And today’s consumer capitalism teaches the same lesson. With the collapse of ideology our souls emptied, for a while, like an apartment abandoned after a radiation accident: the objects are there, but the owners are not. The fall of the communist dream created an enormous information space in which it became insanely easy to lose one’s way. Information poured down onto us in a way that had not happened to anybody before us. I may not know what to believe in, but for some reason I do know the acceleration rate of a Bugatti Veyron (100 kph in 2.5 seconds), the code used to activate the computer in “Lost” (4815162342), and the name of the actress in the Chanel No. 5 advert (Nicole Kidman). Innumerable names and numbers are marching up and down inside my head. If the truth be told, I, like many of my generation, am stuffed to the gills with more or less useless information.

We each have at least two mobile phone numbers, a computer at home and a notebook, several social networking accounts, and a multitude of email addresses. The technology is changing our psychology which was already susceptible beforehand. But, do you know what? Ask me which era I would prefer, if I had the choice, I would unhesitatingly opt for our own. It would be short-sighted to overlook the wide range of new opportunities opening before me, a twenty-year-old lad living in Russia.

At the age of eight I was upset because I had crashed my bike. When he saw me, my grandfather uttered words of wisdom: you’re only as unhappy as you let yourself be. A week later a new bike appeared, better than the old one.

I concluded that “every cloud has a silver lining”. But the full meaning of my grandfather’s words is only becoming clear to me now, after his death. We allow ourselves to grieve, although we have countless opportunities to lift our own spirits and the mood of those around us.

Under the influence of the rat race I celebrated my personal successes and managed to catch my breath. I had started to run too fast to notice happiness. Similarly, it may be worth remembering that being a workaholic did not make Salieri the genius that the spoiled Mozart was. Let the blood boil, let gardens blossom, but let our windows open directly onto our childhood. Our young minds can still experience wonder, we have not lost the gift of risk-taking, we are still thirsty for discovery. Whether we carry this enthusiasm forward into our future lives will depend only on us.

Nikita Bolgov: one of those born in the last millennium, in a country that no longer exists.

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УЗНИКИ СВОБОДЫ

С 12 по 19 января 1989 года была проведена последняя в истории СССР перепись населения.
9 мая 1989 года страна отметила 44-ю годовщину Победы в Великой Отечественной войне.
10 мая 1989 года родился Никита Сергеевич Болгов.

Будем откровенны – едва вошедшему в переменчивый мир Никите Сергеевичу (которого назвали Никитой ни в честь развенчавшего сталинский культ Хрущева, ни кинорежиссера Михалкова – просто так совпало) было безразлично падение какого-то там железного занавеса в конце июня, его последствия он ощутил гораздо позднее. В тот момент автору этого эссе шел всего второй месяц, и его интересовало не символическое разрезание колечек проволоки между Венгрией и Австрией, а материнское молоко. Постараемся простить ему столь несвоевременную политическую индифферентность.

Не испытывая нашему рассказчику и года, как в СССР открылся первый «Макдональдс» – один из предвестников грядущих перемен. А чуть позднее, в марте, Союз обязался первым и последним в своей истории президентом Горбачевым, который произведет одну из самых значимых революций в стране. Этого форменного «чегевару» с родимым пятым на лысой голове поначалу недооценили, и напрасно: 25 декабря того же года в СССР сменели флаг, 26-го – страна навсегда прекратила существование в своем прежнем виде.

Расстрел здания правительства в октябре 93-го я воспринял с типичной беззаботностью четырехлетнего ребенка. В ребяческой душе не возникало никаких страхов, максимум послевкусия – непонятно отчего вззволнованные лица родителей. Мой мир был миром богато иллюстрированных энциклопедий, частых смен обстановки, вечнозеленой травы, безоблачного неба и праздничной музыки. Взрослые вокруг поражались моему не по-детски широкому кругозору, любили и баловали.
Крест школьной программы я нес, почти не спотыкаясь. Хотя бросить на полпути его хотелось не раз. Ненавидеть завтра – одна из истин, которым нас исподволь учили. Потому что завтра тяжелее, чем сегодня, и с этим приходится считаться. Выучишь урока – получишь хорошую оценку, но не освобождение. Придет снова учит. То, что тебе глубочайше плевать на квантовые постулаты Бора, поскольку на повестке дня увлекательный роман Диккенса, никого не волновало. Исключение составляли выходные, однако неизбежное завтра пугало своей тенью уже сегодня. Преподаватели моей школы занимались тем же, чем и в других – заставляя верить в важность того, что на самом деле было неважным. Я, разумеется, бунтовал, заявляя, что в будущей жизни, подготовкой к которой мы якобы занимались, мне никогда не пригодится знание корпускулярной теории света или релятивистской механики. И чем больше лет проходит с тех пор, тем больше я убеждаюсь в правоте своей старой позиции. Но авторитет старших заглушал мой голос, и не оставалось ничего другого, кроме как исправно получать пятерки, поддерживая репутацию шкодливого отличника.

Бессознательно мама вращала во мне неприязнь к телевизионной программе. Пораженный подростковым нигилизмом, я поражался тому, какое влияние имел на нее голос диктора в кадре. Когда по ящику показывали расчененный труп, я оставался предельно равнодушным, а маму мимо захватывало переживание. Меня немного раздражала ее излишняя, как мне казалось, эмоциональность, проявлявшаяся во внимании к чужим трагедиям, в то время как она повторяла:
«В этом мире нельзя думать только о себе». Извольте, почему разбойные ограбления должны меня трогать, если я не принимал в них участия и не был их жертвой? Какое мне дело до кровавых разборок алкоголиков в коммунальных квартирах? Ежеминутно происходят тысячи мини-драм, так что с меня взять? Ну да, я представитель своего поколения, которое, как и положено любому поколению, хуже предыдущего, зато лучше следующего.

Я не философ и не учёный, мне на макушку не падали яблоки и не снимали таблицы химических элементов. Я не гожусь на роль пророка Моисея, мне не доводилось принимать от Бога Десять заповедей на горе Синай и таскать за собой евреев по пустыне. Но подобно тому, как палеонтолог по одной лишь кости восстанавливает вид доисторической рептилии, так и я по единственно атрибуту заново воссоздаю дорогие сердцу образы. И они никак не связаны с политической хроникой. То, что казалось важным для взрослых, почти не трогало нас.

Пока страна агонизировала от бандитских разборок и переделов собственности, а первые карьеристы вешались на галстуках, пожиная плоды финансового кризиса, нас заботили совсем другие вещи: диснеевские мультфильмы, видеоигры на приставке PlayStation, шоколадки «Kinder Surprise» и то, как бы нас не заметили с сигаретами в зубах на школьных переменах. Нашими умами моментально завладела диктатура телеканала MTV. Это мы считали почетным – иметь мотороллеры и на американский манер брать напрокат родительские машины. Это мы восхищались агрессией музыки группы «Rammstein», не понимая текстов их песен. Это мы культивировали вредные алкогольные напитки в железных банках и это мы потом почему-то сочли, что слово «сукa» – комплимент («Детка, ты сучка. – О да, я мега-сучка. Настоящая bitch!»). Это мы внушили себе, что крылья у нас появляются благодаря ультратонким прокладкам и энергетическому напитку «Ред-бул», тогда как летать желали по воле любви. Это мы, генетически запрограммированные на идолопоклонничество, праздновали победу любимой футбольной команды с таким восторгом, будто это наше личное достижение. Это мы попадали в ночные клубы задолго до совершеннолетия и, вернувшись с вечеринки, с пренебрежением замечали: «Фу, да там были одни малолетки», игнорируя тот факт, что сами малолетками являемся.

Да, в воздухе витали перемены, и ощущали мы их не столько на практическом уровне, сколько интуитивно, в ощущениях. Моя бабушка рассказывала мне об одной стране, в то время как я сам уже был жителем другой.
Моими кумирами были не Юрий Гагарин и Владимир Высоцкий, а пришедшие в каждый дом вместе с пиарскими копиями VHS-кассет Арнольд Шварценеггер и Брюс Ли, на русском языке говорившие гнусовым голосом переводчика Володарского. Этот противный голос в какой-то мере тоже олицетворял собой время. В сочетании с тесными, прокуренными видеосалонами он создавал атмосферу неуразной, но по-домашнему уютной подпольности.

Такова была одна из странностей так называемой «перестройки» – мы еще не отошли от предыдущего опыта и пока не освоили новый. Подсугл-

но-то все знали, что пиарство – это плохо, но никто не придавал этому значения, и такого рода продукция открыто продавалась в магазинах всех без исключения российских городов. Надо признать, в этом даже была положительная черта – ранее запрещенное кино стало доступно самому широкому зрителю. И я хорошо помню, как мы гордились тем, что смотрели фильмы ужасов с цензурой «от 18» в 12-летнем возрасте. Как пугались «Чужому» Ридли Скотта, как смеялись над скабрезными шутками «Полицейской академии». Бабушки и дедушки, само собой, ужасались (такую мерзость смотрите!), а мы были в полном восторге. Попросту говоря, мы стали поклонниками, наконец державшимися до развлечений, о многих из которых нашим предшественникам доводилось лишь мечтать (и поэтому сильно их переоценивать).

С нами, родившимися в 89-м, парадоксов вообще хватает. Грезим о спортивных автомобилях, чтобы потом, стоя в многочасовых пробках, с теплотой вспоминать старый мотороллер. Выступаем против глобализации, активно пользуясь ее благами. Восхищаемся музыкальными исполнителями, которые несколько лет спустя исчезнут даже из распродаж.

В чем глубже вера, тем сильнее потом разочарование в ней. Этому научил нас коммунистическая утопия, в этом же убеждает нынешний потребительский капитализм. С крушением идеологии на какое-то время в наших душах стало пусто, как в квартире, покинутой после радиационного облучения: вещи на месте, хозяев нет. Вместе с падением коммунистической мечты образовались огромное информационное пространство, в котором оказалось безумно легко запутаться. Ни на кого прежде не сваливалось столько информации, сколько свалилось на нас. Я не знаю, во что стоит верить, но зачем-то знаю время разгона «Бугатти Вейрон» (2,5 секунды до 100 км/ч), какой код использовался для активации компьютера в телесериале LOST (4815162342) и как зовут актрису, снявшуюся в рекламе Chanel №5 (Николь Кидман). Бесчисленные имена и цифры маршируют в моей голове. В общем, как и многие мои одногодки, я под завязку набит довольно-таки бесполезными сведениями.

У нас минимум по два номера для мобильной связи, домашний компьютер и ноутбук, аккаунты в нескольких социальных сетях и множество электронных адресов. Технологии вносят корректировки в и без того податливую психику. Но знаете что? Спросите меня, какую из эпох я предпочел бы, будь передо мной возможность такого выбора, и я без колебаний остался бы в собственной.

Было бы недалековидно упускать из виду то широкое поле новых возможностей, которое открывается перед мной, двадцатилетним парнем, живущим в России.

Когда мне было восемь лет, я переживал из-за того, что разбил свой велосипед. Увидев это, мой дед сказал довольно мудрую фразу – каждый несчастен настолько, насколько сам себе позволяет. Через неделю у меня появился новый велосипед, лучше прежнего. И я сделал вывод, соответствующий поговорке «нет худа без добра».

Но весь смысл слов дедушки раскрывается перед мной только сейчас, после его смерти. Мы позволяем себе грустить, обладая уймой возможностей поднять настроение себе и окружающим.

Под влиянием глянца я вспомнил личный успех и заполучил от этой гонки одышку. Начал бежать слишком быстро, чтобы замечать счастье. Так, может быть, не стоит забывать, что трудоголизм не сделал из Сальери того гения, которым был взбунтованный Моцарт? Пусть кровь кипит, сады цветут, а ока распахиваются прямиком в детство. Наши молодые умы еще умеют удивляться, в них не пропал еще дар рисковать, в них еще жив жажда открытий. Пронесем ли мы этот задор через жизнь в дальнейшем, зависит исключительно от нас самих.

Никита Боголов – один из тех, кто родился в прошлом тысячелетии в стране, которой больше нет.

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“SOON, BUT NOT BY MY OWN MERITS, I BECAME A MILLIONAIRE. DURING THE PERIOD OF CATASTROPHIC INFLATION EVERY TIME I WENT TO THE SHOP TO BUY CHEWING GUM, EVERYBODY AROUND ME HAD BANK NOTES WITH SIX OR NINE ZEROS.”
“Let’s hope he’s a good footballer and cleans up our room!” I can hear the ringing children’s voices of my two elder brothers on the cassette player in the B&B. In a nutshell, that is how they expressed their wishes and expectations for the newest member of the family.

As a curiosity the story goes that our mother took them (there was no one to look after them) to the hospital to see the gynaecologist when she had to arrange an ultrasound before the birth. At the time family members were not allowed to go in and watch the screen. My brothers (identically dressed) were so irresistible that the doctor let them in and they were offered the sensational opportunity of seeing me before everybody else. I assume I’m the “snow” image on the monitor – they didn’t record anything else.

There was no dilemma surrounding the choice of name as my parents had, at the start of their married life, decided that my name would be Martina, to match my mother’s name Marta. Only there was no opportunity to use it! Fate decided it would for ever stay the “gold reserve”. They shortened the name by one “a” and called me Martin. So we became the 5M quintet which pleased each of us.

Although everyone taught me something, sang to me and read to me, I found it hard to start speaking. Like a small Chinese boy I only used the first syllables of a word: ta, mi, mo, te, do, etc. I made up for this with mobility. I was already walking at ten months, and from eighteen months I climbed the wooden gate, shocking the good-natured old women as they rushed to church. I’m certain they also prayed for me because I suffered no mishap... except, when I come to think of it, when I placed my hand on the exhaust pipe of dad’s car. This can also be considered my baptism of fire. Then I became a real biker. First I rode with my dad, but then he made me a cross-country bike which I was very proud of. I enjoyed riding from eight years of age and taking part in bike competitions. One year I even won a prize for the youngest rider!

When I was born my relatives, with heavy sighs, stated times were certainly hard for a large family and had no inkling what was still to come! My mother diligently kept a diary. It has our scribbles, drawings and a graph of the three of us showing our progress in weight and height. In it she recorded that a friend, the musician Ernest, and my father were tilling the hall when we were told about the fall of the Berlin Wall. They even forecast that the two Germanies would unite. My parents were interested in all of this because they had travelled Europe by car for eighteen years. They had a transit visa for the former German Democratic Republic and just managed to catch the car ferry to Sweden in a day.
At nostalgic retro-parties they used to talk of how they felt putting their passports in their pockets and setting off – which we had not experienced. That same 1989 they were full of emotion as they followed the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Soon, but not by my own merits, I became a millionaire. During the period of catastrophic inflation every time I went to the shop to buy chewing gum, everybody around me had bank notes with six or nine zeros. When they paid out child benefit six months late they were practically worthless. These bank notes were later used as wallpaper in many offices or sold to collectors for five German marks. Everybody bought DM but the rate for the dinar could change while you were standing in the queue. You could protect yourself by freezing old bread because one day in late 1993 the price of bread leapt 800%!

A considerable amount of baking was done at home. I recall this period because of my gastronomic activities. I learned to make kifia rolls (mostly without filling), cake without eggs, “mock” (i.e. meatless or cheeseless) burek, chestnut purée from beans... I also illustrated my cookbook, even – imitating my grandmother and mother – sticking in recipes.

My hyperactive mother used to take part in every possible prize-winning game and quiz. So she won a prize and took us to Hungary for a weekend to an ethno-farm. No sooner were we out of the train than we were straight into the first self-service store. Those observing us knew we were from Yugoslavia since we launched into the salt, oil, detergent, coffee, toilet paper, yeast and margarine. Thus loaded with travel bags we set off for our desired holiday.

At first I didn’t want to go to nursery school but spaghetti for lunch became increasingly attractive. In the evenings the electricity at home was restricted. Every day other streets were plunged into darkness. We had a wooden box with letters and next to the candle or 12V bulb fed from a battery we made up words – our own sort of Scrabble. That’s how I learned to read at five years of age. A thank you to my brothers for sometimes letting me win.

My dad was called up in 1995 to dig trenches near the Danube. Fortunately he didn’t have to take up arms. That left the four of us at home and my mother had to learn to pick clover. The name of the state was changed from the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and the State Community of Serbia and Montenegro until Montenegro broke away on 21 May 2006. But the Republic of Serbia continued. Accordingly, the certificate of nationality was issued in a small version. The really interesting thing is that I have never moved once but I’ve changed the name of the country I live in four times.

“The really interesting thing is that I have never moved once but I’ve changed the name of the country I live in four times.”
Going to school was something boring, which I already knew. My strict lady teacher was unsurpassable with her famous saying: “And what was the author trying to say?” The chances of saying the right thing were less than ten per cent. Preparing for a written assignment we had already taken our notebooks away. We didn’t dare write anything on the cover, but my mother had written the initials CM in lead pencil. In spite of that the teacher had ordered us children to take our notebooks the next day because mine wasn’t there. It was 25 March 1999 when my mother washed the curtains in the early evening, perfumed them and started to hang them on the curtain rods. Then NATO forces started bombing and the first bomb fell on the army base in the upper town of Kula. Mother, without blinking an eye, continued hanging the curtains despite father’s warning that they would be blown out with the window. The job couldn’t be abandoned because the curtains would have wrinkled. Dad suggested removing the interior window casements. Early, before the morning shift, mother went to the shop to buy me a notebook. The shopkeeper persuaded her that there wouldn’t be any time for either notebooks or school.

So we had an enforced spring holiday. I was very keen to have private English lessons. To the general astonishment of everyone, I loved irregular verbs. The woman teacher gathered us together so we wouldn’t miss out on our classes. While the air raid warning sounded we would sit in her basement and revise our lessons. She just reminded us to wash the spinach and young lettuce in water with bicarbonate of soda as there were particles of “depleted” uranium in the air. I really couldn’t understand what kind of uranium it could be that was more depleted than this nation! Again my father got called up for the reserve. I felt very sorry for him when they cropped his hair. This time he was stationed in an old brickworks and they roasted young goat, waiting empty-handed for enemy attacks, until an underground oil dump in a neighbouring village exploded. The inhabitants queued patiently for coupons with which they could buy ten litres of fuel. My brother couldn’t get home from Novi Sad. The bridges there were under threat. And the TV tower blew up with my drawing of a blue apple which I had got an award for.

And so it was for seventy-eight days and nights. We bought dried bones – first they were stripped and next day they were cooked to give some flavour to the food. The hardest thing was when the water stopped. They bought mineral water and batteries in the shops. Neighbours came in and asked whether they could get rainwater from the well to give it to the pigs. People used to husk corn at night; the husking machine was often connected to a tractor battery. Graphite connectors were hung on the long-distance power lines. You never knew when the electricity would go down. We installed a stove in the summer kitchen. The grease bucket served as a boiler.

And many years after these events I jump when I’m outside and hear an ambulance siren. Reflexes are strange and very deeply ingrained.

The biggest problem was shoes for us since both our parents were unemployed. Now and then we would get a box of toys, clothes and shoes from relatives and friends in Germany: then we would have fine shoes and thought we were really “in”. As the youngest I inherited everything from underpants to the school bag, I could only distinguish myself by my hair style which I exploited in various situations. Like for the part of Cinderella I soon grew to 190 cm with size 45 shoes which gave me unusual satisfaction in that we had to buy them just for me!

I’ve rushed a little ahead chronologically. The September 2000 elections are in the offing. Demonstrations are being organised in our town too: people are gathering in front of the post office, the speakers are arriving, banners with “Resistance” are being stuck up. My brothers have gone off to Belgrade to attend a political demonstration. The satellite stations are showing pictures in front of the parliament building. Mother can’t believe her eyes and switches the radio on. She weeps with joy. Dad has taken the loudspeakers on a lorry to the market in Kula. I help him with the cables to get power from the photo workshop. The people celebrate democratic change. Older as well as young people have plucked up courage to go out onto the streets. And life goes on frugally – there was produce in the garden, there was milk from the goat, there was heating from the soya bowl. I have my own bit of garden that looks like an experimental field. The thought has crossed my mind a couple of times of taking up gardening as a profession. I have and still do keep all kinds of rodents. I diligently bury individual victims at the end of the garden and make headstones for them.

My interest in music is growing, although there’s no mention of my attending the music school (for which I have often repented recently). At home I practise and beat the drums with ever increasing enthusiasm, having rejected the help of my father, the drummer. At thirteen my first band, “Treš” [Trash], is formed. We arrange concerts for symbolic tickets and humanitarian causes. A couple of times we made a stage out of two tractor trailers. When expenses are deducted, the result is most often a positive zero.
The day after the gig we clear up the site because we are conscious of protecting the environment. I draw and do pencil sketches to my heart’s content. Art draws me more and more like a magnet. I’m enrolled at the philological high school in Subotica, although I’ve never liked the town. However, school was a second family during working days. I assume that is why I became independent so early. It was a real pain travelling in disintegrating trains on a Sunday. I was always loaded with Hungarian, English, German and Spanish dictionaries. Avoiding the crowds in the train, I kept catching people with the drumsticks sticking out of the haversack. Being tall in this way I had on one occasion even to climb through the window to get just a place to stand. At times I felt I was in India not Eastern Europe.

I play hardcore punk! It isn’t just a sort of fast, dynamic, wild music but the way of life I/we live from day to day. When my father had an attack of lumbago one summer I had to stand in and play a couple of gigs with his band at bike meetings. I’ve dropped playing but I’ve become known as a “brick” among senile rockers. What I am sorry about is that I’ve only heard praise indirectly but it is important that it indicated respect for me because my rhythm is unerringly precise.

I love maps; I often look at them; I copy them; I work out routes I want to follow. My room is completely decorated with maps. I joined a cycling club when I got my first professional road bike. Every summer we select another stage with this club, even abroad. The routes have become ever longer and harder. We’ve gone round the whole of Vojvodina, part of Romania, Austria, Hungary, part of Slovakia and Croatia. We’ve covered about 750 km in a week. Next summer we’re going to Austria and Slovenia. So we’ll have an opportunity to experience countries of the European Union of the same age. It is a big comfort to travel without visas and I’m satisfied that I’ve seen Austria, Greece, the Czech Republic...

Music follows me everywhere, I can’t do without it. I’ve always believed that music has no frontiers. Finally we have the right situation and we’re recording an album. I hope an opportunity will come to show Europe what we know! I think that with the talent we have inherited we have to act intelligently and develop it further.

My brothers have graduated in geography or history. It’s my turn one fine day to graduate in Germanic studies which I’ve enrolled for in Novi Sad. My mother, as a graduate in tourism studies, works in an elementary school as a teacher on half salary. I have before me an example to be persistent in achieving my goals and in daring to dream great dreams.

It’s just that knowledge and the freedom to be creative cannot be taken away. I try hard to perfect my knowledge of several languages and become a linguist, an interpreter. I live in a multi-ethnic and a multi-faith community; this has its advantages because there is tolerance and doesn’t need learning from a book. In the early 20th century our townspeople lived with three languages. Like in the European Parliament today, once upon a time old women sat in front of their houses and each spoke in their mother tongue. The others understood everything and spoke in their own language. Many consider that those of us from Eastern Europe have a certain advantage because many of us are bilingual which is valued in Europe after all. My wish is that we, ambitious, young college-educated people contribute to the democratic changes in society!

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-Samo da zna dobro da igra fudbal i da nam pospremi sobu! -čujem zvonki dečji glas moja dva starija brata s kasetofona u penziji. Oni su sažeto tako formulisali svoje želje i očekivanja u vezi novog člana porodice.


Oko izbora imena nije bilo dileme, pošto su mi se roditelji već od početka braka odlučili za Martinu kao pandam za mamino ime Martu. Samo nije bilo prilike da se koristić! Sudbina je tako htela da ona zauvek ostane zlatna rezerva. Skratili su ime za jedno A, i mene su nazvali Martin. Tako smo postali kvintet 5M što se svakom od nas svida.

Iako me je svako podučavao, pevao mi i čitao priče teško sam progovorio. Kao mali kinez koristio sam samo prve slogove reči: ta, mi, mo, te, do... itd. Ovo sam nadoknađivao motorikom. S 10 meseci sam već prohodao, a s godinu i po dana penjao sam se na drvenu kapiju šokirajući dobroćudne starice koje su žurile u crkvu. Sigurno su se i za mene molile, jer mi se nije ništa loše dogodilo... sem tada, ako bolje razmislim, kada sam stavio dran na vruću ashpul od tatinog motora. To se može smatrati i mojim vatrenim kršćenjem u pravom smislu te reči. Tad sam postao pravi motoraš. Prvo sam se vozio sa tatom, a posle mi je on napravio jedan kroser na koji sam bio jako ponosan. Uživao sam ga voziti s 8 godina, pa još učestovati na moto susretima. Čak sam jedne godine dobio nagradu za najmlađeg vozača!

Kada sam se rodio, rodbina je duboko uzdišući konstatovala da su baš teška vremena za veliku porodicu, a nisu ni slutili šta će se sve još dogoditi! Mama mi je godinama vredno vodila dnevnik. Ima tamo našeg škrabanja, crteža, a i grafikona nas trojice kako napredujemo u težini i visini. Tamo je zabeležila da su kolega muzičar Ernest i tata stavljali pločice u hodniku kada se pričalo o padu berlinskog zida. Čak su prognozirali da će se još sjediniti dve Nemačke. Moje je roditelje sve to interesovalo jer su osamdeseti godina motorom proputovali Evropu. Kroz tadašnju Demokratsku Republiku Nemačku imali su tranzitnu vizu i jedva uspeli da za dan stignu na trajekt za Švedsku. Na nostalgičnim retro večerima se pričalo o tome kakav je to osećaj staviti pasoš u džep i krenuti na put, što mi nismo okusili. Te ’89. godine sa puno emocija su pratili i skidanje gvozdene zaves.

Ubrzo sam, ne svojom zaslugom postao milijoner, i to svaki put kad sam krenuo u radnju da kupim sebi žvaku, silom prilika svi oko mene su imali novčanice sa 6 ili 9 nula za vreme katastrofalne inflacije. Kad su nam isplatili dečji dodatak sa zakašnjjenjem od pola godine, već skoro ništa nisu vredile. Te novčanice su kasnije služile kao “tapete” u mnogim kancelarijama ili ko se snašao, taj ga je prodavao kolekcionarima za 5 nemačkih maraka. Svako je kupovao marke, a dok je stajaо u redu, već se promenio kurs dinara. Moglo se uštedeti i tako da se stari hleb zamrznje, jer je za jedan dan krajem ’93. godine cena hleba skočila za 800%! Mesilo se kod kuće uveliko. Taj period pamtim po svojim gastronomskim aktivnostima. Naučio sam da pravim kifle (najčešće bez nadeva), tortu bez jaja, lažni burek, kesten pire od pasulja... svoj kuvar sam i ilustrovao, čak – oponašajući svoju baku i mamu – leipo recepte.

Moja hiperaktivna mama je učestvovala u svim mogućim nagradnim igrama, kvizovima. Tako je osvojila nagradno
putovanje i uspela je da nas odvode u Mađarsku na jedan vikend na etno-salašu. Čim smo izasli iz voza, svratili smo u prvu samoposlužu. Oni koji su nas posmatrali znali su da smo iz Juge, pošto smo se bacili na so, ulje, deterdžent, kafu, toalet papir, kvasac i margarin. Tako natovarenim putnim turbama krenuli smo na raslužni odmor.

U obdanište u početku nismo voleo da idem, ali su me špagete za ručak sve više privlačile. Uveće nas je kod kuće čekala restrikcija struje. Svaki dan su druge ulice utonule u mrač. Imali smo drvene kocke sa slovima i pored sveće ili lampice od 12 V koja se napajala akumulatorom, slagali smo reći – neku vrstu “skrebla”. Tako sam naučio da čitam s pet godina. Hvala braći što su me ponekad i pustili da pobedim.

Tata je bio mobilisan ‘95. godine za kopanje rovova blizu Dunava. Srećom nije morao da uzme pušku u ruke. Tada nas je ostalo četvoro u kući i mama je morala da nauči da kosi detelinu. Ime naše države se promenilo od Socijalističke Republike Jugoslavije u Saveznu Republiku Jugoslaviju, pa Državnu zajednicu Srbijske i Crne Gore, dok se Crna Gora nije odvojila 21.05.2006. godine. Pa je nastala Republika Srbija. Shodno tome i uverenja o državljanstvu je bilo ispostavljeno u ovoliko verzija. Što je zaista zanimljivo: nismo se ni jednom selio, a promenio sam četiri naziva zemlje u kojoj živim.


Tata je predložio da se skinu unutrašnja krila prozora. Pre prepodnevne smene mama je otišla da trake da mi kupi vežbanke rano ujutru. Prodaćača ju je ubedaivala da neće biti neko vreme potrebe ni za vežbankom ni za školom.

Tako smo imali priruđni prolećni rasput. Jako sam voleo da idem na privatne časove engleskog jezika. Na opšte zaprepasćenje svih, voleo sam nepravilne glagole. Nastavnica nas okupila da ne gubimo gradivo. Za vreme uzbune za opštu opasnost iz vazduha dok su sirene zavijale, mi smo sedeli u njenom podrumu i poravnjali lekcije. Samo nas je opomenula da spanač i mladu salatu peremo vodom sa soda bikarbonom pošto u vazduhu ima čestica osiromašenog uranijuma. To baš i nisam razumeo, kakav je to uranijum koji je siromašniji od ovog naroda?!

Tata mi je opet dobio poziv za rezervistu. Najviše mi ga je bilo žao kad su ga ošišali. Ovog puta je bio stacioniran u jednoj staroj ciglani i pekli su jare na ražinju iščekujući neprijateljske napade goloruki, dok nije eksplodirao podzemni rezervor naftne u susednom selu. Građani su za to vreme strpljivo stajali u redovima za bon kojim su mogli da kupe 10 l goriva. Brat nije mogao da doputuje kući iz Novog Sada. Tamo su mostovi bili ugroženi. I TV toranj je odleto u vazduh s momom plavom jabukom za čiji crtež sam i nagradu dobio.


I mnogo godina posle ovih događaja se trgnem na ulici kada čujem sirenu kola hitne pomoći. Reflexi su čudni i jako duboko usuđeni.

Najveći problem je bio obuci nas, pošto su mi oba roditelja bila nezaposlena. Ponekad smo dobili kutiju igračaka, odeće i obuće od rodbine i prijatelja iz Nemačke: tada smo se fino obukli i mislili da smo baš “in”. Kao najmlađi, ja sam sve nasleđavao: od gaća do školske torbe. Jedino svojom frizurom sam mogao da se istaknem što sam i iskoristio u raznim situacijama. Kao za Pepeljuginu ulogu, ubrzo sam izrasao do 190 cm visine i broja cipela od 45 što mi je pružilo neobično zadovoljstvo što moramo samo za mene da kupujemo!

Malo sam požurio s hronološkim redom. Pred nama su još izbori septembra 2000. godine. Demonstracije se organizuju i u našem mestu: na platou ispred pošte se okupljaju ljudi, dolaze govornici, lepe se plakati “Otpora”. Braća su mi


Sviram Hard Core Punk! Nije to samo vrsta brze, dinamične, besne muzike, nego i način života na koji iz dana u dan živim(o). Kada je tatu jednog leta uhvatio lumbago, ja sam umesto njega uskočio i odsirao s njegovim bendom par nastupa na moto susretima. Spasio sam svirke,a i postao sam poznat kao klinja među matorim rokerima. Što mi je žao što sam pohvale čuo samo indirektno, ali je važno da je bio ponosan na mene, jer mi je rim napogrešno precizan.


Muzika me prati svugde, ne mogu bez nje. Uvek sam verovao u to, da muzika nema graniće. Imamo konačno uslove i snimamo album, nadam se da će nam se ukazati prilika da Evropi pokažemo šta znamo! Muslim da s talentom koji smo nasledili treba pametno da se postupi i da ga još više razvijemo.

Braća su mi završila geografiju, odnosno istoriju. Na mene je red da diplomiram jednog lepog dana iz germanistike, koju sam upisao u Novom Sadu. Mama, kao diplomirani turizmolog, radi u osnovnoj školi kao nastavnik s pola norme.


Mnogi smatraju da mi iz Istočne Evrope imamo izvesnu prednost, jer smo mnogi bilingvisti što se uostalom i ceni u Evropi.

Moja želja je da mi ambiciozni i fakultetski obrazovani mladi doprinesemo demokratskim promenama u društvu!

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I’m sitting on the kitchen sofa. Grandma is holding me tightly in her arms. We are both wrapped in blankets against the cold, but I am still cold. There is a smell of kerosene in the room from the red oil stove, the thing we use to warm up in winter. A candle on the table is melting. We don’t have another. They say dad can’t go outside and buy one because they are shooting. My brother is sitting at the table trying to do his homework; he is in year three. Mom tells him to stop it, that he can spoil his eyes in this light, but he won’t. Dad approaches the window and looks out at the street. I also want to look, but grandma wouldn’t let me.

I am bored. It must be 1992, the end of the Soviet Union, the beginning of an independent republic of Georgia. I am three years old. I know almost nothing about the political tension in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, nor about the collapse of the first Georgian government. I also don’t know that my dad gets up at 6am every morning to stand in a long queue for bread and milk, which are sold for special coupons called “talons”. All I know is that I don’t like my elder brother’s old clothes that I have to wear and I don’t believe that the radiators we have at home used to be hot, although mom says so. I also know that I should not come close to the big canister standing on the stove where we boil water for taking baths. It’s dangerous.

When grandpa sees I’m bored he asks me to come to him saying he has something special for me. I already know what that “something special” is. He gives me a few million “kupons”, Georgian money at the time. “Oh, three years old and already a millionaire,” dad says. I give him a satisfied smile and run to my secret place where I hide my millions from Gi, my elder brother. I look at these green, red and blue papers, sorted in green, red and blue groups, with pride and feel myself completely contented with my life. Later on, I learn that this is called inflation and my millions are nearly worthless.

In the morning mom wakes me up. I have to go to kindergarten. I hate kindergarten, although there is one guy I like. But he doesn’t like me. He is already four and thinks I am too small. Once he promised to show me a real gun. He said that his dad’s friends sometimes bring guns and parents hide them behind the wardrobe. I am so glad he wants to show me a gun! Next day, I wake up and pester mom to hurry up. But the boy brings nothing. He says that his dad caught him when he was taking the gun. He slapped him and told him never to come close to the wardrobe again. I feel so sorry for him that I give him the last chocolate I had stolen from grandma’s Christmas supply, although later I think it would have been better had I eaten it myself. Maybe, I don’t like him that much!

I wanted to tell mom about the gun but she was so late to pick me up that I forgot. She is always late. She has a job. That’s odd, because other moms and sometimes even dads have no jobs and they are always on time. So I think that having a job is bad, especially for moms. Mom knows I hate her being late, so she kisses me and tells me what she has been telling me throughout my life: “You know everything in this country has been a mess since the day you were born. But in a couple of years, when you are older, everything will be OK.”

I am older and I go to school. There is no more shooting in the streets. People are not connected with military groups and don’t hide guns behind their wardrobes. We have a new president, an old man with white hair just like my grandfather. We used to like him too as we liked the first one when he started, but now we don’t. It’s because we don’t have electricity, hot water, warmth or money. We haven’t got our lost territories back. In a word, we don’t have anything and we think that all this is his fault.

I am a millionaire no longer. We have a new currency called the “lari”. Mom and dad give me one lari per day and I can buy some food in the school buffet. But I don’t buy food. On breaks I skip school with my friends and run to a market where an old man with an amputated hand sells posters. While we look with amazement at glittering images
For my friend’s dad, it’s paying money to criminal groups to get his stolen car back.

Sometimes, when protest rallies come along our street, we all go to the balcony to watch. Dad lifts me up to have a better view and mom tells me the same thing again, thinking she has never told me before: “You know everything in this country has been a mess since the day you were born. But in a couple of years, when you are older, everything will be OK.”

I’m getting older and older and it’s never OK enough. If you want to know the full impact of post-Soviet events on citizens you just need to take public transport and accidentally step on the foot of a middle-aged woman. She will explode with all the anger of her life: the unemployed husband, lazy kids, ill mother, low salary, abusive government, useless previous government, immature first government, bloody communists.

And she will be happy to find you, who so unmercifully stepped on her foot, responsible for all the misfortunes of her life. Then she will calmly give her fate back into the hands of God and continue staring out the window, dreaming about some magical change.

Funnily enough, there always is change. As mom puts it, “since the day I was born” we are moving from one radical change to another, ultimately ending with new radical change.

Even funnier, Georgia remains the most comfortable place for me to live, with warm memories of dark family evenings, the impossibility of remembering the names of permanently changing officials, the high risk of getting stuck in an elevator, with my family and friends being the only stability in my life, and the challenge and fear of the future, using every little opportunity given me not to become part of another lost generation.

When somebody mentions independent Georgia, the first thing that comes to my mind is a documentary depicting the official declaration of independence, with the first Georgian president raising his shaking fist in the air, shouting “GOD BLESS INDEPENDENT GEORGIA” and the flow of applause that followed. Who amongst that overjoyed people could have ever imagined that Georgia would get stuck forever between a Soviet past and a European future, taking steps back and forth, over and over again?!}

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“Did you not want two?” retorted Vano. Famusov fell silent. The old Volga was covered in snow and anyway “the snow was up to our knees”, at least that was how he explained his two-hour delay to mother. Do you like the crackly sound of snow? I think it’s devilishly nice, crump-crump it goes, like the crunch of hot fresh bread. Or when...

Never mind!

Well, then! There was the snow, and the queue in the dairy on Voroshilov Street, the sparse recollections from my parents’ memory pools, which I used to winkle out almost the way that Harry Potter worked on Prof. Slughorn. What happens next? Next, don’t you know, as with Kurt Cobain: “smells like teen spirit”2, that’s what.

PART TWO
IN WHICH YOU WILL FIND ALMOST EVERYBODY FROM SISI KEPWELL (!) TO SASHA BELY!

In subsequent years, as everybody knows, there was “political chaos”, which meant nothing to us. Our parents watched “The Field of Miracles” gameshow on Fridays, and for some the signature tune of the TV series “Santa Barbara” still has the significance of a ritual.

At the age of five life definitely became more interesting. Zhirinovsky and Nemtsov were pouring juice, water or mud onto each other, Bill Gates was doing his magic with Windows, in Africa (as always) famine reigned while I stuffed my face with Kinder Surprise chocolates, played Tetris and considered that I lived in the best country in the world and that the whole of that world revolved around me alone. Oh yes. People make mistakes.

I don’t know... Maybe on that day you overslept and were late for work, maybe you had just got divorced and decided to jump off a bridge, maybe you were crying for Lady Di, but I got up, hung some ridiculous headband on my head and went to school. First of September... first class... first love... the first time I saw “c*ck” graffitied on a school fence... and first disappointments.
I did not notice the Russian financial crisis of 1998, it passed me by, all I remember was that my favourite toffees had shot up in price and that everybody all round was burying the labels that said “1 USD = 6 RUB”.

Schoolchildren then were interested only in themselves. If you had a “Dandy” games console, and the wrappers from “Love is...” chewing gum you were considered a spiv. In Russian the word “blat” and “mat” have a particular meaning, they were concepts, so to speak. “We don’t use foul language to swear, as such, that’s the way we actually talk,” said one politician, and he was right. “Us lot”, (my generation), were experts in semi-criminality and foul language, after all that was the period of the celebrated film “Brother” by Bodrov, and the legendary TV-series “Brigada”. The brotherhood was everywhere. We threatened each other with Sasha Belyi, quoted the dialogues, and at New Year our wishes to everyone were “Don’t turn into a bitch”.

You could describe me as the most apolitical of citizens, after all you and I both know that “coarse heavy-cloth truth” which is that it does not matter which regime is in power, who killed the TV-journalist Vlad Listev, or how much money minister Chubais has, when you are between twelve and sixteen and cannot decide which track to choose at the disco to attract Ibragim, the boy in an older class.

But time passed, the dashing nineties were replaced by the new millennium, Yeltsin and his “Russia is rising from its knees” was replaced by Putin and his “Anyone who does not believe that everything will rise, will find that it won’t”, the planet was engulfed by internet-mania, and some people just grew up a bit. Oh yes.

PART THREE, CONCLUSION
IN WHICH “EVERYTHING WILL PASS, AND THIS WILL TOO”?

Putin was replaced by “Prez Medved”, I was a third-year student, and Pele had predicted that Russia would win the World Cup when Brazil excels at hockey. Huh!

But look at the number of problems we have. Nationalism (for three years I have been met at the university by walls bearing the slogan “Armenians, f*ck off”); alcoholism (“The good old Russian peasant swears, in between gulps, that he will endure anything, even if he has no shoes, or nothing to eat. But not if he has no vodka.” This is in a song.); corruption, fools and roads, ... this list is damn long. Of course you can put on a colourful turban, sit cross-legged on the ground, light a hookah and have a deep thought: “Maktub”, which comes out as “Hey, Lola, let’s philosophise”. Damn it, I keep complaining about everything (I used to love it), mercilessly criticise the way things are (I still love that), make plans to escape from this Nigeria with snow”, but all the same I’ll go on loving this country. For the fact that if I put on raspberry-coloured lace-up boots and shout “I’m going to take command of this parade” everybody will understand and we’ll have a laugh together, remembering the pearls of the great wheeler-dealer à la the great Soviet comedy. For the fact that if someone asks “Lola, why did you only revise one topic for the exam?” and I answer “Maybe I’ll get lucky and be asked that question”, nobody will criticise me, and they’ll add “Oh, I’ll do the same. Maybe somehow I’ll get away with it.” And again, they’ll understand. And it’s so important to me to be understood. And when I’m sitting in the coffee shop opposite the university and smoking a Captain Black, I love all that and don’t think about anything, “Tomorrow is another day.” (Scarlett O’Hara) “For me too.” (Lola Davidzhan)

P.S.

“Hey! Waiter! Would you please put some vodka in my coffee?”

“How much?”

“How much does it need, to make us all happy?”

References:
1. “Loneliness of the Net”, novel by Janusz Leon Wisniewski
2. “Smells like teen spirit”, song by Nirvana
3. “We don’t use foul language to swear, as such, that’s the way we actually talk”, Aleksandr Lebed, politician
4. “Dear Brothers! I greet you at the start of the Year of the Dog!”
5. “My greeting to you: don’t turn into a bitch!” Brigada TV series
6. “The coarse heavy-cloth truth”, from The Golden Calf, by Ilf and Petrov
7. “Everything will pass, and this will too.” According to legend, one of a number of possible inscriptions on a ring belonging to King Solomon.
8. “The good old Russian peasant swears, in between gulps, that he will endure anything, even if he has no shoes, or nothing to eat. But not if he has no vodka.” Aleksandr Novikov, singer
9. “Maktub”, from the Arabic: “So it is written.”
10. “Russia is a Nigeria with snow”, Sergei Brin, founder of Google
11. “I’m going to take command of this parade!” Ostap Bender in The Twelve Chairs, by Ilf and Petrov
12. “Tomorrow is another day”, from Gone With the Wind, by Margaret Mitchell

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ЧАСТЬ ПЕРВАЯ,
В КОТОРОЙ МЕНЯ КАК ВСЕГДА ПОТЯНЕТ НА ЛИРИЧЕСКИЕ
ОТСУТСТВИЯ, А ВЫ УЗНАЕТЕ, ЧТО В 89-М СУГРОБЫ БЫЛИ
ПО КОЛЕНУ.

«Дорогая Лола! Это письмо было вручено твоим родителям
в день торжественной регистрации твоего рождения.
Всегда помни, что ты граждanka великой страны – Союза
Советских Социалистических Республик, страны свободы и
счастья, где человек человеку друг, товарищ, брат...
Держи в чистоте достоинство гражданки Советской страны,
береги и приумножай общественную социалистическую
событиность – основу могущества и процветания
Советской Родины...
Помни, что счастье – это когда ты строишь самое
светлое и справедливое общество на земле – коммунизм».

Исполком г. Ростова-на-Дону (Пролетарского Совета
dепутатов).

Я до поры до времени о существовании этого письма и не
знала, пока не обнаружила его среди кипы пожелтевших
газет и бесполезных инструкций. Рождающемся с тремя
волосинками на голове, вопищими днями, и вообще
являющемся собой довольно неинтересное зрелище – и нате,
на тебя уже возложена такая ответственная и высокая
обязанность – быть творцом всеобщего «счастья».
Мелочь, а приятно.

Настроение паршивое. Я села писать вам о том, как
изменилась моя жизнь за 20 лет с 24 ноября 1989 года
dо сегодняшнего дня, но опять зашла в этот треклятый
«Контакт», потом – в ICQ, потом в «Одноклассники»...
ненавижу. У меня синдром «одиночества в сети» (1),
спорм, что и у вас?

Когда я родилась и моему папе сообщили об этом,
он со злости переварило кашу, предназначенную моей
полуторагодовалой сестре.

«Что за комиссия, Создатель, быть взрослой дочери
отцом!» – воскликнул Фамусов.

«А двух не хотел?» – парировал Ване. Фамусов притих.
Старую «Волгу» завалило снегом и вообще «снега было
по колено», так, по крайней мере, он объяснил маме
свое двухчасовое опоздание. А вы любите хруст снега?
По-моему, он чертовски приятен, хрум-хрум, как будто
горячий и свежий хлеб разрезаешь, такой хруст.
А еще когда...

Never mind.

Ну вот. Снег и очередь в магазине «Молоко», что на
Ворошиловском – судьбные воспоминания из омоту
памяти моих родителей, которые я выживала почти как
Гарри Поттер из профессора Смизнорта. А дальше что
будет? Дальше, знаете ли, как у Курта Кобейна, сплющей
«smells like teen spirit» (2) будет...

ЧАСТЬ ВТОРАЯ,
ГДЕ ВЫ НАЙДЕТЕ ПОЧТИ ВСЕХ, ОТ СИСИ КЕПВЕЛА(!) ДО
САШИ БЕЛОГО.

В следующие годы в стране, как известно, творилась
«политическая катавасия», а нам все было иначе.
Родители также смотрели «Поле чудес» по пятницам, а
уж «позывные» сериал «Санта Барбара» до сих пор для
некоторых имеют сакральный смысл.

С пяти лет жизнь определенно стала интереснее.
Жирновский и Немцов поливали друг друга соком,
водой и гризью, Билл Гейтс кодовал над Windows, в
Африке (да как и всегда) царила голодуха, а я объедалась
«киндер-сюрпризами», играла в Тетрис и думала, что
живу в лучшей стране на земле, и весь этот мир
врашается исключительно вокруг меня. М-да. Человеку
свободно ошибаться.

Не знали... Может быть, вы в этот день проспали
работу, может, развяли и решили санитар с моста,
может, лили слезы по принцессе Диане, а я встала,
нацепила на голову какой-то несуразный бант и пошла
в школу. Первое сентября... первый класс... первая
любовь...первых слово «х@й» на школьном заборе...
и первые разочарования.
Дефолт 90-го года прошел мимо меня незаметно, помню только, что мои любимые тянучки резко подорожали и все вокруг хоронили цифры «1 USD = 6 RUB». Школьники в то время были заняты исключительно собой.

Тот, у кого была приставка «Dandy» и все фантики жвачки «Love is...», считался блатным малым. В России слова «блат» и «мать» имеют особое значение, это, можно сказать, концептъ, «Мы матом не ругаемся – мы им разговариваем» (3) – сказал один политик и был прав.

«Наш» (мои поколение) благоволили и матерялись мастерски, ведь то было время знаменитого «Брата» Бодрова, а потом и вовсе легендарной «Бригада!» (4). Братва была повсюду. Мы угрожали друг другу Сашей Бельм, цитировали диалоги, а в Новом году ждали всем «не становиться суками» (5). Тогда меня можно было назвать самым аполитичным гражданином, ведь мы же все с вами знаем эту «серьёзную правду» (6) о том, что не важно, какой режим правления царит в стране, кто убил Влада Листьева и сколько денег у Чубайса, если вам от 12 до 16 лет и вы не можете решить, что надеть на дискотеку, чтобы соблазнить-таки старшеклассника Ибрагима.

Но время прошло, лихие 90-е сменили 2000-е, Ельцина с его «Россия поднимается с колен» сменил Путин с его «Если кто не верит, что все поднимется, то у того никогда и не поднимется», планету захлестнула Интернет-манيا, а некоторые всего-навсего повзрослели. Так-то.

ЧАСТЬ ТРЕТЬЯ, ЗАКЛЮЧИТЕЛЬНАЯ,
В КОТОРОЙ «ВСЕ ПРОЙДЕТ. И ЭТО ТОЖЕ» (7).

Путина сменил «Превед медвед», я на третьем курсе, а Российская сборная по футболу, как сказал Пеле, выиграет Чемпионат мира, когда бразильцы станут лучшими в хоккее. Эх!

Сколько же в нашей стране проблем все-таки.

Национализм (вот уже три года возле стен университета меня встречает надпись «Армяни! идите в ж@ пу армяни!»), алкоголизм («всё вытерпят мужи исконно русский, проматерится, разве что, вполотели: коль нет обуток, или нет закуски, но не потерпит, если нету водки» (8) – песня есть такая), коррупция, дурацкие и дороги .... чертовски длинный этот список. Можно, конечно, надеть на голову расписной тюбэн, поджать под себя ноги, раскурить кальян и глубокомысленно изречь: «Мактуб» (9), но ничего кроме «слышь, Лола, хорошо умничать», не произойдет, Damn it, я все время на все жалуюсь (любила), нещадно критикую нынешнее положение дел (люблю), строю планы побега из этой «Нигерии в снегу» (10), и все равно буду любить эту страну. За то, что, если надену малиновые штбеты и буду кричать: «Командовать парадом буду я!» (11), меня поимут, и мы вместе посмеемся, вспомнив перлы великого комбидрата. За то, что, если на вопрос: «Лола, почему ты выучила только один билет к экзамену?», я отвечаю: «А, а уж мне повезет и мне достанется он», меня не будут порицать, а добавляют: «Ой, я тоже так сожалею. Может быть, как-нибудь прокатится». И снова поимут. А для меня это так много значит, когда меня понимают. А пока я сижу в кофейне напротив университета, курю «Captain Black», люблю все это и ни о чем не думаю. «Я подумаю об этом завтра» – Скаарлетт О’Хару (12).

«Я тоже» – Лола Давиджан.

П.С.
– Эй, официант, подлейте в кофе водки.
– Сколько?
– А сколько надо, чтобы сделать нас всех счастливыми?

Ссылки:
1. «Одиночество в Сети» – роман Я.Л.Вишневского.
2. «Smells like teen spirit» – песня группы Nirvana.
4. «Дорогая братва! Поздравляю вас с наступающим годом Собаки!».
5. «Желаю, чтоб никто из нас не стал сукой» – из телесериала «Бригада».
7. «Все пройдет. И это тоже» – Согласно легенде, один из возможных вариантов надписи на кольце царь Шлому (Соломон). 
11. «Командовать парадом буду я!» – знаменитая фраза Остапа Бендера, главного героя романа «Двенадцать стульев», Ильф и Петров.

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TRAVELLERS OF THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST IN TIMES OF CHANGE

“I don’t have chemical weapons, I’m not going to marry a US citizen, and I’m not a streetwalker!” I had to prove these things when I crossed the US-Canadian border. Even though the Governor General of Canada had signed my invitation to the World Youth Congress, my red Russian passport was like a red bullfighter’s cape for the American border guards. Of course I was angry. After all the humiliation to get the visa, they were putting me through all possible shades of suspicion. Twenty years ago nobody would have thought that a twenty-year old, unmarried, Russian girl could be a potential danger to American citizens.

On the other hand, twenty years ago we couldn’t go abroad at all and actually didn’t want to. Why explore other cultures and exchange ideas and values? We had all the best things in the Soviet Union and there couldn’t be anything interesting outside of our country.

But my mom adored travelling when she was a student in the city of Orel. After traversing the Ural Mountains, crossing the rivers of Siberia and the forests of the Russian Far East, she finally stopped in Vladivostok, at the Sea of Japan with its salty breeze.

And then I was born in 1989, spending the first ten years of my life in a dormitory – one of the last free accommodations provided by the Soviet Union to single mothers. But one night, we went to sleep in one country and woke up in another – getting not only rights and freedoms but also lots of problems.

If you are a child of the nineties in the Russian Far East, you definitely have many skills: making food over a fire in your flat because there was no electricity; finding fresh water in the neighbourhood because the water pipe was often broken; and recharging public phone cards in the fridge because they were expensive but worked longer after being frozen.

And even now, twenty years later, when we can enjoy all the amenities of modern urban life, each of us has candles, matches and fresh water in storage “just in case”. There is a humorous saying: “If you have survived the 1990’s in Vladivostok – you can survive anywhere.” It is not funny to me.

Nevertheless my childhood was wonderful and amazing, filled with new experiences, rapid changes, and constant dreams about inaccessible things like plastic bags, colourful umbrellas and pink synthetic dresses. I grew up in the city of new trends and great travellers – sailors.

In the nineties there were three prime destinations for them – Japan, Korea and China. The luckiest could even go to Australia, the US and Europe.

A sailor was like a window on the world. He always came home with presents. People would gather around him to hear him tell “fairy tales” – for example that in Australia it was illegal not to put trash in trash bins, while the Japanese were throwing away really good equipment and clothes.

Actually Japanese dumps (known in Russian as “pomoiki”) were primary destinations for our sailors. What a paradise for Soviet man – high-tech gadgets for free! They would bring home amazing rubbish from the dumps, from toys to TV sets and cars. And I must say that the seven-year-old Japanese fridge we got in 1994 is still working.

We – the children of Vladivostok – were the happiest of all, since we could get Korean juices and chewing gum and sometimes even “chocko-pies” and melon ice-cream. And my friends from Orel were just jealous that I had colourful Chinese socks and plastic sunglasses. (Orel remained without imported goods and seemed stuck in communism until about 1997-1999.)

Indeed, that was the strange feature of the early nineties: everybody was crazy about things which were worse. People gladly exchanged real chocolate for foreign candy bars, organic juices for coke and leather shoes for coloured, plastic slippers. It was not only the desire to try everything new, but the fact that people wanted to be more similar to Westerners. Of course they couldn’t have big houses with swimming pools, but they could drink coke and move closer...
to a Western life style. We gave up communist values and started to look for a new way.

When my mom was twenty, she would take an eight-hour train ride from Orel to Moscow just to buy a glass of “Mirinda” at the train station. It sounds so unbelievable now, in the age of luxury, to make a journey for a glass of sparkling orange water.

But my travels to Moscow were even stranger. Each summer I had to fly nine hours to wait eight hours for the train to Orel. Where did I spend the time between the airport and the train station? In McDonald’s of course! I knew every toy that came with the “Happy Meal” and always got three or four sets for my friends in Vladivostok, who envied me not because I had seen the Kremlin or Lenin’s tomb, but because I had a plastic Ronald McDonald clown.

In the nineties, there were even stranger travellers in the Russian Far East – the “pomogalka”, or helpers’ businessmen. This phenomenon appeared after Vladivostok’s main industry, shipbuilding, closed down. It worked like this: A trader in Chinese clothing would gather a group of thirty and go to the Chinese border town of Suifenke where they spent two days shopping and eating. Returning to cross the border, the trader would give each person 70 kilos of goods, since one could legally import two huge bags plus whatever you could wear. This translated into a daily masquerade at Russian-Chinese customs. One would pass “travellers” with huge sacks, each dressed in multiple T-shirts and coats, with wedding dresses underneath, bearing lighters, irons and mixers.

Other funny travellers of the time were people who wanted to get cheap Japanese cars. They would go to Japanese ports, buy cars and then cut them in half. These half-cars could be imported as tax-free scrap metal and then glued back together and sold. This was of course illegal – since no taxes had been paid and goods had been sold under the table, but it was a way to survive for hundreds of entrepreneurs, a way for thousands of people to travel and of course a way to get affordable goods to millions of Russians during these years of change, a period I call a “transitional mess”.

During seventy years of communism, everybody had lived stability and everything like education, health care, jobs and pension was provided. By the end of the nineties people had started to believe that they could build their own lives and earn some money without trading oil, killing or stealing.

Communism didn’t work and capitalism has not been working either. We have started to seek our own way by bringing foreign values to our soil and opening not only borders but minds. Different NGOs began to appear and

I, as an activist, have managed to travel half the world, representing my region, our activities and Russian culture.

I have labelled this time the “I-would-have-never-thought-years”. I have taken part in festivals and events that were unimaginable a few years ago. Living in a tiny room with a candle ten years ago, I could not have imagined that I would now be a university student, have my own NGO and represent it at the APEC CEO Summit in Singapore. For me the last years have been years of change, and I think that my area of Russia has been the most dynamic one because of its unique location – and of course because of the adventurous spirit of its travellers.

Still, in 2009 we don’t have a McDonald’s in Vladivostok. The reason? Several years ago we protested against it. We have gone from being children seeking chemical sweets to those who support organic food, natural materials and local production.

The Russian Far East has changed dramatically since 1989, and it is continuing to change. The next few years are going to be even more unpredictable than the crazy nineties. There are several huge projects, such as the APEC Summit in Vladivostok, which will bring new impulses to economic development and give optimism and hope to people. With all roads now open, young people have all the opportunities to find a way for themselves and their country.

Nonetheless, even for me, crossing borders is still much harder than for UK citizens. I do it proudly with my red Russian passport, because I know that I am going abroad for new knowledge and experiences. I know that I will bring them back to help create a new national identity – all the while trying to maintain the good old values which survived the times of change, developing new ones for a new age.

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When a world ends a child smiles. And children, thousands of them, smiled when the Berlin Wall came down. I was among them. I wasn’t smiling because the Wall had come down or because my heart was aching for freedom, or because my head was full of thoughts about the forthcoming changes. I was smiling only because my mother was looking at me lovingly and playing with me. I did not hear the thunder of the bricks hitting the ground, didn’t hear the people weeping with joy, and Gorbachev’s speeches did not exist for me. There was nothing in my life besides a very small house on the edge of a little town in Belarus, besides the warm and kind people, my people, around me, who were inexplicably apprehensive in spite of the fact that their beloved son was with them.

I am grateful to my memory. I am grateful to the tenacious memory I had as a child, one that carved light and dark patches into my life and left them in my soul forever. There was a day at the beginning of the nineties that I shall never forget: my parents had finished regularising their citizenship and were already living on Russian soil, and we were so poor that there was nothing for me to eat. That day mother bought one pastry, for me, and said, “Here you are, Artyom, this is your supper and don’t ask for anything until tomorrow. You won’t eat bread anyway, and I only had enough money for this pastry.” Like hell was she thinking then about how free she was. And I know that there were many similar cases. But I could still smile, because I was still very small, and because the pastry tasted good.

I shall also never forget the day when I first felt that I was free. Like all people of my generation, I was at school, in the senior classes, but I can’t judge whether at that time everybody understood, as I did, that freedom had ascended the throne in that earthly space called Russia with such force that it would, at times, be necessary to bring in restrictions and build walls.

At the time, Smolensk, where I lived, was being called “a second Chicago” because of the number of contract killings taking place on its streets. There is one night that I have stored in my memory forever. At two in the morning my mother came into the room I shared with my sister, with a pair of binoculars in her hands. She stood for a long time looking at what was going on by the main entrance to our building. I looked as well and saw a man in a tracksuit, covered in blood, in the light of police car headlamps. There was a little hole in his chest and also in his head. Beside the man lay some flowers and some sweets. He had been on his way to a date. The policemen stood beside him. A woman was searching the body. That was the first time I had seen a dead body. I could still smile though, because I was still in my warm family home, high up on the fourth floor, and I was not involved.

In fact my head, and my heart and soul and awareness, had been turned by an ardent, innocent and memorable love. I was free when kissing, I was free when singing songs until late in the yard, I was free when I came home completely intoxicated by the smell of that girl’s hair, the smell of leaves drenched by a May downpour, the smell of the hot white concrete of rooves in summer. And I was happy in spite of being poor and having no influence or education, because someone else had appeared, another person to whom I felt like smiling until I cried. And precisely on that day, when I first consciously fell in love with another person, regardless
I AM A MAN OF THAT GENERATION AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT I REGRET THAT I WAS SMALL WHEN THE BERLIN WALL CAME DOWN, BECAUSE
I WOULD HAVE BEEN THE FIRST TO SNATCH A BRICK OUT OF IT WITH MY BARE HANDS IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM.
of their political or religious opinions, their opportunities and prospects, with no thought for material motives, that was the day I felt free!

I started working at an early age. At sixteen. I started off as a yard caretaker and a market trader. My Indian T-shirts “from the home of elephants and tea” were not particularly successful, but I did make a bit of money. For a long time I lived in total isolation from the state, like any other child or teenager. The grown-ups would say that the politicians were lying to us, promising the moon at the elections, but to be honest I was more inclined to believe the news presenters. Tatyana Mitkova inspired particular trust. It was only much later that life taught me not to trust beautiful women. But at the time I felt how wonderful my country would become any moment now, if not tomorrow then the day after. And my life, the life of a personality, a person, as a thinking being, really was improving.

I entered university like many people of my generation. I went without knowing that this was something people didn’t need, not knowing that five years later I would be on the verge of drinking myself to death because of my thoughts about the future and my loneliness. I did not know, at the time, that the price of freedom would turn out to be – not responsibility, but monetary payments to the exchequer, which for a long time appeared to be insolvent. I simply entered university inspired by the holy idea of Learning, which pervades everything and would prevent me from living my life incorrectly. There was not a great deal of learning in my student years, but maybe that is for the best. My first years of study were a carefree extension of school. The only difference was that now I had an opportunity to study just twice a year, for the exam sessions, while the rest of the time I could, considering my ability, merely drop in on the lessons. But, as happened with many others of my generation, the terrible day was approaching with appalling speed when I would have to leave my alma mater and enter that wonderful grown-up life. In Russia, glamour and Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin reigned. The glamour is fading away already, making room for an economy campaign, but Putin is still there. I felt less and less inclined to smile, but all the same I had lots of books I wanted to read, a lot of songs I wanted to hear, and a lot of people on whom I smiled. But more and more frequently there cropped up faces of the type that one didn’t want to see at all.

Now I am a second year post-grad. That’s the social category of young people that I belong to. I must admit the company is very varied. How many second year post-grads do you think have tattoos? How many have ever opened a book on the history of philosophy, if only once? Are many of them fluent in a foreign language in which they have passed an exam at higher degree level? Or indeed fluent in Russian, at the level of a final-year schoolchild? Take a look at the postgraduate entrance exams in any university outside the Moscow ring road – you’d feel even less like smiling. My hair, the hair of a twenty-three year old, is already going grey. Not because of the dolce vita. I belong to a generation of people who did not witness the fall of the Berlin Wall and do not recall Gorbachev’s speeches, people who survived the bandit wars of the nineties, never fought in Chechnya, are very agile in creating an SMS on their mobile phones, who didn’t study the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who survived “epidemics” of bird flu, mad cow disease and BSE, and will survive swine flu. People who remember when talk of holes in the ozone layer ceased, people who saw Beslan and Nord-Ost, people who became superfluous “specialists” at a time of redundancies, when one set of economic principles was replaced by another, who saw their mothers’ arms falling helplessly...

I am a man of that generation and I can tell you that I regret that I was small when the Berlin Wall came down, because I would have been the first to snatch a brick out of it with my bare hands merely in the name of the holy ideal for which you were fighting, in the name of Freedom. May God help us to carry on smiling.

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АРТЁМ КАРАЧУН
СМОЛЕНСК (РОССИЯ)

Когда рушится мир, ребёнок улыбается. И дети, тысячи детей улыбались во время падения Берлинской стены. И я среди этих детей тоже был. Не потому я улыбался, что стена упала, и сердце моё рвалось к свободе, а голова была полна мыслями о грядущих переменах. Я улыбался лишь потому, что мама смотрела на меня любящими глазами и играла со мною. И я не слышал грохота кирпичей, падающих на землю, не слышал плача счастливых людей, не было для меня и выступлений Михаила Горбачёва. Ничего не было, кроме маленького домика на окраине белорусского города, кроме тёплых и добрых людей, которые были рядом со мной, и которые, несмотря на то, что там был их любимый сын, почему-то волновались и чего-то ждали.

Я благодарен памяти. Я благодарен своей целой детской памяти, которая вырезала светлые и тёмные пятна из моей жизни и навсегда оставляла в моей душе.

Я никогда не забуду тот день в начале девяностых годов, когда мои родители, определившись с гражданством и живя уже на территории России, оказались настолько бедны, что мне было нечего есть. В тот день мама купила одно пирожное для меня и сказала: «Вот, Артём, это твой обед и до завтра ничего не прости. Хлеб ты всё равно есть не станешь, а денег у меня хватает только на это пирожное». Чёрта с два она думала в этот момент о том, какая она свободная. И я знаю, что таких историй много. Но я всё ещё мог улыбаться, потому что ещё был очень мал, и потому что пирожное было вкусное.

Я также не забуду никогда тот день, когда впервые почувствовал, что я свободен. Я учили, как и все люди моего поколения, в старших классах, но я не могу судить о том, все ли люди в тот момент так же, как и я понимали, что свобода воцарилась на этом промежутке земной поверхности, который называют Россией, с такой силой, что в пору снова вводить ограничения и строить стены. В то время Смоленск, в котором я жил, называли «вторым Чикаго», потому что на улицах нашего города совершалось много заказных убийств. Одну из ночей я запомнил на всю жизнь. В два часа ночи мама зашла в нашу сестру комнату, в руках у неё был бинокль, она долго стояла и смотрела, что творится возле нашего подъезда. Я смотрел тоже и видел, как в свете фар милицейских машин лежал человек в спортивном костюме, весь в крови. У него были дыры в груди и в голове. Вокруг человека лежали цветы и конфеты. Он шёл на свидание. Рядом стояли милиционеры. Какая-то женщина обнявала труп. Так я впервые увидел мертвеца. Но я всё ещё мог улыбаться, потому что я-то был в тёплом и родном доме, высоко на пятом этаже, и меня это совсем не касалось. Зато начинала крутить мою голову и моё сердце, мою душу и моё сознание первая пылкая, невинная и такая памятная любовь. Я был свободен в поселках, я был свободен в тех песнях, которые пел долгождано во дворе, я был свободен, когда приходил домой совершенно опьянённый запахом волос этой девушки, запахом намокшей под майским ливнем листвы, запахом белого горячего шифера летних крыш. И я был счастлив, несмотря на то, что был беден, не имел авторитета, образования, потому что появился ещё один человек, которому хотелось улыбаться до слёз. И именно в тот день, когда я впервые полюбил другого человека, сознательно, невзирая на его политические или
религиозные взгляды, на возможности и перспективы, не задумываясь о материальных мотивах, именно в этот день я почувствовал себя свободным.

Я начал рано работать. В шестнадцать лет. Я начинал дворником и торговцем на рынке. Мои индийские майки «с родины слонов и чап» не пользовались большим успехом, но какие-то деньги я имел. Долгое время я жил абсолютно отдельно от государства, как и любой другой ребёнок или подросток. Взрослые говорили, что политики врут нам, обещая на выборах золотые горы, и я, честно говоря, был склонен верить ведущим новостям. Особое доверие вызывала Татьяна Миткова. Это гораздо позже жизнь научила меня не доверять красивым женщинам.

Но тогда я чувствовал, какой чудесной станет моя страна вот-вот, если не завтра, то точно послезавтра. И моя жизнь, как личность, как человека, как думающего субъекта становилась действительно лучше. Я поступил в университет, как и многие люди моего поколения. Я шёл туда, не зная, что это никому не будет нужно, не зная, что через пять лет я буду на грани запоя от мысли о будущем и от одиночества. Я не знал тогда, что цена за свободу, оказывается, не ответственность, а денежные выплаты в казну государства, которое долгое время оказывалось несостоятельным. Я просто шёл туда, вдохновлённый священной идеей Науки, которая уж точно всё знает и не позволит мне жить неправильно. Науки оказалось немного в годы студенчества, но всё же, это, пожалуй, к лучшему. Первые годы учёбы были беззаботным продолжением школы. Просто теперь я мог учиться два раза в год во время сессии, остальное время занятия при моих способностях можно было просто посещать. Но со страшной скоростью ко мне, как и ко многим людям моего поколения, близился тот страшный день, когда я должен был покинуть alma mater и устремиться в эту чудесную взрослую жизнь. В России правила гламур и Владимир Владимирович Путин. Гламур уходит уже, уступая место экономике, а Путин остаётся. Улыбаться мне хотелось всё меньше и меньше, но всё ещё у меня было много книг, которые хотелось прочитать, много песен, которые хотелось послушать, много лиц, на которые я смотрел с улыбкой. Однако всё больше и больше уже попадалось мне лиц из разряда тех, на которые смотреть не хочется вовсе.

Сейчас я аспирант второго года обучения. Принадлежу к этой социальной группе молодых людей. Компания, надо сказать, разножёрстная. Как вы думаете, сколько аспирантов второго года обучения имеют на теле татуировки? Сколько из них вообще хоть раз открывали книгу по истории философии? Из них многие свободно владеют иностранным языком, по которому они успешно сдали кандидатский экзамен? Или хотя бы русским языком на уровне ученика одиннадцатого класса? Зайдите на вступительный экзамен в аспирантуру любого университета за пределами МКАД. Меньше всего вам захочется улыбаться.

На моей голове двадцатитрёхлетнего человека уже есть немало седых волос. Не от хорошей жизни они там появились. Я принадлежу к поколению людей, которые не видели падения Берлинской стены, которые не помнят речей Михаила Горбачёва, которые выжили в бандитских войнах девяностых, которые не воевали в Чечне, которые очень быстро набирают смс на клавиатуре сотового телефона, которые не учили в университетах историю КПСС, которые пережили «эпидемии» птичьего гриппа, коровьего бешенства, губчатого энцефалита, и свиной грипп переживает, которые помнят, как перестали говорить об озоновых дырах, которые видели Беслан и Норд-Ост, которые стали ненужными «специалистами» в эпоху увольнений и смены экономических устоев, которые видели опускающиеся в бессилии руки своих матерей...

Я, человек этого поколения, говорю вам, что я сожалею о том, что я был мал, когда Берлинская стена рушилась, потому что я первым бы выдал из неё кирпичи гольми руками во имя одной только священной идеи, за которую тогда боролись вы. Во имя идеи Свободы. И да поможет нам Бог улыбаться и дальше.

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Long before my parents were born, people came to our village, and to the whole area across the stream on which the village lies, from several villages on the other side of the stream. The first time they came was when grandmother wasn’t around, but the second time was when she was young and in love with my grandfather. Both times a quarrel about the forest and fields broke out between the village leaders and some of those who came to us, presumably to cultivate our land, but others said that those who had come were not good people and that we should drive them away.

In our village and the surrounding countryside the people did not know which side to choose and a quarrel broke out on our side and there was destruction and ruin. The older people were astonished at these fine, young, well-fed people being in our spare fields and our wretched villages. They thought they might possibly take a fancy to those springs by the bends in the stream on which the wives did their washing and the children swam and caught the fish that were put on the table after Sunday mass. The young men from the area did not like this, nor were they pleased that they invited our girls to their merry-making where they danced strange dances; some of the girls went out in sheer blouses, their faces scented with creams. That is why the young men, full of passion and brandy, carrying banners in the dark and heavy night, inspired by old tales about heroes and predictions of a better future, drove out the strangers.

When they were driven out a second time, they destroyed the little bridge across the stream as they retreated. They were helped in the destruction by those we had driven out, presumably so we would never visit them again. Those others from other villages across the stream (and who when we fought, were with us after both wars) advised us that some hamlets would join us and that we would be strong and that we should not quarrel amongst ourselves. That seemed better to us, and the advisers were from the more prosperous villages and should certainly be listened to. In the whole region there was no bridge over the stream, just a small ford in our village which one could cross in summer to the other side when the water was low.

In the first years no one went to the other side. And who would? We had been at war until yesterday. The old God, the one who had never been seen and who, it was said, through his agents on earth, had ceaselessly promised people untold wealth once they died, somewhere in heaven where no one had yet been, disappeared from our side of the stream. The best sons, the young men from each village replaced him. It was the leader, the one who knew everything and was our own, although we didn’t all know everything about him, his childhood, or home, but we would see him walking through the village smiling at everyone. The village settled for this opportunity and reaped the fields, so we would not disgrace ourselves before the leader, when he was already so good. In return he always spoke so nicely about the future that this goodness that would come tomorrow gave one a tingling feeling.

By the will of the leader all the mills and ploughs in the village became communal; the ploughing and milling, digging and building, celebrating and dancing were done communally. The singing was mostly about the leader, and then about each of our hamlets and the harmony that held it together. In school my parents were taught that our village was the most bountiful, the girls the most beautiful, and the young men the best.

Then little by little people began in the summer months to cross the ford from our village to the other side. We were in their land, they in ours. We went there to see what it was like, to confirm our faith in this, our village, and they to swim in the clean solitude of the river where the water was pleasant and warm, and the fish tasty and healthy. As it happened, the first to leave was the leader. But not just to the nearest wealthy villages across the river but much farther away, to other poor villages, explaining to them how we had made a success and bringing them the new faith. He returned with gifts and glory. My parents were told this by those who were with the leader. To some of our heretics, life there in the wealthy villages across the river seemed better and they had to be re-educated after returning, or had to be forbidden from returning. In the other villages left on our side of the
stream no one had any doubts because they did not have
a ford and knew that their leaders spoke the truth and that
life for them was excellent. As our people were increasingly
crossing the stream and as the leader too was frequently
away on long journeys and heretics were no longer punished
severely, our village unexpectedly became important to
everyone. Superb novelties arrived from the other side, not
only plastic raincoats and “synthetic” shoes, but also music
and fashion and then, just imagine, “their” newspapers as
well in which they wrote all sorts of things about their
leaders, and they even changed them and elected new ones
themselves. Then those from the other side of the river
began to unite, to manufacture jointly, started to abandon
borders and talk about something that bordered on the
unthinkable – unification into a large communal village
to suit all the inhabitants, with the same currency,
without customs...

In that village they were at first astonished, then they
shook their heads suspiciously, “nothing good will come
of this”, but then they concluded “this is nothing new, they
saw that before us, and we have been taken to it and
beaten it, and here we are now intermarrying as if nothing
had happened”.

In our village, said grandfather, everything was fine
until one day, a Sunday, a misfortune came which we had
not expected and did not believe – the leader died. The
world, they say, had not seen such misfortune and such
sorrow before. But again, what can you do, life went on,
his thoughts and wise advice remained, and other leaders,
those who were with him, calmed the people and promised
that everything would stay the same. Somehow everything
survived, the ploughing and milling continued, songs about
the leader were sung and it seemed everything would be all
right. Then, bit by bit, my parents acquired a reputation in the
village and began to manage some properties in the village.
They were young, fortunate and respected. Those from the
other side became welcome guests and friends. When they
came to our stream they brought pictures of their beautiful
and modern homes and towns. They told my parents stories
about democracy, about freedom of association, about
a better world... My parents, began to doubt some of
the leader’s words, initially feeling ashamed at their
own disloyalty.

But then, in the summer, one day in 1989, when mother
was carrying me in her womb and sunbathing by our stream
and my older sister was just learning to swim, a rumour
spread through our village that in the largest village on our
side their leader wanted to build a small bridge across the
stream, and said the same thing that “those from over there”
had been saying when they visited us in the summer. And
he didn’t just say it; the people wanted it and believed it.
In a short while, a couple of months around about the time
of my birth, people from both sides of the stream, weeping
and kissing, built the bridge, as if nothing had happened,
feeling like brothers after a serious family quarrel about
which we knew nothing, or do not wish to know either how it
had started or why we had been involved in it. There was no
great celebration in my village in the days before and after
my birth. After all, we hadn’t needed the bridge, we had a
ford which they from over there had never had, and life in the
village wasn’t any better. Anyway, those six hamlets of ours
couldn’t agree about the bridge or whether we should stay
as a community. The leaders quarrelled, from somewhere
some figured out that we in the village were not really the
same and that our old people were not praying to the same
God. Those close to the stream wanted the bridge but those
farther away, those below the wood and those over there at
the bottom of the hill who had poor land wanted everything
to stay exactly as it was, to plough the bend by the river when
they sowed and to share the corn.

Again the young men in my village trained, carried
banners, paraded with brandy and hatred around that bridge
and those fields and waged war. My father and all of us were
falsely accused of treason and driven out to another hamlet
in that same village in which, as was said, were “our” people.
Our village collapsed in discord and many friends quarrelled
to death. “Those from over there” were afraid of our
misfortune. They came to calm us and stop the quarrel. They
did not know that in our beautiful village love and hate were
stronger than elsewhere. It couldn’t be otherwise; the
hamlets and their new leaders begged those from over there
to spare their young girls and lead us and protect us from
ourselves. Thus the war ended, and each hamlet became a
village. Democracy came, human rights and freedom of
association came. Today we elect our own leaders and we
can say bad things about them. Our shops are colourful and
the roads are good. Visitors and friends from over there and
further afield come. We still use the ford because we didn’t
make a bridge. We’re probably not good enough and anyway,
the people over there don’t want us yet.

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SONJA KASIPović
RIJEKA, HRVATSKA

Davno prije rođenja mojih roditelja, u naše selo i u cijeli kraj preko potoka koji leži uz selo došli su ljudi iz nekih sela s druge strane potoka. Prvi put su došli dok ni Bake nije bilo, a drugi put onda kad je bila mlada i zaljubljena u djeda. Oba puta je kod njih, radi šuma i njiva, među seoskim vodama izbila svada pa su jedni došli k nama, valjda posijati našu zemlju, a drugi su govorili da ovi koji su došli nisu dobri te da ih trebamo otjerati.

U našem selu i cijelom kraju ljudi nisu znali na koju bi stranu pa je i kod nas izbila svađa i došla pogiblji. Stariji su se čudili što će ti lijepi, mladi, uhranjeni ljudi na našim posnim njivama i u ubogim selima. Pomisli su da im se možda sviđaju oni virovi uz luke pokraj potoka na kojima su žene prale odjeću, djece se kupala i lovlja ribu što se nedjeljom iza mise stavljala na stol. To se momcima iz kraja nije svidjelo, nije im se svidjelo ni što su na svoje zabave na kojima se plesalo nepoznate plesove zvali i naše cure, a neke od njih išle za bluze od finog materijala i pomade koje mirisu. Zato su momci puni strasti i rake, noseći barjake u tmaste i teške noći, ispunjeni starim pričama o junaštvu i slutnjama o boljoj budućnosti otjerali tuđe ljudje.

Kad su ih otjerali drugi put, za njima su srušili mostiće preko potoka. U rušenju su im pomogli i oni što smo ih otjerali, valjda da se više nikad ne posjećujemo. Oni drugi koji su bili iz drugih sela preko potoka i koji su, kad smo se tukli, bili uz nas iza oba rata su nas savjetovali da se nas nekoliko zaselaka udruži da budemo jači te da se među sobom ne svađamo. Nama se učinilo da je tako bolje, a i savjetnici su bili iz bogatijih sela pa ih je sigurno trebalo poslušati. U cijelom kraju na potoku više nije bilo mosta, samo je kod našeg sela bio jedan mali gaz preko kojeg se ljeti, kad se voda smanji, moglo prijeći na drugu stranu.

Prvih se godina na drugu stranu nije išlo. A i tko bi? Do jučer smo ratovali. S naše strane potoka nestalo je starog Boga, onog što ga nitko nije ni vidio i koji je ljudima stalno, navodno preko svojih suradnika ovdje na Zemlji, obećavao neko nepoznato dobro, jednom kod umra, negdje na nebu, gdje još nitko nije bio. Zamijenili su ga najbolji sinovi, mladi momci iz svakog sela. To je bio voda, onaj koji sve zna i naš je, iako o njemu ne znamo sve, ni djetinjstvo, ni kuću, ali ga vidimo kad prođe kroz selo i svima se osmjehne. Selo se za tu prigodu sredi i njive pokose, da se pred vodom ne sramotimo, kad je već tako dobar. On zauzvrat uvijek tako lijepo govoriti o budućnosti da čovjeka prođu žmari od te dobrote koja će već sutra doći.

U selu su, vodinom voljom, svi mlinovi i plugovi postali zajednički, zajedno se oralo i mljelo, kopalo i gradilo, blagovalo i pjevalo. Pjevalo se najviše o vodi pa onda o svakom našem zaseoku i slozi koja nas drži. Moje su roditelje u školi učili da je naše selo najbolgatije, cure najljepše, a momci najbolji.

Onda se malo pomalo iz našeg sela za ljektnih mjesci počelo ići preko onog gaza na drugu stranu. Mi kod njih, a oni kod nas. Mi smo išli vidjeti kako je to tamo, da osnažimo vjeru u ovo naše, a oni da se kupaju u čistim riječnim osamama gdje je voda ugodna i topla, a riba ukusna i zdrava. Prvi je išao, kako i spada, voda. Ali ne samo u najbliža bogata sela preko rijeke, već i puno dalje, kod drugih siromašnih, objašnjavajući im kako smo mi to sve uspjeli i prenoseći im novu vjeru. Vraćao se s darovima i slavom. O tom su mojim roditeljima govorili oni koji su s vodom bili. Nekim našim krivovjencima učinilo se da je tamo u bogatim selima preko rijeke bolje pa su ih morali po povratak predojgotiti ili im zabraniti da se vrate. U ostalim selima s naše strane potoka
niti ko ni u što nije ni sumnjao, jer oni nisu imali gaz i znali su da njihove vođe govore istinu i da im je odlično. Budući da su naši ljudi sve češće ishili preko potoka i kako je i vođa često i dugu putovao pa ni nevjernike više nije žestoko kažnjavao, naše je selo odjednom svima postalo važno. S druge strane dolazile su sjajne novoratije, ne samo šuškavci i „šimi” cipele, već i glazba pa moda, a onda, zamislite, i „njihove” novine u kojima oni o svojim vođama svašta pišu, pa ih čak svako toliko i smjenjuju i sami biraju nove. Tad su se oni s druge strane rijeke počeli udruživati, zajedno proizvoditi, počeli su ukidati granice i razgovarati o nečemu što je slutilo na nezamislivo – na ujedinjenje u veliko zajedničko selo po mjeri svih seljana, s istim novcem, bez carina… U mom su se selu prvo čudili, zatim sumnjičavo vrtjeli glavom, „neće to na dobro“, a onda zaključili „nije to ništa novo, to su vidjeli od nas, i mi smo se ono davno svadali i tukli, a evo sad se i ženimo između sebe, kao da ničeg nije bilo”.

Bilo je, kaže baka, u našem selu prelijevo sve dok jednog dana, u nedjelju, nije došlo zlo kojem se nismo nadali i u koje nismo vjerovao, dok nije umro vođa. Takvo zlo i takvu tugu nije, kažu, svijet još vidio. Ali opet, što češ, krenulo se dalje, ostale su njegove misli i mudri savjeti, a i druge su vođe, oni što su bili uz njega, umirivali ljude i obećavali da će sve ostati isto. Nekako se to preživjelo, oralo se i mijelo dalje, pjevale su se pjesme vodi i činilo se da će sve biti dobro. Moji su roditelji tada nekako počeli u selu stjecati ugled i upravljati nekim seoskim imanijama. Bili su mladi, sretni i poštovani. Oni s druge strane postali su nam dragi gosti i prijatelji. Kad bi došli na naš potok donosili su slike svojih kuća i gradova, lijepih i modernih. Pričali su mojim roditeljima o demokraciji, slobodi pojedinca, boljem svijetu… Mladi ljudi, moji roditelji, počeli su sumnjati u neke vođine riječi, u prvom trenutku sraneći se i sami svojeg nevjerstva.

A onda, negdje u ljeto, jedan dan baš te ’89. godine kad je mama nosila mene u trbuhi i sunčala se kraj našeg potoka, a starija sestra tek učila plivati, kroz naše selo pronio se glas da u onom najvećem selu s naše strane njihov vođa želi graditi mostiće preko potoka, da govori ono isto što su govorili „oni od preko“ kad bi ljeti došli kod nas. I ne samo da sve to govori, već i da ga ljudi vole i vjeruju mu. Nije prošlo dugo, par mjeseci, baš oko mog rođenja, ljudi s obje strane potoka izgradiše most, plaćući i ljubeći se, kao da ničeg nije bilo, osjećajući se kao braća nakon teške obiteljske svađe za koju više ne znamo, ili ne želimo znati ni kako je počela, niti zašto smo u njoj sudjelovali. U mom selu tih dana oko mog rođenja nije bilo velikog slavlja. Uostalom, nama most nije ni trebao, mi smo imali gaz koji oni nikad nisu, a i u selu nije bilo baš najbolje. Onih naših šest zaselaka nikako se složili među sobom, ni oko mosta ni oko tog trebamo li i dalje ostati zajedno. Vođe se zavadile, od nekud se neki dosjetili da mi u selu baš i nismo isti i da se i naši stari nisu istom božu molili. Ovi bliže potoku Žele most, a oni malo dalje, oni ispod gaja i oni tamo podno brda što imaju lošiju zemlju žele da sve i dalje ostane kao prije, da se luke uz rijeku oru kad oni kažu i žito da oni dijele.


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MECHANICS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOLS
(or, what they don’t teach you in physics)

SECTION 1. THE NUMBERING SYSTEM
“Don’t worry, you’ll have another ten children! You’re a fine strong woman”. The nurse was trying to reassure my mother after an abortion. In those days many women had abortions. In hospitals the staff stopped counting them, in fact on their second day working there they stopped being surprised and with every new case words of consolation became more and more sparse. People understood a lot but did not speak much out loud. Though everyone was keeping quiet about one and the same thing.

It was 1986. The year of the Chernobyl explosion. My mother was pregnant with her second child, probably the first “me”, I suppose, since I was her second child after my brother. Three years after him, our family was impatient for a girl. Dad had been in favour of a “Lyudochka” (because Pravda had said it was the prettiest name), grandmother preferred “Shurochka” (the name given to all girls born in her village). If that first “I” had been born, then the real me would not exist now and be living on this earth, under this sky. Whatever my parents may have said, I sincerely think that my birth was both a tragic and a happy accident.
SECTION 2. UNIFORM VELOCITY (SOVIET PHYSICS)
In her youth my mother had been a prize-winning dressmaker. She knew the value of work just as she knew the fundamentals of arithmetic: if she made two extra dresses she would get two roubles more. If she managed three, then her photograph would go up on the factory board of honour. Maybe it was the almost mechanical predictability of those Soviet working days that shaped my mother’s life the way it was destined to be, no more, no less. Something in the middle. To be honest, I don’t know whether she wanted more out of life, or how much more. However, from my childhood it was clear to me from all her moods that the fulfilment that had passed her by must be realised in me. There was one condition: she devoutly believed that something was only yours if you actually deserved it. But you would have to work your way up to it. It wasn’t enough to run up, reach out, or jump up.

SECTION 3. NON-LINEAR MOTION (CONTEMPORARY PHYSICS)
My chief discovery when approaching twenty was an awareness of the kind of country I was actually living in. My feelings were ambivalent because my mother’s teachings said one thing while life all around gave examples of the opposite: in almost all processes in post-Soviet Ukraine normal progression (evolution, if you like) is an alien concept. The issue was not at all that people desired the boring, grey, self-sufficient sameness, the issue was confidence. It is a short step from that to devoted patriotism, which is very difficult to earn in a young person who is “green” and has pocketfuls of hope.

When I was growing up times were hard, or false, or lame and full of snags. People were confused by double vision, they were groping their way forward on confused paths, and the tracks of the trail-blazers were covered over by snow mixed with fallen leaves. My child’s eye perceived the absolutely unnatural nature of the changes that were taking place all around. As a child I was not particularly aware of the passage of time, which is why I imagined that everything was changing from one day to the next, and that another, new life would dawn tomorrow. In actual fact, we were all one-day butterflies, being born anew for fresh flights that were destined to be just as non-linear as those of the state. Life in my country was like an improvisation that sometimes succeeded, but more often did not.

It seems to me that Ukraine was swallowing (and is, actually, still swallowing) everything it met on its path, without being afraid of burping, scalding or nausea or, ultimately, the ordinary disparity between what was “ours”
“MY CHILD’S EYE PERCEIVED THE ABSOLUTELY UNNATURAL NATURE OF THE CHANGES THAT WERE TAKING PLACE ALL AROUND. AS A CHILD I WAS NOT PARTICULARLY AWARE OF THE PASSAGE OF TIME, WHICH IS WHY I IMAGINED THAT EVERYTHING WAS CHANGING FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT, AND THAT ANOTHER, NEW LIFE WOULD DAWN TOMORROW.”
and what was “alien”. Long pants were replaced by jeans, the hamburger ousted the potato dumpling, Soviet-style restraint was hemmed in even more by the invasion of a supposedly truthful and correct modern frivolity. The result was that, because I and many others had not assimilated what was “ours”, we took to idolising what was “alien” simply because it was new.

Today Ukraine is rushing forward towards a place high up somewhere in the clouds which the country itself can’t see clearly. It is as if we are all in a hot-air balloon: in order to fly higher, we are throwing overboard the things that are “ours”. And the higher we go, the more difficult it becomes to see our way back home, I mean to our roots; and the mist-bound heights only make us afraid.

SECTION 4. THE CONCEPT OF VELOCITY, ACCELERATION, AND THE PATH ALREADY TRODDEN
What do I love my country for? Its ability to adapt – I mean, to react instantly to change. What do I not love my country for? Its ability to adapt – I mean, to instantly become a time-server with no family, one that can only speak in macaroni language. Who are we, after all, the people living in this country? Desperate seekers of our own path, but confused by the road signs, a people that has lost its compasses and guidebooks. And those seekers include me.

SECTION 5. INERTIA
Inertia as a natural process makes resistance impossible. National inertia makes it impossible to change course in the right direction, take the direction that’s needed or an alternative one. What is most tragic and terrible is not the impossibility of going into reverse, but that when one walks in step with one’s country, down a crooked path, it is impossible for it to occur to you that this is the wrong path, that the straight path is better, that it’s worth going back or at least stopping. If you were to ask me to draw a map of my pathway, it would show masses of hairpin bends and only a few smooth sine wave curves. If you asked me to depict my baggage, you’d see a random collection of stuff, but no national souvenirs taken for the journey and no notes of my own on the map.

For a long time the right path seemed to me to be this: leaving the main road and seeking every possible detour. Driving at well over the speed limit without stopping at any traffic lights! No looking through the windows – to avoid being distracted by enjoyment of the changing landscape. The main thing is to drive, drive, drive ahead without a destination. I imagined that it was through such chaotic motion, with random halts, random fellow travellers and random night-stops, that we would find the truth.

How surprised I was when I finally realised that we should be travelling only on the main road (even if long and pot-holed), looking through the windows, and braking at the traffic lights, in order to clarify our own desires and allow our impressions to settle. We needed to know exactly where to stop for a rest and – above all – have a clear idea of where we were heading.

SECTION 6. FORCES AND POINTS OF APPLIED FORCE
One of my teachers had said: “I am always right, even when I am wrong. My truth is supreme.” When he was alive his future was dimmer than my own. It appeared not simply spectral but actually like a mirage that played with his imagination and his hopes. At that time that man’s country – he was a Ukrainian by the way – was not simply travelling to somewhere it knew not whither, as it is today, it was hobbling helplessly backwards. The general regression (above all, cultural and moral) forced my teacher to step backwards with it, but also to imagine that he was moving in the right direction.

His original words, as I have quoted them, could be reproached for being excessively categorical, proud and vain. However, because of his convictions he had ceased to be afraid of what lay ahead, his own future. Indeed, he could see it all the more clearly and grasp it with his hands.

My teacher likewise understood that every person must have his own history, his own path, his life story. Then his journey, however branched or crooked, would nevertheless be direct, regular and essentially evolutionary.

Nowadays, for myself, I cannot see any other option. I trust my teacher and his words. And I want my country to recognise them as an absolute truth.

Well then, Ukraine, I’m starting the engine and driving out on to my road. We’ll meet somewhere en route.

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ЛАУДМИЛА КОЛЬ
КИЕВ (УКРАИНА)

МЕХАНИКА ДЛЯ СРЕДНЕГО КЛАССА
(то, о чем не говорят на уроках физики)

РАЗДЕЛ 1: СИСТЕМА ОТСЧЕТА
– Не переживай, нарожаешь еще десятёрь! Баба-то ты крепкая. – Так после аборта успокаивала мою маму медсестра. В тех абортах делали многие женщины. В больницах их перестали считать и перестали им удивляться уже на второй день, а слова утешения с каждым новым разом скучели. Люди многое понимали, но мало говорили вслух. Хотя все молчали об одном и том же.

Был 1986 год. Год, когда произошел взрыв на Чернобыльской АЭС. Моя мама была беременна вторым, то есть якобы мной, наверное, потому что я – второй ребенок после брата. Тогда, как и спустя три года, в нашей семье все с нетерпением ждали девочку. Папа был за Людику (газета «Правда» назвала это имя самым красивым), а бабушка – за Шуручу (в её посёлке всех родившихся девочек называли именно так). Думаю, если бы тогда та «я» родилась, то сейчас бы меня, настоящей, точно не было бы на этой земле и под этим небом. И что бы ни говорили мои родители, я искренне считаю свое рождение и трагичной, и счастливой случайностью.

РАЗДЕЛ 2: РАВНОМЕРНОЕ ДВИЖЕНИЕ
(СОВЕТСКАЯ ФИЗИКА)
В молодости моя мама была швеей-«передовицей». Она знала цену труда так же хорошо, как и основы арифметики: на два платья больше сшила – на два рубля больше получила, на три – твою фотографию уже на доске почета. Может быть, из-за этой почти механизированной предсказуемости советских будней в жизни у моей мамы все сложилось так, как должно было – ни меньше, ни больше. Где-то посредине. Честно сказать, не знаю, хотела ли она большего и, если хотела, то насколько большего. Однако уже с детства во всех её настроениях я ясно чувствовала: то, что не свершилось в ней, должно свершиться во мне. Одно условие: она свято верила, что по-настоящему твое – это лишь заслуженное. Но до него нужно дойти, а не добежать, дотянуться, допрыгнуть.

РАЗДЕЛ 3: КРИВОЛИНЕЙНОЕ ДВИЖЕНИЕ
(СОВРЕМЕННАЯ ФИЗИКА)
Самым главным моим открытием к двадцати годам стало то, что я осознано, в какой стране на самом деле живу. У меня были двойственные чувства, потому что мамина наука говорила об одном, а жизнь вокруг приводила обратные примеры: закономерная последовательность (хотите – эволюция) практически всех процессов – чужда постсоветской Украине. И дело вовсе не в желании скучного, серого и самодостаточного состояния, а в уверенности. С ней недалеко и до преданного патриотизма, «носителем» которого очень нелегко стать человеку молодому, «зеленому», с карманами, полными надежд.

Я росла, когда времена были сложные и неправильные, хромые и корявые. У страны двоилось в глазах, она шла на ощупь по запутанным тропинкам, а следы первопроходцев замело снегом вперемешку с опавшей листвой. Мой детский язык улавливал абсолютно неестественные метаморфозы, происходившие вокруг. Ребенком я плохо чувствовала течение времени, поэтому мне казалось, будто все меняется каждый день и завтра наступала уже другая, новая, жизнь. А все мы были бабочками-однодневками, рождающимися заново для своих новых полетов, таких же криволинейных, как и государственные. Жизнь моей страны была похожа на эксприм. Порой он был удачным, но чаще – не очень.

Как мне кажется, Украина поглощала (в общем, и сейчас поглощает) все, что попадалось ей на пути, не боясь отрыжки, изжоги, тошноты, или, в конце концов, обыкновенного несоответствия между «своим» и «чужим». На смену ретузам очень быстро пришли джинсы, гамбургеры затмили пирожки с картошкой, а «совковую» зажатость зажигало еще больше от ворожения якобы верной и правильной модерной фривольности. Получилось так, что, не привыкну хорошою к «своему», я и многие другие стали боготворить «чужое» только за его новизну.
Сейчас же страна стремится в некую туманную для нее самой, кстати) выс. Все мы, как на воздушном шаре: чтобы взлететь выше, сбрасываем на землю по мешочку «своего». И чем выше мы поднимаемся, тем сложнее представляется нам путь домой, то есть – к истокам, а «туманная высь» – только страшит.

РАЗДЕЛ 4: ПОНЯТИЕ СКОРОСТИ, УСКОРЕНИЯ И ПРОЙДЕННОГО ПУТИ

РАЗДЕЛ 5: ИНЕРЦИЯ
Инерция, как процесс естественный, порождает невозможность сопротивления. А инерция национальная порождает невозможность отклониться в правильную, нужную сторону или хотя бы – просто в другую. Однако, самое трагичное и ужасное даже не в невозможности обратного действия, а в том, что двигаясь в ногу со страной, то есть по кривой, даже в голову прийти не может, что двигаешься неправильно (не в том направлении и не по прямой) и стоит свернуть или, по крайней мере, остановиться. Попросите меня нарисовать мой путь, и вы увидите на моем рисунке сплошные острые углы, и только изредка плавные изгибы синусоиды. Попросите меня показать мой багаж, и вы увидите там все, что угодно, только не национальные сувениры в дорогу или какие-то собственные пометки на карте.

Долгое время верный путь представлялся мне таким: нужно было съехать с центральной дороги и постараться найти все возможные объездные. Затем ехать, превышая скорость и не останавливаясь на светофорах. Желательно было не смотреть в окна, чтобы не отвлекать на любование пейзажами. Ведь главным было бесцельно ехать, ехать, ехать вперед – и в таком беспорядочном движении, в случайных остановках, случайных попутчиках, случайном ночевке мне представлялась истина.

Как же удивлена я была, когда поняла, наконец, что нужно ехать только по центральной дороге (даже если она длинная и полна колдобин), смотреть в окна, притормаживать на светофорах, чтобы закалять собственные желания и дать отстояться впечатлениям. Нужно было знать точно, где остановиться, чтобы отдохнуть, а главное – очень хорошо представлять собственный(!) пункт назначения.

РАЗДЕЛ 6: СИЛЫ И ТОЧКА ПРИЛОЖЕНИЯ СИЛЫ
Один из моих Учителей сказал: «Я всегда прав, даже если ошибаюсь. Превыше всего – моя правда». В те времена, когда я жил, его будущее было еще более сумным, чем мое. Он казалось не просто призрачным, скорее даже похожим на миф, заигрывающий с фантазией и надеждой. Тогда страна этого человека (кстати, украинца) не просто шла куда-то, не зная точно куда, как сейчас. Она, беспомощно ковыляя, отступала назад. Всеобщее отступление (но, прежде всего – культовое и моральное), заставляя моего Учителя тоже пытаться назад и видеть в таком движении единственный правильный путь.

За слово, процитированные в начале, его можно было запросто упрекнуть в излишней категоричности, гордынке и тщеславии. Однако благодаря таким убеждениям он перестал бояться того, что его ждет впереди, – своего будущего. Более того, он смог яснее увидеть его и ухватиться за него руками.

Учитель понял также, что у каждого должна быть своя история, свой путь, свой жизненный рассказ. Тогда такое движение, каким бы ветвистым (кривым) по форме оно ни было, все равно будет прямым, закономерным, эволюционным по своей сути.

Теперь я не вижу больше для себя никаких других вариантов. Я поверил Учителю, его словам. И хочу, чтобы моя страна тоже приняла их как безусловную истину.

Ну что ж, Украина, я займу мотор и выезжай на свою дорогу. Встретимся где-нибудь в пути.

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REVOLUTION NEVER

“WHO DO YOU LIKE BEST, LARS VON TRIER OR DAVID LYNCH?” ASKS THE LAD IN THE “CIVIL DEFENCE” T-SHIRT WHILE POURING PORT INTO DIRTY MUGS. THE SETTING MATCHES THE MUGS: A KITCHEN IN HALF-DARKNESS, FIVE PEOPLE WITH FAR-OUT VIEWS, SITTING ON RICKETY STOOLS AND HYSTERICAL PUNK ROCK COMING OUT OF THE SPEAKERS.

“I LIKE THE CARTOONS. THE RUSSIAN ONES. ‘TALE OF TALES’ FOR EXAMPLE,” I REPLY, MOVING THE WRAPPERS AWAY.

“WELL, I GET IT. NO, LARS IS BETTER THAN LYNCH, BUT NOT HIS LAST FILM,” HE DRINKS WITH AN AIR OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY, HIS HEAD THROWN BACK.

“THAT’S RUBBISH, TARKOVSKY IS BETTER!” YELLS A LAD WITH SCRAGGY HAIR AND A BELOMORKANAL CIGARETTE IN THE CORNER OF HIS MOUTH.
We are just a generation of enfants terribles. We splutter onto each other our accumulated boredom and our complaints against the shortage of company, then disperse to our houses. How many times have I heard all this! And how many times will I again? Crap conversations about “higher things” in filthy kitchens with people in want of nothing but a bit of dubious status for an evening, people who are already tired at the age of twenty. Tired by the non-comprehension of others and a sense of being predestined for something.

We grew up in the nineties. Our parents were desperately shuttling backwards and forwards to make money, while we became members of unofficial groups. We sat at our school-desks and daydreamed about the attributes of the good life we had seen in video clips. Some people dreamed of becoming “wicked”. Some people dreamed of becoming a free artist. But then we grew up and dreamt no longer. We have short-term plans.

Our parents had energy. Enough to build the Baikal-Amur railroad line, the BAM, in the seventies, to live and to love. Disillusioned, they took to the barricades in August 1991, went onto the streets to say “We’re fed up with it all, give us something different.” They did not view the strikes and the tanks shooting at the White House as crazy nonsense. By contrast, all our attempts to express our dissatisfaction are doomed in advance. We are sure that nobody can hear us, after losing so heavily on our home ground. We have reconciled ourselves in advance to the established rules, because in our heads we have put up a barrier that says “I can’t change anything”.

Our parents gave us everything. But we have nothing. The main thing we have lost is the skill of having aspirations. We have no boldness, no passion. No passion to merely do our own thing. For the sake of being alive and knowing that we are of some use. There is total apathy about everything. About music, of which there is a lot but all the same there’s nothing to listen to. There is the internet, with zero new e-mails in our inbox. We spend nights sitting in forums and splattering our “Me! Me! Me!” in front of people who don’t give a damn. Now and again some friends throw a party. We get drunk, there are people all around, we pretend we’re having a great time, everything’s fabulous, then we throw up in the toilet and cry and want to go home. Home to our room with the posters and the computer that is never off, in the flat of our ageing parents. We simply want to be left alone. Just for one night. But we feel lonely. Lonely because we have all been deceived. Not the way our tired mothers were tricked, now that they are drawing their pension. We were deceived from birth.

Look at the people who have forgotten themselves and dance their time away at rock festivals, clubs or concerts. Or the ones sitting in offices from morning to night, making careers in jobs they hate. How they yearn to be “classy”, “in the loop”, or “true to themselves”. We are trying hard to pretend that everything’s wicked, so as not to think about what will happen tomorrow or in a year or in ten years. We seek ourselves but we find a cul-de-sac. We tell ourselves and everybody around us, “Everything is fine, everything is all right, everything is OK.” But if it is, why are so many teenagers dying from overdoses of ecstasy, or from alcohol poisoning, or slitting their veins in the bathrooms of their parents’ well-appointed apartments? We are choking in the concrete boxes of hypermarkets and suburban housing developments. We are forgetting what it is to converse with each other, to think and to breathe.

The simple fact is that the air doesn’t have any oxygen. It has everything else: envy, routine, loneliness, evil, hypocrisy, snobbery, bragging. But nothing that allows us to breathe. In the same way it contains no ideas. We are like earthworms, digging around in old truths, trying to paint them up with new meanings. We do this for the sake of some relief on this merry-go-round where we endlessly spin while stuck on the same spot. At one time we aspired to “do something in the world”, now all we want is a new pair of trainers. This is never a revolution. It is impossible to rise above the shopping basket, the stereotypes, and the image that has been created for an indifferent public. We lack confidence in the future and in ourselves. Right down to the individual kitchen where people drink port and listen to music and discuss Lynch.

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ЕКАТЕРИНА КОЛПИНЕЦ
ТОЛЬЯТТИ (РОССИЯ)

РЕВОЛЮЦИЯ НИКОГДА


– А, ну ясно. Не, Ларс круче Линча, только не последний фильм, – он самодостаточно пьет, запрокинув голову.

– Да лажа это всё, Тарковский круче! – орёт пататый парень с беломориной в углу рта.

Мы просто поколение злых детей. Выпеснув друг на друга накопившуюся скуку и жалобы на дефицит общения, мы расходились по домам. Сколько раз я уже это слышала. И сколько раз ещё услышу? Низкие разговоры на обожженных кухнях о “высоком”. Среди людей, которым не нужно ничего, кроме сомнительного статуса на один вечер. Среди людей, которые устали в 20 лет, Устали от непонимания и от предопределенности.

Мы росли в 90-е. Пока наши родители отчаянно “челночили” и делали деньги, мы становились неформалами. Мы сидели за партами с мечтами об атрибутах красивой жизни из клипов. Одни мечтали стать “критиками”. Кто-то мечтал стать свободным художником. Мы выросли и больше не мечтаем. У нас есть планы на ближайшее будущее.

У наших родителей была энергия. Строить БАМ в 70-х, жить, любить. Разочаровавшись, они шли на баррикады в августе 1991, выходили на улицы и говорили: “Всё надоело, даите что-нибудь другое”. Повсеместные забастовки и танки, стреляющие по Белому дому, не казались им бессмысленным бредом. Все наши попытки выразить своё недовольство заранее обречены. Мы уверены, что нас никто не слышит. Мы проиграли с разгромным счетом на своем же поле. Зааранее смирившись с установленными правилами, навсегда поставив в своей голове барьер: “Я ничего не могу изменить”.

Родители дали нам всё. Но у нас нет ничего. А главное – мы разучились мечтать. Нет дерзости, страсти. Страсти заниматься своим, и только своим делом. Чтобы жить и знать, что ты нужен. Тотальная апатия ко всему. К музыке, которой очень много, а слушать всё равно нечего. Есть Интернет, где в твоем почтовом ящике висит 0 новых сообщений. Мы ночами сидим на форумах, выпескивая свое “Я” перед людьми, которым глубоко на нас плевать. Очередная вечеринка кого-то из друзей. Ты пьян, вокруг какие-то люди. Ты делаешь вид, что тебе весело, что всё круто. Потом тебя тошнит в туалете, ты плачешь и хочешь домой. В свою комнату с плакатами и всегда включенным компьютером, в квартире стареющих родителей. Ты просто хочешь, чтобы тебя оставили в покое. Хотя бы на эту ночь. Тоска.

Тоска, что нас всех обманули. Не как наших усталых матерей, после выхода на пенсию, а с рождения. Посмотрите на тех, кто самозабвенно отплываешь на рок-фестивалях, в клубах, на концертах. Или кто сидит в
офисе с утра до вечера, делая карьеру на ненавистной работе. Как же им всем хочется быть классными, быть “в теме”, быть “своими”. Мы изо всех сил делаем вид, что у нас всё круто. Чтобы не думать о том, что будет завтра, через год, через 10 лет. Ищем себя. Находим тупик. И твердим себе и всем, кто рядом: “Всё хорошо, всё хорошо, у меня все хорошо”. Но если это действительно так, почему столько подростков умирает от экстази, передозировки, просто с перепола или вскрыв вены в ванной комфортабельной родительской квартиры? Мы задыхаемся среди бетонных коробок гипермаркетов и спальных районов. Мы забываем, что такое говорить друг с другом, думать, дышать.

Просто в воздухе нет самого воздуха. Всё, что угодно: зависть, рутину, тоска, злоба, лицемерие, снобизм, понты. Но самого воздуха, который позволяет дышать – нет. Так же, как нет идей. Мы, подобно червям, копаемся в старых истинах, пытаясь раскрасить их новыми смыслами. Чтобы хоть немного полегчало на этой карусели, где мы крутимся без остановки, уставившись в одну точку.

Когда-то мы хотели “сделать этот мир”, сейчас мы просто хотим новые кроссовки. Это революция никогда. Невозможность быть выше потребительской корзины, стереотипов и созданного для равнодушной публики образа. Неверие в будущее и самих себя. Даже в рамках отдельно взятой кухни, где пьют портвейн, слушают музыку и обсуждают Линча.

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To me pictures of the destruction of the Berlin Wall were never quite clear or sharp... I needed time for my own true feelings to penetrate them. I grew, and slowly that feeling gained content. In time that material I had imagined as “bricks” found its place... And when I thought the bricks would never see the architect’s hands again, nor that anyone would lean against them again, something happened that hurt me deeply. Initially less, but then with every day more and more... And I’m not sure whether or not it will continue and last. I had the impression that soldiers who had come with the best of intentions, as they used to say, had dragged the remains of that wall and encircled me, but what was happening around us could not have been worse. While the war raged in Bosnia and Herzegovina I was a child and observed all these people roaring through my house and telling horror stories from the front line. Hunger knocked on our door and we began to raise rabbits, to sow maize by hand; we dreamed about chocolate, sugar, oil, flour... But we held firmly together. Hunger didn’t weaken us at all but united us so strongly that it drove us to cultivate every tiny piece of available land and sow something on it. I observed how the city parks were all planted in rows right up to the buildings themselves. My aunt lived in one of these buildings and never took her eyes away from the window in case somebody stole her string beans or tore down her courgettes which hung there in fear. Fat people melted as if made of snow and I had fun watching their clothes flapping about. They were cheerful and their new appearance imbued them with a childish joy. Foreign soldiers with machine guns on the rooves of their jeeps and fingers on triggers were constantly passing our house. We didn’t dare share a joke with them (the older people told us that) but we often waved and in return we got things from their parcels. Those were the years when I played the most football with children of my own age and was good at slides, even on asphalt.

Everything that happened then now seems shocking to us and smells of a deception encompassing everyone and which overlooked how we destroyed ourselves, killed, felt hatred and locked ourselves in national pens. I feel we had been brainwashed and were incapable of understanding things more deeply than, say, the assertion that “they” are all guilty and we are not guilty of anything. All this in an enchanted circle that no one dares break out from. We have fully accepted the “psychology of the pen” and our greatest fear is to be sheep-like – it’s said that sheep aren’t afraid of being slaughtered but of being outcasts from the flock... That’s the psychology I see people living under in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However many years I’ve studied the past I’ve not been able to find any trace of a forced division like the “entities” we have today. Presumably it’s some organism that is only now being born or something that’s just been born... Something whose status is defined by its swaddling clothes, something which has not yet begun to see, that is helpless, unconscious of itself... I do not think that at present we are a society but I find it hard to accept that at the time when I was born we were not a society either. I simply dare not go back further because that brings pain and deep sighs. Imagine: just five years before my birth Sarajevo was an Olympic city. Perhaps the most valuable thing about it is that all the
former Yugoslav republics “accepted” Sarajevo for the Olympic Games – even affectionately. Or if I go back another five years when the KK Bosna basketball club were European champions. It’s not like now when somebody is European champion. The championship wasn’t won by any basketball superpowers. It was won by students whose grants were so small that they worked out how much they could earn by playing basketball. The secret wasn’t in the money and the benefit but in something called the strength of the collective, i.e. a belief in each other; nobody was interested in what religion or nationality you belonged to... Even if I go back as far as 1978 when the “Indexi”* issued their first album “Blue River”, an album with elements of rock-opera, based on the song collection “The Stone Sleeper” which celebrates the lives of the Bosnian Bogomils in the Serbian Middle Ages when standing stone necropilises were erected as an architectural phenomenon.

I do not dare turn to my father’s generation because I am overcome by some anxiety and complication of that time which witnessed the death of many positive trends. One of them was the shining tradition of the struggle against fascism which is also dying out. It is collapsing, or is trying to re-design the monuments to anti-fascism, to those people who were the witnesses of that time and who consciously chose their revolutionary path. One can only be inspired by the fate of two pre-war writers in Bosnia and Herzegovina who were intellectuals and writers – both played the violin. One was Hasan Kikić, the other Zija Dizdarević. The first was killed in a Chetnik ambush in 1942, the other was taken to Jasenovac camp that same year. Both had social leanings, both in their deeds and in their spirit. Kikić, a lecturer and a lawyer, and Dizdarević, also a lecturer and a pedagogue. I seem to hear their violins urging us to have strength in our constant fight against evil... But sometimes I am overwhelmed by a feeling like that of Josef K., who was ashamed before his tormentors for acting in a monstrous way. Kafka prophesied the deaths of millions of people and of his two sisters who met their end in the camp. But camps didn’t end with World War II...

Actually I don’t know what I would say about the Berlin Wall, destroyed in the year I was born, but I know how difficult it is to fight “internal” walls, invisible to the eye, but definitely present in our everyday life. So these days I’ve been fighting to “vault the wall” and I tell my colleague that I’m fully aware his father is a corrupt tycoon and that he got him a scholarship illegally... But they’re very happy when each year they prepare to go to the seaside and only talk about the sea in front of us, because they know we aren’t going...

and after their tales, father and mother regularly quarrel. So far I’ve spent so many nights cursing Europe to come at once that it seems to me it’s made my return long delayed.

I have completely forgotten about the Berlin Wall, but I dream so much about hitting my head against the wall that it hurts, just like “my time” hurts, although I don’t think people thought other times were any happier... This is what the proverb also says which most probably characterised the impasse man fell into: “Neither steps to heaven, nor a hole in the earth!” Or the proverb that talks of a paradise and a hell it simply points to, and for which the same scenario is needed; even the equipment with which her heroes serve are unusually long spoons which you can’t eat with... Those in hell are in despair because in their efforts to feed themselves they are all hungrier, more nervous and dangerous because they can’t find their own mouths, and naturally their agony is never ending and is repeated ad infinitum... But those in heaven are quite calm, just because they feed each other generously and find boundless satisfaction... just simply... But to man it seems Josef K. is not yet dead, that the shame is still growing...

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*Translator’s note
Indexi: Bosnian rock band of the 1960’s
BOSANSKI ESEJ
ili stid koji raste

Nikad mi slike rušenja Berlinskog zida nisu bile sasvim javne niti određene... Trebalo mi je neko vrijeme da proniknem u taj svoj iskreni osjećaj. Rastao sam i tom osjećaju pomalo davao sadržaj. Vremenom je taj materijal, koji sam zamišljao da su „cigle“, pronalazio svoje mjesto... I kada sam pomislio da one više nikada neće vidjeti ruke neimara, niti će se na njih više iko naslanjati, desilo se nešto što me duboko unesrečilo. U početku manje, a onda svakim danom sve više... i nisam siguran da se to neće nastaviti i trajati. Stekao sam utisak da je ostatke tog zida u moje okruženje dovukla vojska koja je došla u najboljem namjerama, kako su govorili, ali ono što se oko nas dešavalo bilo je da se ne može biti gore. Dok je rat u Bosni i Hercegovini bjesnio ja sam bio dijete i posmatrao sam sve te ljude koji su kroz moju kuću tunjivali i pričali zastrašujuće priče s fronta. Glad je zakucaла na naša vrata i mi smo počeli uzgajati zeceve, sijati kukuruz ručno „pod šiljak“, sanjali smo čokolade, šećer, ulje, brašno...ali smo se držali čvrsto jedni uz druge. Glad nas nimalo nije oslabila, već toliko ujedinila i natjerala da svaki djelčić slobodne površine obradimo i nećim zasijemo. Posmatrao sam gradske parkove, svi su bili zasijani redom, sve do samih zgrada. Moja strina je živjela u jednoj takvoj zgradi i nije skidala očiju s prozora da joj ko ne obere buraniju ili ne pootkida sakrises koje su sa strahom visile. Debeli ljudi su se topili kao da su od snijega i bilo mi je smiješno gledati njihova odijela koja su oko njih letjela. Oni su bili čili i nosili su dječju radost zbog tog svog novog izgleda. Kraj moje kuće stalno su prolazili strani vojnici s mitraljezima na krovu svojih džipova i s prstima na obaračima. Nismo se s njima smjeli šaliti (to su nam stariji govorili), ali mi smo im često mahali i zauzvrat dobivali ponešto iz njihovih paketa. Bile su to godine kada sam sa svojim vršnjacima najviše igrao nogomet i dobro izvodio klizeći, čak i na asfaltu.

Sve mi to što nam se događalo sada sabsasno izgleda i miriše na jednu udurmu u kojoj je sve namješteno i ispalo kako smo mi sami sebe porušili, poubijali, zamrzili, i u nacionalne torove pozatvarali. Naši mozgovi mi se čine ispriman i nesposobnim da išta dublje razumiju od recimo konstatacije da su za sve krivi „oni“, a da mi nismo krivi nizašto. Sve je to u jednom začaranom krugu iz koga se niti može niti smije izići. Potpuno smo poprimili „psihologiju tora“ i naš najveći strah je potpuno „ovčiji“ – kažu da se ovce ne boje da će ih zaklati, već da ih ne izopče iz stada... Eto, čini mi se da se u takvoj psihologiji živi u BiH.

Koliko god proučavao njezinu prošlost nisam mogao pronaći da ju je neko ovako nasilnički podijelio kao sada na „entitete“. Valjda je to nekakav organizam koji se tek rađa, ili nešto tek rođeno... Ono, dakle, kome pelene određuju stanje, ono što još nije progledalo, što je bespomoćno, bez svijesti o sebi... Ne mislim da mi u sadašnjem trenutku sve to kao društvo nismo, ali mi to teško pada što mi, u vrijeme kad sam se rodio, nismo to bili. Prosto ne smijem da se vraćam dalje jer mi to donosi bol i teške uzdahe. Zamišlite, samo 5 godina prije mog rođenja Sarajevo je bilo olimpijski grad. Možda je u tome najvjernije to što su Sarajevo za Olimpijadu „pripremale“ sve bivše jugoslavenske republike, i to s ljubavlju. Ili zar da se vratim još 5 godina unazad kad je Košarkaški klub Bosna bio prvak Evrope. Nije to kao sada što je neko prvak Evrope. Nisu to prvenstvo osvojile nikakve „košarkaške velesile“. To su osvojili studenti čije su stipendije
bile toliko male da su okolo izmišljali kako oni mnogo zarađuju igrajući košarku. Znači da tajna nije bila u novcu i koristi, već u nečemu što se zove snaga kolektiva, tj. vjera jednih u druge, nikog nije zanimala vjerska i nacionalna pripadnost... Zar da smijem zastati u toj 1978. godini kad su „Indici“ izdali svoj album „Modra rijeka“, album s elementima rock-opere, napisan na temu pjesničke zbirke „Kameni spavač“, koja slavi život bosanskih bogumila u srednjem vijeku, kad su podizane nekropole šetcaka kao fenomen umjetničkog građiteljstva. Ja se ne smijem okretati za generacijom svog oca jer me sopadala neakvna tjeskoba i kompleks ovog vremena, koje je svjedok gašenju mnogih pozitivnih tekovina. Jedna od njih je ta svijetla tradicija antifašističke borbe koja je također na izdisaju. Ruše se, ili nastoje redizajnirati, spomenici antifašistima, onim ljudima koji su bili svjetionici svog vremena i koji su svjesno izabrali svoj revolucionarni put. Kako ne uzdahnuti nad sudbinom dvojice predratnih književnika u BiH koji su bili intelektualci – pisci i obojca svirali violinu. Jedan je Hasan Kikić, a drugi je Zija Dzidarević, prvi ubijen u četničkoj zasjedi 1942., a drugi odveden u logor Jasenovac iste godine. Oba su bili socijalne orijentacije, kako svojim djelom, tako i dušom. Kikić, učitelj i pravnik, a Dzidarević, također, učitelj i pedagog. Na momente mi se jave osjećaj da čujem njihove violine koje nam trebaju dati snage da se protiv zla čovjek mora stalno boriti... Ali me ponekad preplavi osjećaj poput onoga kod Jozefa K., koji se stidi ispred svojih dželata što onako neljudski završava. Kafka je proročki osjetio smrt miliona ljudi i svojih dviju sestara koje će završiti u logoru. Ali logori nisu završili s drugim svjetskim ratom...
SAILING STORMY WATERS
The events of the past twenty years through the eyes of a common Kazakh family

My very first, bashful childhood memory is milk. I’m not talking about the sacred substance with which mothers breastfeed their children. I’m talking about powdered milk – 50 old Soviet kopeks per kilo, nutritional value zero. That insipid, papery, de-spiritualising placebo, which would always leave a dry and somewhat tart aftertaste in the mouth, was the gustatory accompaniment of my early years. Dare I say, it was also the gustatory accompaniment of the early years of my entire generation.

There were two powdered-milk-associated concepts that were firmly rooted in kids my age – “queueing” and “rationing”. Those two words are guaranteed to give shivering fits to any person born in the Soviet system. Although I was barely three years old, I remember very well the daily ritual: my mother would wake me up at 5.30am, wrap me up in a furry bundle of clothes, place me on the hand-made sled and drag me four blocks to Karaganda’s biggest grocery store. Then we would join an already enormous queue and wait for several hours for our turn to buy some bread, milk, sausage or butter. Always the same amount, always the same contemptuous “no” in response to “Can I get some more of that?” Strangest phenomenon of all – the population has the money, but doesn’t have anything to spend it on.

In January 1993 even the money was taken away when Kazakhstan switched from roubles to tenge. Initially, the switch appeared to make sense – a new currency for a new country. For the first couple of months the currency experienced moderate deflation, which, however, was soon replaced with inflation so high that the value of the American dollar skyrocketed from two to around eighty tenge. There weren’t any queues anymore – most of the queue-regulars were begging on the streets. I was getting older and will forever remember the astonishment I felt at how rapidly the cemeteries were growing – by half-a-mile over the winter. Thousands of crude, hacked-together wooden crosses.

It was the fly-or-die period for our fledgling country. Families had to choose between learning to stay buoyant in the new waters of the market economy or getting sucked into the abyss of poverty and desperation. My family chose to learn.

Until the early nineties we were a typical, well-off Soviet family. Mom and dad graduated in 1990 with degrees in geophysics, granddad was an engineer and grandma was a prominent journalist. In order to survive after 1991, however, dad and granddad had to learn to do business, mom taught herself accounting and grandma retired early to become a housewife. In 1994 granddad bought out the ferrous materials plant that he previously worked for. Several successful iron-trading deals that he concluded brought us a lot of money, real money, kept in dollars and deutschmarks. We had a safe embedded in a wall. The incongruous promise of time-deposits offered by Kazakhstan’s embryonic banks could not be trusted.

In the meantime, my father became our city’s official representative for the German carmaker Audi. We would always have several brand new models parked in front of the house. Dad had the luxury of being able to present his best friends with cars for Christmas at a time when unemployment was hitting forty per cent and average household income was less than a hundred dollars per month.

Looking at the events of that period through the prism of my current experience, I understand that the likes of my dad and granddad were merely the first wave, the paper-thin social stratum of benevolent businessmen. Those nouveau riche didn’t know how to make their riches work, and neither
did they know (or, at least, they didn’t accept) the “by-any-
means” approach. They weren’t sharks. The sharks arrived a
few years earlier: gangsters, fraudsters, racketeers, 
drug-dealers, all the riffraff of the new supply-and-demand
mindset. Worse yet, the riffraff had connections in the
government. De facto they were the government. The starry-
eyed communist ideologists of the past were gone and a new
breed of officials was in power.

Unsurprisingly, all the money was soon gone, either
exaggeratedly spent, or stolen, or never returned by the
people who borrowed it. Our personal fleet of a half dozen
Audis was replaced by an old Ford pickup and my collection
of LEGO began to get old. That ferrous materials plant still
belonged to our family, but turned into a liability rather than
a source of income. The scrounger government didn’t want
anything to do with supporting the domestic producer, the
market was chaotic, demand – unpredictable. My grandad
would often be forced at gunpoint to relinquish the little
money that he did make.

My family’s last attempt at staying afloat came in 1996.
All remaining money was pulled together to open a café, a
stylish, cozy little place, which was christened “Blues Café,”
because there was always live music playing. It is hard to
believe it today, but in 1996 “Blues Café” was one of only
three cafés in a city of almost a million. This really tells a lot
about how seventy years of a centralized economy crushed
the entrepreneurial spirit.

“Blues Café” forever remained more of a plaything, a way
to vent the family’s cultural frustration in, arguably, the most
degraded and stupefying period in the history of the nation.
My dad never really believed that it could be an effective
enterprise. He wanted to flee Kazakhstan as did most of the
non-Kazakh population. The rate of emigration was such
that the country plunged into a precipitous demographic
hole. Back then Israel, the U.S. and Germany were the most
popular destinations, so for about a year dad had me and
mom take ten hours of German a week.

But the move to Germany had to be put on hold because
of unexpected changes in Kazakh emigration regulations.
Dad was devastated. He knew it was the end of his dream
of life in Europe. I wasn’t particularly happy either – it all
happened long before I was able to understand that, had
everything gone according to plan, we would have become
just another family of “Polish plumbers.”

I remember feeling increasingly disillusioned about
the future. Me and my now jobless mother were spending
freezing evenings of the winter of 1998 in front of the TV,
trying to stay warm under a down blanket. We would first
watch the Russian ice hockey team lose to the Czechs in the
final of the glittering Nagano Olympics, then see the footage
of Americans “bringing peace” to Belgrade and Sarajevo.
That was also the year of the Russian financial crisis, which
had severe implications on the oil-price-driven economy
of Kazakhstan. The dollar now stood at about 140 tenge,
which rendered people’s savings and salaries worthless.
Disposable incomes were barely enough to cover the cost of
food. Not for the first time since the turn of the decade the
situation was looking hopeless.

No matter the circumstance, my granddad was never one
to give up. He sold “Blues Café” for the now-laughable sum
of $20,000, but that was enough to keep his plant going and
to steer the family through the crisis. My mother received a
university degree in the fast-expanding area of web design
and started to do some freelance work. By the end of 1999,
I knew that my family was making a respectable $300
per month. Together, we made it through the most difficult
period, and that was the end of the turbulent first decade of
my life.

The following ten years seem rather pale by comparison.
The country has been making steady progress, based mostly
on appeasing Russia, the U.S. and China with the natural
riches of its bowels. My family’s joint income grew to over
$1,000 per month, and the number of cafes in Karaganda is
now around a hundred – it didn’t take too long to restore the
entrepreneurial spirit after all. The current financial crisis hit
the country hard, but not as hard as that of 1998 – there is
no sense of desperation among the public, most people
feel optimistic, although some do say that the worst is yet
to come.

In my view the most notable change of the past decade
was the rise of globalism in post-Soviet Europe. Places
like Cairo or Detroit lost their aura of outlandishness and
became mere points on the map. Knowing one or two foreign
languages became a sign of good manners. A friend of our
family who now lives in China has recently called me up
suggesting a trip to the Shao-lin monastery for my nine-year
old martial-arts-obsessed brother. It is feasible now, the Iron
Curtain seems finally to be gone for good.

Until 2004 I had never been outside Kazakhstan. Fast-
forward five years and I’m a senior student at the American
University in Bulgaria. Just for the record, I’ve also visited
China, Greece, Romania, Italy, Russia, the U.S. and Turkey.
At twenty, I’ve seen and learned more than my parents could
ever imagine. I think, I can safely say that this is the case for
most of the powdered-milk generation.

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HUMPTY DUMPTY SAT ON A WALL, HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL, ALL THE KING’S HORSES, AND ALL THE KING’S MEN, Couldn’t put Humpty together again
My parents met in a very romantic time, which is called “perestroika” in school textbooks. They also were lucky to meet each other in very romantic place, “the cradle of the Russian Revolution”, called Leningrad at the time. Some time after that, they made their own revolution and decided to get married. A year later the doctor told my mom that her future child would have a great sense of humour, because her son was going to come into this world on the first of April. Mom was in a panic; her first child was to be born on April Fool’s day! So I decided to appear on the second of April, because any fine lady should be a bit late. Yes, that was my April joke, but mom was expecting a boy, and that was why I was paraded around town in a blue pram wearing a blue bonnet. Such a shame! Luckily, I don’t remember it.

At the same time, the world was enjoying the other great events of 1987. U2 received the Grammy Award. the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Nike released a new line of shoes called the Air Max, the best-selling shoes of all time and, on the 12th of June, Ronald Reagan, standing near the Brandenburg Gate, called out: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” I would find out what wall he was talking much later, but my interest in Mr. Gorbachev would awaken quite early.

I liked watching TV since I was a kid and my choice was pretty unusual for little girl. I loved cartoons, but I was also a big fan of the show in which “the man with the world map on the forehead” took part. Later, it was explained to me that Mr. Gorbachev was the president of the USSR, that he had a birthmark and that, actually, the world map looked a bit different.

I was a little disappointed since I thought it was cool to have the world map on your forehead, especially for a president. First of all, it is very cosmopolitan and, looking in
the mirror, you always can check where the next international summit will be. At that time I couldn’t imagine what an important role this person would play in the world, in my country and in my life. “The man with the world map on his forehead” really changed the map of Europe and the world forever!

I was two when the Berlin Wall came down, I was born in one country, never moved, but was growing up in a new one. It was a country which was on the highway of change, driving at crazy speed. Everything was changing and everything was new: name, map, politics, way of life. But when you are a child and just starting to take your first steps everything is new and you are looking forward to trying everything. First snow, first Santa’s present, first kiss and first cigarette. It happens to everyone. When you are growing up, changes are natural, no matter what they are – a change of season or your country’s name. You are just curious and can’t wait to see what will happen next.

My generation and the New Russia are almost age-mates, that is why we get on well and understand each other. As with all age-mates, we have common experience, interests and worries. When Russia turned into a democracy that was a choice made for all of us. The country had to elect the president, whereas I wanted to watch cartoons. Even at this age it was clear to me that democracy was not ideal.

Despite the fact that my family had traditionally held deep beliefs in democracy, almost every evening the electoral process of what to watch somehow always ended not in my favour. Mom and dad, who formed the majority, voted for the election show and my vote for Spiderman who saved the world on cable never changed anything. At that time I was disappointed with the majority vote in my house, and it seemed that many people felt the same about the country’s
choice. But anyway we agreed that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried.

We learned to speak together as well. To be honest, at that time everyone learned not to whisper, but to speak out loud about what they really thought. It seemed for us children that it was easier, and some adults weren’t really so happy about the fact that we enjoyed our freedom of speech so early and so playfully. So, some of us were sent out of the classroom very often and dissidents’ parents received complaints like: “Talks too much in class!” Compared to the murder of journalists, to be sent out of the classroom was not a risk at all.

Now, no matter what critics of state TV channels say, you always can change the channel and listen to an alternative opinion and version of events you believe in. So we have made big progress in the question of freedom of speech!

“I have nothing to wear!” This is a permanent global problem for women of all ages and continents, even if their wardrobe is about to explode. But in Soviet times people really had nothing to wear just because they had nothing to buy. Women were ready to die for Italian shoes and it was a big problem to get them. I asked my mom once how she understood that she had found her Mr. Right. She told me a bittersweet story about the twelve near-Herculean trials of my dad, the last one being something about getting a pair of jeans for my mom. This story can be used for the next film about James Bond, “License to Buy”, as it is full of pursuit, secret agents and passwords.

Well, if someone decides to prove his feelings to me now and brings me jeans, whatever the brand, I will definitely say NO! For us girls, good alternatives in shopping are almost as important as having an alternative in elections. The free market provides us with good choice in the shops, but some people suppose that democracy in Russia doesn’t give people a choice in elections. Let’s see: in 2000 we had eleven candidates, during the last elections there were only four. Not so bad anyway, because some democratic countries have only two candidates all the time. Figures are a stubborn thing!

The free market comes with competition and competition hurts. The first to suffer were Russian cars and Russian men. In the past every family wanted to buy a Russian car, now people prefer driving German or Japanese vehicles; women wanted to marry Russian men, now they are looking for Spanish machos, English gentlemen or at least Turkish businessmen.

When my parents were kids many of their friends wanted to become cosmonauts and establish contact with aliens. Mars was closer then the West and it was more risky to communicate with guys from capitalist countries than with aliens. The internet changed everything and even if you never were abroad you can easily get in touch with every part of the world. In my contact list on Facebook I don’t have a single alien, but only 15% of my friends are from Russia, the rest of them come from all over the globe, from Brazil to Japan!

I asked my friend: “What has changed in your life since the Berlin Wall disappeared?” She replied, “Darling, why don’t you ask me how life was before the Great Wall of China? It was a long time ago, I was born much later.” I reminded her that she was a pretty big girl in 1989 and already could walk and talk. “Really? I thought it happened a long time ago,” she said. “Anyway, it is impolite to hint at my hair colouring all the time. Yes, I am blonde and it is not my job to remember all the dates, but I am OK now!” Of course it wasn’t my intention to discriminate against my friend on the basis of her hair colour, but our conversation means that my generation got used to all the changes and found them absolutely natural. That is why my friend thought the Berlin Wall was demolished before our birth.

Twenty years have passed since the Berlin Wall was torn down. We can travel all over the world, can work and study everywhere (if you get a visa of course), because this question still stands and sometimes common Russian people still feel that there are some walls we should destroy. If we look back, all these changes seem unbelievable. The main thing is that despite all the difficulties and challenges, this “revolution” really changed the life of my generation for the better. Some people call us “the lost generation”, but I think I was born at the very right time, and we are not lost, we are united, possibly by Facebook and MTV, but it is much better anyway than to be separated by any kind of wall, even if it leaves Humpty Dumpty unhappy and homeless forever.

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RED IS COMMUNISM
GREY IS CHANGE
YELLOW IS CAPITALISM
WHITE IS THE END
**RED – IS THE COLOUR OF COMMUNISM**

It is the colour of the X written over the sign “freedom of speech”. It is the colour of hearts beating in a queue waiting for food. It is the colour of sharing. It is the colour of the tomatoes my grandma loved to eat. It is the colour of stories I heard about communism. It is the colour of the star on the hat that my parents wear in their old pictures. It is the colour of the stones that the Berlin Wall was made of. It is the colour of blood that flew through my country when the time came to say “goodbye” to communism. It is the colour of open mouths of people standing shocked.

**GREY – IS THE COLOUR OF CHANGES**

Red started to fade, and it turned into black. Black as fear, black as the unknown, black as “what’s going to happen next?”

Black as a dark sky, sky calling for a storm. It’s the colour of the wire on the Berlin Wall. It is the colour of bombs that used to wake us up while we were hiding in basements during the war in Croatia. It is the colour of the shoes my mother used to wear to work every morning. I heard the echo of the sirens outside while I watched her climbing up the stairs in her black shoes. Black is the colour of a small toy car that my brother used to play with. He broke it one day while running into the basement. It is also the colour of the small radio we used to listen to. It is the colour that many people started to wear after the war. Not just as a part of their wardrobe, but also as a part of their soul. It is the colour of sorrow and funerals.

Then came white. White like clear sky, white like big, soft clouds. It is the colour of doves. It is the colour of hope. It is the colour of shining smiles on the day the Berlin Wall fell. It is the colour of the shirt my father wore on the day he came back home from war. It is the colour of the bottle of milk my mother gave us every evening before going to sleep.

Black and white mixed together and painted this time of changes, painted it in grey. Grey is the colour of buildings in my town. Buildings that look tired but that finally found their place. Grey is the colour of highways that connect us. Grey is the colour of the ground where the Berlin Wall stood. It is also the colour of the foggy morning after all the changes. The morning that brings new changes, new adjustment, new questions.
YELLOW – IT IS THE COLOUR OF DEMOCRACY AND THE COLOUR OF CAPITALISM

It is also the colour of money, the colour of coins and the colour of the dollar symbol. It is the colour of an envious man, a man who wants more and more and is never satisfied. Yellow is the colour of the flowers that my mother planted in our garden when I was in the first grade of elementary school. It is the colour of smiley faces that were presented to us when people were talking about democracy and our new country. It is the colour of a question mark above my head, asking what happened with all those stories. It is the colour of candles that people light praying for better times during these years of crisis. It is the colour of flames in people’s eyes while they are running for money and fighting for things. Because people today... they fight for things, they don’t fight for people. Everything has a price on it. Even people. Their pride, their dignity...

Yellow is the colour of the paper that used to be white, it’s the colour of forgetting. It is the colour of the stars in the night. Stars that seem so unreachable and far away, but yet stunning. Yellow is the colour of shining dresses that TV celebrities wear. It is the colour of the time we live in and the colour of a small, sad sparkle in my eyes while I’m writing this. I feel this is a time of shallowness, a time in which we often forget that we are human beings, a time that puts society and the planet earth in second place and profit first. I would like to think differently, I would like somebody to prove me wrong. It was weird growing up in the nineties; it was often hard to understand all the changes happening around me. Sometimes I feel privileged because I was a child then and I was not aware of all the pain and sorrow, I did not know what war means and what it brings. But that does not mean those times did not leave their mark on me. I feel it every day; I see it in the footsteps of people walking by. That is why this yellow sometimes hurts even more, it burns my eyes. I feel like people were expecting much more, they were fighting for something more, something else, and I am not sure they got it. I feel their disappointment.

Despite all the things I have written so far, I still believe there is the possibility of a better life, a better society. Yellow is not only the colour of sadness and envy, it is also the colour of the sun, the sun that nurtures life on earth. It is the colour of prayer. Prayer for a better tomorrow. Prayer for man, for humanity. It is the colour of protest, it is the colour of screaming and activism. Yellow is the colour of a hand reaching out. That is why I am going to leave space for sunlight to shine into this text, a place for hope, a place that says “it is not so bad, it can be better, we must work to make it better, we can do it.” It is a place for a big yellow smile after all the troubles and all the pained times we went through.

Our colours, colours of the time we lived in, make us special, they make us different, and we must do everything in our power to turn those colours into a big rainbow that is going to bring happiness to our world and nice weather after the rain.

WHITE FOR THE END – IT IS THE COLOUR OF PURITY, THE COLOUR OF INNOCENCE

The colour of honesty. I wasn’t born in 1989; I was born at the beginning of 1990. I am not writing this to win an award. I just wanted to share my story, to voice my opinion and to express my emotions. Since I am studying journalism, I felt it my obligation to share these thoughts. I want my words to be read, I want them to be heard. I think it is really important to encourage young people to express their opinions, to raise their voices! That is why I wrote this. And that is all.

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TO BE BORN AT DAWN, ONE LATE SUMMER MORNING IN 1989: A PRIVILEGE OR A CURSE?
The last footsteps of an idealistic system are still audible. Initially, you can only hear a distant and hesitant rumble, but gradually the noise gets louder, more resounding and more assertive. Individual spirit crushed underground is rising up and fighting for its own voice, for everyone’s free choice to express his or her own opinion. Deep into the night is emerging the beginning of a long finale, with its ugly grin, threatening a merciless bloodbath between brothers and sisters, up until now kept together artificially. Suddenly, they see in their neighbour their worst enemy.

Yet again, the small and tasty “apple of discord” – Macedonia – was caught up in turmoil: this time in the wave of transition sweeping through Eastern Europe. Troubled throughout their history Macedonians faced a dual reality. On the one hand, fate offered them wings so that they could fly freely across their own Macedonian sky, lit up by this yellow sun with its sixteen shining rays. On the other hand, if someone took a closer look at the happy flight of the free spirit that had earlier been fettered in chains, they would spot the approaching cloud. It forecast many tears for this newly-created “oasis of peace”, followed by hunger, poverty and cunning survival: all that the price of loving your motherland.

Transition was marked by a showdown between the state and its people. It had two sides: on the one hand, painful privatisation, and on the other, unavoidable steps towards a more rational functioning of society. That meant sad-looking fathers standing outside the factories where they spent the best of their lives, remembering how they built those places from scratch and earned an honest living. Now they had to return home and tell their children: “That’s it, we’ve gone bust...” How would they now look after their families?

Those were years of struggle for survival in which some families ended up on the edge of a cliff, while others took off – their success due more to their capitalist aspirations than democracy. But gradually privatisation started showing its benefits too. The craftsmen found a way to express themselves. The smart ones got ideas. The skilled people put them into practice. So in this way, little by little, standards improved and Macedonia started looking like a democratic society with a multi-party system, where each citizen had the same rights and responsibilities according to the constitution.

The people of Macedonia are brave and no “transition fever” will ever stop their progress and survival for centuries to come. It’s a nation with strong and indestructible roots. So the Macedonians just got on with it and started putting together the pieces of their new existence. This all happened at a time when our newly-found independence had fragile
foundations – like glass. Over the last two decades those pillars collapsed more than once and lessons had to be learned from our mistakes.

At one point the whole ideal which Macedonians had aspired to for centuries was shaken and about to collapse. It was all because of a violent storm that came out of the blue, on a foggy winter morning in 2001. One of the larger ethnic groups living on Macedonian soil had decided to resolve the ethnic problems of the area with blood. Surprised by this sudden aggression, Macedonians found themselves besieged in their own country. After a few months of violent frenzy, the warring sides finally sat down at the table and brought to light the Framework Agreement, which ensures all ethnic groups in Macedonia have the same treatment as those born Macedonians.

Today Macedonia is an ethnic idyll in this part of Europe. It’s one of the few states which recognises the existence of other ethnic communities as well as their languages, culture and religion. It values them and embraces them in modern Macedonian society. To show that it truly respects the cultural identity of the state’s ethnic groups, Macedonia is seriously considering introducing Albanian lessons for Macedonian schoolchildren. This speaks volumes about the openness and generosity of the Macedonian soul.

But changing the constitution wasn’t the only thing Macedonians did on the road to their long-cherished goal of joining Europe. All the time the country is introducing wide-ranging educational reforms to make European integration more accessible to its citizens. It starts with renovation of school buildings to make them a better place to work and continues through promoting lifelong learning, training, keeping up-to-date with progress, following world trends in science and technology, and introducing the European Language Portfolio. This encourages multi-lingualism, which means the study of many European languages. It also leads to respect for multi-culturalism and the diversity of Europe in terms of its traditions, customs, culture, history and religion. Learning foreign languages makes people more independent. The projects “a computer for every child” and “free internet for every citizen” sit at the top of this pyramid of reforms. Those two explain why Macedonia is moving now more quickly towards Europe.

The kind hearts of all Macedonians are now gathered around a guiding star that shines brightly and leads towards the creation of a better place for the youngest generation, the ones who will build the future of Macedonia. The unforgettable singer Toshe Proeski who died in 2007 was a gift from God; he inspired and encouraged the Macedonian people to do only good things. Through his music he spread good will and showed everyone how life should be lived. Two weeks before his sudden death he united twenty thousand Macedonians and several million TV viewers in the biggest concert ever aimed at raising the teaching standards in schools.

His last message to the world was about being human, helping your neighbour, and helping the most innocent and pure in this world: the children. God gave us Toshe Proeski, our angel, for a reason, and He took him away from us for a reason. Toshe accomplished his mission – now it’s time to see its results, and for Macedonia to become an oasis for people who care for one another and help those in need.

Visa-free travel for Macedonians to the EU which began 19 December 2009 opened a bright gate of new opportunities. It introduced the young to clever ideas, new cultures and shared experiences, bringing down walls, marking Macedonia’s escape from a siege. All this gives Macedonians hope for a more accessible Europe, of centuries-old dreams come true, of greater freedom of the creative spirit, of higher standards of living. Step by step, we get closer to Europe, our ultimate destination. It’s every Macedonian’s dream to see their homeland as a member of the European Union, equal to other European civilisations.

Looking back at my country’s last twenty years has made me think of how badly the last century ended, and of the hopes the new millennium brings. The difficulties in our recent past make my present day sweeter than anything. More than anything now I appreciate free thinking, because my parents were not allowed to express themselves and were forced into silence: they were subjected to a system which today seems unthinkable to me.

I am happy that I live in Macedonia and I’m part of an academic community working towards a bright future for our country. There is only one sun in the world and it shines equally on all nations.

Macedonia has earned the right to be part of Europe and part of the world, and I and other young people who believe in a democratic society will be trying to prove this. Finally I’d like to stress that being born in 1989, having witnessed so many changes in society in just twenty years, is a real privilege. It means I can see a wider world, a world beyond the horizon, and that makes me a happier person than ever.

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МИЛИЦА ПЕТРОВА НЕГОТИНО, РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНІЈА

Родена во раките мугри на едно доцно летно утро во годината 1989, привилегија или клетва? Се служат последните чекори на владеењето на еден идеалистички систем. Од почеток, се забележуваат само тивки и несигурни татнежи, кои со текот на времето стануваат се почуви, погромотгласни и поли си самодоверба. Се издигнува од под земја закопаното его и се бори за глас, за слободен избор, за правото секој да го каже своето сопствено мислење. Далеку во нокта се гледа почетокот на една добра завршница и непристојно се смеща,заканувајќи се со немилосрдно крвопролевање помеѓу дотогаш вештачки сплотените браќа и сестри, кои за миг во соседот до себе го препознаа својот најголем непријател.

Малечкото вкусно „јаболко на раздорот” и овој пат не беше поштедено од претговорното бран што ја зафати Источна Европа. Намачени и напатени долж историјата на времето, Македонците се соочија со судбината што за нив имаше две лица. Од една страна таа им пружаше крила, да летаат слободно на своето сопствено Македонско необосветлено од жолто сонце со шеснаесетте блескави краци. Од друга страна пак ако некој се загледаше подлабоко во срцкит потег на слободната мисла, претходно окованана со пранги, ќе можеше да го забележи надвиснатиот облак кој прогонираше пролејување на многобройни солзи за новосоздадената „оза на мирот” проследена со гладување, невработеност, беспарица и уметничко преживување за љубов кон татковината.

Една од позначајните претизацији премети со наркот и државата претставува од една страна болната приватизација, а од друга страна неминовниот чекор кон рационално функционирање на општественото систем. Имено, татковци со тажни лица стојат на прagt од фирмите во кои ги оставиле своите најубави години од животот, се потсетуваат како цигла по цигла ја граделе фабриката и чесно го заработувале својот леб, за денес да појдат дома кaj своите деца и да ја кажат: „Готово е. Отидовме под стечај.” Како ли сега тие ќе се грижат за своето семејство? Поминаа години борба за егзистенција каде некои семејства се најдоа на работ на пропаста, а некои други пак се вивнаа во полетот кој повеке личеше на капиталистичко општество отколку демократско. Но, со текот на времето, приватизацијата почна да ја осветлува својата добра страна. Занаециите дојдо до израз. Паметните добија идеи. Вредните ги реализираат идеите. И така малку по малку премногу ниските стандарди започнаа да закрепнуваат и Македонција почна наликува на современо демократско општество со повеќепартийски систем каде секој граѓанин исто одговара пред силата на уставните закони. Македонскиот народ е неустроен и ниту грам од претговорите треска нема да го спреќи да закрепнува и опстојува во идните столетија. „Пиејот” е неуништлив, колку повеке сака да се ослободи од него, толку повеке тој зајакнува и пушта жилави корени дланбо во земјата, двојно понеуништлив и поиздржлив. Така, Македончето почна вредно да го реди кошта по кошта мазаикот на својот нов живот. Сепак, околната придонесе темелите на новосоздадената самостојност да бидат со стаклени столбови и во текот на последивите две децении неколку пати тие да доживеат распарчување и повторно и повторно да се обновуваат поучени од грешните чекори.

Во еден момент целата кула од карти што Македонците со векови ја градеа, беше разнишана, и сосем на работ на распадот, предизвикана од силна неочекувана бура во едно магливо зимско утро во годината 2001. Имено, една од поголемите етнички групи кои живеат на македонско тло одлучи со крв да ги реши етничките проблем-прашања за ова миротворно поднебје. Изненадени од неочекуваната агресија, Македонците повторно без сардисани во својата сопствена држава. По неколкумесечно беснење на автоматките пушки, конечно противставените сили седнаа на маса и го донесоа на виделина Рамковниот договор со кој етничите во Македонија добиваат ист третман со родените Македонци. Во денешно време Македонија претставува етничка идеја во рамките на Европа бидејќи е една од ретките држави која го признава постоено
на другите етнички заедници како и нивниот јазик, култура и вероисповед кои се ценат и инфилтрираат во современото македонско општество. За да докаже дека навистина го почитува културниот идентитет на етносите во државата, Македонија сериозно размислува да го воведе албанскиот јазик да се изучува од прво одделение од страна на Македонците, што зборува за отвореноста и широкоградоста на македонското срце.

Промените во Уставните закони не се единствените промени што Македонија ги направи за да се доближи до одамна посакуваната Европа. Таа е константно подложна на крупни реформи во образованието се со цел европинтеграцијата да биде подостапна и поуспешна за македонските граѓани. Почнувајќи од драстично реновирање на сите училишни институции за подобрување на физичките услови за ракочење, продолжувајќи со стимулирање на доживотното учење кое подразбира натамуноси усовршување, доквалификација, држење чекор со времето, следење на светските трендови во науката и технологијата, па до воведување на Европското Јазично Портиоло. Тоа стимулира плурилингвизам што подразбира изучување на повеќе европски јазици, понатаму плурикултурализам што значи почитување на разновидноста на Европа во поглед на традиција, обичаи, култура, историја, религија, итн. Како и стекнување на автономност во ученето странски јазици. Како врв на пирамидата реформи се покажуваат проектите „компјутер за секое дете“ и „бесплатен интернет за секој граѓанин“ кон кои определија забраното тempo со крупни чекори кон Европа.

Хуманите сцени на Македонците собрани сите во една сведна водила која сjaвидно е и ги обединува во реализирањето на добри дела за најмалите, за поколенијата кои ќе го градат иднината на Македонија. Непрекаленото Тоше Проески претставуваше Господов дар кој ги инспирираше и поттикнуваше македонскиот народ на исклучиво добри дела. Преку неговата музика ја сееше својата добродушност и му покажуваше на светот како треба да се посвети животот. Две недели пред неговата ненадејна смрт тој обедини двaesет илјади Македонци во најмасовниот концерт досега за подобрување на квалитетот на наставата во училиштата и уште неколку милиони граѓани пред телевизиските екрани. Тој ќа кажа својата последна порака кон целиот свет, да се биде хуман, да се помогне на ближинот, на соседот, на најмалите и најмилите, а тоа се најневините суштества на светот, децата, најскрените и најчистите во мислите. Господ ни го даде Тоше, ангелот наш, со причина, и ни го зеде повторно со причина. Тој своето дело го заврши, сега е на ред да никне семето што го посеја и Македонија да стане оаза на хумани лица кои ќе се грижат еден за друг и ќе најдат начин да му помогнат на оној што е во неволја.

00:00, 19.12.2009 се отвори една светла порта која нуди многу можности. Просветување на идеите на младиот човек, запознавање на нови култури и споделување на искуства, уривање на сидови наметнати од визионит режим, ослободување на Македонија од замрзнати граници. Сето ова зборува за званична либерализација која на Македонците им влече надеж за подостапна Европа, за реализирање на вековни соништа, за поголема слобода на творечкиот дух, за покачување на економските стандарди на живеење. Чекор по чекор, стигнувајќи поблизу до Европа, нашата крајна дестинација. Сон на секој Македонец е да ја види својата татковина како членка на Европската Унија, рамноправна со останатите Европски цивилизации.

Петроспективниот гледање на текот на последните дваесет години во мојата татковина не монтер да се потсетам на ужасната завршница на миналот вek и на надежите што новиот милиенум му ги донесе на мојот народ. Денес слободата ми е посатка од било што, затоа што имав тешко транзиционо минато. Денес слободната мисла ја ценам повеќе од се, зашто некогаш на монте родители не им било дозволено слободно да се изразат туку напротив биле принудени покорно да молат а да се потчинат на еден за мене незамислив систем. Денес сум сречна што живеам во Република Македонија и сум дел од академските граѓани кои доправа ќе делуваат и ќе и носат светла идина на својата татковина која го заслужува само најдоброто. Има едно сонце на светот и исто грее за сите народи. Македонија заслужува да биде дел од Европа и дел од светот,а јас ќе бидам таа што ќе се обиде да го докаже тоа заедно со уште еден куп млади луѓе кои веруваат во демократското општество. На крај ќе потенцирам дека да се биде роден во 1989, да се биде сведок на промена на неколку видови општества за краток временски период од само две децении е секако привилегија која ми овозможува да го перспирим светот со поотворени хоризонти и неминовно ме прави посрекна личност од кога и да е.

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MY FATHER DIED WHEN I WAS TWO, AND MIŠA’S FATHER DISAPPEARED THREE MONTHS BEFORE MIŠA APPEARED FROM HIS MOTHER’S STOMACH, BUT MOTHER ALWAYS USED TO SAY HOW RICH SHE WAS. I COULDN’T QUITE UNDERSTAND THAT.

As always, we were playing in front of the building. My impression is there were a thousand of us, but I think there were no more than 20-30 boys here. Pajče, as we used to call him, was the only friend in the neighbourhood who had a football. More accurately he was the only one who had any kind of ball we could play football with in front of the tall apartment block. It was some sort of rubber ball, but it was the only one around.

It was in front of the apartment block that I got my first beating. My impression is that two friends I’d fallen out with had been beating me for hours, although probably it didn’t last more than two minutes. Pajče’s father asked why my elder brother Miša hadn’t gone down to break it up since he had a yellow belt in karate. My best friend, Vlada, thought at the time that I had leukaemia. In fact I had frequent nose bleeds and had very close-cropped hair – almost bald, but Vlada had watched a lot of films where bald-headed boys had nose-bleeds and then the doctors would tell them they had leukaemia.

I’d heard somebody in the neighbourhood mentioning “communards and Chetniks”. My mother had said how terribly insulted my grandmother Dušanka had been when anyone said the word “Communard” in her presence because grandmother had liberated Belgrade and had even got as far as Trieste with the liberators. I tried to imagine how you would reach Trieste on foot, although I had no idea how far away this Trieste was. It was certainly much further than, let’s say, Karaburma, where grandmother Ljuba lived, and I would never have walked to Karaburma. It wasn’t at all obvious to me but it’s what I heard.

I knew about the football teams Zvezda and Partizan, but knew nothing about these communards and Chetniks, nor did I know who they supported. Later I found out that people weren’t divided by who supported Zvezda or Partizan, but it still wasn’t clear to me. We used to take shots at the goal and I used to get angry at those that called us “communards”. I felt grown-up whenever I answered any of them back by saying how insulted my grandmother would be to hear them telling stories because she had defended Belgrade. But I was standing between the goalposts and wasn’t able to defend even that goal, and because of that my grandmother Dušanka, who had liberated Belgrade from fascism, was even more fascinating. It was obvious to me that she hadn’t exactly liberated it herself, but I calculated: if there were eleven players in a football team, there can’t have been many more at the liberation of Belgrade. The reserve bench possibly, but I was sure my grandmother would certainly not have been on the reserve bench. As a small boy I trained for several sports. I trained for volleyball one
IT SHOULD TO GO TO YOUR THAN TO GATE
BE EASIER
OR NEIGHBOUR
IN THE MOON
against the WA
day and as soon as the trainer sent me to the reserve bench to watch the boys who had been there longer, I decided it wasn’t for me. For swimming I trained for two months and was in the non-swimmers’ group. It wasn’t my aim to watch those who, allegedly, swam better than me. The most training I did was for basketball because I spent less time on the reserve bench. And so I believed there was no way my grandmother could have been on the reserve bench – even in the “team” that liberated Belgrade.

People have said that the times we live in are hard times. I was happy when mother took us out for an ice-cream cone. Marina, the pastry-shop owner, often used to treat my brother and me to two scoops of ice-cream each and I, without fail, would take two scoops of chocolate. I used to eat the cone from the bottom, letting the scoops slip down my throat. I was the thinnest of all the children in the neighbourhood and wanted to gain weight by any means. I used to think: if hard** times are here, I should be heavy myself. In fact, I often saw a terribly fat neighbour who drove the best car in the world. So I came to the conclusion that in hard times only fat, or “heavy” people had an easy life. There was a certain logic in this because neither my mother, nor Miša, nor I put on weight while the hard times lasted, nor later either, but our fat neighbour got fatter and fatter and his life got better and better. Mother worked ten to fifteen hours a day and never brought us presents after work. Grandmother Ljuba made us mashed potatoes and fried egg and I, after eating it, would wipe the plate with the bread so that Ljuba wouldn’t have to wash it up. I could never understand why at the end she always washed it up anyway.

My father died when I was two, and Miša’s father disappeared three months before Miša appeared from his mother’s stomach, but mother always used to say how rich she was. I couldn’t quite understand that. We had no money for a new ball, but she kept repeating how we were her greatest treasures. Together Miša and I were probably as heavy as one of our fat neighbour’s legs, which in my estimation meant that we could possibly buy one of his car tyres. And mother kept saying how wealthy we were...

Today we no longer play around the building. We’ve grown up. I assume. Today all the boys have the best balls, and those who have a ball like Pajčė’s are really poor. When Pajčė had that rubber ball, we were all poor but then it didn’t matter. Two teenagers have beaten up my little neighbour and hit him on the head with a stone. The government would probably think it was war because only in war films do people have bloody heads. My little neighbour Djole doesn’t have a father and his friends call him “woman’s fart”. He doesn’t understand. He’s just in love with Thea and because of her he plays with Barbie dolls. He’s also been told he’s “Ustasha”*** and that his mother is a whore because she was screwed by a Croat. He doesn’t understand that either and replies that they are Chetniks, but that doesn’t stop them since they think they really are Chetniks.

My neighbour Filip has played all the sports there are, as well as those that aren’t, on his new computer. He’s never done any training because he’s constantly sitting in front of his new computer. There’s a huge family pack of ice-cream in the freezer and he eats it from a bowl. He doesn’t eat ice-cream cones because he believes that only those who can’t afford to buy huge ice-cream packs eat them. He’s fat and mother calls him “chubbykins” in baby-talk while she watches with satisfaction as he overeats on lamb. There’s always some food left on his plate which he throws away afterwards like the bread, which he could clean his plate with so his grandmother doesn’t have to wash it up. She doesn’t wash up the plate, she’s bought a dishwasher. Today there are no hard times but Filip regularly puts on weight – just in case. His father has bought his mother the most expensive wedding ring and has taken her on a cruise for their honeymoon, but she still complains how poor they are. I kissed my mother when I came back from college. I ate egg and mash, wiped my plate with bread, and laughed with my mother when I told her how it had upset me that Ljuba would wash the plate up anyway when I cleaned it. I no longer have such close-cropped hair so the government doesn’t need to worry too much and I still watch films. And I’m still thin but I don’t have nose bleeds any more, and Filip’s father is still terribly fat and drives a new Audi.

I check my bank account to calculate how wealthy we are. I warmly congratulate the cashier who tells me I still have four euros in the account.

My mother hasn’t bought me a present today but has told me she loves me... She sleeps peacefully, works less and is happier than ever. Because she knows that now even we understand how wealthy we are!

But I’ve learned one thing at least: that times cannot be so hard that people can be poor in spirit.

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Translator’s note
* Chetniks: Serbian nationalist movement in World War II
** “Heavy” in Serbian
*** Ustasha: Croatian fascist movement in World War II
Jurcali smo, kao i uvek, ispred zgrade. Imao sam utisak da nas je bilo hiljadu, a verujem da tu nije bilo više od 20-30 dečaka. Pajče, tako smo ga zvali, bio je jedini drugar iz susedstva koji je imao loptu za fudbal. Tačnije, bio je jedini koji je imao bilo kakvu loptu s kojom smo mogli da igramo fudbal ispred solitera. To je bila neka gumena lopta, ali je bila jedina u celom kraju.

Ispred solitera sam prvi put dobio batine. Imao sam utisak da su me satima tukla dva drugara s kojima sam se posvađao, iako to, verovatno, nije trajalo duže od dva minuta. Pajčetov tata se pitao zašto moj stariji brat Miša nije sišao da ih prebije, kada ima žuti pojas u karateu. Moj najbolji drug, Vlada, u to vreme je mislio da imam leukemiju. U stvari, meni je često isla krv iz nosa, a bio sam vrlo kratko ošišan – skoro čelave glave, a Vlada je gledao mnogo filmova gde čelavim dečacima curi krv iz nosa, i onda im doktori kažu da imaju leukemiju.

Čuo sam da neko u komšiluku govori „komunjare i četnici“. Mama je rekla kako bi se baka Dušanka strašno uvredila da pred njom neko izgovori: „komunjare“, jer je baka oslobađala Beograd i stigla s oslobodiocima čak do Trsta. Zamišljam, kako je peške stici do Trsta, iako nisam imao ni predstavu koliko je daleko taj Trst. Sigurno je mnogo dalje nego, recimo, Karaburma, gde je živela baka Ljuba, a ja ni do Karaburme nikad ne bih iscao peške. Meni to nikako nije bilo jasno, ali šta ču.


Mama je radila deset do petnaest sati dnevno, i nikada nam nije posle posla donosila poklone. Baka Ljuba nam je pravila krompir pire s jajetom na oko, a ja bih, kad to pojedem, omazao tanjir hlebom, da Ljuba ne bi morala da ga pere. Nikad mi nije bilo jasno zašto ga na kraju, uvek, ipak opere.

Moj tata je umro kad sam imao dve godine, a Mišin tata je nestao tri meseca pre nego što je Miša izašao iz maminog stomaka, ali nam je mama uvek govorila kako je bogata. Nisam to baš razumeo. Nismo imali novca za novu loptu, ali nam je uvek ponavljala kako smo joj mi najveće bogatstvo. Miša i ja smo, zajedno, verovatno, bili teški kao jedna noga našeg debelog suseda, što je, po mojoj proceni značilo, da možemo da kupimo, možda, jednu gumu s njegovog automobila. Mama je i dalje pričala da smo bogati...


Dva dečaka su prebila mog malog suseda i udarila ga kamenom u glavu. Vlada bi, verovatno, mislio da je rat, pošto samo u ratnim filmovima ljudima kvarli glava. Moj mali komšija Dole nema tatu, a drugovi ga zovu „ženski petko“. On to ne razume. Samo je zaljubljen u Teu i zbog nje se igra s barvikama. Rekli su mu još i da je ustaša i da mu je mama kurva, jer se jebala s Hrvatom. On ni to ne razume, i odgovara im kako su oni četnici, ali njima to ne smeta, pošto misle da zaista jesu četnici.

Moj sused Filip je igrao sve sportove koji postoje, kao i one koji ne postoje, na novom kompjuteru. Nikada nije trenirao ništa, jer stalno sedi pred novim kompjuterom. U zamrživaču ima veliko porodično pakovanje sladoleda i jede ga iz činije. Ne jede sladoled u kornetu, zato što smatra da to jedu samo oni, koji ne mogu da kupe veliki sladoled. Debeo je, a mama mu tepa „Bucko“, dok ga zadovoljno gleda kako se prežderava jagnjetinom. Uvek mu ostane nešto hrane u tanjiru, koju posle baci, kao i hleb, kojim je mogao da očisti tanjir da ga baba ne pere. Ona ne pere tanjir, kupila im je mašinu za pranje sudova. Danas nisu teška vremena, ali se Filip uredno goji, za svaki slučaj. Tata je kupio njegovoj mami najskuplju burmu za venčanje i vodio je na krstarenje za medeni mesec, ali se ona i dalje žali kako su siromašni.

Poljubio sam mamu kad sam se vratio s fakulteta. Pojeo sam pire s jajetom na oko, omazao tanjir hlebom, i smejao se s mamom dok sam joj pričao kako me je nerviralo što je Ljuba ipak prala tanjir kada ga očistim. Nisam više tako kratko ošišan da se Vlada ne bi previše brinulo, pošto i dalje često gleda filme. I dalje sam mršav, ali mi više ne ide krv na nos, a Filipov tata je i dalje strašno debeo i vozi novi Audi.
As everything needs a beginning, I would prefer to begin with a short introduction to my short life story. As a matter of fact, many people around me say that I am a good story-teller and speaker. Some go even further, get lost and conclude that I am a good writer. But when I come to my life story, to the moments I have kept deep inside, to sounds which I haven’t heard but felt, everything has moved to a different plane and become more difficult. It is so much more difficult to step aside and let others in. My tale will be neither exciting nor breathtaking, there is nothing inspirational or worthy of example. If it were, I would be famous and instead of this Microsoft Word document you would be reading some world-class best-seller based on the true story of my life.

Chuck Palahniuk once said, “Your birth is a mistake you’ll spend your whole life trying to correct.” In the period when I was born, it was really difficult for a family to have more than one consumer of food. Regardless of the reality of the political situation, Human Character, will and passion took over – and since everyone has to pay for certain things, I was born. It was the 21st of April 1989 and there were no lights to shine, but there were guns to shoot to let others know that I was born. I have no clear memories before my third birthday. I hope you won’t be disappointed to miss valuable facts from this time, but if you are, we can have a contest next year called “Born in ’70” with my mother as a participant and she will provide you with the missing details.

So now, with your permission, I will switch to the time when I started to look at the world with my own eyes. The period of 1991-1993 was one of the worst periods in Georgian modern history. There was though a positive side for me as a kid: not only did I play with toy tanks and soldiers, but I could actually see them in the streets, feeling not afraid but excited that my “toy-world” had got much, much bigger. At the time it didn’t seem strange to me; I thought that was the way that everyone grew up, eating food which we had to like because it was the only food we had. (Looking back, I now realise why the concept of “The Matrix” is so close to me, since I was closing my eyes and trying to imagine. But frankly, I was never good enough to bend the spoon.)

As my mother looks back, she remembers the time when I had to eat beans which I couldn’t stand. A small boy, eating and bursting into tears while making a speech to the “small”, yet “dumb” society of beans: “Dear beans, you know that I don’t like you, most probably you don’t like me either, but we have no other option, I have to eat you.” When my mother tells the story now it is funny, but at the time it was very depressing. It was when I was four years old; it was when I went to kindergarten. Kindergarten was so terrifying for me that I pretended to have a fever, warming the thermometer on the stove before giving it to my mother for inspection.

I really believe that in everything we can find something positive. As difficult as it was, that life made me more thoughtful, more creative, a little bit of a cheater perhaps, but even at the age of five I knew what I wanted and was conscious that getting the juice was worth the squeeze. The reason for my hatred of kindergarten was the direct result of the Soviet regime. For it was, you see, a Russian kindergarten. My mother said that I was a gifted child, but not gifted enough to speak Russian at the age of five. So I was sent to a Russian kindergarten to learn. Everything was nice, the teachers tried to be as nice as they could with the few Georgian words they knew. The result was that I was punished constantly for not obeying the rules or teachers’ orders. In fact, it turned out that I was being punished for not knowing Russian. Aside from these complications in translation, there were many bright moments. It was the first time I noticed that Russian girls are more shapely and lovelier than Georgians. I must say that it was my first time to fall in love – and my first real-life experience with love, after which I concluded that love costs a lot.

Life was really harsh. I rarely saw my father who was away on business and saw my mother all the time because she had no job. Doing business at the time was quite strange. My father’s income was the stuff with which he did his business. First it was salt, then it changed to nuts, then butter and in
the end it was kerosene. Of course we couldn’t eat or drink kerosene, but we could sell it and, as a benefit of this activity, we got a stove which burned kerosene. In those years, there was no electricity, gas or central heating, so warming up the house was difficult. Thus, the stove was the perfect addition. The only problem was that it was really risky to switch it on, as we had to put a flame directly into the canister. Thus every attempt to warm ourselves bore the possibility of losing a father. That was when I realised that to reach one’s goals one must take risks, and that he who has never fallen has never lived. My father was good at lighting the stove so he never died in an explosion, and every evening we had a warm room full of our neighbours who, needless to say, were in search of free heat. But you know, it was interesting, all the kids together in the corner of the room with the parents sitting in the other corner, discussing politics, books and writers. It was this situation of having conversations about Writers and Art in a dark room lit by the flames of our stove that made me feel passionate about books, roses, romance – and romantic girls with books and roses.

The beginning of school was very interesting. New children, new teachers who spoke Georgian. Nonetheless the winter was very difficult for my family. Because once every two weeks I was on duty, which meant that I had to bring oil to the class to warm up the oil-stove. By then, father had moved out of the petroleum industry because the authorities had discovered that the business was quite profitable – meaning that there could be no place for ordinary people. It was really difficult to buy oil as it was very expensive. Being proud, my mother would collect glass bottles and sell them to shops to earn the money to buy oil for me – not wanting me to feel ashamed in front of my new classmates.

Because of our financial problems I had to move from my parents’ house to my grandparents in the village. I actually adored my grandparents, but this change hurt because, at the age of eight, I missed my mother and father. But you know, even this situation had its positive sides. Now I look at friends’ relationships with their parents and see that I can express my love for my mother more often than they. I don’t feel ashamed of saying “Mother, I love you”, at the age of twenty – though my friends consider that mothers know that they love them, so there is no need to say anything. Fools don’t understand that one day it will be too late.

From life with my grandparents I remember a scene. I am nine years old, sitting at the table next to my grandma, the oil-lamp on the table lighting up the small space of the room. Grandfather is sitting on the sofa, trying to keep silent as I study English with my grandmother who doubles as an English language teacher. Grandmother is satisfied with my results while Grandpa is waiting for his turn, as he is a huge lover of literature and wants to give me a new book. He wants to tell me about the book. It smells of warmth and I can hear the sound of wood burning in the fire-place. It smells like family.

Older, I became a fan of conformism. Just like everyone else, I was growing up, making new friends, getting into trouble. I remember every inch of the playground in front of my house where all the kids were gathered and played after they did their homework. There was no point in telling us to go home or to stop playing. But there was one thing which would make us leave at once. It may surprise you that this magical thing was electricity. It was, you see, a very rare occasion when our windows would be lit by electricity and the TV sets were turned on. But when it happened, no matter what we were playing, we would leave everything, whistling with happiness, and run home to re-join “modern” civilization which we knew from television, and which seemed so far away. Now, when looking at photographs, I realise that I was running home not because I wanted to watch TV or to read books at the lamp-lit table; I was running home to see the happy faces of my folks, happy because they felt more productive and more alive when there was electricity. I still don’t know the reason for this happiness. Maybe it was that they weren’t afraid of my losing my eyesight while studying by the light of an electric lamp, rather then pouring over individual words by the poor light of the lantern.

I sit and write. I am trying to show you what we went through, recounting my bright memories of the past. Yet the more I think about the consequences of those hardships, the more I look at modern children, at young people who have electricity and running water – the better I understand that nothing happens without reason and that life is short. So forgive quickly, kiss slowly, love truly, laugh uncontrollably and never regret anything that made you smile. That’s about it. I’m trying to live so that one day (hopefully far away from now) I dare to die too.

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OUR HISTORY IS LONG AND STORMY, WE ARE SLOW TO DEVELOP, SLOW TO GROW, SLOW TO FORM OUR SMALL LOAF, PERHAPS BECAUSE WE WILL STILL LIVE LONGER, UNTIL WE ARE THOROUGHLY BAKED TO A TASTY FLUFFY LOAF WITH A HARD CRUST.
I live in a small European town. Although... I can’t say it’s one hundred percent European. I myself am a happy combination of wild Asia and globalised Europe.

Many of my friends are now talking about leaving the country, about illegal or legal migration to anywhere as long as we don’t have to stay here. So as not to be surrounded by filthy streets and bad roads, among ignorant officials and unjustifiable corruption, high prices and political instability. I think about leaving too at times and it disturbs me. I am writing this in my second to last term at university. I have four years of study behind me, four years in which I learned so little that was useful and necessary for my profession, but so much about living in Ukraine in general. When I got a self-confidence shattering “3” on my first exam, I didn’t know then that two years down the line I would understand that the reason was not my lack of knowledge but simply tribute to corruption, the lecturer’s desire to show me my place and establish a wonderful “financial relationship” for future terms. And I still didn’t take the hint and stayed ridiculous and honest.

I am twenty-one. I went to a kindergarten, three schools and one university. I am writing my own story. I like sweet things and listening to family history. I like going back in time and remembering. I can sum myself up in these few words. One thing is missing. I do not want to emigrate.

I recall the nineties well. These were the first ten years of my life. Fortunately, the long queues at night for bread, sugar and milk passed me by because at that time I was still dropping my long-suffering funny toys and spinning the magic top with sledges and Christmas trees inside, rocking on an old wooden horse that, when we were visiting my grandmother, my dad had taken from the dust-filled loft.

(Memories of my grandmother were still there in small pieces among her overcoats and dresses, and grandfather too in his carved stick, and other deceased members of our family in a variety of things – footprints, baskets, the bottom part of samovars, rags and books). In the mid-nineties, I go to my first class. I have quite a pretty little cherry-coloured dress and a funny rabbit-skin bag, the horrible brown school uniform also passed me by. At the time we collected chewing gum packets and became addicted to yoghurts or other foreign wonder-foods that rained down on us as in a year of plenty after years of shortages. I finish school in completely different times. I am in the last year of my studies and I am a revolutionary. I miss lecture after lecture at the university where the autumn preceding our peaceful uprising there was a tent-city. And then I move to cold, snowy Kiev and realise that my people are not dumb and that... And that I don’t want to emigrate.

And look. Today it’s already Christmas 2009. There are still two whole weeks left until our Greek Catholic Christmas. And I’m so happy you can’t put it into words.

I sit sometimes in the coffee shop and watch the pre-holiday rush, the market and the fabulous shop windows and think only about how we will get together for Christmas to sing carols, how we will be eating “kutya”* and dumplings stuffed with cabbage, how I will be baking Christmas pastries, how beautiful it is in our Carpathian Mountains when they echo to the sound of the trembita** and ancient monitone carols. And the carol singers don’t miss a single house, not a single family, and the tables break under the weight of food, and... I don’t want to emigrate because how could I let myself run away from absolute happiness? And we will be joined at the Christmas Eve table by hundreds of our ancestors who lived under the Lithuanian princes and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Poland and the USSR, who lived in times of a dependent and independent Kievan Rus, but who lived! We were, are, and will be enigmatic Slavs. We were, are, and will be Ukrainian-Russians who live at the crossroads of world cultures, at the divide of Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Most of us will continue to have an average wage of 200 dollars, will continue to dress in cheap Chinese or Turkish-made clothes transported all over the country in bales or in huge cardboard boxes from Odessa or Khmelnitsky, will continue to prefer chemical surrogates to traditional food. Or somehow on a low salary even manage to have a car and a house, to look good in cheap clothes, and while consuming fast food not to forget the habit of family eating. This country is good in that you never know what will happen down the road; that is its charm, believe me. Why do parachute jumping or dive for sharks, if you can just live here and experience magical sensations. I love adventures and that means I don’t need to emigrate because I was born for this country.

Our Ukrainian world is not perfect. It is just as changeable, just as submissive as dough left to turn sour in wooden troughs. We are both happy and unhappy. We is us. We love complaining – on the one hand we want to join the EU, on the other Russia. We are that very dough, we are just preparing to become bread. Our history is long and stormy, we are slow to develop, slow to grow, slow to form our small loaf, perhaps because we will still live longer, until we are thoroughly baked to a tasty fluffy loaf with a hard crust.

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Translator’s note
* Kutya: boiled wheat with honey and ground poppy seeds
** Trembita: a long bugle
УЛЯНА ЯВНА
СМТ. ЗАПИТІВ, УКРАЇНА

Я живу в маленькому європейському місті. Хоча...
Я не можу сказати, що є стовідсотковою європейкою.
В мені поєдналися гармонійно і дика Азія, і глобалізована Європа.

Так багато моїх товаришів зараз говорять про виїзд з України, про нелегальну чи легальну міграцію. Будь-куди, аби тільки не залишатися тут. Не залишатися серед брудних вулиць і поганих доріг, невихованих службовців і невиправданої корупції, високих цін і політичної нестабільності. Я теж іноді думаю про це, і ці думки мене бентежать. Пишу під час своєї університетської передостанньої сесії. Позаду залишилися чотири роки навчання: чотири роки, за які я так мало пізнала потрібного її практичного для своєї професії, але взагалі так багато про виживання в Україні загалом. Коли за перший екзамен отримала відмивку для моєї впевненості трьох бину, то я не знала, що через два роки зрозуміла, що причиною того було не моє незнання, а просто дана корупції, бажання викладача вказати мені на моє місце і встановити чудові фінансові відносини на подальші сесії.

Та я й далі не розуміла натяків, залишалась смішною й чесною.

Мені двадцять один. Я вчилася в дитсадку, трьох школах і одному університеті. Я пишу оповідання. Люблю солодке, з захопленням слухаю сімейні історії. Люблю повертатися подумки назад і згадувати. В ці кілька речень можна вкласти всю мене. Бравує лише одного. Я не хочу мігрувати.

Добре пам’ятаю дев’яні роки. Це було перше десятиліття моєго життя. На щастя, довгі нічні черги за хлібом, цукром та молоком пройшли повз мене, бо в ті часи я ще брязкала пострадянськими смішними іграшками й крутила чарівну дзігу з санями та ялинками всередині, гогойкала на дерев’яному старенькому коні, якого тато, коли ми бували в бабці, знімав із запорогощеного горища (там ще жила прораба) – дрібними частками серед своїх паль та сукенок, працід у своєму різьбленику ціпку та інші вмерлі члени нашої родини в розмаїтті речей: ступок, кошиків, глечиків, лахміт і книжок). Середина дев’янких, і ось я йду до першого класу. Маю гарячке вишневе плаття і фігуру кухонної сумки із зайчиком: страшна коричнева шкільна форма теж пройшла повз мене. В той час ми збирали фантами від жуйок і налягали на йогурти чи всіляки інші закордонні диво-харчі, які посилали на нас назив з рогу достатку після багатьох років дефіциту. Закінчу школу вже у зовсім інші часи. Останній рік навчання, а я вже революціонерка. Прогулюю уроці біля університету, де цілу осінь, що передувала нашему мирному повстанню, було розкладено наметове містечко. А далі вирушую в холодний сніговий Київ і усвідомлюю, що мій народ не німий і що … і що я не хочу мігрувати.

І ось... Нині вже католицьке Різдво 2009 року. До нашего ж греко-католицького свята залишилося ще неповних два тижні. І я настільки щаслива, що це відчуття не вкладеш ні в які слова. Сиджу іноді в кав’яній і дивлюсь на передсвяткову метушню, на яммарок та казкові вітрини, і думаю лише про те, як ми збережемося на Різдво колядувати, як будемо їсти кутою і вареники з капустою, як спечу різдвяне печиво, як гарно в наших Карпатах, коли вони страсяться від звуків тромбіти і стародавньої монотонної колядки.
І не міннатимуть колядники жодної хати, жодної родини, і столи ламатимуться від найкідів, і... Я не хочу мігрувати, бо як можна дозволити собі втекти від абсолютного щастя.
І за святвечірній стіл з нами сидять сотні наших предків, які жили під пануванням князівства Литовського й імперії Австро-Угорської, Польщі та СРСР, які жили за часів Русі, залежної й незалежної, які жили!.. Ми були, є і будемо загадковими слов'янами. Ми були, є і будемо українцями-русинами, які живуть на перехресті світових культур, на зламі католицизму й православ'я.
Більшість з нас й надалі має середню зарплату в двісті американських доларів, одягається в дешевий китайський чи турецький одяг, який пачками чи великими картатими сумками розвозять по всіх-усюдах від Одеси чи Хмельницька, більшість з нас віддає перевагу хімічним сурогатам, а не традиційній їжі. Але при низькій зарплаті якось вдається навіть мати машину й хату, в дешевому одязі виглядати гарно, а, споживаючи факт-фуд, не забувати про культ сімейного ідження. Ця країна дивна тим, що ніколи не знаєш, на що сподіватися далі, але в тому є свій шарм, повірте мені. Для чого стрибати з парашутом чи пірнати до акул, якщо ти можеш просто жити тут і мати ті ж самі чарівні відчуття. Я – любителька пригод, а це означає, що мені не треба нікуди мігрувати, бо я народилася для цієї країни.
Наці український світ не є досконалім. Він такий мінливий, він такий піддатливий, наче тісто, залишене підкисати у дерев'яних ночвах. Ми такі щасливі й водночас такі нещасні!.. Ми – це ми! Любимо нарікати, хочемо то до ЄС, то до Росії. Ми – це те саме тісто, яке лише готується стати хлібом. Наша історія довга й бурхлива, ми повільно розвиваємося, повільно ростемо, повільно формуємо свою хлібину, може тому, що будемо жити ще довго, аж до цілковитого спікання в смачний і пухкий хліб з твердою скоринкою.

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I have been sitting at my computer in my empty office for nearly three hours, tapping away at the keyboard and deleting every line almost as soon as I write it. The working day has long since ended, everyone has gone home, but I am still unwilling to abandon the hope of writing something for the essay competition. It has to be submitted today. The big square clock ticks away on the wall, its long hand resembling a sharp sword of Damocles hanging over my head. Deadlines were never my thing.

The problem is that I don’t feel especially close to the subject of the essay – the fall of the Berlin Wall. In 1989, when it fell, I was in year two and more interested in pulling girls’ pigtails than in politics. Nor had I ever been in Berlin. I realise that the essay is not meant to be about politics, but about how our lives have changed in the last twenty years. But has anything in fact changed?

When I was little, I prepared myself for travel: on one wall of my room there was a map of the world and on another a map of the USSR. Sitting in the reading room of the science library, I longingly studied atlases with pictures of exotic fauna. I studied English, I corresponded with a Canadian girl and dreamt that one day I would learn to play a theremin* sufficiently well to become a virtuoso and tour the whole world. And what do I have today? I never went anywhere apart from a few Soviet republics. I can’t afford to travel to Western Europe. I feast my eyes on ostriches and camels only in the zoo and on television, just as I did before. I use my English mainly to read the labels on drink bottles. And messages from overseas no longer find their way to my letter box: at any rate, all three parcels of American comics which I ordered this year from online shops disappeared without a trace – no doubt the Ukrainian customs officials found them much to their taste. And another thing – I am still dreaming of learning to play the theremin. Strictly speaking, my life has changed so little that if it were not for the essay competition, of which I learned from a reference sent to me by a friend, I could easily not have known that some wall had come down some place.

Jokes aside, it is interesting that the answer to the question of whether our life was bad under the Soviet Union is less obvious today than it was twenty years ago. It is true that our parents shudder when they remember the declining days of the Soviet empire: the long, long queues for sausage, the endless lies on television, the wall-to-wall sleaze in place of the cinema and literature. But the further the Soviet Union recedes into the past, the greater the sympathy with which it is viewed by post-Soviet society. The flood of information, life lived at a pace accelerated beyond all reason, having to survive in a capitalist society and other not very nice things make many turn their minds back to the lost country where everything was simple and comprehensible, where education and health services were free, where you could live on your old age pension and people were not ruined by the “housing issue”, because if you were willing to go to the necessary trouble, free accommodation would be provided for you by your government.

I don’t know why nobody seems to remember the empty shelves, the Gorbachev “prohibition”, the anonymous letters, KGB intrigues, the trips to the countryside to dig for potatoes and other delights provided by the Soviet system. But one thing can’t be denied – the USSR is back in fashion with a vengeance.

Translator’s note
* Theremin: an electronic musical instrument
HAVING TO SURVIVE IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY MAKES MANY TURN THEIR MINDS BACK TO THE LOST COUNTRY WHERE EVERYTHING WAS SIMPLE AND COMPREHENSIBLE, WHERE EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES WERE FREE, WHERE YOU COULD LIVE ON YOUR OLD AGE PENSION
By your government, would be provided for you trouble, free accommodation necessary. To go to the necessary, because if you were willing, by the "housing issue", and people were not ruined.
To want to go “Back to the USSR” is no longer shameful – after all, there were no all-devouring mortgages then, or soya meat substitutes, and it was still possible to drive down a street without getting stuck in a traffic jam. It can therefore come as no surprise that an internet poll to name the most influential intellectual in Russia included among the top three the journalist Leonid Parfenov, who has glorified Soviet reality like no-one else in recent years: it would be hard to find a more powerful nostalgia generator than his television series “Recent Times”.

Many are actually proud of the Soviet past. An item enjoying great popularity on Runet, the Russian internet, is a de-motivational picture showing an 8-bit game attachment called “Dandy” with the caption: “School kids won’t get it”. And it is true – today’s school children, who play Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Wii, are unlikely to get those who battled against Super Mario Bros on the screen of a tiny black-and-white television set. On the other hand, if you were to tell people born in the eighties that their childhood had been boring and sad, they would think you were mad.

I type in the address of the internet site “76_82” where grown-up and even already slightly balding people swap memories of their Soviet childhood: Murzilka, slide viewers, chewing gum inserts, poker-work kits, the Visiting Fairytales programme, pre-washed jeans, cupping, ghost stories told in pioneer camps after lights out and an apocryphal one about the football commentator, Vadim Sinyavsky, having sworn obscenely on air during a nationwide radio broadcast. All this stuff keeps being chewed over and is now in its fifth year, but so far, no one seems to have had enough.

The fact is of course that we have taken no time at all to learn how to live in an age of digital plenty. For instance, my niece, who started school this autumn, has flatly refused to read a Neznaika* story which she received as a present, but can make her way briskly through the clips posted on YouTube. For her, the internet, mobile phones and DVDs are as natural as soda water machines and red telephone boxes were for us in their day. I remember my own toys – a slide viewer, a kaleidoscope and a poker-work kit – and I sigh softly. Of course school kids will never get any of this.

By now it has become quite dark outside. The rain drums on the tin window sill. Thinking how twenty years ago the winter was much more like a winter, I shut down and get up from my computer. I haven’t really been able to think what I should write about in the essay. It may well be that I simply have nothing to say.

I leave my office and close the door. The lift doesn’t work. The security men have already turned off the lights and all you can hear is the sound of rain drops dripping loudly from the ceiling. The house was built in the eighties and hasn’t been repaired once, so it is hardly surprising that the roof has finally started leaking. I start to walk down into the darkness by the light of my iPod screen.

Having reached the fifth floor, I decide to press “play”, and the sound of Underwood flows from the earphones: “We long to go back to the Soviet Union, oh how we long to go back, yeah-yeah ... We long to go back to the Soviet Union – nuclear, terrible, huge, and crafty ... We long and we long, yeah! To fly in a MiG-25, to fly in a MiG 25.”

Between the fourth and third floors I notice that I have been nodding my head in time with the tune.

And between the second and first floors I am singing along.

* Neznaika: Soviet cartoon character

Translator’s note

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АРТЕМ ЗАЯЦ
ДНЕПРОПЕТЕРОВСК (УКРАИНА)

BACK IN THE USSR
(вместо эссе)

Уже почти три часа я сижу в пустом кабинете у монитора, настукивая на клавиатуру какие-то строчки и почти сразу стирая их. Рабочий день давно закончился, сотрудники разошлись по домам, а я все не оставляю надежду написать эссе для конкурса. Сегодня последний день, когда это можно сделать. На стене тикают большие квадратные часы, их длинная стрелка напоминает острый дамоклов меч, занесенный над моей головой. Никогда не любил дедлайны.

Проблема в том, что тема эссе – падение Берлинской стены – мне не особенно близка. В 89-м, когда это произошло, я учился во втором классе и больше интересовался дерганьем девчонок за косички, чем политикой. И в Берлине я никогда не был. Хотя понятно, что речь здесь идет не о политике, а об изменениях в нашей жизни, произошедших за последние 20 лет. Впрочем, поменялось ли что-то на самом деле?

В детстве я готовил себя к путешествиям: одну стену моей комнаты занимала карта мира, другую – карта СССР. В читальном зале научной библиотеки я восторженно рассматривал атласы с экзотической фауной. Я учил английский язык, переписывался с канадской девочкой и мечтал когда-нибудь научиться играть на терменвоксе, чтобы стать виртуозом и объехать с гастролями весь мир. Что я имею сегодня? Я так и не побывал ни где, кроме нескольких союзных республик: поезда в Западную Европу мне не по карману. Страусами и верблюдами по-прежнему любуюсь только в зоопарке и по телевизору. Английский язык использую в основном для чтения этикеток на напитках. И послания с той стороны океана больше не достигают моего почтового ящика: во всяком случае, все три посылки с американскими комиксами, что я заказал в этом году в онлайн-магазинах, бесследно пропали – наверное, комиксы понравились украинским таможенникам. И да – я все еще мечтаю научиться играть на терменвоксе. Строго говоря, моя жизнь изменилась столь незначительно, что если бы не конкурс эссе, ссылку на который мне прислал приятель, я бы, может, и не знал, что где-то там упала какая-то стена.

Но отбросим шутки. Любойтно, что ответ на вопрос «Плохо ли жилось при СССР?» сегодня менее очевиден, чем 20 лет назад. Да, наши родители вспоминают закат советской империи с содроганием: многокилометровые очереди за колбасой, бесконечная ложь по телевизору, сплошная «чернуха» вместо кино и литературы... Но чем больше делается дистанция между нами и Советским Союзом, тем с большей симпатией относится к нему постсоветское общество. Переизбыток информации, ускоренный до невозможности ритм жизни, вопросы выживания в капиталистическом обществе и прочие не очень приятные вещи заставляют многих вспоминать о потерянной стране, в которой все было просто и понятно, образование и медицина были бесплатными, на стариковскую пенсию можно было жить, а «квартирный вопрос» не портил людей, потому что при известном старании можно было получить от государства бесплатную жилищность.

Уж не знаю, почему при этом никто не вспоминает пустые полки в магазинах, горбачевский «сухой закон», анонимки, козни КГБ, поезда «на картошку» и прочие прелести советского строя. Но факт остается фактом: СССР сейчас в большой моде.
Я выхожу из кабинета и закрываю дверь. Лифт на этаже не работает. Свет в здании уже потушен охраной, лишь слышно, как где-то на лестнице гулко стучат падающие с потолка капли. Здание построено в 80-е, и с тех пор ни разу не ремонтировалось – неудивительно, что крыша наконец протекла. Посвятив себе экраном айпода, я начинаю спускаться в темноту.

На уровне шестого этажа мне приходит в голову нажать Play, и в наушниках оживает «Ундервуд»: «Очень хочется в Советский Союз, очень хочется, правда-правда... Очень хочется в Советский Союз – атомный, страшный, большой, коварный... Опять и опять очень хочется – ай! Улететь на МиГ-25... Улететь на МиГ-25...»

Между пятым и четвертым этажом я обнаруживаю, что кочаю головой в такт мелодии.

А между третьим и вторым начинаю подпевать.

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“I deeply appreciate the opportunity to judge such fine essays. Each and every participant deserves the highest respect and joyous congratulations for their fresh-voiced, forthright and captivating honesty about the challenges, hopes, successes and -- unfinished business! -- of their lives. The writers’ willingness to tell these special stories stands collectively and individually as a testament to the resilience, candour and wisdom of a very special group of people -- the Generation of ‘89.”

KEVIN KLOSE
Dean, Phillip Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland
President Emeritus, National Public Radio, Washington, DC