34 Years Later – Flashbacks from a Red Past

Supliment al revistei

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Revistă de cultură

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Before you browse through…

About one year ago, I tried to devise a way in which teaching English to my secondary school students could also be aimed at some of their key competences, which, I make this note for those who are not attuned with the current trends in education, should be included by teachers in their lesson planning. In essence, the pieces published herein are the results of an English assignment for the summer holiday of 2023, where 11th graders had to engage in a conversation with somebody in their social proximity, somebody who was old enough when the Iron Curtain fell to make their account of communism relevant.

Although students were provided with some topics (education, everyday items of necessity, homes, holidays, social relations), these were meant as mere conversation igniters, as we aimed to delve into the memories of our subjects in an attempt not just to document how things worked 35 years back, since there are countless sources reporting the factuality of the Romanian recent history, but rather to catch a glimpse into the most powerful memories of our subjects, the ones that have stayed embedded in our memories for all this time. Where we succeeded and where we did not is left for the reader to judge.

In various discussions about this social study, two questions have come up most often. Why should our interviews be published in English? They were, after all, conducted in Romanian. And why have them published at all?

Whether we like it or not, most of the significant science work is available in English primarily and where we by no means live under the illusion that our brush with sociology could be considered as such, our students nevertheless undertook this task in order to prepare for their future university assignments (they are all classmates currently in XII B in the "API" Technical College and most of them intend to obtain university degree in various fields). The idea was to give them a head start, if you will.

Ultimately, there must be some significance in how a political system is perceived by the individuals living in it. As I write this, I am under the impression of an INSCOOP survey published today, whose results show that an increasing number of Romanians (48% this year, compared to 45% ten years ago) feel that communism "was a good thing for Romania" and 46% believe that "living was better then". While I shall refrain from picking sides in this matter, it is clear that a simple judgement (the communism BAD, democracy GOOD dichotomy) fails to impress at this stage. With this in mind, the answers we obtained in our study gain in significance. While clearly most of our participants praise communism for its affordable housing, foodstuffs, social security in general and its social equity, the same responders denounce it for its shortcomings. Numerous practices went against basic human rights – insufficient food rations; violations against the freedom of expression and personal liberties; electricity, water and heating restrictions, travel and commute hardships, censorship. I tried to maintain the list above according to the recurrence of its items in the answers obtained.

Another approach to interpreting our results relates to a phenomenon called "rosy retrospection". Our memories are biased in that most of us tend to remember the past in a positive or rosy hue, thence our affectionate, nostalgic positioning in relation our past: our school years, our parents when they were young, childhood friendships, the dress code of our youth, the technology we used, so on. We keep photos and significant memorabilia: awards we received, pieces of clothing which marked our rites of passage, gifts we hold dear, all of which we then use to revisit our cherished memories from the past, all in effort to preserve time. In our study we note that this tendency is especially visible on individuals who were socially validated during communism. Some were professionally or financially successful – held managing positions, had a job which matched their expectations, or simply they were more actively occupied.

I would also like to thank the editor-in-chief of *Caiete Silvane*, Mr. Daniel Săuca, for his openness to the idea of publishing this work in

his prestigious magazine and offering our students the chance to receive an early validation of their efforts. It is vital for them to understand that they are capable of writing publishable works, that they can rely on their English skills in all their pursuits.

Dan Dinistrianu – teacher of English – Colegiul Tehnic „Alesandru Papiu Ilarian"

Andreea-Maria Adalinean - Life in a Communist Zalău

Andreea: What was everyday life like in communist Romania?

During the communist period, everyday life was full of shortages, abuses and marked by fear because anything you did could lead to a condemnation.

It was a life trampled with restrictions. The basic foods (meat, eggs, dairy, sugar, flour, fruits and others) would be brought only at certain times or on certain days and consequently, they ran out quickly; sometimes you had to stand in line since 4-5 in the morning. Bread was free only in Bucharest, in the province on the other hand, it was distributed on the basis of a card (one loaf for an adult, and half a loaf for a child, in a family). Over time, the rations decreased more and more.

For us, being children, the most difficult part was the TV programme, because it lasted only for a few hours, which were assigned to news - called *Telejurnal* and a film. In the evening, more often than not, we were left without electricity, because we were saving money as a state policy. Saving money meant we only had hot water on Saturdays and Sundays."

Andreea: How was the vote and the political part during the communist era?

Voting was not free, but you didn't have anyone to vote for because there was only one party – the Romanian Communist Party, with the initial rule of the communist leader Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, whose term ran until 1965, and then that of Nicolae Ceaușescu, until 1989 when communism collapsed in Romania and the Eastern Block.

Andreea: How was the police and the defence of the population?

I believe that the police were stricter in that period compared to today, and even the population was afraid of the police. You couldn't go in a group on the street because you were immediately stopped

by the police and ticketed. The security of the individual was much better safeguarded than today. Much less was stolen, the number of robberies or murders was significantly lower than the current one, and when something like that happened, very few knew about the existence of these crimes. The population was "protected" in this way, perpetuating the impression that the state was successful in taking care of its citizen. You were not allowed to speak ill of the regime, you could be dismissed at any time if you did, and of course punished appropriately.

Andreea: How was the school during the communist period?

School was strict, all the students wore uniforms, and on their chests a ”matricula” which stated what school we were registered in. We couldn't skip school. If the police saw us on the street, they would stop us and take us to the principal where the punishment was to be determined. If we didn't learn well, the teachers had the right to "listen to us" or "send us to the corner" or make us stand on our feet the whole time.

Andreea: What were the jobs at that time? What about housing?

I remember, at that time, all citizens who were able to work, had a guaranteed job, which depended, of course, on each person's training. If one did not have a job, they would be taken away from the street and employed in the *labor field*, so there wouldn`t be any unemployment. For example, at that time I was at school, but my parents worked at the factory, the famous factory in Zalău, where they were both employed at the foundry. At that time, no one who held a job lacked a home, the opportunity to get a home was almost guaranteed. Studios were allotted to singles, whereas young married people who later had children received a flat with 2 or 3 rooms.

Carina Breje – An Interview with My Mother

Communism, inspired by the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, is a social and economic system where all properties are publicly owned. The idea is to eliminate social inequalities by equally distributing resources and benefits to all members of society, based on their needs, not the work done. The ultimate goal of communism is to create a classless society, where there are no major differences in power or wealth. I`ll try to find out more about communism and how life was during those times from my mother.

Carina: How was everyday life during communism?

Life during the communist era was very hard, because resources were all limited. The food was given in rations, you stood in lines for hours to be able to buy the food based on the card. Every year we had to give the state grain, pork, veal, because quotas were set and had to be respected. But you also couldn't find clothes easily to buy, and that's why most of them made their clothes by hand at home from wool or woven in war from hemp and this cloth had to go through several stages until it reached the stage where it could be worked with and made into clothes. In that period, not even the rich could buy more food than the rest, because it was restricted and because each person could only buy what was due to him.

Carina: What kind of job did you have?

At that time, I was young, but my parents mostly dealt with agriculture, and my father worked in the forestry sector as a labourer to ensure our daily living, because agriculture was not a big source of income.

Carina: How were the social relations?

Social relations were more difficult than nowadays, because there were no mobiles and we met more at school or in the field while we were tending the animals, when our parents asked us and at that time, we met most of the children from the village we played, but we still helped round the farm.

Carina: How was access to information?

Access to information was more difficult, but there was a person whose role was to notify the villagers in respect to the various news that could be useful for us. He had a trumpet to make sure he was heard by everywhere in the village. And other information was transmitted from one house to the other.

Carina: How was the education system?

In the beginning, the school was only compulsory for 4 classes, but it was also depending on the possibility and the family. We were forced to wear pioneer uniforms that had degrees on the shoulder, and depending on how you studied you received different ranks, stars and insignia, each of which had a specific colour. In every classroom there was a picture with the portrait of the communist leader Nicolae Ceauşescu. There was no religion being taught in schools, on the contrary, you were encouraged not to go to church either.

Carina: How was health and the medical system?

People didn't really go to doctors, only when they were in a very serious condition, because they treated themselves more with baby remedies. They didn't even have means of transport to go to the doctor`s, and that's why they resorted to trying various methods heard from the elders. At that time, there was not even a very advanced medical system, having only one doctor in the whole commune.

Carina: What role did religion play in your life?

I went to church more often without the teachers at school knowing, because they told you not to go to church, and if they knew you went, they criticised you. There were quite a few people in the church, because that's what the leaders told them. The priest served in parallel at two churches in the commune, and the service was also on a two-week basis.

Carina: How were the conditions in cities vs villages?

In the city, people had access to services and hot water, electricity and television were restricted to only a few hours, compared to the village where the conditions were still restricted, but

you had a stove where you could warm up your water and instead of a light bulb, people had a lamp which ran on oil.

Carina: How were women seen in society?

Women did not have equal rights with men, they were made to stay at home with the children and do the household chores. In the country, women were not employed, only men were, because women were perceived as inferior to men. The families had a lot of children and the conditions were difficult, they had one or two rooms where they ate, lived, the bathroom was in the yard and this made living in the countryside difficult.

Carina: Any problems of communism?

In my opinion, it could be the prohibition of abortion, since the only cases in which abortion was allowed were rape and serious medical cases. Because of this problem, the families were numerous and the conditions were difficult. This also led to many cases of illegal abortion, and if the police found out, the women who attempted such illegal medical procedures risked imprisonment. There were cases when many women died and all this because Ceaușescu wanted more work force whilst country remained as poor as it could. Food was sent for export to improve the country's economy and getting Romania out of the crisis was the priority.

Carina: How were the relations during that period?

Relationships were not really encouraged, but above all the rulers wanted to double the population and so they encouraged the birth rate. Love meant many marriages, many children, a larger population which could then be indoctrinated in communism.

Tudor Butcovan – In Short

Tudor: So, tell me a little about the communist period in Romania.

Romania was under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu, who was a powerful and authoritarian leader. Life was quite different compared to what you enjoy today. We had a planned economy, which meant the government controlled most aspects of our lives. There was limited access to goods, and shortages were quite common. You had to stand in long lines just to buy basic necessities like bread.

Tudor: So how did people get the things they needed in case of shortages?

Well, people often traded and bartered to get what they needed, and we relied heavily on our communities for support. Neighbours helped each other out, and there was a sense of solidarity among the people.

Tudor: Was the school system better back then?

Education was highly valued in communist Romania. School was mandatory, and we had access to free healthcare.

Tudor: What were the bad parts about living back in the day?

All sorts of restrictions on our personal freedom were in place. You weren't able to leave the country easily. The government controlled the media, and there was limited freedom of speech. Political dissent was not tolerated, and there were severe consequences for those who spoke out against the regime. The lack of personal freedoms and the constant surveillance by the state could be oppressive. And there was always a sense of uncertainty about the future.

Tudor: Is there anything you miss?

One thing I do miss about those days is the strong sense of community. We were all in it together, and we looked out for one another. Family was of utmost importance, and we spent a lot of time with our loved ones because there weren't as many distractions as there are today.

Rus Cătălina – We Wore Large Coats

My mother was born in 1974, so she spent her first 15 years of life in a communist state. Although all they heard on the radio about this communist regime were good and promising things, she, her parents and siblings went through tough times. I asked her a few questions in our home, which is equipped with all the popular amenities, such as running water and electricity, access to diverse food and unlimited sources of information, all things to which their access was restricted to back then.

Cătălina: I know you were young, so I want you to tell me about school and the educational system.

I remember that we used to work in the first weeks of school. Every year in autumn we worked alongside our teachers. I don't remember exactly what uniforms we wore, but our "pioneer`s tie" was very important. You could easily lose it if someone heard you speaking badly about the system and the regime. You couldn't trust anyone because anyone could be an "informant", even your best friend and their family. Nicolae Ceauşescu was an atheist and decided to oust church as a public service as much as possible. I remember that one day my sister was humiliated at school because her teacher found out that she had been to church. They went as far as to take away her ”pioneer`s tie”.

Cătălina: Tell us a personal story about that time.

It was winter and even then, we were working the fields. I remember that my sister and I had some long coats, which were also very baggy for us because we got them from some girls from the neighbourhood. Our parents hid carrots in the wide and what were now torn and enlarged pockets of our coats. We looked funny with our goofy full pockets and you could easily see that something was off, so they sent us home on another road, through the forest.

Cătălina: Tell us about food and the quality of life.

I don't know exactly what we used to eat, but we were doing well compared to people who didn't have animals because we had buffaloes, so we had fresh milk to drink and sell. Even if we had sold

it, I don't know what we could have done with the money considering that the products were offered to us only on those punch-cards. I remember that my mother used to bake bread in the oven. I actually don't know if my family managed to buy flour secretly or if they took their own wheat to the mill, all I know is that when I was eating that soft and fluffy bread I`d forget about all the worries. Those were some hard times; it was very frustrating to work and only get a small percentage of what you truly deserved. So, we stole as much as we could and told ourselves that we had no choice.

Cătălina: How did the fall of communism affect you?

In '89 I was only 15, a teenage girl who was finally able to read new books, to listen to uncensored news on the radio, to see something different on the tele rather than the Russian films that had been broadcast until then. I got access to information that helped me develop but which also frustrated me. I grew up and realised how bad it is to be oppressed, how important it is to express your opinion, how irreplaceable it had proved.

Cătălina: Tell me about the good parts.

I don't remember ever complaining during that time, but after I grew up, I started to hate people who said that "Communism was good, that they gave you a job and a flat to live in. What else could you ask for?" I do believe in equality, but that was not what Romanian communism was promoting. I'm only glad that the debts that the country had were paid, and that's about it.

Culciar Antonio – Between Teaching and Queuing for Bread

Antonio: Maria, please provide a brief overview of your background and experiences during the communist period in Romania.

I was born and raised in Cehu Silvaniei, Romania. I lived through the entire period of communist rule, from the late 1940s to the revolution in 1989. During that time, I worked as a teacher in a local school.

Antonio: What was a typical day like for you during the communist era?

A typical day would start early. I'd prepare for work and join the queues at the store to buy groceries. The state-controlled economy meant that some items often came in short supply. After work, there were community gatherings or political meetings, which we were encouraged to attend.

Antonio: What was your occupation or profession during the communist period?

I worked as an elementary school teacher. It was a respected profession, and the curriculum was heavily influenced by the state ideology.

Antonio: Where did you live during the communist era? Can you describe your living conditions?

I lived in a small apartment in a residential block in Cehu Silvaniei. The living conditions were modest, and we shared common spaces with other families. Housing was allocated by the government, and there was limited choice in where one could live.

Antonio: What was the educational system like during the communist era? Did you attend school or pursue higher education during that time?

The educational system was highly centralised and focused on promoting communist ideology. I attended a state-run school, and later a university. The curriculum was heavily influenced by the government's political agenda.

Antonio: What were some of the social activities or gatherings you participated in during the communist period?

We had community events, like parades on national holidays. There were also local clubs for various interests, although they were often closely monitored by authorities.

Antonio: How did people acquire basic goods like food, clothing, and other necessary commodities during that time?

Goods were distributed through state-run stores. There were often shortages, and we had to wait in long lines. Rationing was common for certain items, especially during difficult economic times.

Antonio: How did the political climate affect your everyday life and decisions?

Politics permeated every aspect of life. There was a constant awareness of the government's influence. It was important to be cautious about expressing dissenting opinions.

Antonio: Can you talk about the level of freedom of expression and personal liberties you experienced during the communist period?

Freedom of expression was restricted. Criticism of the government or its policies was not tolerated. People were cautious about what they said, even when in private conversations.

Antonio: In what ways do you think life has changed in Romania since the end of the communist period?

There have been significant improvements in many aspects of life. We have more freedom, economic opportunities, and access to goods and services. However, the transition was not without challenges.

Antonio: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences during the communist period in Romania?

It was a challenging time, but we also found ways to support each other and find joy in simple things. The resilience of the Romanian people is something I'll always admire.

Andrei Damșa – Giving Blood for New Year`s

The Communist era in Romania is certainly an interesting part of history in this great country. Many have documented all the important events that deserve recognition and coverage, so I decided to take a different approach. I am going to interview someone who lived through those times and try to get an insight in the life of an ordinary citizen during the late stages of communist Romania. That someone is my own father, who was 21 when the revolution took place and should be able to provide us with some interesting information.

Andrei: Hello. How are you today? I am going to interview you about your time spent in the communist regime.

Hi. I'm pretty tired, so keep it short, buddy.

Andrei: How would you have fun in your free time back then?

We would go to the disco every Saturday night because that's the only day of the week that it was held, we would go to the surrounding villages on foot to dance in the disco and sometimes I would use the bike, but one time it got stolen. We had our home-made wine that we used to take with us on the road and by the time we got to the disco the wine would usually be gone. If we were lucky, we would get a couple of beers at the counter. The disco used to end at 3 in the morning. After that, we went back home.

Andrei: Knowing you are a factory worker, was work easier back then?

Not in the slightest. I started working when I was 17, every day of the week. I was even working on holidays, no exceptions, not even for New Year's Eve. One year I was on the night shift on New Year's Eve and I really didn't want to go. I donated blood that day because they would give me a day off and it worked. I stayed home.

Andrei: How did you visit the family in the countryside when you were working in the city?

I would go by train to Jibou. The trains were always full of people, a lot of times I would cling myself on the outside of the rail wagon because there was no space for me inside the train. Once I

reached Jibou I needed to find buses that went to Zalău and it was the same story all over again. You were lucky if you got a spot inside the bus. The quality of the trains and buses were pretty poor, it wasn't a pleasant experience to ride in one of them.

Andrei: What kind of food were you eating back then?

We were eating whatever grew in the garden, and we would slaughter pigs for their meat in our own backyard. My father used to bring me cherries and bananas from Cluj, but that happened once a year. It was bad in those times because food was heavily rationed. We had cards that we used to get oil, sugar, bread in small portions.

Andrei: What was being in the army like back then?

I worked for three months in a corn field, I didn't get the chance so much as to touch a gun because my parents were part of a banned religious group and that meant that I had to work a lot during my time in the army. I was moved around the country for work.

Andrei: Were you scared to utter your personal opinions out loud in public?

There was always a secret service agent nearby, so you had to be careful with what you spoke in front of other people. Once I was waiting in line at the cinema and a guy cut off the line and got tickets in front of anyone else. A man from the front of the line started complaining, so the guy grabbed him by the arm and they went for a walk. I think he was taken to the police station and he was beaten for speaking his mind out.

Andrei: And the last question: do you think it was better back then?

Personally, I don't think so. As a citizen you had a couple of advantages during the communist regime, but overall, the quality of life is way better in the present.

David Holhoş – A Short Talk with My Dad

David: Dad, I`ve been reading about Romanian history and I came across a lot of information about the communist period. What was it like living in that time?

Ah, the communist period in Romania, that`s quite a chapter in our history. Well, it was a complex and challenging time, to say the least. It lasted for more than 40 years, from the end of World War II until the fall of Ceauşescu in 1989.

David: It must have been quite different from our lives today. What were the major changes and challenges?

Oh, it was very different. The government controlled almost everything: the media, the economy, and even people`s thoughts and actions. The Communist Party, led by Nicolae Ceauşescu, held an iron grip on power. There was limited freedom of speech, and any opposition was severely suppressed. People were afraid to speak their minds openly.

David: That sounds really oppressive. How did it affect daily life?

Well, for one, the economy was centralised, and shortages of basic goods were common. You had to wait in long lines just to buy bread or meat. Sometimes, we had to rely on the black market to get what we needed. Jobs were often assigned by the government, and there wasn`t much room for career choices. And speaking of travel, it was heavily restricted. Going abroad was nearly impossible unless you were a party member or unless you had special connections.

David: That sounds incredibly tough. Were there any positive aspects during that time?

Surprisingly, yes. Education was highly emphasised, and the country achieved near-universal literacy. Healthcare was accessible to most people, and there was a sense of security. Also, cultural activities were promoted, and Romania saw serious advancements in the arts, literature, and sports.

David: But overall, it seems like it was a challenging period for our country.

Absolutely. The lack of freedom and the constant surveillance made it difficult for people to express themselves or live their lives as they wished. The secret police, the Securitate, had a pervasive presence, and many lives were affected by it. It was a time of both hardship and resilience.

David: I can`t imagine what it must have been like to live through that. Thanks for sharing, Dad. It helps me better understand our country`s history.

Dayana Marian – Mixed Feelings

Photo: Party leaders, peasants and pioneers join forces towards the overachievement of production plans set for the collective farming. (Courtesy of Mr. Mirel Matyas)

Dayana: Hello! I will ask you some questions regarding the communist period in Romania. But first, please introduce yourself.

Hello! My name is Marian Ioan Dorin, I am 55 years old, I live in the village of Brebi and I was 21 years old when communism ended.

Dayana: Wow, you caught a pretty long period of Communism. That means you have a lot to say. To begin with, I would like to ask you what it was like growing up during the communist regime.

As a child I did not fully feel the effects of communism due to my parents, who tried to protect me and my sister from shortcomings, but growing up I began to see and understand the problems caused by communism.

Dayana: What was it like to be a student during the communist period?

As students, life was harder compared to today's school because of the severity of the teachers but also because of the many school activities. Besides the lessons at school, we were compelled to collect various things such as: paper, iron and berries. Also, as early as the 5th grade, all students were required to do agricultural practices. They took us along to pick apples, corn, potatoes.

Dayana: **What would be the most unpleasant experience in your student life?**

I was a student in the 7th grade, and after watching a slide film with images from the holy land at the Baptist Church in Brebi on Monday, those who participated were taken out to the square and pulled by the hair and ears, mocked because of religion. I remember that this incident was also talked about on the radio station *Europa Liberă*.

Dayana: So, at that time you didn't have the right to religion or free speech?

No, they tried to keep us as far away from the church as possible, so every Sunday during church sermon we had to participate in *pioneering activities*.

Dayana: In addition to these sufferings caused by communism do you think that the social life as a young person was better then or is it better today?

I think that social life is better nowadays because now we are freer, we have rights to free speech and getting around is much easier.

Dayana: What is a fond memory of your childhood under communism?

An experience I remember with pleasure is a school trip where we toured the country and also visited Bulgaria. We visited many tourist spots such as: Vidraru Dam, Curtea de Argeş, the Transfăgărăşşn and beautiful cities in Bulgaria. As a child who was raised during communism, we were indoctrinated with limited thinking, but this trip helped me open my eyes properly, broaden my horizons and helped me to see the differences between village and city life. A difference between life in the village and that in the city was the food, in the country the food was more plentiful, whereas in the city the living conditions were much better, people lived better and had more opportunities. To get by in the country, you had to work the land and raise animals.

Dayana: What was your first job?

An important part of my life connects me to this topic. My first job was at the *Zalău Iron and Steel Industrial Fittings Company* (IAIFO Zalău or *Armătura*, as the locals called it). I worked in this company for 36 years, from the age of 18 until the closing down of the factory. The working conditions were more difficult than today, we didn't have days off, not even on holidays labour was more physical and the bosses were stricter.

Dayana: What do you think about the fact that the factory where you worked was closed and a mall opened in its place?

I believe that the fittings factory was very important for the economy of the county and the country because we exported valves and fittings to more than 25 countries. The factory provided many jobs to the county, about 20% of the town's population worked at the factory. So Zalău lost an important production company and became a city of consumption.

Dayana: What was the food like during the communist period?

Food was rationed, given on card, and although it was less, it was much healthier than it is today. In the country we allowed ourselves to eat meat more often, while those in the city ate less, namely that which they received on their rations.

Dayana: Do you think compulsory military service for boys was a good thing?

Yes, the army was the place of growing mature and training for the boys, mental and physical hardening by going through many experiences and putting them face to face with life.

Dayana: Could you tell me one thing you liked about the communist period and one thing you hated most?

One thing I liked about the communist period was that people were more content, they really appreciated what they had and they were happier than today. The thing I hated the most was politics, the lack of freedom and the fact that we were forced to do what we didn't want to do.

Dayana: One last question: do you know any jokes about communism?

At communal farming company the granny steals by the apron, peasants steal by cart and gentlemen steal by car, who knows who went too far?

Denisa Resteu – Now and Then

Denisa: Hi dad! How was your day?

Hello! Pretty tiring because of work. How about yours?

Denisa: Mine was pretty chill, nothing interesting happened. Could you help me with something please?

Of course. What do you need help with?

Denisa: My English assignment. I have to ask you a few questions about life during communism. Do you believe life was better back then?

I do not believe life was better, but it still had its benefits as well as its disadvantages.

Denisa: What do you believe were the benefits?

People had a guaranteed job and a place where to live. That I would say that was a benefit. Of course, this opinion can change depending on who you're asking. There are some people who might see more benefits to communism than I do.

Denisa: And what were the disadvantages?

People did not have the right to express their personal opinion and beliefs about the people who were in charge of the political field. The food was rationed, people only having limited access to essential aliments such as bread, oil, sugar, flour and rice. Children at school were abused by teachers on a daily basis, something that was still normalised some years after the end of communism and the assassination of Nicolae Ceauşescu.

Denisa: Do you believe you are living a better life than your parents did in those days?

Yes, I do believe this. You certainly cannot compare the kind of life you have, with the one kids had back in the day. In some aspects you should consider yourself lucky.

Denisa: These were all my questions. Thanks for helping me, dad!

Anytime, dear!

Erik Laszlo – An Unfulfilled Dream

Erik: Hello dad. Do you have time to answer some questions for an interview?

Sure son, anything for you.

Erik: First of all, how old are you?

I am 49 years of age.

Erik: You are 49 years old. That means when you were young, you used to live in the communist era of Romania, right?

Yes, that's right, but that was a looooong time ago.

Erik: May I ask you for some words on this topic? The communist era and how people used to live their lives back then.

Why not, I guess this will only bring back some memories. The first thing I want to say is that I don't miss those times because I was a very rough time to live in, mainly because of corruption and starvation.

Erik: **Those are some really harsh things to hear. How did you get past them? How did you manage to live your childhood?**

Well, there was really nothing you could do about it, you just had to try to look past those things and try to live a normal life. Before I turned 18, I just lived off of my parents, so I wasn't affected economically, but I had to respect their words and do whatever they asked me to. The main tasks that I was given were feeding animals and taking care of them, buying groceries, which was hard because back then we used to have rations, which was the main cause of starvation and people being skinny, cleaning the house and doing my homework. At school they used to take us on field working, which wasn't that bad, but it was extremely tiring. After I turned 18, I won the lottery and wanted to buy myself a car, but couldn't, because back then it didn't matter if you had the money, what mattered was how early you had requested to buy a car. The sooner you asked for it, the higher your chances were to get one. After that I got a job as a firefighter, but a few years later I was fired by my boss because I didn't want to get promoted to a higher desk working position, which would have enabled me to misappropriate money

from the state and give it to my boss. My refusal led to my dismissal.

Erik: Wow, those are some really interesting things to hear. I never thought that my dad could have gone through such harsh times. I'm glad that I don't have to live that nightmare. I suppose it's enough for now, thank you very much, you helped a lot.

No problem, son. I'm glad to help you any time you need. Come back if you have more questions for me.

Florina Sabo – Standard-Life All Around

Florina: Hello, mom! Thank you for helping me with this project. Please, tell me what age did you have when the revolution had gone?

Hello! You're welcome! I was 18 years old at that time. Life was not easy at all for my generation.

Florina: How was the communist era for you?

It was a period with a lot of lacks and restrictions.

Florina: Can you give me some examples?

For example, during communism we only had access to warm water 2 or 3 times per week. Even cold water was restricted. Electricity was cut systematically for hours at a time and often we had to do our homework under the lamp`s light or that provided by a candle.

Florina: To my knowledge, in that era there were no electric stoves. How did you manage to cook the food?

Yes, you're right! At that time there were only gas cookers that were functioning on gas tanks. When the gas tank was empty, we had to wait in an endless queue to refill it."

Florina: At that time there were no supermarkets, only small shops for basic food. Did you have to wait in a queue for food as you did for refilling gas bottles?

Yes, we had to. For example, there were bakeries if you wanted to buy some bread. The maximum portion for a person was regarded as a half of bread for each day. As my family had 3 members, I could buy a bread and a half per day. Oh, I almost forgot. There were dairy shops too. The portion was not limited but you rarely could find some cheese or milk. People with toddlers at home were assembling into the queue as early as 5 AM and it wasn`t always that they got back home with milk for their kids. At the butchers` it was the same situation. Rarely were we given the opportunity to eat some salami because there was only baloney to buy. Those days when we did find salami at the butchers` were outright feasts to us.

Florina: Could you find things imported from other countries in the shops?

No! All the products from any shop out there were made in Romania. Even the most expensive things that you could find were Romanian products. For example, there were some sneakers that everyone was dreaming of, but rarely could you find some pairs of these. I have to mention that people had the money to achieve the things they wanted, but there was no way to achieve it. Only the people with connections could buy some rare products.

Florina: How was the beginning of the school for you?

For example, in Zalău there was a big shop called *Guliver*, where kids and their parents would go to buy school supplies. Consequently, all the children had similar backpacks, similar pen cases, and notebooks.

Florina: How was the school outfit in that time?

The uniform was one of a kind in the whole country. All the schools had the same uniform. Boys had to wear a shirt, jacket, and in the middle school it was mandatory to wear the pioneer`s tie, however in high school it wasn`t. They had to have short hair. For girls things were a little bit more complicated. In the middle school we had to wear sundress and, as same as the boys, we had to wear the pioneer`s tie. In high school the colour of the sundress was changed. If a girl had long hair, she had to wear it in a ponytail and to wear a headband and if she had short hair, she had to wear only the headband. Every day at the entrance of the school these things were checked by the responsible student for that day. Our nails had to be clean and short, headband needed to be in place, the student`s license on us and in high school we had to wear a registration number that was unique for each student. On it was written the high school where we were studying.

Florina: I heard that at the beginning of the school year students older than fifth grade had to do an agricultural practice. Tell me about that!

It was not easy but I liked it because it was fun. We were enjoying the bus ride. We would play different kind of games until

we arrived at the destination, for example the wireless phone or pheasant. We also liked to sing on the bus. The destination was not the same for all classes. Some of them were picking apples or grapes while others were picking corn. We were taking our job seriously but sometimes we also fought with apples or ate some grapes that we picked (that's why picking grapes or apples were my favourites, we were eating a lot of fruit).

Florina: I know that men who were fit and who didn't suffer from serious illnesses, when they had turned 18, they had to go to the army. I know this is dad's case.

Yes, it is. Men had normally to serve the army for a year and a half, but university graduates had to do only half of it. The training period took 3 months to complete and men were assigned to areas as diverse as police, firefighting, marine, aviation. They had to wake up at 6 a.m. and to make their beds, afterwards they had to do the morning workouts. Then there was breakfast. For each day there was a man who had to assist the cook with things like peeling, chopping of the vegetables and another one that had to bus and clean the dishes. After that, they had to do the actual training. Each afternoon every single soldier had to clean the army building and to clean their uniform, there weren`t any housekeepers present. At 10 PM all of them had to go to sleep. The army building was guarded by the soldiers who had guns of them. From time to time, they went to the range where they had to shoot at targets.

Florina: Do you like the life conditions nowadays more than back then?

Of course, I prefer the nowadays conditions but I can surely tell you that in the communism era there was no person who didn't have a job. In our era you can see a lot of unemployed people. Not to mention restrictions. Those days if you did something illegal you would go to jail. Life was safer.

Maura Ghile – Homework during Blackouts for a Brighter Future

Maura: Hello everyone, my name is Maura and today I'm here with my mom to talk about life during communism. Mom, can you tell me about school and the educational system back then?

The educational system was very well organised. Illiteracy was not common among us. In classes we had pictures of Ceauşescu and his wife that we were forced to praise daily. We all had the same uniform; girls were forced to wear a cord and the boys had to wear a tie. No one was disrespectful towards teachers because they were very strict. After the compulsory school years, only those who had money could go to college, the rest of us stayed at home and got to practice a job because school prepared you to be able to work in a one field or another.

Maura: And what about the good parts, were there any?

Yes, the parts that can be considered good in communism are those where Romania managed to pay all its international debts, all the people had a job which allowed for them to earn a living, as well as Romania's autonomy, which was in full bloom. Everything the citizens used was produced in the country.

Maura: That was good, but how was the quality of life?

The quality of life was very bad. The money earned by the families was little, they could not sustain themselves properly from it. Food was scarce, the poor barely made it from day to day. In general, people helped each other, exchanged things and services with one another. For example, those who worked at the bread factory offered bread to those who worked at the milk factory. There was a lot of bartering. Field work was very hard and we were all compelled to practice it. Each family was made to give a part of the crops of the land it owned to the state.

Maura: Did you have any electricity issues?

Electricity and heat were a very big problem in society. Many times, we ended up learning by candlelight and in the winter we had

to go to bed all dressed to avoid getting a cold. We used to have wood-burning stoves, so that we wouldn't have to endure the cold of winter months.

Maura: What do you think is the most significant difference between life in communism and life in a capitalist society?

I believe that the biggest difference between communism and capitalism is freedom. The voice of the people must always be heard, the right to vote and freedom of expression are some of the most important human rights. Censorship in communism takes over people and they live in constant fear. Only very strong people are capable of carrying out a revolution. In communism you have to be as you are required to be, all your rights are violated. The people must always be the ones who make the decisions in a country. Each person must be able to choose for himself what he wants to become in life, in which field to practice, therefore, I consider that the most important difference between communism and capitalism is the right to make our own choices in life, and if these are bad choices, then we should accept it and bear the consequences of our acts.

Ghiurca Raul – Rations for Some

Photo: Workers on parade in Zalău on a 23 August
(Courtesy of Mr. Mirel Matyas)

Raul: Hello, this is an interview about the communist period in Romania, can we start? How were the public means of transport?

Public transportation was horrible. Workers went to work hanging on to the handles of trams or on the stairs of buses. And there was a lot of sweaty people and it smelled bad.

Raul: How was it with hot water and heat from the houses?

In the 80s, electricity, hot water and heat were scanty. "Put on an extra sweater" – was the exhortation attributed to Nicolae Ceaușescu. People waited for hours for the hot water and each had to wait for their turn to take a bath.

Raul: How was it with electricity and gas?

The townspeople adapted to the lack of electricity: they bought kerosene lamps, then wicks and glass chimneys to keep them operational. And the gas on the stove was off or had no pressure. The queues at the gas cylinders were impressive. It was dark both on the street and in our houses.

Raul: What programmes were there on TV?

The black and white TV was full of static noise after 10 p.m. The National TV station started to broadcast at 7:50 PM, with ten minutes

of cartoons, followed by an hour-long of *Telejurnal*, which presented the activities of the comrades and Comrade Ceauşescu.

Raul: How was food distributed?

In 1981 food rationing began - milk, bread, meat, sugar and others. There was talk of a *rational diet*. Over time, the rations decreased more and more. Even on the menu, food was hard to come by, after hours of standing in line. Also, around that time the electricity cuts began, for the sake of economy.

Raul: What was the secret police?

Basically, if someone simply complained about his job to a co-worker who happened to be an informant, he could find himself with the secret police knocking on his door in the middle of the night to take him. Then he`d come back a week later, unable to tell anyone where he was or what had happened to him. So, freedom of expression and freedom of thought did not exist, people were either for the regime or against it. And if they were against it, they had to be re-educated to be a full member of the communist society where all were equal; with some, of course, being more equal than others.

Raul: Were there events were organised on certain days?

Before any communist event, when winter came or when Nicolae Ceauşescu travelled the country, the employees did patriotic, unpaid work. They shovelled the snow from the streets, swept the streets or whitewashed the roadside tree trunks. Equally *voluntary* went things for the Mayday and 23 August events. High school students were taken to farming practice, sorting potatoes, or to construction sites.

Raul: What were schools like back then?

For students from the time of the communist regime, school meant not only classes, but also

workshops, patriotic work, membership in organizations such as the Pioneers or the Communist Youth Union. Uniforms were mandatory and manuals were unique.

Raul: What can you tell us about free time, what was it like back then?

Adults were always divided between work, standing in lines for food and taking care of the house. The comrades wanted the free time people had left between work and sleep to be used for voluntary work, socialist education and friendly rallies.

Raul: What were the salaries like at that time?

Construction workers earned the best. The monthly net salary was close to 3,600 lei. The lowest salaries were in the field of public catering, tourism and restaurants, where the average wage was 1,500 lei per month. The official salary of Nicolae Ceauşescu was 18,000 lei.

Ianchiş Antonia Ioana – Mother`s Childhood

Antonia: In this dialogue, my mother tells us about her childhood in the era of communism. Hello mom, can you tell us your name and where did you grow up?

Hello sweetheart, my name is Ianchiş Ana and I grew up in Balan, Harghita county.

Antonia: Can you tell us something about your life during the communist period? How old were you then?

Sure, I was six years old when the communism era ended.

Antonia: How were those years for you? If you still remember something.

Of course, I remember. For us it was a normal life, we used to go out in front of our building to play. There were many children and we stayed from morning to evening. It was a much safer environment for children, our parents were not scared that something might happen as it is nowadays. After 10 pm we were not allowed to go out. And we had rations for food.

Antonia: Have you ever stood in line for a certain product?

Yes! we were only entitled to half a loaf of bread for two people, we had a special card with family members to be able to buy bread. Many products were only given to the wealthiest of people.

Antonia: What was the most wanted product at that time?

Gas cylinders. We used to stand in line for 3 days to get one. Your grandparents and I used to do it in turns.

Antonia: Tell us about your first years at school.

I remember that in my first year of school I had my first orange, I was so happy that I cried. As for school… there was more discipline, the teachers were allowed to hit us with a wooden ruler over our fingers. I was a pioneer. We had coloured ties for our grades. I had a yellow tie. That meant I was head of detachment.

Antonia: Do you think you could have a different life if it wasn't for that period?

Yes!

Antonia: Why do you think that?

In the era of communism everything was censored, we were deprived of information and there was a lot of corruption. Because I did not have any connections I could not go to university. For example, the only cartoons that we had were named *Mihaela*. Other than that, we had numerous programmes starring *Tovarăşul Ceauşescu*.

Antonia: How do you remember the day of the Revolution?

People were full of joy, but they didn't know how it would turn out. I remember a Hungarian woman said to my mom these words in Romanian: "Atâta aur o să avem acum, că şi flecuri la pantofi o să avem din aur" (Now we`ll have so much gold, that we`ll wear it on our toecaps). I remember everyone threw away Ceauşescu's picture.

Antonia: And after that day?

Things did not change exactly at that moment, it took a while, we still have certain after-effects from that time. After some time, they broke the borders and I remember trucks from Germany were coming with aids and the stores had more products. The lines and other restrictions disappeared.

Antonia: Would you go back to those times?

Sometimes I think about it, but I don't know if I could get used to it again.

Bianca Igna – Clubhouse Members Only

I was interested in knowing more about communism and decided to talk to my father about communism from his point of view. He was born in 1962, which means that he lived through the communist period during several stages of his life. I think that I bought something from the store every day when I was little. How did it feel seeing the sweets and not being able to have them? Or what were they playing with back then? After school, what job they could have? Did they have options? I had so many questions that I didn`t hesitate to ask my father.

Bianca: What was it like to spend your childhood in communism?

It was, I would say, much healthier than now. I was a small boy, I didn`t know much, but I was happy with the little I received. Together with my brothers, I walked 5 km every morning to school all gussied up with a pioneer`s tie. Be it summer, be it winter, we walked. In the winter, so that we could also have fun, we would put out backpack down and let it drag through the snow.

Bianca: How long would you play after school?

What do you mean play? I used to come from school and go straight to the cowshed. We had to take care of them, milk them and in the evening, I did my homework. In addition, there was no light, I was doing my homework by the lamp. There was a something scheduled on the TV, but only during certain hours. The biggest problem, which I found unbearable, was the blackout at 10 PM. You were not allowed to leave the house later than 10. If you were outside, the police picked you up and you wouldn`t make it to your destination.

Bianca: What did you do after school?

I ended up studying at the current CNS College, then it was called the *Math-Physics*, I went to the mechanical school, in the evening, because I had already been working at foundry for some time, casting metal. We didn`t spend our holidays with our family. I happened to work on Christmas Day and with my work mates we

went carolling by the fittings among the valves. When Ceaușescu came to town, we would paint all the gates, even the grass.

Bianca: Tell me a funny story, one that you remember with joy.

At the foundry one worked on three shifts and I happened to be the third shift. I was tired, I didn`t feel like working and I fell asleep on the lathe. I wake up and when I`m about to start working, I notice I`m all covered in grease. My colleagues had pulled a prank on me. The leadership were looking to turn workers into members of the party`s youth organisation and after that, to sign you into the party. If you joined the party, you could advance in your career. I wanted to go to a foreman`s school. I accepted the deal, but I never saw the membership card again. The revolution followed shortly.

Maxim Adelin – We Had to Steal from Our Own Pockets

Adelin: I`m going to ask you a series of questions to find out certain things, do you agree?

Ask away, I`ll answer if necessary.

Adelin: What is your name?

I`m your grandfather, Petru.

Adelin: How old are you?

Well, I was born in 1948, so 75 years old.

Adelin: Firstly, I would be curious as to how was your life during communism.

Life was quite difficult... there wasn`t much food, there was little money. People worked day in and day out just to get the money to buy something to eat.

Adelin: What did you eat at that time?

We ate what we had, butchered a pig or a cow and managed somehow. That was our advantage over the townspeople that we didn`t have to pay for whatever we ate because we produced food. Nevertheless, we had to put it out of sight, so we wouldn`t get in trouble.

Adelin: Why or who were you hiding it from?

Communists would come and took our animals, our food, our possessions, they took everything that was best and so that we learned to hide things from them.

Adelin: And where do you hide them?

In old people`s houses we would squirrel food and at the edge of the fields we were working, we set up places where we store the drink and covered it.

Adelin: What did you work during communism?

I worked at a hemp factory in Arad and for CAP. During this period, it was mandatory to work, and those who did not work were taken by the police and forcibly taken to work.

Adelin: What is the CAP?

It was for this Collective Farming enterprise that we had to go and work the land, and from the entire harvest we were left with very little. Most of the crops was taken by the state because it needed to be exported.

Adelin: Good, what do you do in your free time?

I didn`t have much to do.

Adelin: You could still watch TV.

Which television? It ran for round two hours a day, most of it was spent on boasting Ceauşescu`s genius, there were maybe one or two cartoons.

Adelin: What were your favourite games?

We played different games like football or hide and seek, we went on all kinds of hikes, but we didn`t really have time because we had to study and work.

Adelin: What about school?

School was strict. Wearing uniforms was mandatory, although it was difficult to get to school every day because I had work and couldn`t really go. Now I remember that there was this math teacher who, if you didn`t study or were naughty, would hit you with a ruler over your fingers, so I learned harder out of fearing him.

Adelin: So, am I to understand that things are better today?

Today they are worse, because then there were plenty of jobs and houses. Then everything was well calculated, but today we have debts and everything goes wrong.

Adelin: Thank you for taking part in the interview.

Alexandra Mocan – Life Before the New Media Took Over

Alexandra: I would like to ask you questions regarding the period of communism.

Sure, I will try to answer inasmuch as I can still remember from that period.

Alexandra: Good. The first question for you is: What did the period of communism mean to you?

The period of communism was the hardest period of my life, because of the work in the field that was not paid, the money not being enough to buy us food, which, on top of that, was came scarce even in the stores. Even though we worked hard, our efforts were not rewarded as we would have deserved. Men had to work on construction sites far from home, in difficult conditions, just to earn the minimum necessary. Women took care of the house and worked in the fields, having more tasks than the men, considering that they had many children. The people who were in charge of the collective farming unit had everything they needed, from food to clothing.

Alexandra: Next question, how was the situation with the food?

The situation was very difficult, especially with the waiting in line to buy milk, bread, oil, sugar and other foodstuffs. In order to buy them, we had to exchange eggs brought from home to receive bread or oil. Wheat, corn, potatoes and other products of this kind were insufficient to feed all the few animals peasants still owned.

Alexandra: An interesting question that I want to ask you is what were the concerns of the young people of that period?

Young people found their fun in simpler things than today, such as going out to the forest with friends or to the river, where they gathered and talked about their adventures.

Alexandra: Another question is related to the educational situation of the children, what was the educational situation?

Children were compelled to go to school and respect the school schedule, to wear appropriate clothing, namely school uniforms,

which then were in every school. Those who had grades above 7 would attend high school and the others had to go to professional vocational schools in order to secure a future. Some students were wealthier and could secure their place in high school by paying. School supplies were provided by the school, and they were much more modest than today. The level back then was not as high, and the teachers were more tolerant with the students, knowing their situation. Parents` intervention was a great shame for the students but also for the parents, who were summoned to the school in order to clarify this problem. The best thing the communists did was to force students to go to school to ensure an easier or harder future, depending on everyone's abilities.

Alexandra: Good. The last question is what was life like without technology?

In a way, life was easier, children socializing more, staying in groups, playing outdoors without being distracted by phones. For the children of that time, their parents were their role models, the most important people, having a very good attitude towards them as well as the teachers. After a while, radio and television appeared, but they were not used excessively, except for information from the communist party. As a final opinion, I want to say that communism caused poverty and left sad memories in people's minds. The end – we all know it – came along with the revolution.

Bianca Plotuna – Trading as in Bartering

Photo: Mum`s class and her primary school teacher in a rural school (personal collection)

Bianca: Where did you work during communism?

I worked for the CAP communal farms, each family member who had a 15-acre working lot had part time, and those with 30 acres had the entire work quota. These areas of land represented the surface of land that you received at the beginning of the year and on which you could cultivate what you wanted without the state taking away any of it. In exchange for the received land, you had to go to the bordering lot and work on the state land for as much as your quota was. These plots were divided according to how members worked at CAP farms and they put up a sign with the name and number of the house and to where you had to work, regardless of the crops that was grown there. After you finished your work, you had to take the produce the scale where you also received a small percent of everything you brought.

Bianca: How did you get your food?

Food products were given per person and you had to pay for them, even though they were limited, the state did not offer anything for free. There weren't many things you could buy at the store, although you may have had money. Also, families were quite large at that time, abortion was prohibited, and women who practiced these procedures ended up in prison. The situation was a little more acceptable for those who could grow various animals, although for these too you had to pay a fee to the state. People were not allowed to slaughter cattle and if you wanted to build a house you had to give the state a fat pig as a tax in return for the permit.

Bianca: How did young people have fun at that time?

We used to gather girls and boys at *Haba*. Here the girls came to spin and the boys came to meet them. From time to time we danced, sang and told stories. Some relationships between boys and girls were tied here.

Bianca: How was the school system?

It was really strict. I remember that in the primary classes we had a specific type of uniform consisting of a dress with long checkered sleeves, an apron that was put over it and a tie-type scarf that could be adjusted and that had the Romanian flag on it as a pattern. And we had to wear a white ribbon or string in our hair. This uniform could be bought from any store because everyone wore the same uniform. And if you didn't wear the uniform you couldn't go to school. Also, every Thursday the children were forced to put oil on their heads to prevent lice infestations and you were checked, and if you didn't apply yourself, you would be sent home. In secondary school there was a different type of uniform, the girls had to wear a navy-blue sundress with a white shirt and the same type of scarf.

Bianca: What were the teachers like?

The teachers were very strict, I remember that the Romanian teacher would hit us with the pencil case over our fingertips if we didn't know the questions he was asking us, and the pencil cases were made of wood at that time, that's why it was very painful when he hit us.

Bianca: From where could the children get sweets?

We would get sweets from the grocery stores. But considering that at that time there weren't a lot of money, we could buy sweets on chicken eggs. The seller had a wooden object with several holes, and depending on the size of the egg and the hole through which it passed, you received a smaller or larger value from which you could buy sweets. Of course, there weren't many types of sweets, there were more candies or *Kandia* chocolate.

Bianca: How did young people have fun at that time?

In our village, film evenings were held on Sundays at the cultural centre. The films were in black and white and were projected on a white screen, and after the film ended, the disco started, where we had traditional or soft music, all in Romanian. We were not allowed to listen to anything that came from abroad.

Bianca: What childhood games do you still remember?

When we were little, we used to play rope, hopscotch, and we had another game where we threw the *oina* ball in the air and said a name, and the child with that name had to catch the ball while the others tried to run away as far as they could. After the child with that name caught the ball, he shouted stop and the others had to stop running in the place where they were when *halt* was called. The one with the ball was trying to throw the ball at the child he thought he could hit to come and take his place, then threw the ball in the air again, and so on.

Alexandru Pop-Seling - Compulsory Entertainment

Alex: Hello!
Hello!
Alex: What is your name?
My name is Rodica.
Alex: How old are you?
I'm 48 years old.
Alex: I want to ask you some question about communism.
Ok. I will tell you what I can still remember because I was very young at that time.
Alex: What was the school like during the communist period? What were the teachers like?
School during the communist era was held on 6 days a week, the only day off was Sunday. Rules were much stricter and there was no real risk of anyone disobeying them. Teachers had total authority in school, they could resort to corporal punishment and no one could hold it against them. The quality of the education and the educational act were good, but the unpleasant part was that there were many weeks of agricultural practice. After school started, I would go to classes for about 2 or 3 weeks, and then harvest would start out in the fields. First picking potatoes, then picking corn, then beans, all until November when it ended with fodder or sugar beets. Only when the frost began to fall and it was late autumn did we go back to classes, where we had to make up for all the lost time, so that by Christmas the term could be finished and the theses handed in. But there were also advantages in all these aspects, the fact that we socialised a lot during this agricultural practice. We would go in organised groups in all kinds of tractors and trailers, often we commuted singing as if we were on a trip. In the end we would enjoy those activities together, a lot of outdoor activity, even if we came back tired and then maybe had to carry on with doing the household chores. There were both advantages and disadvantages in the

educational act. I don't agree with the punishments one could receive from teachers back then or teachers who were more demanding. They called for corporal punishment and did not give you the right to justify yourself, whether you were guilty or not. They were punishing the whole class by hitting their hands with wooden ruler. Still, they had too much authority.

Alex: What were the ways of transmitting information in communism, the media sources?

During communism there were very few sources of information, especially in the countryside. There were two newspapers you could subscribe to: *Năzuinţa* and *Scânteia*. *Năzuinţa* was the more expensive newspaper with more pages and *Scânteia* a cheaper newspaper with fewer pages that you had to subscribe to. It was a clear directive from the communist party to subscribe to at least one of the newspapers and they would be delivered to your door in the morning. Even if it they held no important information, they highlighted the achievements of the communist party, their political platform, everything related to the communist party. We didn't know much about what was happening in the country. Access to television was quite limited, just a few hours in the evening. I remember it started with a very short cartoon, *Mihaela,* then the evening news, a political show and on some evenings there was a movie, and that was about the schedule. On the radio, the programmes were a little more diverse, in the sense that a little more music was broadcast, but the main topics were those regarding the communist regime, the weather, the political environment and the achievements of the Romanian communist party. These were the media that we had access to at that time. Internet was not around yet and alternative sources of information were banned, a fact which increased the party`s domination, as the population did not have access to sensitive information, because of the censorship. Information was coming to light, only if it was first checked by the communist party. The population was not informed about the debts the country had, about the political instability in the bordering countries. We had no opportunity to ask for more information and fight for our rights.

Alex: What did you do in your free time, how do you spend it?

The activities we carried out in our free time were quite limited, most of them were limited to team games, sports competitions at the commune level, there were film screenings on Sundays, of course carefully chosen. There were films that were broadcast in the first part of the day, on Sundays starting 11 for example, those matinees that they forced us to go to as we were students, so that the teachers were waiting for us to enter the church trying to direct us to the film and prevent us from entering church. There were also discos and proms on important holidays or in the evening on Saturdays and Sundays, school celebrations. That was all the fun and activities we could do in our free time, that's why socializing was much more present.

Alex: How did you move to other places then? Did you go on trips?

The trips in that period were clearly much shorter, as vehicles in general were less numerous than today. When it came to traveling between two places, the most efficient means of transport was the train, especially for trips from the countryside to the city or for longer distances the buses, at least on our route there were only those that took workers to different points. There were also organised school trips, but they took place once a year, at most. They would either take us to Baile Felix, or to the Bears` Cave, for a day or two. School camps were also held for those who could afford them and students were handpicked, the criteria for participation in the camp limiting access for most children. So, obviously we were somewhat more isolated. Travelling long distances was already a challenge because you didn't have enough information to find a route. You had to go to the station and there you would find the route to the next point, when you got to the next station the information could change, so that it was very difficult to make a route from home. Sometimes you were just going to pieces. Crossing borders was almost impossible for the commoner, it was either that you went illegally, which meant taking very high risks, or you had a position that allowed you to

travel abroad, perhaps with a special delegation or a visa, but otherwise, as a tourist it was almost impossible to cross the borders of the country.

Alex: Do you have any regrets about communism?

One of the regrets I have from the communist period is that we lost our interpersonal ties once communication media and social networks penetrated society, but also the fact that we now spend much less time outdoors. Then most of the activities we engaged in as children, regardless of the season, were held outside. We did much more physical activity and spent a lot of time with other children our own age. Interhuman relationships were much more stable, without a prevailing personal interest, something that does not happen nowadays. I think that's my biggest regret, that I lost that special bond between people with much less envy.

Alex: Can you tell me a joke from the communist era?

Sure. At school, the teacher asks Bulă: Bulă, where does electricity come from? From the sty, teacher. What do you mean from the sty? Well, last night when the blackout started, my father said: The pigs! – they`ve done it again.

Vlad Pop – Forms of Restraint

Building Zalău`s Cogeneration Plant Towers
(Courtesy of Mr. Mirel Matyas)

Vlad: What was the best part about communism?

In my opinion the best part about it was that you had a guaranteed workplace after you finished school, there was no unemployment and overall, you felt safer on the streets.

Vlad: And the worst part?

The means of transport were insufficient in number, only one or two buses a day, also the bread, oil, and the sugar were given on a card basis and they were limited. There was TV only from 7:00-9:00 PM and I remember the having our electricity cut out almost daily for some reason I don't know why, but it was probably to save money. I even remember the heating was done by the CET pipelines (Thermic energy and electricity cogeneration), and it was kind of cold even with it running. You had to get your clothes off the balcony because they would get dark from the smoke that this power plant produced and all the pollution. I remember buying oil for the oil lamp and having to buy a fish or two along with it, because they

needed to get rid of it. Also, the only cartoon I remember seeing on TV humps to mind, it was called *Mihaela*. The church was forbidden and I remember children who had gone there, the next day they would be shown off in front of the whole school and made fun of. The military was mandatory once you turned 18 years of age. It added its positive and negative parts to it from my experience. I remember that before I was drafted I had hid a wine bottle somewhere with my brother so we would have it after we came back. Those were some good times.

Sabou Olimpia – I Led the Way

Olimpia: Hello, grandpa, how are you?

I'm just fine, just like old people these days.

Olimpia: Can you tell the readers about you how old are you?

Of course. I'm 75 years old.

Olimpia: As I told you, I want you to tell me more details of what you did in the communism.

Oh, yeah, I remember it's been a long time... time just flew as fast as the wind...

Olimpia: So, can you tell me how your life was back then?

Sure. You know that when I was your age, I was a rebel kid and teenager. When I didn't want to go to school, I just told my uncle that I had a holiday and I would stay with him for a week or two, but in fact I had run from home. But I was aware of what was going to happen when I went back home or to school...

Olimpia: What about the subject in school?

I didn't find it hard at all. Actually, it was easy as my favourite subjects were Math and Physics.

Olimpia: And what about the job that you had after you graduated?

I really liked it. I was a boss, more specifically I was an engineer back then and I worked 17 years in Valea Drăganului, building the hydroelectric dam. It was a dangerous job. I had the permission to carry a gun on me on workdays, because we were working with explosives - we drilled them

into the mountain so that we can start to have a flat surface and start building the dam.

Olimpia: What can you tell me about the food that you had in that time?

Well, my dear, I've never been worried about that sort of thing. I remember that I sent your mother the one litter of milk that was given to every family once a day and every day after school before getting home, she always managed to drink all the milk, but it was not a problem because I was could afford everything that I wanted and at work I would eat at the canteen.

Olimpia: Can you tell me something else about communism?

I want to be honest with you and tell you that I was a member of Communist Party and I had meetings with 40-50 people and we were debating how fast we could raise the dam and what materials to use and how many people we needed to complete this in a short time. I was looking after 120 people or more in a day and I was working with them, but giving instructions also. I put my heart in this project and I didn't leave until the very last piece of metal was assembled onto that dam.

Olimpia: What about the people and friends you had?

Thinking about that time… it was better than now because we were safe, no one would steal from you, people were more educated, they were kind and hardworking.

Olimpia: Another thing that you did/didn't appreciate about that time?

Another thing: working meant having money, and I would prefer that this country would be communist again. Food would not be wasted; you would have money and you would be safe around others. Nevertheless, in that period of time you couldn't express your opinions as freely as now and you couldn't say a bad word about the government and the people that worked for it.

Olimpia: Any regrets?

Now that I look back, I realise that I had everything that I wanted but I didn't spend more time with my family - that would be one regret I have, and now it's all in vain because I'm old and retired and I can do nothing about that. So, make your life interesting and be happy!

Ioana Ştirb - Social Certainty in a Totalitarian Regime

Ioana: What was it like?
It was tough. Many restrictions, few freedoms.
Ioana: Such as?
Well, travel was limited. We couldn't speak freely.
Ioana: And fun?
We found joy in simple things. Family gatherings, music, homemade games.
Ioana: What about school?
Education was strict, focused on discipline and compliance.
Ioana: And food?
Food was rationed, queues were long. We grew our own when we could.
Ioana: What were some specific travel restrictions under communism?
Under communism travelling abroad was heavily restricted. Only trusted individuals could get passports.
Ioana: How did people feel about not being able to travel?
Many felt trapped, longing for the freedom to explore. It was a tough time.
Ioana: Did people try to escape despite the restrictions?
Yes, some did try to escape for a better life, despite the risks involved.
Ioana: What is your opinion about jobs?
In communism, each individual was assigned a job. Now, there's more choice, but also more competition.
Ioana: What were the heaviest restrictions during communism?
The heaviest were freedom of speech, travel, and political opposition restrictions.
Ioana: How did the restrictions impact daily life?
People lived cautiously, fearing punishment. Lack of goods also made life difficult.
Ioana: Can you explain more about the impact on freedom of speech?
Sure, expressing dissent was risky. People had to be careful what they said and to whom.
Ioana: Is it better now or was it better then?

Both times had challenges. With freedom came inequality. Some people are thriving, others are struggling. It`s subjective.

Maria Antal – Communism, Life for the Families of Those Who Built It

Maria: First of all, I would like both of you to tell me how old were you when the revolution happened. Mom, you go first.

"I was thirteen years old when the revolution took place."

"And I was almost fifteen years old."

Maria: Mom, could you describe to me how your family looked in that period?

We were a family of five, me, your grandparents, my older brother Calin and my younger brother Ciprian. Your grandmother was a stay-at-home mom, while your grandfather was the only one working. He worked on the Danube's Depression, on the Transfăgărășan and he spent most of my childhood away from home, but his salary was the only source of income in the house. I can't complain. The state offered us money and so we were able to build our home. Your grandma took care of us, raised us and of course took care of the animals. We had cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and ducks.

Maria: How about you, dad?

My life was a little more complicated. We were a family of thirteen, I am the eighth child in the family. Your grandma was working at agricultural production cooperatives and my father worked on the field most of the time. He was very abusive and he was an alcoholic. He never cared about us. While your grandma was working, he went drinking and that is why I was mostly raised by my older siblings. I was about eight years old when my mother

decided to leave him and we moved to Zalău into a three-room apartment.

Maria: I know that everyone is saying that there was a very drastic shortage of food. What can you tell me about that?

You know, we had some type of cards with a small calendar on the back. We were allowed half of bread per person and they would mark on the calendar the day when we received the bread so we couldn't get more. Same with oil, sugar, flour. If you wanted to buy milk you had to wake up around five in the morning. I know sometimes we would wait in line for hours and still go home without any milk. And by the way, there was no such thing as meat in stores and equally rare were sweets. My childhood dessert was bread with oil and a thin layer of sugar. Living in the city was way harder than living in the countryside, because people that were living in the countryside had animals and were able to grow vegetables and fruits.

Maria: What about electricity and hot water? And TVs. Did you even have TVs?

Not everyone had TVs. But I remember someone in the neighbourhood had one and we would gather up like seven children at that person's house and watch a cartoon series called *Mihaela*. In Zalău I remember we had hot water once or twice a week for only a couple of hours and the electricity was cut off almost every night. Wintertime was the hardest. We would heat up pots of water to thaw the windows and make the temperature in the room rise a little. It was very tough; I don't think you or kids your age could live like this.

Maria: I also heard teachers in schools were very strict and maybe sometimes aggressive. Is that true?

Yes, very true! We had to wear the uniform every day and there were no excuses. We were not allowed with our hair undone, the girls had to wear it up and had to keep their nails clean and short. No such thing as what you girls have nowadays. And yes, they would sometimes hit us with a ruler over the hand or twist our ears

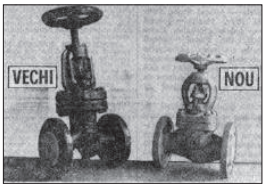
if we weren't listening. Maybe sometimes they were too tough but I think a teacher like that would be perfect for some kids nowadays.

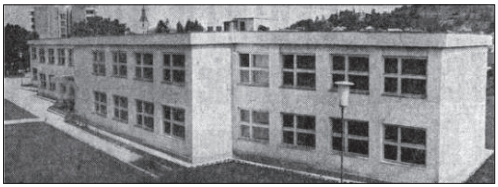
Maria: What about clothes? Were you able to buy any?

Yes. Every year the school would start on 1 September and the whole summer we would go in the forest, pick up blueberries and we would sell them. Like that we were able to buy our own clothes or a pair of shoes before the school year started.

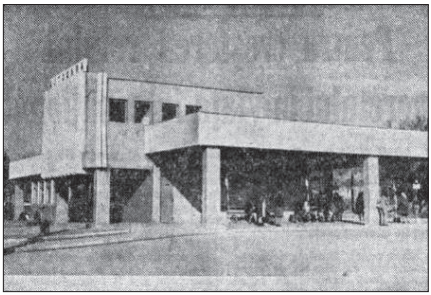
Maria: Anything else you would like to tell me about?

We are not saying that we are missing that period. Not at all. But sometimes I think life was better because it was much simpler. Yes, it is true, we had to work from a very young age, we were missing a lot of things, but through that we learned to appreciate everything we had around us and maybe that is what kids your age are missing.

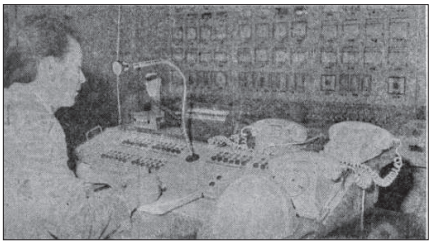


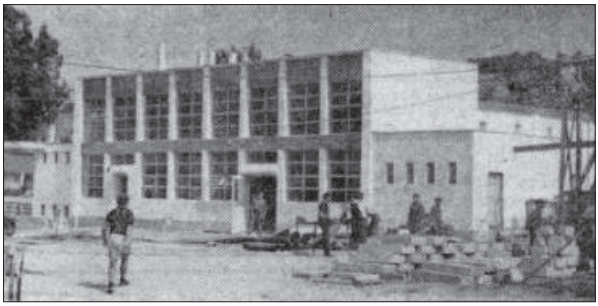


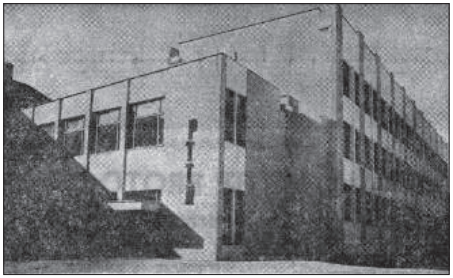
IN CLIȘEU: Hrănirea unui copil la secția de pediatrie din Zalău



Secția de artă populară a Muzeului de istorie și artă din Zalău
Foto: M. Andrei







„Scînteia liberă" — Pagina a 3-a — 24 mai 1966

CUVÎNTAREA TOVARĂȘULUI NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU
la marea adunare populară din municipiul Zalău

VIZITA DE LUCRU A TOVARĂȘULUI NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU
ÎN JUDEȚELE SĂLAJ ȘI SATU MARE

LA ORAȘE S-AU DAT ÎN FOLOSINȚĂ de 5 ori mai multe apartamente față de perioada 1961-1965