

Anna Eva Gaspar With The Neighbors' Children



My God, I was looking for this picture for so long... The kids are our neighbors', I was looking after them. The first from right is Gabi, the small one in the center is Lili and the one on the left is Rodica. And the highlight is Pitu [the cat]. I tied the knitting wool to its paw and it sat in my lap. I'm sitting on a bench in the yard.

Stej, 'Orasul Petru Groza' [Petru Groza Town in Romanian, in Bihar county], as it was called then, some 50-60 km from Belenyés, in the direction of Biharfűrés. [Editor's note: It is in fact 16 km away from Belenyés.] This small town was built by the Russians, because they found uranium and built a uranium mine. Andris was appointed shop-floor leader. He wasn't an engineer yet, he did not have his diploma yet. The Ministry had a department. A huge building was built, it was like a smaller ministry. I don't know why, but Andris had to go there. And this all was built by the Russians. They even measured the air in front of the department, and the gauge was clicking stating 'poluat' [polluted]. The army was responsible for the uranium. This was a military secret. Andris was a civilian, he was an engineer, and he worked there in the shop-floor. But the army was supervising everything. It was order, order, and again order. There was no stealing there. The uranium was transported away by the Russians. They processed it. Here it was just extracted. Once a car tipped over while transporting uranium. It was transported several kilometers through the field from the mine, and it turned over. The land in an area of one kilometer was removed, and not only what the truck was transporting. The uranium was a military secret, so we were transferred to the M.A.I. [Ministerul Armatei Industriale, Ministry of Defense Industry], the army. This is a very hazardous material, but weren't aware of that. At least I didn't. It is possible that Andris knew the M.A.I. was looking for trustworthy people, offering them a very good salary, and we finally could breathe again, because it wasn't that easy to go to Bucharest all the time with a child. So they lured us there. There was a lido, and everything. And there was a large market, where the village people used to come, because there was a very good life there. There was meat, and what else did we need after that starvation?

I was a housewife, and took care of the children. My daughter started school in Stej, and finished two grades of elementary school there. She studied in Romanian. Andris wanted badly to have another child. I told him: 'If you can get me a mother-in-law or a mother, or an aunt, grandmother, then we will have another child.' I was working: knitting, sewing, everything that had something to do with needlework. I worked for the neighbors and everyone. I had so much work I was almost unable to keep up. I started knitting, sewing in Gyulafehérvár. I couldn't take a job because although there were opportunities, but what about the child? Back then there were no kindergartens. So I made money as I could.

In Stej there were those flat blocks with four apartments. Two of them on the ground floor, two upstairs. And between the blocks there were green belts. And there were these 'vb's, the Russians called them this way, small green houses, small villa-like houses for one family. I just watched those beautiful houses, made of wood, but Andris wasn't watched those beautiful houses, made of wood, but Andris didn't want to move in such a house. So there was a little block, then a 'vb' and a little block again. And lots of green belts. It was a beautiful way of building. It was a beautiful little place. When we arrived in Stej there were still many Russians living there. My neighbor, for example, living in the same block, was a Russian family. An engineer working there and his family, just like ours, and another family, the Sugars. The lady, Elza, was saxon, while Laci was Jewish. She saved her husband. He wasn't deported from Kolozsvár. This was the chief accountant, they lived on the first floor. And there were the Calianus, originally from Temesvár. We called them 'Kajla neni' (Lady Droopy), my daughter gave her that name. To sum up, only the very best were brought to Stej from the different companies. Because it was a very lucrative company. So in that block there was a Russian family and three local families: a chief accountant, an engineer and us.

One day the Russian's little girl came to our kitchen window, saying 'malinki koshka'. I told them: 'What are you saying?' And she kept saying 'malinki koshka'. I had absolutely no clue what that meant. It turned out we put some crates outside, because we just moved in there, and a cat had kittens in one of the crates. Malinki means small and koshka means cat. They used to come to us and we threw about our arms trying to explain them if we needed something, and they gave us anything we needed. It was a young couple, the little girl was around six or seven. Later they went back to Russia. The Russians had their separate store, and we were not allowed to shop there. But they were allowed to shop anywhere. We had money too, we could loosen up a little.

It was forbidden to go even in the area of the mine! On one evening Andris didn't come home because some misfortune happened in the shop-floor and asked me to bring him some sandwiches, if I could, because he hadn't eaten since morning and he wasn't able to come home. It was the first time I went there. He explained me, though, where I should go, because there was an asphalt road leading there and it was already dark. Well, a soldier jumped ahead of me every minute! They asked me what was I doing there. Fortunately Andris told me to bring along my pass I could prove my husband was working there. They searched me before I went in. They searched Andris, as well, because they wanted to prevent him bringing out anything. He was searched both when coming out and when going back in. Andris couldn't bear this atmosphere. People had to submit their Resumes two or three times a year. Because you never know when one's background changes, right? And Andris hated this very much. And he didn't like this army life anyway. We only stayed there for two years. So he started sniffing around [looked around]: 'Where can we go?' They were looking for a man in Govora, Vilcea county. So he requested a transfer, and what a fuss they made

of it. He just wanted to get out of that army life. I believe if we wanted to we could stay for there even until now, but we chose to go to Rimnicu Vilcea.