

Angelika

I was born in Central Asia, raised in Transcaucasia and I live in Europe.

I remember catching snowflakes in our courtyard with my dad when I was little. Snow in central Asia is a rare sight. I remember the hospitality of those people. I remember the roof of our house, overgrown with vine. They said it was inhabited by snakes. Sometimes it seemed that they were having a fight, knocking their tails against the roof. We often met the snakes in this country. I saw them in the market - still alive, white, locked in big jars. They said you had to cook them (alive), that they had some sort of a healing power. I remember the garish clothes of these women, holding trays with fruits and food on their heads. I wondered how they prevented the trays from falling down. The girls with many braids and barefoot boys. I tried that too, but the ground was too hot. I remember the Asian climate of that country, huge watermelons and melons, green tea and dad...

This image is different from the one in Transcaucasia. The watermelons and melons changed into apricots, mulberries and sweet-smelling pears. Instead of green tea, people would drink coffee with their neighbors, and read their futures in coffee grounds. I remember the fresh mountain air smelling of oregano, long thin bread wrapped with goat cheese, fresh cucumbers, coriander, basil, and estragon. There was no longer the house with snakes, the garish clothes, and no dad...

Despite their different history, culture, religion and language these two countries were united as a part of the world's biggest country. Yes, I only knew about that country that it was the biggest one in the world, that it fared brilliantly in the World War II and that everyone loved each other there (the friendship of peoples). But still as a young girl I wondered why we couldn't trespass the boundaries of this country, and why my mum said my granddad didn't come back home, why nobody explained it. I got to Europe at the age of 21. Although "there" I finished school and seven semesters of university education, it was only "here" that I learned about the repressions and totalitarianism of that peoples' friendship country. Its demise precipitated the decline of the already weak economy, the friendly nations started to argue with each other, and millions fled the war, famine, cold, lack of jobs and perspectives, heading toward the West. I was among them...

What can a twenty-one-year old girl know about life (even after seven semesters of studying)? Can she be deprived of the will to live, depressed because she witnessed constant quarrelling at her home, lies and hypocrisy outside it, a terrible earthquake, an armed conflict, thousands casualties?

I was crying silently in the bus on the way to the airport. My tears washed my face like the rain flowing down the windows. The hidden sorrow choked my throat. I left everything. I ran away. I hurt my mum. What did I want, what did I expect? Freedom? Love? Understanding? Peace? Comfort? The lack of fear. Goodness. Sensitivity.

I came to a European country which bordered on the empire. Here, they said a lot about the evil empire and nobody believed in the friendship of peoples. Here, they didn't want to submit to the empire. Here, they long fought for the freedom. They won it. Freedom is their pride.

The beginnings were hard. I didn't know the language, the culture, the tradition. The problems in my relationship... I wanted to continue my studies. I knew that earning a degree and finding a job would later help me attain more than one goal in life. The birth of my son prolonged my studies a little. But eventually I got the Master's degree. Nobody, even those who told me not to give up, believed I could find a job in the country where the unemployment rate was 17 percent. Everybody else was leaving the country seeking job somewhere in the West, and besides, I was a foreigner, and citizens had priority (obtaining a citizenship is very difficult, I still don't have it).

I looked for a job everywhere. I enrolled for another study program. I was happy I could develop myself (and where?! In the city where, among the others, Copernicus and John Paul II studied!). In the meantime I gave private lessons, translated. Luckily, after my application for exempting me from the foreigners study fees was positively considered by the university authorities, I didn't have to pay for my studies. I met there many wonderful and good people who inspired me. I'm still friends with some of them today.

I have been working at a university for seven years. I'm planning to write a doctoral thesis. I'm happy that I can teach, not only the language but also the positive attitude to the world, the friendly approach to people, how to be strong.

I love life, I love people, I love the rustle of rain, the touch of warm hands, the smiles on my children's faces. I immensely love the baby sleeping beside me and his brother, who is starting the first grade of the middle school the day after tomorrow. I thank God for my life and I pray for peace in the world. These words resemble those trivial texts of models chosen in beauty contests. But it is true. To have a loving family and close friends, to be sure of the upcoming day – these are the most significant things on our planet.