

Rhapsody

"Sisters"

She gave me his sweaters
to get them out of the house
calling an end to doubts...
But I hang them in my closet,
and the slight smell of his sweat
remains deceptive.
His brushes are mine—worn
to angles on canvases long gone
brushes and his paint box
brushes still tinted with yellow ochre
real artifacts of that father
painting desert scenes in Arizona
making storms in the kitchen back home.
When he died, we entered his room
opened drawers, took his comb and shoes
packed suits and pants, his shirts and ties
made him an anonymous benefactor
that man who was never quiet
the center of all storms, unruly
raging through our childhoods.
My sister kept the shirt she had given him
still wrapped in cellophane
put at the top of the drawer
pale yellow ochre strips folding in angles.
But I took the sweaters
worn at the elbows, splashed with paint.

Claudia O'Driscoll



"Then and Now"

by Ben D. Anderson

"My God! how little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy." Thomas Jefferson

The last days of summer were almost over. Slowly, the autumn was tip-toeing through the golden hills, carrying a mantle of rusty and bright yellow leaves scattered from time to time by the eastern wind coming from the Russian steppe, on the other side of the Prut River, the natural border between Romania and Russia.

Slowly, I was making my way towards the end of the row carrying two buckets full of grapes. .18, .19. comrade instructor was counting the buckets as I was dumping them into the big barrel. I was still far from making my quota for the day which was coming to an end soon. The sun was descending from the clear sky, behind the hill into the amber waves of grain in the horizon.

Finally, at the sound of a whistle we started to group ourselves for the return trip to the camp which was about seven miles away. The instructors were adding up the day's harvest in their notebooks. The looks on their faces were not very pleased. They had to report the numbers to their superiors at the Party headquarters, as soon as they arrived at the camp. Yet they would probably do what they always do when the buckets on the field did not match the quota set by the almighty party chiefs, inflate the numbers.

Another day was over and we were closer to building a bright future for the country the socialist republic. At least this is how the words of the song sounded as we sang it half heartedly marching back to the camp on the dusty country road.

I remember it as if it happened yesterday.

I was 14, just going into the ninth grade. Two weeks every year before the start of the school year and two weeks after the end of every school year we had to go out in the cornfields or into the vineyards to help out with the harvest. It was on a "voluntary" basis, our instructors assured us. Yet the alternative was expulsion for a term and a public reprimand in front of the whole school, for not serving the motherland with all our might in the spirit of patriotism and unselfish dedication. How I used to hate that with all the particles of my being.

Born in a "free" socialistic society, I was just another faceless number destined to follow the path carved in stone by the communist elite who governed the country. I often found myself crying at night searching for a way out. Raised in a family with a rich Christian heritage, I have been humiliated countless times at school in front of my classmates for not worshipping the official religion, Communism. In my heart, as a teenager, a lot of anger started to build up. I often pounded the walls with my fists crying out for justice that seemed so far away.

One Monday morning as I was just turning sixteen, I was told by the school principal that I was just the right age to join the Communist Party youth organization. When I bluntly refused to do it, I



"Losing her"

Looking out over the ocean
Crying with the young gulls
Dreaming of how it would have been.

Thinking of what he said
Watching the sailing boats
Erasing the tragic memories.

Dealing with today and not tomorrow
Seeing the waves crash with the rocks
Calling her name over and over.

Staying too long in the night
Trying to let her go
Waiting for the daylight to come.

Renada Anderson

"Dear Friend"

Distant friend across troubled seas,
your paper thoughts so dear to me.
With words alone we've joined our shores,
Not with politics or threats of war.
Every letter, sharing our dreams,
Has made this world smaller it seems.
Ink feelings and paper hopes,
Fragilely sealed in envelopes.
Two people of such different lands,
Letters reaching as out stretched hands.
If they could know what we have found.

People are people the world around.
It seems we are old friends and yet,
Sadly true we have never met.
One day perhaps I hope we meet,
A quiet park, a crowded street.
Until that time I speak with pen,
To you my not so distant friend.

Sincerely Julia Singer

paid with a black eye and a few bruised ribs. Who was I to stand against the current? And this was just the beginning.

I always dreamed of someday becoming an engineer, yet this dream was so far away from becoming a reality, as I found out when I finished the high school. When applying to a university, the student was judged on his or her grades from high school and also on the political behavior of that individual during the previous school years. In my case, as in the case of other Christians, I was considered unfit for a higher education environment, a disgrace for the university.

A few months later I was sent into a labor camp near The Black Sea. The Communist Party was trying its best to reshape my way of thinking into a more appropriate environment while I was to perform free labor white is blue.

"Three minutes until landing, and welcome to Rome's Fiumicino International Airport," the captain said as the airplane made the final approach for landing. I still could not believe my ears and my eyes. I was finally free, forever. Less than two hours ago we left the Romanian capital covered under a thick blanket of snow and we arrived in a sunny Italy, which was to be our home for the next three weeks.

I was still pinching myself to see if it was true. This was the result of a fierce battle between the American Consul and the Romanian Interior Ministry in an attempt to grant us exit visas. Under heavy pressure from Washington, the Romanian authorities agreed to let us go, I and my family, but not before we were stripped of our citizenship. Even though I felt for a long time to come like a man without a country, I never missed losing my Romanian citizenship.

Looking through the airplane's window, I was searching for a torch. The Lady Liberty's torch that shined for years welcoming newcomers to this great country. The snow was coming down heavily in the evening hour as the TWA flight 841 from Rome was ready to land on the JFK Airport in New York. I saw the Lady the next day. I had to. A tear dropped from the corner of my eye as I looked at her standing majestic at the entrance of the New York harbor. I felt blessed to be a part of this great country, a nation under God.

Today it is a special day. A day that will remain in my memory for the rest of my life and it will mean a great deal to me. As I was walking on the steps of the U.S. District Courthouse, in Portland, my heart started to beat faster. I have been waiting for this day for a long time and it is finally here. My heart and my whole body tremble as I walk into the courtroom. "All rise," the clerk says making room for the judge. "I pledge allegiance to the flag..." I can not control my tears anymore. The moment is so overwhelmingly sacred, so powerful. I hear the last words of the judge... "I welcome you today as the new United States citizens." I feel like flying and for the first time in my life I feel that I belong somewhere, that I am welcomed and respected for what I am.

Editor & Designer
Judy Singer

