

I Savored the Velvet Revolution Also on Behalf of My Father. We Would Copy Pamphlets Right In Front Police's Noses.

Daša Matejčiková

In the summer of 1988 I got acquainted with the son of writer Ladislav Pecháček. We were lying in the same Prague hospital talking all days about books and politics. For the first time, somebody openly explained to me the working of the dissent and the Secret Police practices. One afternoon a friend of Pecháček came to see him and for a long time they were sitting on a bench in the hospital park whispering something. And the young man was growing paler and paler. Somebody “snitched” on him that he had anti-governmental materials at home in the attic. And he did have them there. So he ran away through a hole in the fence, drove home – and burnt everything.

He was back for the ward round. But without his mischievous smile.

In the summer of 1989 I was hitchhiking through one small part of Bohemia. At that time, somehow, nobody minded any danger and it was both free and exciting. I was standing outside of Prague in the Carlsbad direction. Almost instantly a young truck driver, maybe in his thirties, stopped to give me a ride. He was going to the West and we started to talk about politics. He told me about Charta 77 and about the petition *Několik vět*.¹

We had a rapport and he all of a sudden suggested that I could sign it. That he would stop by and give me that document. And we went on in our conversation. To this day I don't know what happened, but in the end he never gave me anything. He even gradually stopped talking. Maybe he at first wanted to trust me, but his fears were stronger. From time to time I recall this moment pondering whether I would have signed. I guess I would.

The 17th and 18th of November caught me while I was doing my teacher's training in one small town in northern Slovakia. Friends of mine called me and referred was going on in Banská Bystrica. They were enthusiastic. Immediately, I started to pack, logically I wanted to be there where “history was being made”. My mother was whining – Darling, they're going to sack you! but my father cheered me.

I will never forget the look in his eyes – sparkling, eager. Happy. He was one of those who in the zeal of their youth believed in communist ideals, but were kicked out of the game in 1968. Simply, my father got expelled from the Party after the soviet invasion to Czechoslovakia, due to his “great zeal” leading to protests against the “brotherly help”.

¹ In June 1989, a group of people around the dissident and future president, Václav Havel, put together a petition to the communist authorities asking them to stop oppressing freedom in the country. The petition marked the demise of communism in Czechoslovakia (Translator's note).

Each day I would call him from our faculty and describe everything to him in detail. He, in turn, sent me a newspaper from 1968. He had been hiding it in the office – together with his hope – for all those twenty years.

Of course, I immediately jumped in the thick of the events in the coordination center. I was in charge of distribution of pamphlets. We would be posting them during frosty nights, walking around hilly neighborhoods of Banská Bystrica – always in mixed couples. The police would be catching us like flies; some would get a beating, some were just psychologically harassed. (Herewith I wish to thank Robo “Mišel“Vaněk, my “accomplice” and friend who at a police station did not allow me to cry from stress and fatigue. “That’s exactly what they want, that will make them happy,” he kept whispering to me.)

But there were also other policemen – a number of them. Those who pretended they didn’t see anything. We managed to commission a printing shop in the center of the town located right above a police station. And the policemen, who if nothing else must have heard us going there, let us be.

Everyone who experience November 1989 at a college will tell you that it was the best period of his/her student life. That feeling of shared freedom and solidarity was better than the wildest party. Nobody really counted how many men and how many women were working in the strike committee. This issue was relevant just when somebody wanted to spend a pleasant night after a pleasant day. It was chain of meetings, discussions and concerts. Ideas. Experiences. Big responsibility. And happiness.

In September 1989, two months before the Velvet Revolution there was a screening of the film *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in the aula of our Faculty. The room was packed and after the film everybody applauded. They applauded from distance to Milan Kundera, Daniel Day Lewis and all makers of the film. And personally to professor Brigita Šimková who organized the screening.

During the revolutionary days of the year 1989, on the soil of my alma mater of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Banská Bystrica I was in charge of production and distribution of pamphlets.

Translated by **Eva Riečanská**

Daša Matejčíková – a former journalis, at present a writer and media consultant.