Pilgrim Notes

by Woody Fridae

P I L G R I M N O T E S

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June 10, 1974

To Johnny and Renee, and to Rusty and Kelly, to Roxanne and Robin and Kathy and Don and Vaughn, to Katie, Scott and William, to Susie, Mary, Freddy, and to all the other children of this land that--as I would at their tender age--find this story unimaginable. Imagine, dream and imagine, dear friends, in order that those dreams might not be forgotten; brave the storm; dare to imagine this world as one family and one race. And perhaps some day we will find it so. woody.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The wind wisps over the lake and scoops up the sweet air which lingers above it. Every now and then the wind turns in our direction and carries with it a warm breath of the hot summer air, puffing it in our faces here under the drooping old oak where we sit. The quietness speaks. The quietness, the whisper of the waves and the sparkling sun undulating on the water's surface speak of a few months ago when we were in Spain on the "Costa del Sol" of the Mediterranean Sea. My father and I would walk down to the white beach where he would fish and I would read. But this is not even a large lake, and the vision of it is containable in the mind's eye. Unlike the sprawling horizon of the stretched-out sea, life can be detected on the far side as rising clouds of faded-gold dust evince heavy trucks making their way up the ridge.

My father casts his line out to the murky bottom and then waits. He pulls the excess line in and then it is taut and sensitive. He turns one rotation at a time on his reel as the weighted hook slowly drags the bottom. The tension of the line ripples in his hand as it announces every pebble or weed in the geography of the lake floor as the hook passes over it. The gentle sway in the tension of the line indicates the moving waters at higher levels of the lake's depth while the line also whistles as it is subjected to the

breeze just above the lake. He explores the remote surface by extension as he combs the lake floor. Each cast has a unique pattern of tensions and releases as all the elements join in a composition, continually new, and although simple, it's always unmatched by previous compositions.

My father has only given me bits and pieces of his early years. The first thing that I knew about him is that he was only seven when he left his homeland in 1914. He came from Rumania. He and his mother left his older brothers and sisters to come to America because his mother had the vision of an easier life there and also had the fortune of having sufficient money to make the trip. His four brothers were either in boarding schools or working, his sister had married a wealthy man, and his father had died some years before. So in June of that year they boarded a ship; my father didn't know if he would ever see the rest of his family again.

He had to learn English at the age of eight, something I feel had a lot to do with why he later became an English teacher. He was forced to re-learn language from the bottom; soon patterns between the two languages became evident. He had a lot of difficulty in his first years at school with the language, and in the streets learning to use his fists. He lived with his mother in Ohio until she died--he was just

entering college at the time. He has told me that many a lonely night was spent crying and feeling alone. It was a time of great sadness, but it was also a time when outside things began to take up his interest. Little by little the pain of losing his mother eased as he met friends, had girls, went to dances and began to work. He also discovered that he could go down to the train-yard and hop the freight cars. He spent a part of his life riding the boxcars through the eastern United States.

My mother once told me about my father when she first met him. She said it was just after he had returned from Europe in 1939 after trying to get into Rumania; however, they wouldn't let him get into the train at Budapest because there was a fear that fighting would break out at any time near the border. He went to the American Embassy; again they couldn't help him. Two weeks passed and there was no change in the political situation; as he ran out of money, he had to return to the United States once again. So close to fulfilling his desire to return to Rumania and yet so far. That was 1939, and after that he didn't receive any more mail from his brothers or sister; he had no idea whether they were still alive after the war. "That, I think is why he was so eager to get married at that time," she said, "he wanted a family."

This simply, is all I knew about my father's family. He had one aged picture of himself standing with his mother, taken when he was about nine, and a list of names of his brothers and sisters. So my sisters and I have grown up completely blind to any knowledge of that half of our family.

Now, as I sit here at the side of the lake with my father, it is amazing to think that at one time I was so ignorant not only of my roots, but of his roots and the soil from which they sprang. If I were to meet an aunt or uncle, they would be very old and well-tanned like my father is--my imagination carried me, when I was much younger, to far-off lands or big cities when I should happen to meet another Fridae.

The story of discovering these roots and that land began for us two years ago when, due to some investigation of my sister's by mail to Rumania, we received a letter from Gheorghe Fritea, (original spelling), the son of my father's oldest brother. We wrote back and forth asking and answering questions, but the months were short and the letters and packages we sent took weeks if they made it at all. Somewhere along the line the idea of going to Rumania came up. My father had to struggle with his financial situation as he was already retired, and my mother made arrangements in the dress shop where she works to be gone for a few months. Unlike my three sisters, I was unmarried and eager to see the world.

On January 23rd of this year we boarded a plane at San Francisco International Airport which took us to Luxembourg. As we heard that the roads through Austria and Hungary were unkept and still snow-covered, we decided to buy a car as planned, but go to France and Spain first and enjoy a vacation from our jobs and school while waiting for the roads to clear.

At points during the trip I seemed to forget why we started out. I remember in Spain I wanted to stay so that I could continue studying Spanish. I began to realize that when people travel together they have to make mutual sacrifices of what they want to see and do. The only reason I decided to resume the trip after becoming enamored with the southern Spanish coast was that I saw how difficult it would be for them to continue on with my mother doing all the driving and my father having to figure out all the exchange rates alone. They wanted me to be with them.

But in recounting the story of our two weeks in Rumania, my mind seems to race by the Pyrenees on the snaking road out of Spain and the grape-fertile flatlands of Southern France and the treacherous sea cliffs going into Italy; through the lodging at various roadside hotels, the buying of food, eating and sleeping and subsisting in the car, the climbing upstairs of the various cathedral spires; past all the faces that come to mind when thinking about the first

part of our trip to Rumania.

I had thought that the truth-pure and unbiased--was the best source of surprise, beauty, drama and soul-stirring reality. But the way that time previous to our arrival passed, rolling from ome day to the next in a sort of melancholy progression, it led me to believe that I could have experienced them with as much significance if I had been at home, in a room, whiling away the hours as my mother was so fond of doing when we were planning this trip. I jotted down some notes in journal form and I think that the uneventfulness of those days spent being cooped up inside an automobile, driving, seemingly, only from one point to the next, is in brilliant contrast with the two weeks that followed.

Yugoslavia, 3-12:

> Yesterday we drove north-east up from Italy and through the rolling hills of Yugoslavia, staying at a comfortable hotel in Zagreb, and only getting a 24 hour glimpse of the country. Father has already managed to get the entire set of coins used here, but was complaining that there was a new set and an old set, and he has only found the old set. Mother too was somewhat disturbed--she is running out of reading material and only has one or two Reader's Digests left.

But the notes from March 14th show an internal excitememt evincing the outward arrival at the home of my father's nephew:

> I begin to write as I normally write. But today I am forced to somehow break the trend of this journal.

> What was monumental before in experience has now drifted into minuteness, and conformity with what has gone before is impossible, for what has happened within the last twelve hours is incomparable with all events. . . . . all this is said in my present altered state of mind as I become uneasy at the thought of including just some of the details of the most overpowering experience of the entire trip; the day we met my father's nephew and his family for the first time.

It seems so strange that there was no progression of excitement as we drove the remaining 200 kilometers from Budapest that would have completed my father's journey thirty five years ago to the place of his birth. In the morning the day was nearly drab--cloudy and turning into sunny on the tablelands of Hungary--and I retain a vision of several small communities skewered through their hearts by a narrow, flat road. The hazy day and dust-laden highway side and small buildings are in some way special--perhaps dreamy.

We arrived at a small two-story building at the border of Rumania. It looked as if it had been used as a hotel in the 30's. We had to unpack the entire car on the benches out front after we were allowed to enter through the guarded gate. Our wait for visas seemed like hours and my father began to complain of "butterflies" in his stomach. "It's reminiscent of when I was in Hungary and they wouldn't give me back my passport," he moaned in a somewhat shaky voice. But I think I only felt the calm before the storm.

Again my mind tends to race past the two-and-a-half hours

we waited at the border station, out of the station and down a long shaded flat stretch of road to the first Rumanian town, and the remaining fifty kilometers of stone roads, small villages, and carts of hay and corn stalks to the place of the first contact with those people.

We came to a "T" in the cobblestone road just before which railroad tracks crossed, and an aged yellow train station stood on our left. Also standing directly in front of us was a chafed wooden post with an arrow to the left to Marghita, ten kilometers, and another to the right with names of towns we didn't recognize.

The town that my father was born in--the same town where his nephew lives--is Margina, and after sixty years, he hadn't any idea where it was. He knew only from letters from Gheorghe that it was about fifteen kilometers from Marghita. Not knowing whether it was on that side or another, we decided to stop there and ask.

My father got out in the wind and spoke to a man near the train stop. Mother and I laughed at the manner in which daddy bent over close to the young man's face to hear the Rumanian language once again. I was surprised when we got to the border to hear him speak the language to the policemen. He has never spoken it in front of us at home, although he swears that he tried to teach us when we were little. But I heard him each time we stopped like this, and I can tell that a new fire is burning within him. I feel him grasp for words and I feel his stagnation when he cannot find them, and then I feel his satisfaction when he succeeds in pulling one out of a deep, long memory.

As he spoke to the young man near the tracks, a woman

from across the road, where she was waiting with others for the bus, took a quick interest in what they were saying. She heard the name "Gheorghe Fritea" and picked up her bundle in one hand and grasped her long brown skirt in the other, then she ran over to them with a small tear beginning to trickle down her smiling face. "They're my neighbors!", she exclaimed. "Are you his uncle from America?"

We pushed things around inside the car to make room for her and her bundle of bread loaves and clothes. I noticed how awkwardly she placed herself into the car, by bracing herself with her hands on the door frame and the back of the seat, and placing both feet in, then ducking way down to avoid the door frame.

She had large husky limbs under her dusty woolen clothes and a large checkered scarf wrapped tightly about her head. When we took the road to the right, she grinned wide at the others waiting on the dirt space off the corner of the road. She started to talk to my father and told him that "the whole family waits very hard,"--such was the translation. She laughed again and revealed large spaced teeth.

We went down a long straight road--the ground on either side plowed--only a few houses in groups off in the distance. We passed some train tracks--the tracks intertwine with the road--then again the miles and miles of upturned earth waiting for seed.

We pulled off the pavement onto a rocky dirt road where the ridged tires of heavy vehicles have traversed in the rain and squeezed the mud up into rows half a foot high. Houses border on each side of the road. They are all made of mud bricks and then filled in with mud paste or painted with bright colors.

I remember carefully dodging every large rock only to find holes and rocks in other areas of the road. All the time my father was talking to the neighbor and trying to get information about where his family lived. He had four brothers and two sisters, (one had died when she was young), but now they are all dead---the only direct relative is his nephew. But the neighbor lady didn't remember back far enough to when daddy's brothers and sisters were still here. They all died or left around the Second World War. Some were soldiers and another died in an accident.

All these things started coming to surface after such a long time as we approached the house in which my father was born.

We came over a rise and got to a place in the road where it split---one going to the left and slightly uphill, and the other dipping down to the right into a little valley. And just off the road in the valley, behind a few trees, was a steeple covered with rusted tin crowning the old basilica. Daddy recognized it and began to cry. I recognized it, too,

as the place that he had told me about so often. He used to tell a story about the time he fell into a mud puddle on Easter. He had on a white suit when he slipped on the rain-soaked ground; he always recounted how his mother then gave him the worst spanking of his life, too.

In this moment he also realized that we were directly in front of his old home. There stood the crucifix which he knew to be in front of his home, but "that's it?" he questioned the neighbor lady. This he didn't recognize with other houses that had sprung up beside it and the metal fence around it.

We all piled out and anxiously ran through the gate to be met by a brisk lady of about forty-five hard years clad in scarf and a long black apron over her woolen dress and boots. She had a face delineated to heighten her smile, and a hurried laugh to match her busy hands. She greeted us all with kisses on each cheek and rushed us into her small mud house for bread and wine. We didn't know exactly who she was, but I was stumbling over myself with the excitement--I didn't know whether to go back to the car to get my camera or continue on with the others.

A few days before, I had given this much thought. I wondered about the <u>moment</u> we would meet Gheorghe. I hoped I would be able to catch that moment with pictures.

When I finally came in the door, camera in hand, Daddy explained that this lady was only the neighbor of his nephew. He explained that they all share the same lot and that they are close friends of the Fritea's but they too had waited "hard" for us. Gheorghe and his wife had gone into Oradea and would be home soon. We had a few moments to look around.

Mrs. Petrus was the lady's name. We tried to talk with her but she was preoccupied about our comfort and getting food and drink. When she brought out the wine, I had my first try at politely refusing alcohol with the Rumanians... it's nearly impossible! It's just about all they drink after they are weaned, so, more than a cause of offense, it is the cause of wonderment. What I wanted to tell her was that it was my belief that alcohol was damaging to brain cells...but leaving it to my father, I heard him say something about my only drinking lemonade, milk and water.

While Mrs. Petrus was busy worrying about us going from that little building, (which was only the kitchen), over to the building in the center of the lot (bedroom) she noticed Mariora coming up from the bus stop. Mariora is Gheorghe's daughter. She didn't look anything like the picture we received of her wedding just a couple of months before. She looked like a little girl as she ran in her knee-length dress and as the wind blew her scarf to one side. We

watched her run for a half mile up the road, up the wide dirt road, on the concrete slabs laid down for a sidewalk--she must have seen our car and known that it was us. We didn't know whether to go out to meet her or to stay in Petrus' house, and before we did know, little Mariora buzzed into the house.

She grabbed each one of us and cried as she held on. She is shorter than all of us and has a girlish big grin and bright inquisitive brown eyes. She and daddy began to talk, and the one thing he did try to translate was "I have been praying to God night and day that you would come!" He asked, and yes, they did receive our letter from Spain stating that we would be in Rumania in the middle of March. No sooner did she come in than did she leave--Mrs. Petrus explained that she went to prepare something to eat.

Mrs. Petrus took us out to show us the property--what the family used to own is now plowed, as the rest of the land is here, and behind the houses are rolling hills, cleared, smoothed and plowed as far as the eye can see. Mrs. Petrus was also eager to show us her pigs and cow.

Minutes later Mariora came quickly back from the other side of the lot and ushered us out the gate and down the street; Gheorghe and his wife were now walking back from the busstop. On the way out the fence we met Stelica, Petrus' son. He took an automatic liking to me and the six of us

in three pairs set out the gate to meet Gheorghe.

We saw two figures in the distance coming at us between the trees and the fences--a short plump woman in a knee length coat and a man just a little taller and very strong. They began to run to us and we to them. I remember the feeling of being swept in an undertow out to a sea of emotion. He had an expression that showed his whole life seething before him. I knew that this first sight of him was not a normal one--tears were streaming down and he appeared as if he didn't believe that life could be so benevolent. Before the two groups made contact Gheorghe took his well-shaped fedora off to reveal a head of barely graying dark hair, curly and trimmed. First, he took mother's hand and decisively kissed it three times, then once on each cheek and embraced her--then my father took him in his arms as if they would never be separated again. The rising flood of tears had engulfed us all and the two families, now united as one, huddled closely, intimately, and walked the irregular dirt path back to the house.

We stood in a courtyard surrounded by a tall metal fence in front, a small house to the right and a larger one to the left, and several waning structures for the animals built upright on the gently sloping, treeless land to the rear. Engaged in trying to perceive all this, our eyes were like screens of slow-reacting photographic film. Although we wanted to exchange greetings, there were periods of intense silence during which we tried to get a full and clear exposure of their faces in our minds:

> I looked at my father in a way I normally can't. My father is a hand taller than Gheorghe, and his white hair sharply contrasts with Gheorghe's dark hair. My father's glasses make him seem more "clerical," and Gheorghe's rough delineated hands show the mechanic that he is. His hands are similar to a wood carving, but each fine groove is darkened by grease rather than paint or ink. As my father laughs to relieve some excitement of the occasion and occasionally hugs Gheorghe, the two of them look quite similar in the face--excepting that my father is somewhat jejune when compared with Gheorghe's salty features. My fahter's lines announce age; the lines on Gheorghe's strong face and hands speak of toil.

My mother, too, was in sharp contrast with the others; her nylon stretch-pants were like flowers in a vegetable garden as she stood next to Gheorghe's wife and daughter, whose usual attire is knee-length (or longer) woolen dresses; her hair, done up in the hotel the night before, was not wrapped up in a scarf like the others. Gheorghe's wife, Lelica, is shorter, thicker and stronger than my mother--her hands, too, are much

rougher than my mother's--without long nails.

After a short while of standing around face-to-face, and shuffling nervously, balancing from one foot to the other turkey-fashion, they escorted us into Gheorghe's house.

We all sat in the front room. There was hardly enough room for the double-bed on which we sat, or the stools on which Gheorghe and some other faces gathered around. Gheorghe's wife is quiet--she quietly stoked up the little tin stove with an armload of sticks and brought in plates of cornmeal, chicken soup, (I think), and dried pork.

My father was the only one who could speak to them for us. Mother and I waited impatiently for a translation from my father, but he understood but little and, in his excitement, neglected to translate much of what he did understand. But one can follow the deeper currents of a conversation even if he can't interpret the specifics. With consummate interest, we watched the gist of the communication and we were vassals to the swell and ebb of everyone's merriment. The things that I could really understand were the hugs, the kisses and the happy faces as they spoke to us. I picked up a few words but I still had to laugh at myself and shrug my shoulders in regret that their words meant nothing to me.

> These faces! How can I tell you that I love you? That's it! I'll ask how to say "I love you."

But my father wasn't sure of the second person plural of the verb, or the kind of love that I meant, and...well... I could see how it was going to be: I was going to have to reach for something, anything--use signs and gestures, point to my heart, try a Spanish word and see if it rings true, try to remember some Italian (which is very similar to Rumanian), pull anything out of the air just to show them that I am pulling something--and maybe they"ll know.

As the evening turned into night, many more faces began to crowd the room--men took their hats off and greeted us with kisses on the cheeks. I haven't felt that sensation in a long time--when I was five or ten I would sit with my father in his recliner and hold his hand and feel his beard. I remember that feeling of his uncut beard scratching when he would kiss me goodnight. The women too would greet us with kisses on the cheeks. We would ask their names four or five times as we tried to formulate the correct pronunciation; then in a few minutes, we had forgotten it again.

My diary says that, "Somewhere during all this:"

> Gheorghe broke his attentive conversation with my father to pull out a couple slips of yellowed paper he had put in the drawer of the small, green dining table; my father picked up a match box, in response to the information on the papers, and penciled a "68" on it and

circled it--then he said, "I'm a year older than I thought!"

Mariora's husband, Gavrila, came in after shaking off his dusty work clothes. He is short, well-built, and has the face of a loving but friendly joker. He poured his fresh excitement onto the lively evening.

I grabbed my mother's camera and snapped off a picture. Everyone was quite surprised and looked curiously at the little apparatus. I'm sure they must have seen the flash of a camera before.

After I had eyed both rooms of the house over in search of the bathroom, Gheorghe stopped me and asked me what it was that I wanted. I rubbed my hands together to demonstrate that I was looking for the washroom. Lelica poured me a pan of water from the water on the stove. Becoming a bit embarrassed at the situation, I spoke aside to my father and asked him if he knew where the toilet was. "No," but he thought for awhile and then said out loud, "pisuar?". They all laughed. Gheorghe took out from a chest of drawers a roll of tissue and a box of matches, led me down behind the house to an out-house, lighted a match, handed it to me, then the tissue, and then said something I suspected to be "good luck."

When it grew late the people began to leave one by one, but not before paying great respect to us, my father especially. They waited to kiss his cheek or hand, much reminding me of the royalty of a king, and then departed.

I was taken to sleep in the same room with Mariora and Gavrila. Their house was the one between the Petrus neighbors' and Gheorghe's, and near the front fence. It was newly built and the mud bricks hadn't yet been filled in or painted. Inside the rear room where Mariora and Gavrila lived, a table separated two beds, and on the other side of the room was a chest of drawers and a wash bowl and towel rack.

Without worrying about my presence, Mariora pulled off her dress and pulled a nightgown on. They insisted that I wear a night shirt instead of my teeshirt; they each kissed me goodnight, got into their bed and slept. I stayed awake for awhile looking out the window at the glaring porch light and then sank into sleep beneath the huge feather blanket.

The dust from the farms, that seems to coat everything with a thin layer, had even the smell of being primeval. But there we were after we returned and the excitement died down, asleep, at night, dark, and inhaling the dust from the dried mud floors. "La mult ani,". . . "good night."

Thou causest the night to gain on the day,
and Thou causest the day to gain on the night.
--the Koran

When I woke up to the bright morning light, both Mariora and Gavrila were gone. There was a towel draped over the wash basin; a small bowl was full of water and a few other dishes were soaking in it. They had left to go to work. Gavrila drives a tractor which I had heard him starting up around six. In the earlier pre-dawn hours--about five--Mariora had walked down to the paved road to catch the factory bus.

I went down the concrete steps and across the simple dirt yard to Gheorghe's house. Gheorghe and Lelica made us sit down to a dish of baked eggs, freshly baked rolls, and strips of pork. Gheorghe told the three of us that he planned to take his vacation days off while we were there and that he had many places he wanted to take us. He also had a list of things to do of his own while he had the use of a car, if we didn't mind.

At this point, we really had no idea what members of the family we would find still living. We had heard about an uncle, and then some cousins. The prospect sounded quite exciting, but I felt the necessity of getting myself back together after driving four days straight and losing an hour when we had crossed the border. I decided not to accompany

my mother and father and Gheorghe to meet more people in a neighboring community.

After clearing the breakfast dishes, they started up the car and drove it out the gate while Lelica and I held the sheet metal gates open.

I wandered back into the front room of the two-room house, sat on the bed and read from a book by Oscar Lewis I had brought. It was his study of a poor family in Mexico City, Children of Sanchez, and I remember being struck by the timeliness of a quote in it from C.P. Snow:

> "Sometimes I am afraid that people in rich countries... have so completely forgotten what it is like to be poor that we can no longer feel or talk with the less lucky. This we must learn to do."

Before I had realized that time had moved along, Lelica brought in a plate of strangely flavored potatoes and a kind of soup for my lunch. I got up to thank her (or, to try to thank her), but she was on her way to work and had no time to wrestle words with me. She handed me a pair of Gheorghe's shoes to slip into and motioned to me to come with her. We walked out in the daylight to the gate. She motioned with a key to the gate and another to their door and showed me where to hang them if I should leave, then kissed me on both cheeks and started down the road to the highway.

I stood there alone and watched her as she hurried to

catch the bus. Lelica's image now danced on the sun-baked earth of the main road just where it levels and then drops out of sight in the distance. She finally sank from sight.

The wind stirred the dust in the yard as I turned to return to the house. "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men:" so I recorded that moment in my diary. The same guilt that James Agee felt when he was priviliged to be alone in the home of the humble sharecroppers of the American South in the 30's now welled within me. I found myself suddenly in the very heart of these people. The dust blew around in the yard. This day seemed unsettled; our arrival was still, in my mind, a misty fantasy--like a meal that is not yet digested, like the wind still in the air.

Wide-eyed and very much aware of my alone-ness, I walked back into the front room. I sat at the table to eat, but I could eat very little and was preoccupied with looking around me at the walls, the table, porcelain dish and cup, and at everything that they have. I looked with sheer love and admiration because it <u>is</u> what <u>they</u> have, and all that they have was right there around me.

> The house is nothing but one roof over two rooms with a ground level porch between them. The rooms have a small entrance between them in which their doors face each other. The front room has two small square windows, but the rear room has no windows because there are sheds leaning against it from the back two sides, and on the right a new part of the house has been built for the

geese and a cow. This makes the structure of the house an "L" shape.

Around the entrance to the house is a wood-frame fence with chicken wire about a yard from the house. Within this space is a prune tree not much larger than a man and a few other lonely plants. In front of the house a deep well has been dug with foot-wide concrete pipe stacked end on end tunneling down to the water. Gheorghe had showed me how to take the stick that sits on the metal arm which holds a pulley over the opening and to apply pressure against the spool of cable with it as the bucket lowers to the water. "Gulp," echoes up when the water rushes in to fill the bucket. I cranked the water up to wash and shave.

Gheorghe and his wife had prepared a bed with straw in an old bed frame in the kitchen (the rear room) near the stove so that my parents could sleep in their bed in the front room. The front room, now crowded with suitcases and handbags, is neatly painted with flower designs--they must be rolled on with a cylinder having carved designs of flowers. In the corners, where a roller might not reach, the designs are bordered with fine hand-painted lines about a hand's width from the corner. The walls are green, and the flowery designs are brown and white. This front room remains cool late into the day. So I went out again to find how I might

build a fire. I walked out, behind the house where the land gently slopes into a valley, tractor plowed--waiting for seed. Leaning against the rear wall of the house, I found a tall stack of wood, no piece larger than a man's wrist that it would fit into the small tin stove. Back in the front room, I found no matches after building a stack of wood and paper in the stove. Still engaged in taking-in, looking both to the right and left, hearing the chicken's voices from their pen down, around, behind the house, hearing an occasional Rumanian voice pass from one road to another, I lay back on the bed and at length fell into sleep.

The door opened; I raised my head and focused on an old woman, nearly seventy, in a gray woolen dress, hobbling forward to the bed. Before I could get to my feet, she bent over to kiss me and then greeted me. I didn't remember meeting her before, but she said something about being a part of the family. She didn't speak well because she had no teeth. I tried to explain that everyone had gone and I was the only one at the house. She pulled up a stool and sat across from the bed and she kept talking about someone named "Yorkey". After about an hour of tedious guessing back and forth at what the other said, I collected everything and realized that she was Gheorghe's mother. Gheorghe's nick-name spelled "George" is pronounced "Yorkey". The

spelling, "Gheorghe," is pronounced like the English "George".

We waited out another twenty minutes until Mariora returned from work. I was able to talk to her more easily. By now I was picking up a few phrases, but I began to feel a kind of indigestion inside--there was so much that I wanted to say, but the words were only choked by my ignorance of the language.

It seems so clear to me now what happened later that night--within such a short period of time were submerged in an experience so exciting, so intense, that even those times when we could escape, as I did this second day at Gheorghe's house, the walls, the simple furniture, and the land around us came alive to us as if our imagination had been set loose.

After my father and mother and Gheorghe came in from driving to several small towns, I only got a half an earfull of what had happened to them that day. They were talking about Uncle John, a ninety-five-year-old man, my father's father's brother. They spoke with him, heard stories about his brothers and sisters that my father had never heard before, and collected dates and names of places, where and when they were born, and how and when they died.

Again, people began to come into the house from all directions to meet those <u>Americans</u>. They all drilled us

with questions--wildly interested in us and America. Some of the questions were quite revealing, showing what they knew as well as what they didn't know. "How does this place please you?" I understood one question. "Is there <u>really</u> murder and stealing in the United States?" another face from the crowd inquired. Picking up a piece of clothing or a kitchen utensil, one would ask, "do you have this in America?"

My father now took on the appearance of a wealthy distinguished man condescending to the poor as he explicated great tales of the freedoms one enjoys in America, how one can own land, how there are people who not only own cars, but boats and planes, about our house and others like it which have running water--hot and cold--refrigerators, stoves--electric--and a host of other things that amazed them no end. As more people came in and gathered around to be entertained by my father's enthusiasm, Gheorghe brought in more of his homemade wine and they all toasted "<u>La mult ani</u>," . . ."to the many years!".

On the outside, all were happy and gay, but it seems so clear to me now that all this wine, excitement, and exertion can be the cause of grief as well as happiness. From between these many people of the community, Gheorghe informed us that we should take him to his employer's house that he might get the time off from work that he wanted to spend

with us. So, at 10:30 p.m. we set out in the night over the snarled road, then over the cobblestone road to the man's house where we were again offered several rounds of wine and then stood nervously at the door for what seemed like hours trying to formulate our goodbyes. When we returned to Gheorghe's house we were all quite tired and began adjusting the bags and things getting ready for bed.

But my father went outside for a while and then limped back in and said that he wanted to see a doctor. What a shock to me when those words hit my ears! The last two times before this that my father had had a heart attack, he had thought it only gas pains in his chest and had begun to take Bromo Seltzer before he realized that it was much worse.

This time he had the same moaning tone in his voice and his face had the same demure hue. "We're not going to play games this time," he said almost in a faint as mother and I set ourselves soberly to the task of getting him to the hospital. Gheorghe, not understanding, stopped us as we were taking father out to the car and insisted on his lying back down on the bed. Mariora brought in a rag with a pungent, penetrating fume reeking from it and wanted him to sniff it. But he just sat, nearly upright, pale, and unable to say much as mother and I frantically tried to get them to realize that not a minute could be wasted.

I remember the pale yellow light of that front room as we all stood around him on the bed trying to help in some way. I remember the cold black night as we drove, finally, into town. The minutes stretched into hours, it seems, as I clutched the steering wheel, driving my best, driving my fastest yet safest, driving as surely as possible. We pulled off the cobblestone road, at Gheorghe's direction, into another small town, down the dirt streets, to find a small yellow building barred by an iron gate.

I sat beside myself in the waiting room with unimaginable visions of his prolonged sickness so far away from the security of America that he had just been talking to them about. But just as suddenly as this thing rushed upon us, we were surprised to find that it was not a heart attack. The doctor spoke in lanugage that I was beginning to understand and gave father a shot to alleviate the gas and nervous tension.

Those first two days of our visit in Rumania were unexpected--more than anything this first glimpse seemed to drop the veil covering my father's age. In two short hours, hordes of memories of two years earlier were re-enacted. When he was in the hospital before, and we would come daily to see him, and have to tell the story a thousand times a day to all our friends. Also, a different "age," the antiquity of this land, and the age of the people, began to show.

> As we weaved down the wide dirt way to the cobblestone road, everyone came out from behind the row of wooden fences that line the main street of Marghia to wave as if they hadn't seen a car in a month, and perhaps they hadn't--not on that road, anyway. We are the celebrities of the town; everybody knows that the Friteas' have guests.

The sun was alone in a clear, blue sky and the billows of dust coming up from the front wheels and, lapping at the windows, were brightened with poppy-yellow sunlight. After turning onto the main road to Marghita, the people quit waving, but when we slowed before passing a high-bedded truck or an ox-drawn cart, we could see that the women smiled or even nodded and the men looked curiously at our Russian Moskavitch with a Luxembourg license.

> The town of Marghita is mostly one long avenue with one and, occasionally, two-story buildings, a few automobiles and people dressed in faded colors walking the sidewalks. The eye is drawn to the faces--they're reddened by the sun and split and delineated by shapes of smiles and frowns, and the eyes are squinted with chicken's feet perched and clawing back toward the temples. The buildings are not really dirty, but they they take on that appearance with pale grey-yellow plaster fixed on the outside, and with empty store windows--so empty that the inside surface of the panes is visible in the hardened morning sun.

We pulled off the road; I eased the car next to the brick curb. Gheorghe sat tall in the back seat to lean over his uncle, drape his arms around him from behind, and talk into his ear. His words ambled out in a slow but determined

tone, rising in pitch at the end of a sentence--a first grade teacher leaving instructions for his six-year-olds--Gheorghe explained that he had to go to the authorities to report our whereabouts; we waited. There was something in the way he left us to walk several blocks out of our sight that made us uneasy, but just the same we felt secure that Gheorghe was taking care of it for us, and we could sit in the car and talk over how the morning went.

It was Saturday, the last day of the week that we could go into town for this business about a report, and while there, we could find some film for our cameras and maybe buy something in the store.

Even inside the car we could smell that the air was as fresh as the wind, but the industry soot dampens the smell of alfalfa and the weed grass coming in off the fields. My thoughts came down from the wind when the phrase "Mariora told me that she can't have children," broke the silence. They were words not directed at me; they were mother's words to my father.

"How in the world did you find out that?", I had to ask. Not that it was information too private for only the third day, but I wanted to know how she spoke to them--I was picking up the language more easily than she.

"Well, when I was showing her the pictures of Dixie

(my sister; her daughter) and Dixie's children, she pointed to her stomach and shook her finger 'no!'"

"That's too bad!", I thought, and just for a moment the connection was made--no children in the years ahead, and the family seemed to be the most powerful force of this society, much of it as I could see up to that point. It saddened me.

Mariora, why Mariora? She more than anyone else bustled about us, making us feel like masses of aimlessness by comparison; she made us sit down if we were standing; she gave us a pillow when we sat on the bed in the front room so we could sleep. Her hospitality was almost disquieting--- I wasn't able to justify that she came home from eight or ten hours work and had to walk a mile or so from the bus stop in those half-heeled scuffed patent leather shoes; that she always went right to work getting something for dinner out of the raw materials that lay on the shelf in the kitchen; that we had gone for a ride to see some land that my father's father once owned while she was at the fabrica sewing the seams to the feet of panty hose; and that she had more muscles than I in her legs and hips from growing up in this land instead of the United States like me. Oh, Lord! if only I had known when I was five or ten that I had a third cousin of the same age--that we were growing up together, at the same time. Dear cousin! what words can fill those years,

and "God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to die that man might have life..." No! dear God take me! that I might die for her...

But it is not mine to die for her.

Mother was sitting with both legs on the back seat and my father had turned around while she was talking about breakfast, about how she had been frustrated when they wouldn't let her wash dishes because she used soap, how the water was always thrown to the pigs and the pigs didn't like to drink soap. And I was fastened straight in the driver's seat thinking of Mariora, and visualized myself dropping to my knees, hoping to somehow show Mariora of my care, wondering if she would understand if I hugged her feet, when the urge to pull back, just as sudden as the one to drop, caught me; I began to focus once again on the street out in front of the car, and released the steering wheel.

I looked down at the large empty bay windows from the balcony of a very cold-looking, nearly stark naked clothing store. People pushed the swinging doors open and walked across an empty, scuffed-wooden mezzanine floor, over to tall shelves which hid sight of the wall. Gheorghe had finished his business across the street; I waited while Gheorghe and my father tried on the small, round caps--like

French kepis, but without the bill. And they waited for a short, young women to come down off the ladder, as she reached for one of the smaller sizes near the ceiling. She got one down; it was a circular piece of wool with an inner lip and a nipple curved like an apple stem on top. Wanting to look like the others, my father went over to the mirror to see himself in triplicate.

My slacks didn't fit tight to my calves the way trousers on others' legs fit. With my hands in my pocket, feeling the sta-pressed material in the lining of the pocket, I kept leaning on the grained wooden handrail and watched the others fingering the rolls of material and the machined sweaters and skirts on the tables below. Just out from the railing, hanging over the mezzaine from an electric cord fastened at the ceiling, was a glaring clear light bulb. I yawned; I had slept fitfully the night before:

> I couldn't think of complaining, but many hours I had tossed from one side to the other--gazing for a time at the pale glow of the porch light that shone in the window and coated Gavrila and Mariora's bed and the wall to which both heads of the bed were next, and then curling up with my face next to the wall, all the while gasping for air and coughing out the vapor-fine dust that is in the air because the floors are made of dried mud and wrestling the feather blanket down off my throat--its microscopic plumage came sifting through the coarse material each time I made a move under the covers.

Gheorghe was finished buying his uncle two woolen hats at about 20 lei each. We walked between the people coming up the staircase, then out, across a treeless plaza, and down to a small concrete building no different in facade from the others it stood between--it was a hardware store, dimly lighted with lamps, stovepipes, and an old accordion hanging from a ceiling of about ten or fifteen feet. This store sold a few cameras which were shelved behind the counter with pieces of pipe, and thermostats and a copper hose. We inquired, but no, they had no 35 millimeter film (in fact they had no film), but they expected to have some in about a week.

We would be going into Oradea, the biggest city near the border, in just a few days.

> The smog, (if one can call it that), is not oily or gaseous even though we were on the road heading back to the house. There is seldom a whiff of exhaust fumes or the kind of smell that is caused by burning rubber. But the sky is filled with a percentage of dust that is stirred up from the earth on both sides of the road. At sunset, the light of the sun grows dim before its lower edge touches and adheres to the horizon like a clinging drop of water. The colors fade until the only natural light, which is a backdrop behind the lighted windows scattered out over the planes, is a glow from the west, a thin strip of phosphorescence, but dirtied by the denseness of the air.

But when we arrived at Gheorghe's house, the sun was still only half-way between noon and setting, and Mariora

had just returned from work. She was cranking up water to fill a large pan to wash our clothes. When she had lowered the bucket for the second panful, I ran over from the car and motioned her over to the gate as if to see something. When she moved away from the well and sacrificed the four or five turnes she had on the bucket, the handle began to fly. And when she turned her head to see down the road as I was pointing, I fell quickly away from her to grab the wheel and turn the water up for her. Quite seriously, she frowned back at me, then laughed at the joke I had played. Her lips had to crack into a wide grin as her eyes brightened. "Oh tu!. . ."

It was a rare opportunity of helping her. That morning their hospitality had even become annoying when Lelica insisted that I wait for the warm water in the kettle instead of using the water, (as I wanted to do), which Gheorghe had used. And then at dinner they insisted again and again that we have more until the otherwise good food and loving generosity was no longer enjoyable. But then, I guess I appreciate it. Even though I couldn't defend myself and tell them that no, I have eaten plenty and it would be unhealthy to eat more; I still appreciated it when they made us put on a coat even though we had stepped out for cool air, or when they shoved a pillow under us if we

lifted a finger to help.

I started up the car again so Gheorghe and my parents could come and meet the lady who had translated our letters for us; the sun was just setting, and a few of the neighbors had just finished work and had gotten cleaned up to come and talk with us. But Gheorghe bid them all adieu for us before we started rolling behind the headlights at twilight. We drove west toward Marghita again, but then off the road and north on a flat narrow road. We drove along the perimeter of the valley and swerved with the fingers of the hand-shaped foothills. Five kilometers out from the town of Abrham we found Anita's house--a small, newly-built mud house next to her sister's house. The two buildings are grouped along with a barn and some pigpens by a short unpainted and withered fence.

Just as we were parking on the edge of an open field, a procession of at least two hundred people--women in long dark dresses, men and boys in peglegged trousers and dark jackets--began to round the bend in the road ahead of us. At the front of the line was a bride in a long white gown and a groom with a cane, (as is the custom), and a jug of wine. They stopped about fifty yards out as they saw me getting out my camera. The men stood rigid, and some of the women glanced the other way. Then they surrounded the

car and insisted that we share their bread and wine before moving on.

When we swung open the gate of Anita's yard, it was a strange thing to hear her voice say in English, "Do I see American visitors coming?" as she came off the hill behind her house, with a basket of berries under her arm. Coming up to us, she apologized that her house was not prepared for guests, but took us to her sister's house where all of us gathered around a cast iron stove and a lantern.

> This house is not unusual to me--I have seen many like it in California in remote places, up mountains, where one would not expect to find electricity. The heat of this house is the same heat that cooks the meals, and all life in the evening is centered in this front room--sometimes only room--where both the fiddle and loom sit in the corner waiting to be used. But in Rumania, this is the standard for rural houses. And everyone is allowed by the State to own one acre of land and 300 sq. meters of vineyard. The homes do not vary much. The rural towns, too, are only collections of homes--each with its own well, wood pile, pigs, chickens and geese-and the towns are only the homes from which the people ride buses out to the fields or factories to work.

Anita was born in the United States, but came back to Romani before the Communist regime in 1965. Now she had lost her citizenship and had no way to get back to the United States.

She told us many things that Gheorghe had wanted to tell us, but couldn't get across on my father's narrow bridge of

the two languages. She explained that there is a law which demands that a person must have at least two children which he would leave behind before the Government would grant permission to leave the country--and then, only on a visit. The wrinkles on her kindly face and the rough skin on her arms, her pleading tone and her absolute sincerity spoke of things much more basic than a written law.

Gheorghe spoke to her in Rumanian for several minutes, then Anita turned to us to translate his speech. She said that Gheorghe loved us very much, and that he wanted us to feel that his home was our home. He explained that he wanted us to ask him whenever we want something, and to stay as long as we wanted.

Then he spoke to her again, and a few minutes heard her explain this: The government is not just--they set it up so one can only earn just enough to stay alive, and no more; that Gheorghe believed, but could only tell us in his confidence, that if the president allowed the people to leave, that they would all leave the country; that he wanted to leave too; that he wanted to get to America, and then send for his wife.

"What about your children?" my father questioned.

"Mariora is well-off, married. My son (little Gheorghe) is in trade school--soon he will be old enough to support

himself. When they are old enough, and with children, maybe they'll want to join us."

I sat alone and out of the light of the lantern that had been put on the table in the center of the room. My eyebrows went up as if waiting for a cue to speak, but no one saw me. "Ugh. . ." and again no reception from the others. I began to realize the seriousness that Gheorghe must have to want to leave his children, "But Mariora. . ."

Now Anita was just translating that he would need the equivalent of two thousand dollars in order to make things possible for him to leave the country.

"To make things possible for him to leave. . .?" I thought. I began to squirm in my seat, and my mind flashed on fantasies of Gheorghe, a great con, who was about to soak my father for two grand. And the nerve of that man going around arm-in-arm with my father and hugging him so much the last few days.

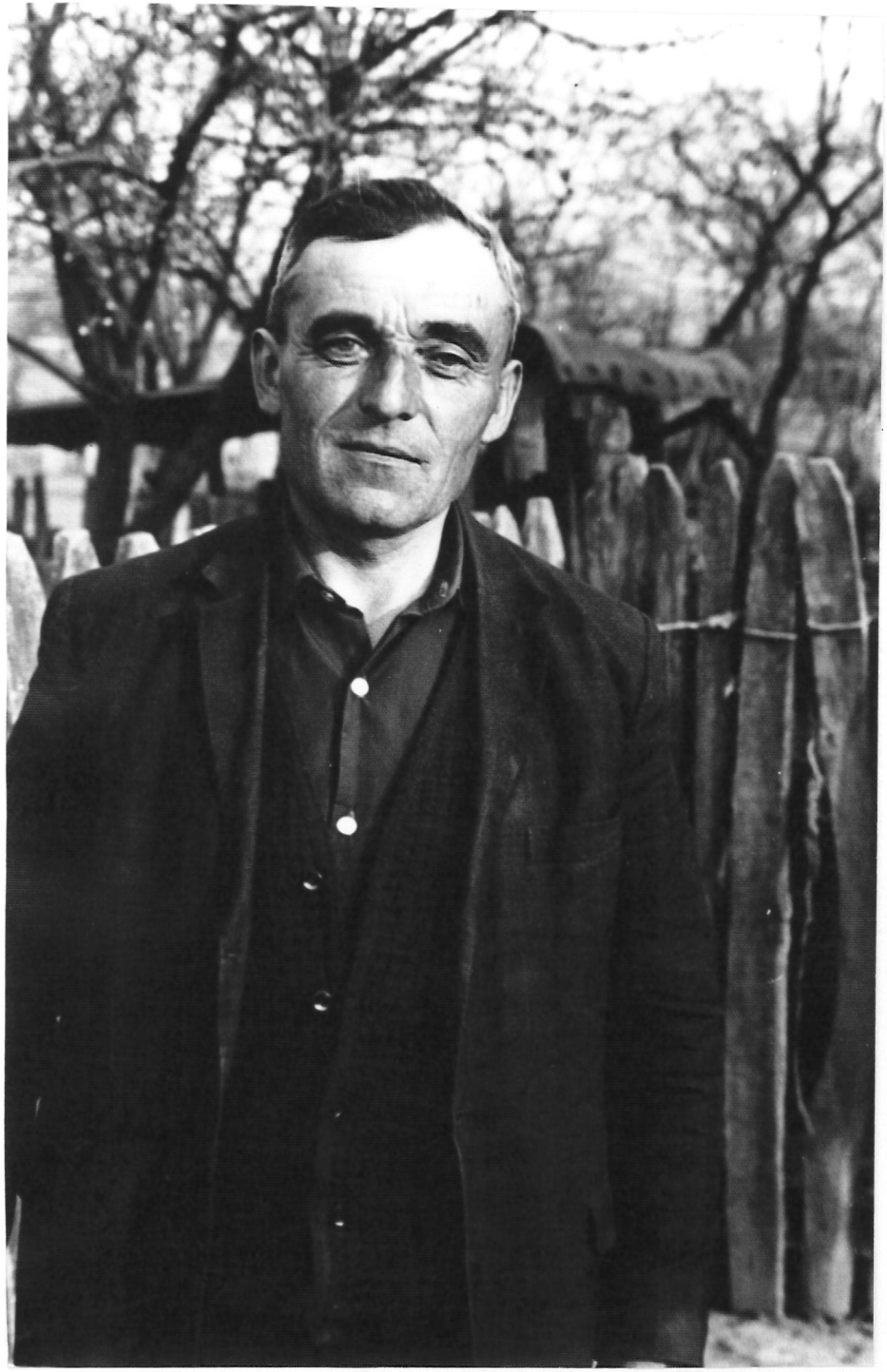
"But that is in lei--prices for Rumanian citizens are much higher," she said, and then the ugliness of my own suspicions were thrown up in my face as I realized my misjudgement. He didn't want our $2,000. If a Rumanian is caught with foreign money he could be thrown in a prison or beaten," she continued. "But with American dollars, it would only cost five hundred dollars, and then he could pay you back,"

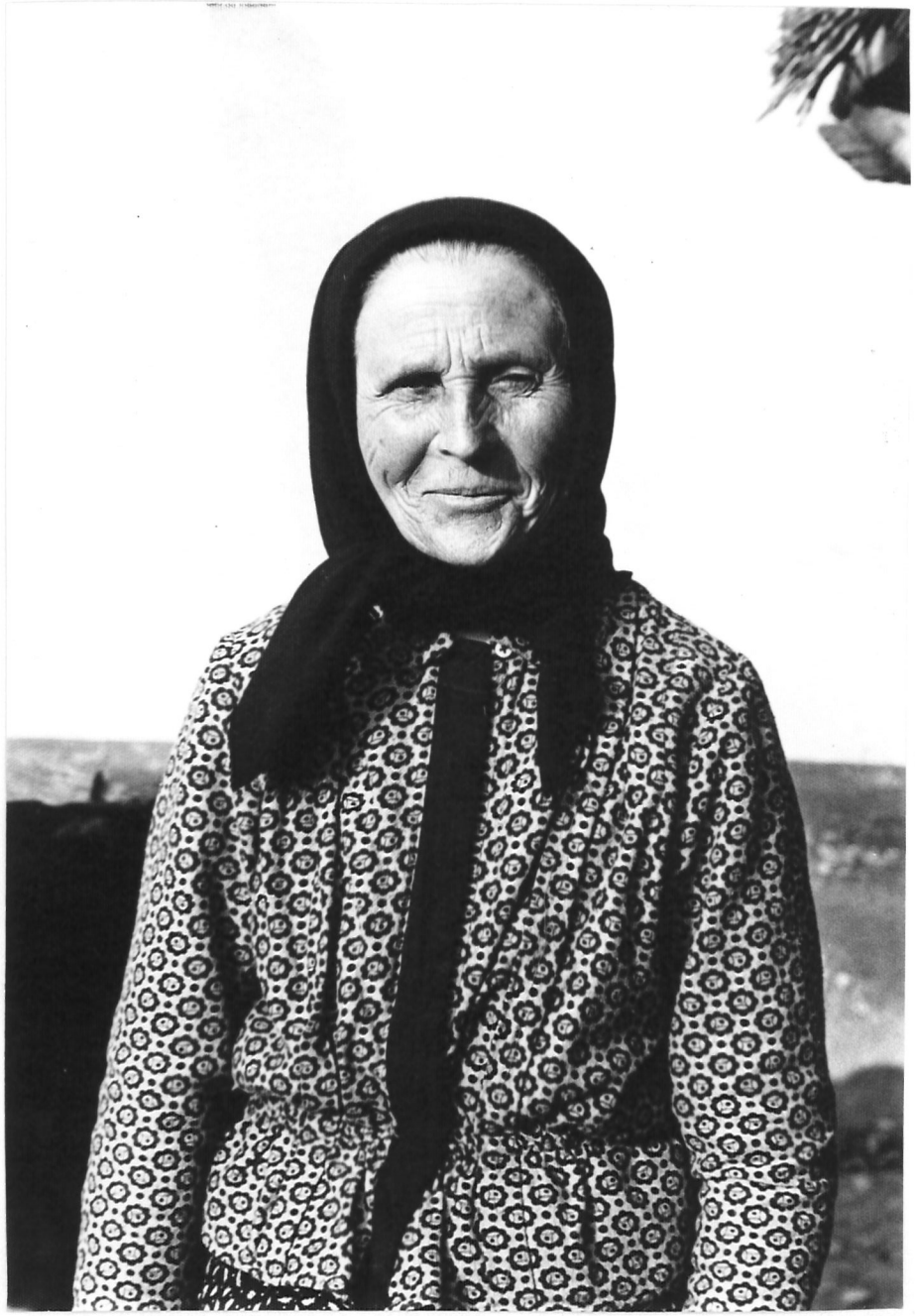
she went on to translate for us. Each time she talked she would add a hint that she, too, was interested in leaving, like: ". . .and if you know of a place that I could work making food. . ." Her pronunciation seemed to be a little rusty and even a Rumanian roll to the words came through.

So Gheorghe wants us to pay his way over to the States and then he could pay us back when he got a job as a machinist; I pondered the situation. My father began to explain that he wasn't as rich as it might have appeared, that he had had to save a long time for this trip--but he looked at mother and, "Yes," they said, they would do their very best to get him a plane ticket if all else works out.

They began to talk about all the details involved in the problem of getting permission, but I lost the trend of the conversation. I spotted a small grey-white kitten curled up just inside the open door of the cast iron stove. I picked it up and felt the warmth of its underside as it curled up on my lap:

Soon they were making a toast prior to leaving.

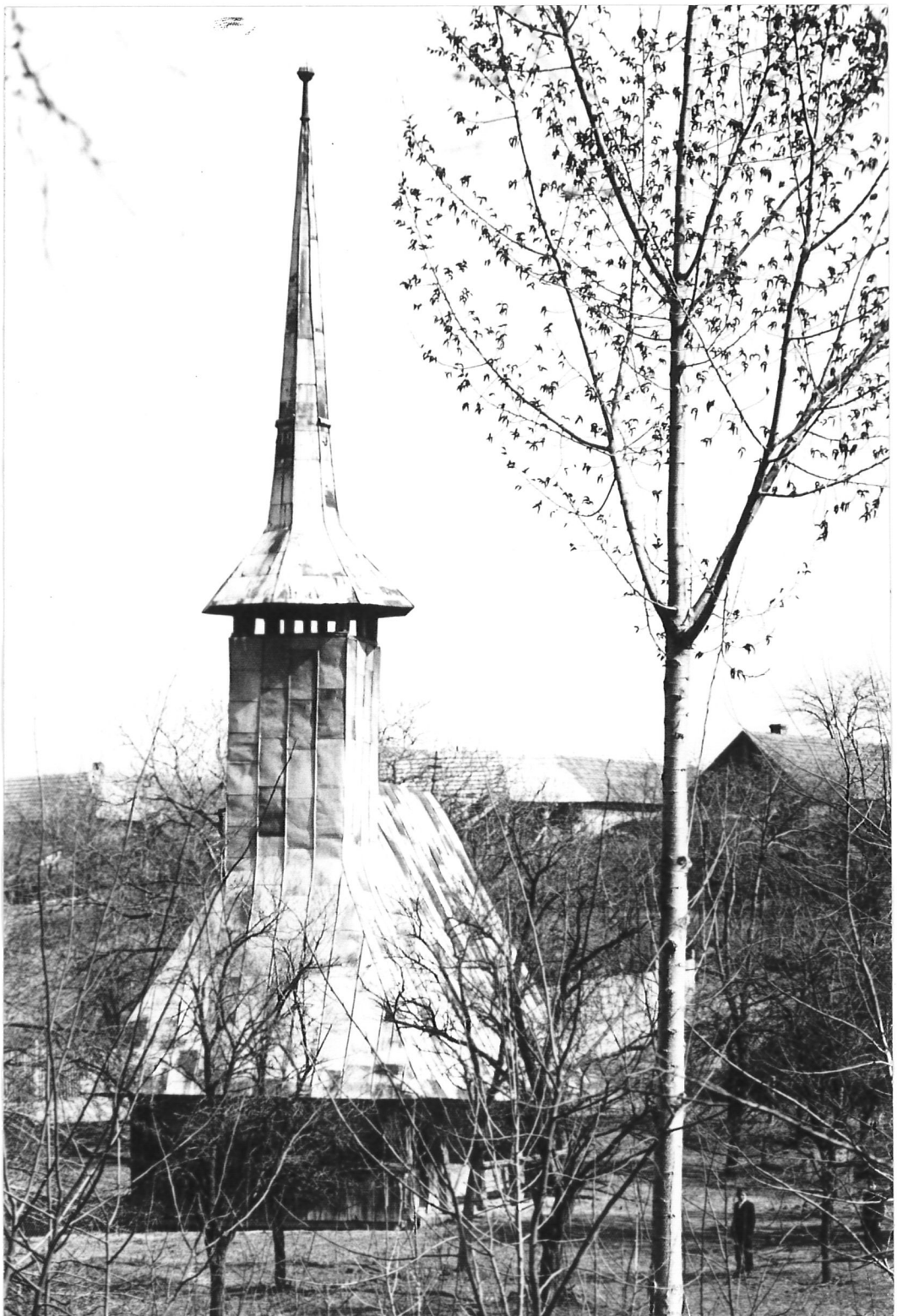




The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

--Mark 2:27

Far to the south and west, the dust on the earth was still, the tractor out front, cold. The ground had already



lost its moist coolness, the long-haired dog had left the middle of the yard for a spot he shared with an exhausted weed under the bench, and the chickens had strutted from their pens below to the soft sprouting soil--the place most likely to dig out worms--near the well.

Inside, my parents had made a fire in the tin stove to take the chill out of the stone-cold earthen walls and to heat a pan of water for their instant coffee. Gheorghe burnished his tired leather shoes, Gavrila was trying our aerosol shaving cream while he shaved, and Lelica pulled the table out from between the bed and the cabinet for breakfast. It was Sunday--the first day that all of us could sit down for breakfast together.

No sooner had Lelica brought in plates and bowls of breakfast than she was up to go back for the salt, then up for the knife in the kitchen, then up again to carry the empty bowls and plates back to wash. And to wash was to go out into the sun-lit yard and crank up the water, to fill the pan, and to scrub the dishes. Sooner, again, than we could get our own things straightened and in the suitcases, she was shooing us out into the yard so she could sprinkle the dried-mud floor with water and sweep up the excess rubble.

It was nearly time to go to church. The Petrus family had come around from their side of the lot; Mr. Petrus--a

thin, red-faced ditch-digger--and his son--a likewise thin and lean worker, who works in the factory--were both dressed in suits which hid their features under the poorly fitting material. Their jackets left a white triangle of the shirt underneath--bisected by a thin black tie--which set their face up like a tee to a golfball. All of the women wore knee-length dresses, brown or dark grey, and their boots came up to the bottom of their dresses. The top halves of their old dresses were covered by jackets of leather vests with imitation fur lining.

The three of us, by contrast, wore bright colors--wash and wear. I had on a pair of blue corduroy bell-bottoms and a printed shirt. Mother's only dress was a long formal she had bought to wear in the European nightclubs, so she had to wear pants and a top. My father's suit coat was a double-knit sports jacket with a wide lapel.

Lelica took a strand of my hair in her fingers and pulled it away from my head to see and gasp at its length. I asked if it was too long. "No. . ., yes a little bit, but I have seen longer hair in the City." They teased and laughed; I laughed with them. And with each vibration of the ribs, the nervous tension that had disturbed me before when they touched or kissed me was exhaled into the air.

As we all prepared to leave the house--by foot like the others this time--I asked Gheorghe why everyone was heading

down the main road of Marghina, instead of going down into the valley behind the house where the chapel was, the chapel in which my father said he was baptised. "The one behind the house is now a national monument," my father translated for Gheorghe. But Gheorghe was unsatisfied that I nodded in receptive manner when my father spoke and not when he did. Removing my crutch by speaking directly to me, he brought his face close to mine and put his arm on my shoulder and said: "La biserica nu ie acolo en la drum." (the new church is down the road). He caught my straying glance as I began to look toward my father, and I saw by the way he shaped his own lips that he was anticipating me to repeat. "La biserica. . ." I started. Again he performed the sentence in front of my eyes. I watched his slightly scarred lips milk out the words, and his barely crooked nose bob with the rising, then falling, intonation of the phrase. I started again, stammered a little, and then watched Gheorghe's face cheer me on as I finished. Now Gheorghe was content and he gave me a hug; he was ready to go out the gate with the rest of us to the church.

Somewhere in Marghina a stocky woman has left a bare, naked goose to soak in her largest porcelain crock and has set the bag of feathers aside so that she could

> clean the blood from her hands and pull on her finest wool dress for church; she is ready. In another part, the spades are left propped on the fence near the furrows which are to be the womb of vegetables this summer. The men's hats are brushed off, the children's faces are scrubbed, the coats are on, and the gates are locked behind them as they set out for church. These yet unseen faces begin to come. The Proor family from down near the highway is on their way up the gently sloping road; the Tadeus family is coming up from the plainlands on the outskirts of the town; the young Vasile newlyweds are crossing the bone-dry planks of the bridge down the road to the south-east. Like the organization of a colony of ants, the people come from all directions to respond to the clarion bell in the church tower.

We, the Fridaes and the Friteas, also joined by the Petrus family, arrived at the gate in front of the church with latecomers on the road behind us.

It was strange that I hadn't noticed it before--the hard red-brick church rose to a height of, perhaps, five stories; taller than any tree or house I had seen on the rolling plains of the Western Rumania. Greek Orthodox, I had thought, was supposed to have the flavor of the Islamic minarets and the golden domes billowing like helium-filled ballons. But this Greek Orthodox church looked like a modest, practical, and unworldly Baptist church I had seen in California, or imagined to see in a place like Pennsylvania, seated near orange-leafed trees to match the red brick. This church looked as if it were built around the turn of the century. I later learned it was built only ten years ago by the men that filled it (minus a handful) that Sunday.

Breaking my study of the exterior lines of the church, the Petrus boy, Stelica, took me by the arm and led me through the archway at the porch which resembled a fattened ace of clubs. I suddenly found myself down the aisle and in the approximate center of a large, chairless floor; realizing that most of the eyes were on me, even though they were singing some verse; and found myself repeating Stelica's reversed from-Catholic (Greek Orthodox) sign of the cross, and following his kissing prostrations at the feet of two half-dollar prints of the Virgin Mary and Jesus.

After this seeming test of faith, I followed Stelica back to the rear of the church where we found the stairs to ascend to the balcony. From there I watched my parents go through the same rite at the altar below before going to their place. Both my parents and I were taken to different places to participate in the ceremony. The women stayed behind a ceremonial fence which bisects the length of the floor, and the men stood in the front half of the floor, while the unmarried youth went to the balcony. The infants, of course, stayed with their mothers, but some of the older children went where they pleased.

The interior was decorated with the same rolled-on designs as Gheorghe's front room coming all the way up one side of the plastered wall, across the hollow, rounded ceiling, and down the other side. Some of the larger delineations

around the three pairs of windows were not as carefully done as the pinstripes on the edges of the walls in Gheorghe's house. Someone had even hand-painted the sun and moon at the zenith of the sèmi-cylindrical ceiling.

After everyone had circulated in front of the flowery decorated shrines to the Holy Mother and Christ, the curtain behind the altar was pulled open to reveal a small rectory behind. A man in priestly garments, of about forty years, walked swiftly out, chanting verses in a rich baritone voice. He reminded me of a barber the way his curly black hair was neatly combed, and the way his pencil mustache was tightly clipped. He continued chanting long flowing passages, and then the rest of the congragation sang responses in a wailing, almost bemoaning manner.

I was patient and listened for about an hour and tried to pick out an occasional word or two. But the tendons in the back of my leg began to tire until I shifted the other leg forward and propped most of my weight on the roughly-cut railing in front of me; my eyes wandered from the scene of people below prostrating again and again on the planked floor, and beginning to regurgitate the same split harmonies:

> A small girl with her tender hands silhouetted by the reddish-black nap of her grandfather's neck around which her arms are locked gives out a radiance, an irridescent beauty when she smiles at me. My heart is filled

and I try to reflect her pure, unstained light from here in the balcony with an equally happy grin. Her back is turned to the altar; she does not see and most likely doesn't hear, but perhaps she knows; "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."*

When the service had finally ended, neighbors gravitated each to each. The Fridaes and Friteas, too, were re-established as a single unit by the time we were out of the coolly lighted church building, and like the other families, we sauntered off in our particular direction. The animals were there to meet us when we entered Gheorghe's gate.

"Take this jar over to the Petrus' house and they'll fill it with milk," Gheorghe said, "they have a cow."

> Go outside. Go to the corner of the yard, to the extension of the roof of the new house which hangs over two barrels, a bale of hay laid up last harvest, a fruit-box with tools sadly in need of refurbishment themselves, and a rusting sickle. Continue around this shed and between the sapling birch and the pigpen; make your way down the path and step over the chicken wire hung like a spider's web between the two fences and enter the Petrus' yard.
>
> Once the milk has been gotten, and the tables brought up from Gheorghe's house and placed end to end in Gavrila and Mariora's room of the new house, the chicken cooked, the pork fried, the wine brought from the cellar, and everyone called to dinner, we'll begin the Sunday meal.

My father's cousin from over the hills to the west had brought his son with him on the train. Gheorghe's mother, with whom I had spent hours trying to talk to a few days before, was also there for the Sunday meal. I could tell that Mariora and Gavrila were happy that we were all in their house as now <u>they</u> could practice the overbounding Rumanian hospitality. They welcomed us and seated us. The room was neatly cleaned, the glass on the print of Jesus and Mary was washed and tipped straight on the wall, and the feather blankets of the beds are folded in half and pushed back to the wall and covered with a spread. A doily was laid on the center of each bed.

When all were seated Gheorghe toasted "that you all return to Romania soon." Mother asked my father to translate, "Maybe we won't have to return; maybe we'll have you all with us in the United States soon." He began to formulate the words in the Romanian language, but before he could finish, Mariora shook her head "no." We stopped his speech. She let out a sigh and laughs to say that we should know that life could never be such. Not this side of heaven, anyway.

Dear God! If ever there was a heaven, being with them was a drop of that great Ocean; if ever there was hell, it was to dwell on the fact that nations have torn us apart so thoroughly that we begin to believe that there was no nepenthe. Mother, it is a good wish; how in this world can we make it come true?

> On the road again, but being Sunday, there are even more people to stand out front and wave as we pass down the main street. We see faces that we met at church this morning and some we have seen here on the road before, and mostly, we see new faces that were, before, at work on previous days. I try to look everyone who waves in the eye or wave back at them, but there are too many.

We often set out in our car in the evening so that we might catch friends or relatives at home just after their dinner. This time, my parents and I went to see Lelica's mother and her sisters in the town of Satu Mare which lay

east, then north, and was nestled close to the foothills of the Transylvanian Alps more than a dozen kilometers away.

For the first time, Lelica went with us. She directed us down the several wretched undulating roads to the place in the continous wooden fences behind which hid her mother's one-room hearth.

> Lelica's son by a previous marriage shares this home with his grandmother. Upon entering the room I realize that it is divided into two areas, although there is no wall or partition. On the left, there are two beds in opposite corners and a table sits between them. Also from that side, light comes in from the only window. On the right, the floor space is shared by a smaller bed, (on which a small thin black-haired visiting grandson is now sleeping), a stove, and a chest of drawers. I recognize the floor plan as one not uncommon in these parts.

Lelica and her mother appeared to be made of the same thick and heavy features. I remember leaning down to kiss her mother the same way I had to greet Lelica. But her skin was leathery and her hands were not as strong. Her left eye was made of glass which didn't follow the other as she glanced from one to the other of us.

While we sat on the two beds and had, by this time, a very familiar recitation of how we made it to Rumania, the small boy on the other bed began to stir. When he had wrestled to his stomach and raised his poor head up, he spoke to his grandmother; she brought a pan over to him and, much to my secret surprise, he stood in the bed to

urinate. She then put a coat about him and he went out to play.

When both of Lelica's sisters came from their houses down the road, I gathered them out in the yard for a posa. Indeed, they were much more excited about having the picture taken than I was, even though Lelica and her mother acted shy in front of the camera. Others who had seen a car out front were now peeking over the fence to see what was happening. Cornel, Lelica's 12 year old son, had just returned home, and he was proud that so many people were standing around the car out front.

It pains me inside to think of the incident now, but when I finished the picture of Lelica and her family, a woman, (a neighbor, I suppose), brought her two children into the yard in the hopes that she could get pictures made of them. How I wish I had brought enough film; how I now wish I had taken that pose! But as it was, I had only a few dozen shots left and I was worried that I wouldn't even have enough to capture the family members for posterity. So I only clicked the rewind knob. What a charlatan I was; how could I have betrayed them so?

As the sky darkened, we began to say the long goodbyes that are called for in these situations. Although we were already saying goodbye and we had only met, Lelica's son and I seemed to have a preordained attraction for each

other. Our friendship ignited his brown adolescent eyes into bright, pensive messages of love and brotherhood between us. When my mother asked me to turn the car around on the treacherous road, I motioned for him to come along, and then made a short ride of it. His friends saw him and I got the feeling that his smile was saying "I can't thank you enough!"

Now, I began to understand the goodbys; we stand face to face for minutes upon minutes wondering if we will ever see each other again, hoping that what we could say was understood, and praying that all we couldn't say was somehow cosmicly felt. We departed.

The road through Margina splits at Gheorghe's house, and our headlights illumined the windows as we approached. They must have known we were coming; the sight of headlights shining through the curtains must have been so seldomly seen in those parts that it announced only our arrival.

> Usually when we return to Gheorghe's house the double gates open just before we arrive. "Porta automatica?" I guessed the second night coming home from Gheorghe's work-master's house. When he laughed, I knew that my guess was right. We usually sit in the car and watch feet between the bottom of the gate and the ground moving first to the center of the double gate and then to the side, taking half of the gate with them as the gate swings inward, then the feet walk out in the open to reveal that it was Gavrila. He swings open the other side.

But that was usually; Sunday night there was none to greet us. Gheorghe had to get out and open the gate before we could roll the car up to the chicken coop. When we climbed out of the car, we saw the neighbors who normally stand and chat in the front yard now crowded at the entrance of the front room. It was not hard to tell that there was some kind of problem when I got close enough to see the worried look on their faces. But just then, everyone cleared of the entrance, and my jaw was loosened abruptly, as if by an unseen power, when I saw three men carrying Gheorghe's mother out of the room. At first I thought she had somehow fallen and broken her leg by the way she winced with pain as they dragged her puppet-limp legs over the raised threshold of the front door. They lifted her onto the bed where Gheorghe and Lelica had been sleeping next to the stove. "Dear Jesus!" I thought, "what happened?"

"Mariora said she fell from the bed," my mother told me when she came out of the front room where an older white-haired man was recounting the scene to my father. I went into the kitchen to see if there was anything I could do. "Mama's" face was dropping to one side, her eyes had a helpless, sinking-in-quicksand look. She had suffered a stroke with her fall and half of her body drifted into paralyzation before our eyes.

My fingers rubbed nervously against my sweating palms, and my face must have been as stern as Gheorghe's who was now working with his mother and persuading her to try to move her various limbs.

I suddenly felt the need to discharge an electric energy that I had contracted from the high-powered tension in the air. Standing there as helpless as "Mama", I could do nothing to help as her life seemed to come undone, unraveled and thrown and tossed out on the cold night air. Before imagining my fist plow through one of the brick walls in an effort to break through this sullen drama, I thought there must be some action we can take.

"I have seen that it is better to go to the doctor as soon as possible," such was the translation of the Rumanian words that I was suddenly saying. "Let's take her in the car!"

But no, they knew what the problem was and saw no reason to do that.

I found my father amidst the worried, confused faces, and tried to get him to convince them to take "Mama" to the hospital, because they usually looked up to him and regarded the things he said as truth. "I already spoke to Gheorghe, but he doesn't want to go." He won't go, the words rebounded like a ball on my forehead--and my mind went back to the night before when Gheorghe had correctly diagnosed

the gas in my father's chest--perhaps they knew.

But in a few minutes there was a general consensus among some of the older women who had probably seen birth, disease and death more often than many physicians, that she should go to the doctor. They were not accustomed to having the opportunity to use a car in such cases. I asked later how they would get a sick one the five or ten kilometers to the doctor. Usually, they said, they would have to walk to the nearest phone, and the doctor would ride his bike out. If it were a real emergency, they might call the ambulance out of Marghita.

About four of us carried her moaning, paralyzed body out to the car. She could not or would not cooperate; a dangling leg or arm would prevent us from positioning her in the back seat. Once she was in the car and the door closed, she fell over sideways into the seat; she could not sit up straight.

Again the night drive to Abhram; this time only with Gheorghe and Lelica. I waited again in the small waiting room, shuffled lethargically through some printed matter on the end-table, and rubbed my hands as if they were cold. Within a few minutes of our arrival, Gheorghe came out the double french doors to get me to help him put her back in the car. We were to take her back to the house and the

doctor was to call in a day or two to check the seriousness of the stroke. In two days she would be dead.

The only picture we have of "Mama," Gheorghe's mother; she is seated here at the Sunday supper table, third fron the left.

The whole of the Rumanian plain-lands near the Hungarian border has been ploughed and turned. Only islands of houses disturb this panoramic profile of earth on night-sky. From a knoll of a rise, the warp and woof of the land would appear smooth, and the moonlight would cream the perpetual furrows with a gossamer filling. But the texture of that land is fierce and vehement from the grass root's level, and causes the human foot to falter in its effort to traverse it. The rains have stopped too early this season, and the land that should be soft and yielding is hard and unpromising.

The road out front is a silhouette of black clay on the fathomless, star-flecked blue of the sky. The twisted, beaten earth between Marghina's long row of houses appears to be the surface of an ocean whose caps and swells have been frozen into a parade of acute figures along the surface.

In the houses, the tired workers sleep in prayer that rain will soon come and break up this post-winter draught, and that the corn and bean seeds they are planting will fall on fertile ground. Outside this house, the tractor used by Gavrila awaits the dawn work-whistle with its seeder hitched and ready.

Gavrila and Mariora now sink under a pile of blankets in their room. Their sleep is deep and heavy, and they slumber down through the bedding and the bed boards, the stones and the earth, out of their fatigue; drifting, as if from a secret, nocturnal harbor, away from the musty air of their room and slowly, invisibly astray on a placid ocean of nighttime. The room is dark and warm with human sleep.

But I have sacrificed the human-sweat and baked-ash heat of their room, and have moved my sleeping bag, writing tablet and a small stack of books into a cold, unfinished room across the hallway. Above, twin moths play tag around the cool-yellow lightbulb suspended about a foot from the hurried, hand-painted designs in the ceiling. Around me sit a collection of the finest chip-board furniture that Rumanian industries have to offer, waiting for the time when Gheorghe can afford for this room a wood stove and windows. Sobered by the cold, I can escape in solitude and amble down the long recollections of the day, and try to make some record of them here on paper.

Down the sleeping courtyard, in the smaller house, my parents sleep off a long day in Cluj, the capitol

of this region. Across from them "Mama" pants with a purling noise of phlegm filling her lungs, and Gheorghe and Lelica take turns sitting with her, wiping her colorless brow with a damp cloth, and speaking to her in low, sympathetic tones.

My body grows lazy as nighttime turns into morning, and, with each yawn, my lungs begin to fill with sleep. O Lord! How lowly I feel my indolent life is when compared with theirs! Life in Romania is an elusive, heroic struggle. I feel the need to somehow join them in their cause, and take a post in their invis ble conflict. And filling my soul are the words: "How can I choose to sleep, O God? words remembered from Baha'i Prayers, a book which I had to send from Italy back to the States because it was illegal to bring into this country. Oh how I wish I could somehow demonstrate the kind of poverty I feel in their presence, I imagine myself kneeling before Mama's bedside or at their shrines and praying with them in words I have memorized, seemingly, for this occasion:

> How can I choose to sleep, O God, My God, when the eyes of them that long to meet Thee are wakeful because of their separation from Thee; and how can I lie down to rest whilst the souls of Thy lovers are sore vexed in their remoteness from Thy presence.. . .

and:

> I entreat Thee by Thy Name through which the Hour hath struck, and the Resurrection came to pass, and fear and trembling seized all that are in heaven and on earth, to rain down out of the heaven of Thy mercy and the clouds of Thy tender compassion, what will gladden the hearts of Thy servants. . . . . .

Let this be my supplication; may it be sent forth out of this chamber to others this night that are able to dream.

And thus I went to sleep.

I can't remember the dreams,
dreams like the music that played before
the hollow needle scratching
at the end of the record,
or like a child before puberty, in purity;
unborn child, I can't remember.

Before birth, and I was in the womb of night
then foliage intertwining, and paint-blotch blossoms
blinding
my nocturnal sight;
ceiling images, graven on my mind,
carved with the switching on of light.
Oh! when Mariora came into the room,
on that dark and lonely night,
"Ou morit!" she said
and I knew that "Mama" had died.

It's a cold and sober world to wake up to--Mariora was standing over me, and I squinted my eyes in the bright and sudden light.

"Dumnezeu!" I said, "Dear God!"

"Ou morit Mama," she repeated, and then she demonstrated by palming her hands together, putting them next to her cheek, and then tilting her head and closing her eyes: She repeated "Mama died, do you understand?"

"Da da!" I had understood when first she turned on the light and I was delivered out of the night. But I didn't understand why she started to move my books and clothes back into her room across the hall. "What are we doing?" I asked.

What she said then I did not understand, but I got up and began to get dressed, thinking that they wanted me to drive the car--the only skill I seemed to have to offer.

"Nu nu," Mariora said as she tended to her job of getting me out of the room, "Go back to sleep," and she led me into her room where Lelica had prepared the bed by fluffing the blanket and turning it back. "Sleep here."

Of all of the things to be worried about at a time like this? Here they had awakened me, and, through an overall feeling of dispair, a sense of acceptance and contentment began to console me inside, because now I was up and could share the burden, or somehow partake in their grief. "No, I

can't sleep," was all I could say. They didn't appear to understand, but left me to my decision.

Then that contentment began to turn into anguish as I stood motionless by the bed they had prepared. We all had privately feared that "Mama" would not live long, and that was not the cause of my sudden pain. Regardless of all the things I hadn't said before, I still hoped they had understood my love; even though I had been stifled by my gagging lack of words a thousand times over, I still had prayed against hope that the purport of my message would somehow--by their empathy perhaps---be transmitted; even though we must have flown into their lives with more pomp and circumstance than tney would have believed possible, we had the presumptuousness to suppose that they could see through all our haughtiness... And all this flashed through in a moment. Those hopes were in vain, I realized; they had supposed that I would want to go back to sleep instead of wanting to be with them in their time of grief.

They were busily sweeping out the room I had been in when I realized that they were going to bring the body there, and that that was why they had awakened me. Remorse over her death, and remorse because I could not verbally express it, overtook me. I didn't know how to look at them, but--as if in a last minute attempt to redeem myself for the many times I had let them wait on me or not done a proportionate share of the

housework, I started over for the small house to help them bring "Mama's" body to the room that was waiting.

As I ran out into the courtyard, now only dimly lit by the weak yellow porch light of the new house, I saw Gheorghe and Gavrila around near the pigpen searching for something. I walked over to join them.

"Why don't you go back to bed?" Gheorghe consoled me.

"I don't know," I whispered after a long pensive look at the ground; I didn't know, exactly.

"...Na," he replied, a slang word I was just becoming acquainted with, which I understood to mean something like "Well ... okay; good, my son."

I looked at his face for a moment before he turned to go back to his work; more than a face of grief, it was a face that was expectant of an immense task ahead, as if he had just set out across a desert alone. He did not look as if he had just fallen from a cliff but rather as if he was about to scale one.

I began to help them in their search; they were looking for boards to build a platform on which to lay "Mama" until they could get a casket. After a short while of feeling around in the dark corners of the shed behind the house, we managed to scare up three suitably long boards--flat, roughly-cut, and retaining their rounded edges which were once the

surface of a log. Gheorghe took the three boards, stood them on end, and measured where to cut them by envisioning the height of his mother. He dragged a sawbuck over from the side of the house, found a rusted saw in the shed, and then began to saw.

One of the neighbors must have gone for the bell ringer, because just then, from off in the cool, dark sky, the church bells began to toll, anouncing to the world the loss of "Mama." The groaning of the bells weighed on me as a low fog, drifting landward from sea; I looked at Gheorghe's face: again the battle of tears: the sawing stopped for an instant while he smeared a rebel tear across his embittered cheek, and then continued sawing.

He continued toiling by himself as the rest of us silently, sympathetically watched on. He cut three boards to about the length of five feet, found some twisted nails in the tool box, banged them straight with a clawless hammer, and nailed the three boards together with two sticks laid perpendicularly.

I followed them as they carried the platform into the kitchen where "Mama's" body lay. We placed her on it and began to struggle our way carrying her out the door, and up to the room in which she was to lie for the next three days.

A little later when the stars were turning pale, and the light from the east began to burst forth into the solemn house,

the family began to gather in the small front room again. My mother had been up earlier and seen the drama through the window; both she and my father knew. When Gheorghe entered, there was a sudden absence of even the slightest noise. His face began to sour to indicate his grief and his bottom lip stiffened to hold back the tears. My father stepped out from among the rest of us and took him in his arms and said, "Cheer up," in a soothing voice.

"It's all right," Gheorghe said, "but I won't be able to rest until Mama has had a proper funeral. I just wish this hadn't happened while you were here."

"No! Gheorghe, we are privileged," my father said, "that it happened while we are still here. Thank God we were able to see Mama before this happened." And we all agreed.

In the next few hours women from all over the countryside came one by one. Women that I might have met some night before in the crowded front room now began to come in the gate with bundles under their arms or on their shoulders. They brought sacks of flour, bowls of eggs, live chickens in gunney sacks, legs of pork, large and small bowls, rolling pins, knives and their own towels; and without a word as to what they should do, they infiltrated the front and back rooms of Gheorghe's house, and began to work. When one would enter, she would say "Ou morit Mama Maicha," and the others would

reinforce her words by stopping their work, pulling a handkerchief out of their sleeve, and squeezing a tear or two out of each eye, and then going back to the work of rolling dough or plucking the chicken they had brought.

And so the day progressed in an entanglement of tears and community spirit. Gheorghe took my father with him on some "business" he had to take care of for the funeral which was to be held three days later. Mother and I found that we--more than ever---were not made out of the proper stuff to fit into the pre-organized machinery of the community, and, for the most part, stood spectators to a grand coalition of human effort. Ill-equipped with the language, we had no idea where this sudden wellspring of energy would flow next.

By the end of the day, the women had filled all spare floor space in all the rooms with cooling bread. Several bowls of egg-flour dough had been rolled out on broom-handles into one-meter diameter sheets of egg noodle, and three chickens were killed, plucked, and made into soup. Because of the custom, "Mama's" belongings that were with her were hung outside on the line to air, and the bed on which she had died was dismantled and stacked out behind the chicken roost. "Mama's" body had been laid in a black, ornamented pine casket and flowers were placed around the room. The men played cards and drank whiskey in the hallway of the new house

while the women sat into the early-morning hours with the body weeping and telling stories of her life. Gheorghe's house seemed to be a community center--more than before--as we watched this intricate preparation unfold during the next three days.

> The animals have been penned up in the lower field, Gheorghe and I have gone over the entire yard for papers and trash, and the car is parked outside the fence. As is the custom, whiskey has been taken as payment to the gravediggers and the bell ringer. All the food is prepared and set in the wine cellar for after the ceremony. We've gone for the priest and stopped at the cooperative grocery store on the way for two dozen bottles of soda water for the dinner afterwards.
>
> The yard that is usually empty and barren is now crowded with neighbors and friends dressed in black and squeezed shoulder to shoulder four or five deep around the casket.

The sadness of her death had struck me before. Perhaps I had felt it most suddenly the night they woke me, but even before then--when I saw her suffering--I mourned. But what seemed to be intervals of mourning from the others and small puddles of tears during the three days of preparing was nothing compared with the sadness that was poured forth during the ceremony. The priest was the only one who did not lose composure--and that through necessity, as he had to perform a long, tedious, ritualed ceremony of chants and orations and blessings.

I don't know if she was secretly chosen, if automatically assumed the roll, or did it spontaneously, but when the yard was completely full of guests and the priest was beginning his benediction, Mariora walked up in front of the casket and began to weep and moan and wail in whining, almost agonizing tones. Every now and then I understood a word or two--something about, Oh God...how could this happen. But I imagined

hearing long eulogies about how many wonderful things "Mama" had done for everyone, but I know that I didn't have the vocabulary to hear such things. Others followed her example and added to the moaning at the surges of her bewailment. The ceremony continued for a much longer time than I would have thought it possible for anyone to cry.

And even while we walked behind the ox-driven cart down across the short valley and up to a small knoll to the graveyard, and while small children stared on, they continued sobbing and wailing. Not until the final spadeful of earth was replaced in the grave did they cease their wailing.

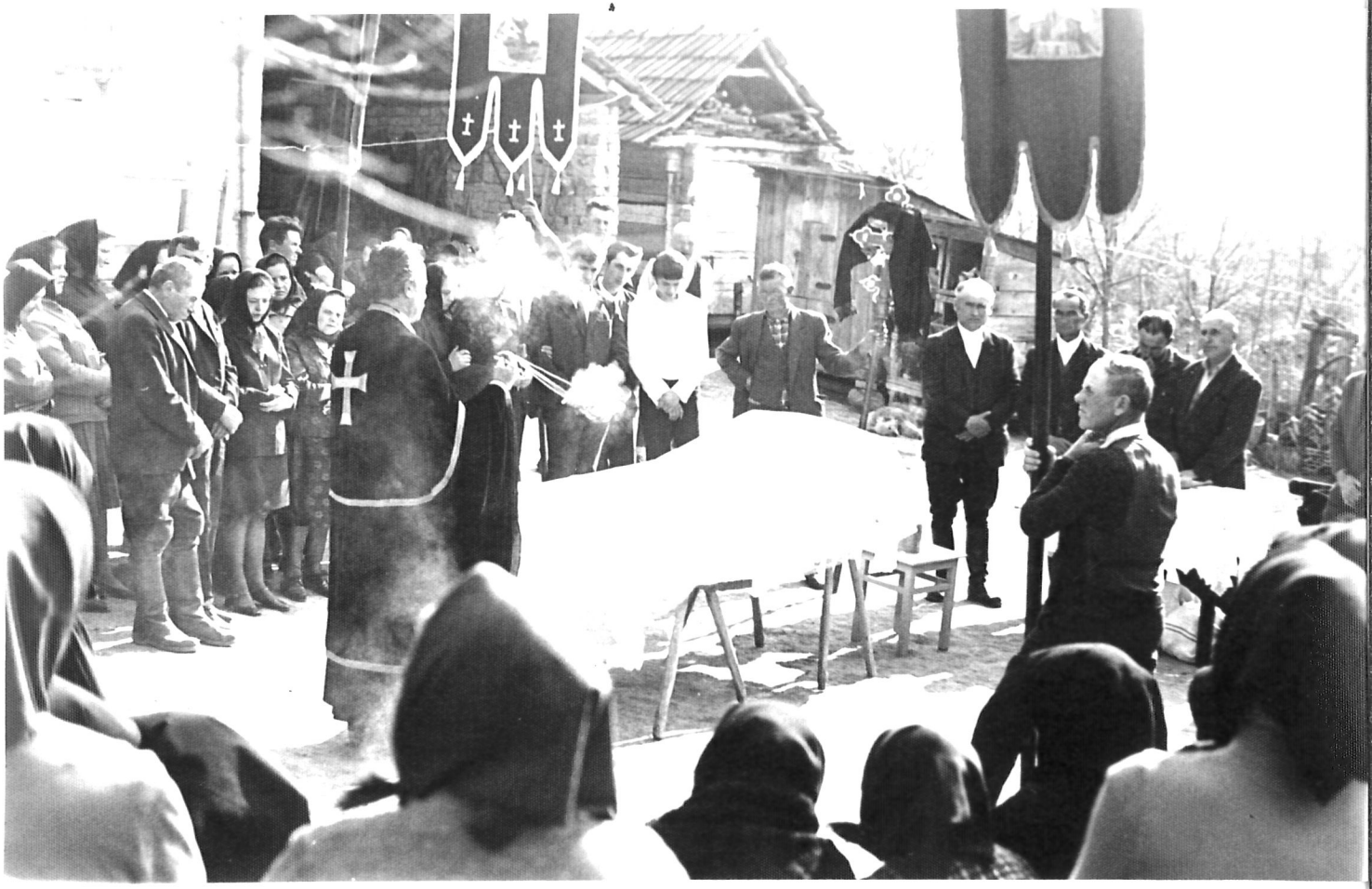
On the walk back to the house where we were to feast and make merriment late into the night, I took Mariora by the arm. Her face was red and puffed from crying.

Trying to lighten the situation, I said, "You were raining much." Her face brightened a little.

"Do you have any more tears?"

"No," she said, "I have no more tears, and now I will never need to cry for Mama again."

And from that deep and lonely night,
Song and dreams went from my sight.
"Mama" was delivered from painful plight,
as was a child born into light.



Indeed, we were privileged to be witnesses to such rare and sacred happenings as these. So intense were these last few days that my mother and my father and I found quite frequently that we had to go for a walk in one of the surrounding fields or down a dried-clay road to escape the language, the customs, and even the people. In these brief periods when they had lapsed enough in their hospitality to allow us to occupy our own time, we could meditate and sort through the multifarious carryings-on of the day. But likewise, in such moments, I am afraid that many perceptions were discarded and forgotten as a way of relief from the overbearing daily routines in which we were subjectively placed. On the floors of such editorial workrooms--on those walks or drives--lie the scrapings that would be ample to fill a thousand hearts; how much more could be written? Along with this--and here I would not try to give any false impressions as to my humility, but rather only state an obvious truth--I apologize that I am not better equipped or more experienced at this to record more faithfully the workings of these people and of this land, and that I have not done their beauty of spirit any kind of justice.

Nevertheless, on one such day when my father and I felt the need to get away from the heavy atmosphere that lingered after the funeral, we escaped the house before they could sit

us down to a heavy breakfast. The sun was only an hour up the silvery eastern sky. We drove down across the highway and continued north on a straight, kneaded cart trail. My father had brought his pole and I had brought my camera for picutres. After the road climbed over an abrupt mound on which the train tracks were planted, we saw the Satu Mara Creek snaking its way along the gently sloping, fruitless tableland. We abandoned the car on the empty field and set out to spend the time alone.

> Through my telephoto lens I can see the emerald waters sliding past the cattails where my father sits and concentrates on the point where the fishing line submerges below the surface and slices the passing waters. We sit in Nature's Beauty.
>
> Through such a lense, things which are far away are brought and seated just behind the things which are close, and the perspective and depth of vision is lost. This greatly reminds me of the way our aproaching departure has sneaked up on us. Looking back there is no sense of time, no perspective of vision.

And now, that vision of the gently rippling waters dances, intertwines, and co-mingles with the vision of the lake--here in California. The conclusion of our trip melds into the travel back, and the traveling back melds into the activities we have resumed here. All experiences appear to be closely related.

My mind especially avoids some of the more painful occurrences when we began to come back to these secure surroundings. The most painful thing about leaving was the incredible

way they begged us to stay.

About two days before we left, we went to the village where my father's uncle lives in order that I might meet them and add to the collection of family portraits. Now this ninety-five year old exuberant man has five daughters that live in the same town, and each one of them insisted that we honor them by visiting her house. After eating at one house, we walked down the street--all of the other sisters following with their children (and sometimes grandchildren) following too. Just fifteen minutes after filling up on soup and roasted pork, the next sister tried to out-do this latter by bringing out an even more enormous meal.

"I don't feel well," I began to explain--and I really was a little under the weather earlier that morning--"I am sick and can't eat." I began to think of every word I possibly knew to explain that I couldn't eat. I don't know how they did it, though: they were so persuasive that we ended up eating another full meal.

Now here is where the memory really gets painful. Not only did this happen once, but four more times. Each time, I would do my best to tell them that it was impossible to eat any more. But each time they would insist and appear to be so sincere that I couldn't turn them down. One lady even began to cry when we refused to eat.

When we left the village, they (I can't possibly remember all the names and faces) began to shower us with gifts to take back to America. They brought out a large sack of walnuts, three gallon bottles of wine and a gallon jug of whiskey. One of Uncle John's daughters gave us her finest glass and pitcher set. She too began to cry when at first we would not accept them. Another lady gave us a feather blanket which would barely fit into the back seat with mother and Gheorghe. And just when we thought that we were about to break away from the wine-soaked kisses and prolonged hugs, the youngest sister (about 45) took her finest hen out of the hen-house, tied up its feet with twine and presented it to us. We could only guess how we would get onto the plane in Luxembourg with the spinning wheel which Gheorge had already given us, four jugs of alcohol, a hulking feather blanket, the twenty pounds of linens, and a perforated box packed over our shoulders for the chicken. Well, they demanded that we take it, so we drove off with the chicken in the trunk and the rest of the car packed with gifts.

As it turned out, we had to give most of the gifts to Gheorghe and mail the rest of the things from Germany because we had a limited allowance of weight on the plane. The chicken we had for dinner that night at Gheorghe's house.

That evening I actually became ill, and excusably can't remember much of what happened the final days of our stay.

But, moreover, I say many of these final things merely as a matter of form: in order that this story might have an ending. But, for me, it has no ending. What at one time seemed like a once-in-a-lifetime trip, now had become an intimate part of me. And the discovery of a lost part of a family, which seemed at one point fantasy-like, had now turned into real people and one-to-one relationships with them. For me, the relationships had only begun. While before we had even gotten there, I was hardly concerned about these people, by this time I had considered coming back as soon as I could afford it or even accepting one of their many invitations to live there.

The hour finally arrived when we would leave. The car was packed much fuller than we thought would be possible, we had taken the car for gas the night before, we had said final goodbys the night before too, and we prayed--but secretly knew otherwise--that all had been said and done. The final hugs and kisses for all except Gheorghe--who was to accompany us to the border--were made. The final tears swelled and filled the eyes, and the final view of their faces was to be the same distorted picture we had remembered of when we arrived. Lelica and Mariora wept, and Gavrila waved.

We drove for the final time down the rocky dirt road.

Our visas into Hungary are just about ready. My father is bitterly disappointed that they won't let us bring three hand-painted pictures which were given to us by the priest of Marghina. Gheorghe tried to explain, but they still would not let us keep them; Gheorghe is going to take them back with him on the bus and try to mail them to us.

Gheorghe now indicated that, as much as he would like to stay with us, he fears being so near the police, and that a bus which will take him back to Marghina is about to leave. In his face is seen, once again, the battle of tears and he takes a long, saddened look at the ground between our feet. He and my father have a few final words. "Yes, we will do our best to find out if it's possible to get you to America" he said, then time jostles us forward, and we find ourselves in the moment.

"When will you return to Rumania?" he asked me.
"Two years," I found myself saying.
"And you, Aunt and Uncle?"
"I guess two years would be as soon as we could save up enough to return--yes, two years."
". . .na,bun!" "Very well."

He turned around and walked quickly down the road to the bus stop, not turning to hide the tears he promised he would keep. And we got into the car when the visas were ready and drove through the guarded gate and across the plain lands west, looking back, looking back.