

THE COLLEGIAN

Serving the Tarrant County College District

April 8, 2009

20 years not enough to put aside revolution's traumas

Student relives memories of life in Romania during fall of communism

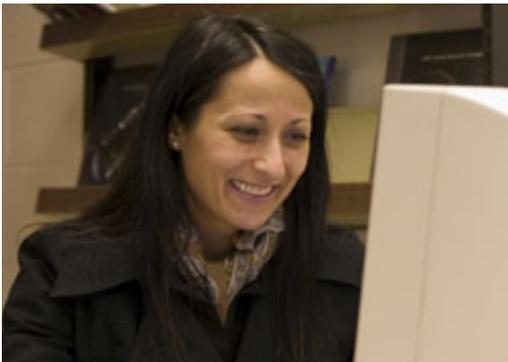
by **Steve Knight**
managing editor

The memories are still fresh.

Twenty years after the fall of Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu's communist dictatorship, NE Campus student Alexandrina Hogue's emotions and memories of that pivotal week in December 1989 remain fresh in her mind.

Living in Bucharest, the capital of Romania, Hogue said she and her family were in constant fear of abduction.

"For us, for so many years to be scared to walk on the street because the Secret Service was after us," she said.



Hogue, now an RTVB student, remembers her father gathering the family around the shortwave radio in the dark to listen to Radio Free Europe. "We were hoping that we would be set free by Americans or the Western world," she said. Breaking into houses that had radios, the Secret Service would arrest the father, leaving the family unable to support itself, she said.

Oana Serafim, former director of the Romanian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and current director of the Moldova service, said in an e-mail from Prague, Czech Republic, that although the station discontinued the Romanian service last year, they still receive e-mails and letters from listeners stating how important news from the station was.

"Radio Europa Libera has influenced my thinking since before 1989. I grew up listening to this radio. It gave me courage and patience," said one 20-year listener in a letter.

Protests started Dec. 16 in Timisoara, Romania, when the government attempted to evict dissident pastor Laszlo Tokes from his church after making comments against the communist regime to the media.

Since Timisoara was close to Hungary, it was the most Westernized part of the country, she said.

“People were bolder,” she said, referring to the fact the city largely broke away from the communist system.

The revolt spread to the capital Dec. 21 when Ceausescu attempted to make a speech condemning the Timisoara protests.

Instead of cheering, those listening to the president’s speech in the square started to chant “Timisoara! Timisoara!”

Hogue said she was in a doctor’s office when a man came in saying people were protesting against Ceausescu in University Square.

“I’ve got to go ... I’ve got to go,” she told the doctor.

Hogue, 17 at the time, went to University Square, ignoring her doctor’s warning that she might be killed.

Hogue estimated around 100,000 people were protesting in the square when she arrived about mid-afternoon.

“Down Ceausescu! Down Ceausescu!” the protesters yelled.

Police and the militia were soon called in to quiet the unrest.

“At midnight, the craziness began. The tanks were rolling over people,” she said. “Many were caught under the tanks while trying to escape.”

The militia also started to shoot at the crowd to keep them from protesting, she said.

“I struggled with feelings of guilt because when they started shooting, I ran away. But I was trying to survive,” she said.

Fire trucks with powerful jet water hoses were then used against the protesters.

Hogue said another frightening experience came when she was arrested.

“They made us write declarations of why we were in University Square, and I wrote that I was scared,” she said.

Hogue witnessed a man beaten by guards during her eight hours in the jail and thought she would be their next victim.

“They beat another guy until he couldn’t stand up. There was blood,” she said. “They threatened me and tried to take my coat from me.”

She and other protesters were then sent to militia headquarters for more interrogation where she thought she would be beaten and raped.

Hogue feared she would then be sent to Jilava prison, a detention center for political prisoners outside Bucharest.

“Jilava prison was the worst prison. It was like hell. Little Hell,” she said.

About 10 a.m. the next day, Hogue heard rumors that something was going on although she did not know what.

By afternoon, while being taken to a train terminal, word came of Ceausescu’s arrest by the army.

On Christmas Day, Ceausescu and his wife were tried and executed, and pictures of their bullet-ridden bodies were shown worldwide.

“We had mixed feelings [about the trial]. We rejoiced in the fact 20 soldiers emptied their rifles into Ceausescu. We were judged that we rejoiced in that. Those two people kept us under bondage for so many years. I rejoiced that justice ultimately was served,” she said.

According to Radio Romania International, around 1,300 people lost their lives during the revolution.

When returning to Romania to see family, Hogue visits the cemetery where some of her friends who were killed protesting are buried.

“It was a time I will never forget, and it made me the person I am today,” she said.

Although the communist regime ceased, it took some time to come to terms with the enormity of the event.

“For seven years, I went through a lot of feelings. I often wondered how I still functioned,” she said.

Hogue, who still has a father, sisters, nieces and nephews living in Romania, arrived in the United States in 1999 and obtained citizenship in May.

“I am grateful for what this country has given me. I am still mesmerized by what this country is about,” she said.

“I understand and appreciate this concept of freedom and democracy more.”

Adrian Neely, NE Campus RTVB instructor, said Hogue sees everything from a different perspective.

“She has a positive tunnel vision and is not afraid to get out there and try things. She always gives her very best,” he said.

Hogue voted in an election for the first time in November.

“I was crying of happiness because I was able to do something like that, which in my country, I never had the chance,” she said.

Hogue said the country’s involvement in the last election made her happy.

“It felt great and was proud to be an American and to give my vote,” she said.

Hogue said Americans can accomplish whatever they want to and become whatever they want to be.

“What this country offers is the gift of individuality and personality. You are able to just ‘be,’” she said.

When remembering those world-changing events of 1989, her emotions still come out occasionally.

“Maybe I don’t want to forget. They were more courageous maybe and gave their lives confronting those tanks, water jets and rifles. That little girl of 17 still surfaces sometimes,” she said.

Photo by Jennifer Covington