

1 Memories

Memories from my childhood! What are memories? What is childhood? I don't know for sure. Is it more than a mere accumulation of memories, feelings and experiences from way back? It wasn't easy to remember. That's why I started to write it down. These are my memories. Memories from my childhood.

I was born and raised in Sackelhausen – Sacklas, Săcălaz, Szakálháza. So where exactly? Does a place need that many names? Two were already too many for me: Sacklas and Săcălaz. Where did I belong? I always had the feeling that I had to decide. I didn't want to. I liked them both. Sacklas was my family, my neighbours and my friends. The German village, the dialect and the festivals. Săcălaz was Romanian. The Romanian language, Romanian neighbours and Romanian friends. The exotic. The familiar and the foreign at the same time.

I call these stories 'Memories from my childhood'. Why? On the one hand, they are about my childhood. On the other hand, however, it's a homage to the Romanian book 'Amintiri din copilărie' by Ion Creangă. As a boy, the stories about his childhood fascinated me. I still remember it clearly, probably because it was my very first foreign language book. Peculiarly, I can also remember things that happened way before I was born. And I could swear that I was there myself. I was told that I was born in 1954, in the October. Germany won their first World Cup that year in Bern in Switzerland in the July. I was there. Today, I feel more convinced than ever. I also went to war. And that ended in 1945. And I was a refugee during the war. I came back to Sacklas. And we experienced together how it changed to Săcălaz. Long before that I was in Szakálháza. The Hungarian Sacklas. And I immigrated there! Together with my ancestor Matthias Wilhelm. He migrated from Saarland in 1766 via Vienna.

It's a part of me. The memory of my family. Of my village. My clan. But still, these are my memories. And my childhood. That's what I want to remember. For example, I want to remember that I grew up in a village. Not just any village, but my village, in Sacklas. On the outskirts, to be more precise. My relatives lived there as well. We kept the village together. We gave it its shape. The outskirts were distinct from the rest of the village, I remember that. The 'We' and the 'I' melded during my childhood on the outskirts. We were special.

We were the chosen ones. The whole village was chosen. The whole clan. I didn't know it back then. But I sensed it. Can you pass on something like this if the village loses its contours? When it's dissolving? When the whole clan scatters? For how long will the collective memory last? Maybe, as long as you are able to remember. Maybe, as long as being special, being a chosen one is relevant.

People and events in these stories are real. They are my reality. I didn't make anything up, at least not on purpose. I only wrote what was in my memory. The gaps are big. Some things I have simply heard too often. Memories and stories get mixed up. I have left out many things I can remember. Only stories that concern me are left. Memories of my childhood. Just 'Amintiri din copilărie'.

Glossary

Sackelhausen – Sackelhausen (German), Sacklas (Banat Swabian dialect), Săcălaz (Romanian), Szakálháza (Hungarian); former German village in the Romanian region of Banat, located 6 miles from Temesvar

Amintiri din copilărie – book by Ion Creangă; English: Memories from my childhood

Ion Creangă – Romanian writer (1837-1889)

War – in this case World War II (1939-1945)

Refugee – after fleeing Sackelhausen during World War II, the villagers sought refuge in Austria and Germany

Matthias Wilhelm – Wilhelm Matthias, my ancestor, born in 1734 in Otzenhausen near Trier (Saarland); immigrated to Banat in 1766; died in Sackelhausen in 1812; eight generations lived in Sackelhausen until the Wilhelm family emigrated to Germany in 1972