

What I Have Learned From James Wilkie

I grew up in the Maramures region, Romani, where I have my first memories. The region was much nicer, ethnically more diverse, better climate, and more geographic diversity, with the Mountains of Gutinul and the rivers of Iza and Tisa, as Tisa was the natural border with the Ukraine before the cold war settled in in 1947. We had vampires, and wolverines, but all these mythological characters were actually members of the communist party, which everyone had to join.

In college I excelled in History and English, as well as French Languages.

I was admitted to the University in Cluj, in the heart of Transylvania, namely the American Language and Literature –Romanian Language And Literature Department of Philology. The Boljay University Is considered the Best University in Transylvania. Once I started mentoring other students, I was happy and had the sense of freedom, reading and writing comprehension being my forté for the following years at the University in the heart of Transylvania. I always dreamt of being a professor, and a writer.

The professors, started reading the mounds of new Decrees every day, which made me laugh, and staff of the university was suspicious of me not believing their “expose” in the classrooms. Professors were trying to befuddle us with words from a wooden language, totally bent toward twisting our brains into confused submission. Professors, securitate officers were acting as sweaty bureaucrats, and Eagle minds trying to tell us what to think. Not one professor asked us, “What do you really think, all of you?”

Each professor had their favorite students and made sure they pointed this out in class, stifling any competition, and were showing openly their favoritism or nepotism.

When I reached 22 years, I started being argumentative, and started criticizing professors, esp. the history professor. I was getting so sick at academics yelling at us, and being forced to do the military service as a woman in the academia. After all, Americans were coming to take away our socialist country. We were doomed as a nation, I was taught in History classes, by being taken over by foreign powers, especially the Americans. Because the Russians already did. Sic! The Russians have been directing Romanian politicians since 1947!

As awful as it sounds I learned the hard way and bought my books from the black market.

We couldn't buy books in English, and I was an English major.

We couldn't talk to foreigners, and the atmosphere was dreadful in classes. Restrictions were plentiful and absurd. Speech was not free; one couldn't argue in class, or make any real analysis or debate. You had to regurgitate what they were telling you, and read whatever was there in the old books stacked in the communist library.

I was an English major, but could not get the books in English necessary for the Exams. They did not exist. Talking to foreigners in English or answering one question was a crime, according to a stupid decree. Abortion was a crime for 20 years. Doctors performing it ended up in jail, and so did the pregnant women. Punishments were ridiculous, e.g. 5 years jail for an abortion for 40 years.

Furthermore if my uncle from Canada visited us, we were all under surveillance, the entire family. Even today, in 2014 one has to go and declare if you have family visiting from the USA or CANADA for some bizarre security reasons. Well after 22 years, not much has changed in poor Romania.

Nobody underwent this.

I was a professor of Romanian and English in Sighetu Marmatiei, Maramures County, at School #2. It was very exacting commuting all the time from Tisa where I lived in our private Museum (Pipas Museum of Art) to Sighet. So, finally I decided to leave in 1986, and traveled to the border, as well as paid a smuggler to take me to Yugoslavia. We were caught on the border and sent back in 1984.

The jail was so cold in Timisoara to keep the bacterias and viruses that it made everybody sick internally with the cold and the flue. Most of civil society was imprisoned, for trying to open the system, and denounce the Ceausescu dictatorship. The blanket was as warm as a Kleenex tissue. Moreover there were no pillow, and the concrete slab where inmates slept was a back-breaker. The lights were on 24 hours a day, blinding all of us, and there was constant observation. Every hour one was awakened to be counted at 5am. All under the guise of watching out for suicides. But everyone could be clearly seen by the guards, and there was no need to sleep-deprive inmates, as they were doing. There was also someone in the higher echelon ripping off the food bill. They served only baby carrots, and spicy beans.

My poor mother was so confused by the propaganda, that she started crying when I was freed from jail, feeling very emotional after the death of the nation's father, Ceausescu.

Fed up with all the restrictions, and full of frustrations, I hit the border with Yugoslavia.

I have been unfairly jailed as I tried to leave the country in 1986. I was ready to give up my freedom, just to escape an impossible country, with impossible leadership.

In 1989, Ceausescu finally pardoned everybody who tried to escape the horrendous conditions in the country.

The first act of freedom I have performed it was to secure a passport for myself. And got married to Valerian Pipas, a famous violinist from Virismort, Tisa in Maramures county. Otherwise the consulate would not have given me the visas. Conditions were one had to be married, and own a house. Truly I enjoyed being married to a musician; he played the violin and I danced tango and csardas in weekends.

I have been teaching English in Sighet, Tisa, and Giulesti, as well as Camara for another 10 years. Conditions were absolutely horrific; no heating in schools, no teaching material, and constant harassment from colleagues of being informed on. And constant surveillance.

Over 1000 young students were killed in the University square by the Securitate (security) agents when Ceausescu was shot. By gunshots. A bloody revolution started that winter.

An all out civil war started in December 15th, in 1989. Dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was shot, together with his wife Elena, execution style.

Luckily I could start now get a passport and visas I was dreaming about for escaping to the West. Even when Ceausescu was dead, change was happening excruciatingly slow, in all domains of life.

After I met Jim, in the city of Sighet, I decided to finally leave Romania, well after an execution squad shot the Ceausescus in December 26, 1989 for Christmas. Such a nice gift to the Romanian people.

When the regime changed in 1990, I was free to get a passport, and started Organizing Conferences and Seminars at the University of Babes-Boljay, in the heart of Transylvania. Together with James Wilkie, we have opened a PROFMEX office in Moscow, headed by Boris Koval.

I was mostly writing on destatification and privatization of Romanian companies. 51% of MARA, the textiles company I researched was finally sold to the Germans. ***The opening up of Romania to the world has finally begun. And so did my eyes open with having met James W Wilkie on a beautiful day of September 16th, in 1990.***

It was on a rainy September 16th day, in Sighet. Being the only English speaker in town, I was called to translate for a small group of academics by the mayor. Shortly after I have met James Wilkie, and James Platler, the two American professors from UCLA, I realized I could leave and that I was meant to see the world.

The two professors were doing a study on the effects of the Cold War in post-socialist countries.

I stated my observations and my truths to James Wilkie, as I saw a kindred spirit in him the moment I have first talked to him. Many of my thoughts were very valuable to Dr Wilkie, who then asked me to guide the academic group through Eastern Europe.

The academics were traveling in a German Opel (a U.S. made car). I took them to the Museum of my friend, Ms. Mihaly de Apsa, in my hometown, Sighet. We then went to the Merry Cemetery, the unique “happy cemetery” in the world.

I will start by explaining the places I went in 1991, mainly one of the most beautiful part of Romania, through Pasul Prislop. We then continued and went together around Romania, visited the monasteries of Moldova, C-lung Moldovenesc, Suceava, Sucevita and Agapia monasteries. Then we went to Lacul Rosu. We took the scenic road to Cluj Napoca, where I was trying to get the plane in order to fly out to Paris, in France. I had all the visas. But there was no flight. Nobody took credit cards at that point in Romania. James Wilkie taught me what CREDIT was.

I fell in love with Jim Wilkie. After this I am going to call him JW.

I was deeply in love with James Wilkie, whom has hired me as a guide.

After I explained to Prof James the failed privatization process in Transylvania, he said: “call me Jim”, which made conversation much easier, on a first person bases.

Being very adamant on leaving the country, we finally left for Budapest after the airport visit in Cluj Napoca. There were no planes there whatsoever. So, Dr James Platler was driving strong, and in 2 days we got through Budapest, finally, and then got out towards Austria and Germany.

Dr James Platler, Jim’s colleague was worried that I was a spy that is because everywhere we went, we received special private rooms, and great Hotel deals, plus good lunches at the Monastery, where I was a good friend with the Mother Superior.

But, after reflecting on the situation, James decided to help me get out of Romania. In Budapest I obtained the Austrian visa, where I needed a simple transit visa. James Wilkie had tremendous confidence. He was irradiating confidence.

After, getting the Austrian visa, we next travelled to Kobentzl, overlooking Salzburg, in Austria talking about the global economy. We even spent most of our time down Salzburg city, taking pictures, and JW was teaching me constantly economics, how the world of development worked: finances, credit, and interest. JP had more faith in me than ever.

Then we went to Munich, where we celebrated Oktoberfest.

I have decided to stay in the West, which is in France. I had my family friends waiting for me. I took the plane to Paris, from Munich, to fly out to Bordeaux to meet the family, which invited me to France. JW had to go back to teach. He promised he would return for me soon. I was already missing James W., hardly had he disappear from my sight at the Paris Airport when we separated that year, in 1991.

After ten weeks in Bordeaux, JW came to visit me. After one year in France, in Paris, I was refused asylum in France. The national security Bureau headed by a Gris guy (security officer) was constantly menacing me...with turning me back.

JW returned for me and arranged with Gerard Chaliand so that security won’t meddle constantly in my life, and I could leave for the United States, moving towards freedom faster than ever imagined by me. It was a very wonderful fall, in Bordeaux, so we drove to see all the castles along the Loire River.

The 1st trip was to and along the river of LOIRE; we left in September, and came back in December. Then we went to Paris, and visited the Versailles, Champs Elysee, the Montmartre, and Montparnasse. We had everything to ourselves, and then we went to the beautiful port of Marseille, while listening to the PASTORALES, and exploring the beautiful green lands of France.

In Marseille we stayed at the Sofitel, JW was overlooking the Bay, into the icy cold town. And we went to the COTE Azure. We stayed at Hotel Welcome. Then rode over the serpentine Cornish roads, overlooking the Mediterranean, Cap Ferrat, and Monaco. Then Jim W. had to fly out to teach again, and I flew back to Bordeaux, where I took numerous courses in European Union Regulations for the environment, and sustainability. I was deeply in love with James.

In Bordeaux France, 1992

Life with the nuns in Bordeaux, France, the city of Commerce, was excellent. The mother superior took me to Toulouse Lautrec's castle, and swam in the Atlantic Ocean. Then I flew to meet Jim in NICE, in 1992.

It is now another beautiful stay at WELCOME, in Beaulieu sur Mer.

James came back 10 weeks later, when getting a break from UCLA teaching. So, the second time together, we travelled to Carcassonne, a fortified city, through Andorra (a gambling center, in the Pyrenees') Mountains. The Principality of Andorra was rich and ostentatious with baroque buildings. And gorgeous La Rochelle, a beautiful Bay, nested in the mountains.

Then entered into Spain, toward Madrid, and stayed at Hotel Paris for a week, in the center of Madrid. We were studying the Spanish cultures, and later, I had a great background in the Peninsular thinking of the Spanish conquistadors. Major Spanish cities are named after in Mexico.

In Toledo, we enjoyed the charales in the main plaza. Morelia, in the state of Michoacán reminded me of Toledo later on.

We left to Toledo, the town of knives, and then headed to the town of Trujillo. In Trujillo we went and took pictures while walking on the red roofs of houses, perfectly lined up for us to walk.

I took great pride that I was free and nobody minded my business for the first time in my life. Jim and I, we were only taking care of one another.

We went up to the Devil's Throat (a town deep in a canyon, tucked into the mountains) to continue up in the mountains, and then went down to a walled town of Avila, to Trujillo, and continued to rainy Madrid.

Then we headed toward El Escorial, the monastery, and then JW flew out of Madrid. I took the plane to France, and in Bordeaux I joined the nuns again, and continued my studies of Folklore at the University of Bordeaux, where I was writing about the mythical Lilith.

To paint it in a picture of words, I am flashing out the pageant, of that beautiful Catholic Church, as we went down from La Rochelle, along the clean river, and the gorges of the Pyrenees Mountains

Out of many, Switzerland is my favorite European country; the majestic mountains and the rivers impressed me.

Monte Rosa's Peak and Matterhorn were absolutely fabulous, left us breathless, and the chalet Michabell was looking down on Italy. The view out of the window was that of Matterhorn Mountain in Zermatt.

We enjoyed the lovely scenery in Luzern, and Interlaken, with the beautiful lake with little bridges leading up to the center, all dressed up in geranium flowers. Multicolored geraniums flowers were hanging out from each houses' window. The beautiful trip was to go up on a chairlift (teleferico) to wheel you up over the meadows, seeing cattle and, magnificent glorious view of the Swiss Mountains, and the peaks. It is a very gentle and slow trip.

In 1991 in summer James and I left France for the United States, more specifically to Los Angeles that is to UCLA, where I wanted to get my master's degree in History.

In L.A. I have arrived just in time to witness the 1992 riots. We found a lovely place in Marina Del Rey, where we stayed for a week, and read all the books on Los Angeles, and its diversity.

I have escaped from the bad world into the good world. We loved each other so deeply.

OPENING PROFMEX To Russia And Eastern Europe

In 1992, we went to Russia and opened the PROFMEX office with Boris Koval our Latin Americanist, and great pianist, thus marking the opening of PROFMEX to Eastern Europe. Publications followed.

Next we went to Hungary and opened a PROFMEX office in Budapest, the capital on the majestic Danube River.

Professors, academics were curious about Mexico, and its leadership in Free Trade. And special trade regions, how Mexico has become the linchpin for trade in the western hemisphere, and NAFTA was in works.

Determined to continue my education, we moved into Westwood and enrolled into the UCLA's Master program in the summer of 2004. I graduated soon after in 2005, but no family was present, as my mother died of a heart attack, and could never travel by plane. Prof James was there for me, and so was Aida Mostkoff of PROFMEX, with flowers; an unforgettable uplifting moment registered forever.

Attending Conferences and seminars on free trade, and managed trade was a full time job now, in the big family that was UCLA for me. We went to a great Conference in Toronto where I could also see my uncle who fled Europe from the Russians. My uncle Nicholas Lazin, who has fled to Hungary in 1947, and settled down in Oshawa, Canada, invited me to visit, Oshawa, and the General Motors Plant, where he worked for over 40 years. It was wintertime in Canada, and it was a harsh experience staying there and getting accustomed again to cold weather. It just does not work with me; we don't mix, the cold weather and me, it was as simple as that.

Discovering new places and peoples.

It was a good feeling escaping Ceausescu's tyranny and discovering the hidden side of the word. I realized how we lived in the dark for 20 years, and one does not be the prisoner of their own thoughts and limited spirit of the others, living the same nightmare, as I did back in Romania.

James and I enjoyed the nuns in Bordeaux; they were free spirits and happy women, with a great sense of humor especially the Mother Superior. In France we even visited Toulouse Lautrec's castle, and spent good times on the beach where the Atlantic Ocean met the Pacific Ocean. I had spent unforgettable moments of discovery, and fraternization with the nuns.

But the most beautiful place on earth is Mexico's Morelia Michoacán. Then Mexico D.F. Even though the air is too polluted in Teotihuacan, I have found Mexico D.F. a nice city, so we travelled around Mexico D.F. and finally visited the Pyramid of the Sun, the pyramid of the Moon, and I found this sacred place a nice place for meditation.

After having worked a long time on getting a Mexican passport, I discovered Mexico as the most beautiful country on earth. Its diversity is mind-boggling. James and I went to Mexico every month for the past 24 years, except for this year.

But as all ironies are happening, when I arrived to L.A., the riots were in progress.

It took 8 years of College and University learnings with James Wilkie to better understand the Los Angeles riots for me. James taught me in 1992 that there were no black or white issues, but there are the “greys” in life too.

Moreover he taught me life-skills, like e.g. how to balance a checkbook, and how to swim. And how to be the best version of myself. All these are very important things for survival in the 21st century.

After graduating from UCLA, my self-development took me again to Toronto to see my uncle Nicholas, and cousin Caroline Lazin. I started teaching History pretty soon, when I returned to UCLA as a Teaching Assistant for 4 years, during my MA and Doctoral Program.

After 2 years in the Doctoral Program in History at UCLA, I graduated in 2001, in January. After graduation I have published my Doctoral thesis, and a second book on the bright and dark sides of Globalization with Dr James W Wilkie, Professor at UCLA. Our books are widely read around the world and are used to teach Courses at College and University levels. To get the books we have written together with James Wilkie, download them from the PROFMEX website.

After 9/11 the whole world has changed. And this will be the topic for another book. A book in which we are still research/investigate what has changed exactly in these 25 years in Los Angeles, and how change has impacted us, at PROFMEX. We, James and I want to come more often to Mexico. I have been teaching a course on Globalization and its impact on Mexico and the world of Free Trade, or managed trade in 2012 and we stellarly did it irregardless of what the press was saying about TJ. The other course we co-taught in Cancun, at the Universidad de Quintana Roo. It was a great success. I miss the peaceful time in Mexico and the U.S. I miss the indigenous people’s traditions and customs. I am now focusing on writing a new Chapter of our lives, with Prof. James Wilkie, and my resolve is growing as per why we are we missing those good things of the past (rituals, customs), as a collective. That is we are together bent on recovering the collective memory of our academic freedom.

And here we are now, paying tribute to James Wilkie the man and the Academic of the Century!
Thank you, Jim! Vivat Academia.