

Anna Lengyel Reflects on the Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Budapest

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In 1989, Anna Lengyel was 20 years old.

ANNA LENGYEL:

My parents, they kept saying, “Well, you know, the Soviet troops are not going to leave Hungary in our lifetime. If you’re lucky, they’ll leave in your lifetime.” It’s very interesting how you couldn’t, even in ’87, you couldn’t tell that there would be a regime change, that the Soviet troops would leave the country.

Quite the opposite. I remember, the system worked in a way that you had to take an entry exam to university. We made a mock entry exam with my dad whereby one of the questions was, “What have you read in original English?” What books. And I mentioned *1984*, and he said, “Well, never, ever mention that! Make sure you don’t because, for that single reason, they are not going to admit you to university.” And I remember how two years later, in ’89, my sister was sitting in the same kitchen with my father doing the same mock exam and going on and on and on about *1984* and what an experience the book was.

But you can imagine coming of age at the same time as having your country become a free democracy from a dictatorship occupied by a foreign army. There is something to be said for that. The euphoria, I don’t know if you can have anything bigger than that.

