

Synopsis :

CEAUCESCAU'S ORPHANS

20 years on

Photography by
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Romania 1993 - 2008

From 1993 to 2000, I regularly travelled to Romania in a humanitarian context. I always visited the same orphanage in Popricani near Iasi, North-East of the country. I got to know some of the children very well and built strong relationships with them. I took a lot of pictures of them mainly in black and white. Some of them were used by the charity to set up sponsorships of the children by French families.

In 2002, the orphanage of Popricani closed down. The same year, I became a professional photographer.

In December 2006, I went back to Romania to meet again the orphans I used to know in the 90s. I wanted to find out what had happened to them. Some of the children I used to know were still living in the village. They were young adults but we immediately recognized each other. It was very emotional. They started to tell me their stories.

I went back in October 2008. One of the "kids", Radu, was getting married. I was invited to the wedding. I photographed the event. Thanks to Dan Palimaru, who used to be a social worker at the orphanage, I found some other ex-orphans : Liliana, 25, married to a villager and already a mother of three, Ramona, 25, baker in a nearby village; Daniel, 25, who by a curious irony is the handy man of the ex-orphanage (today an institution for people with disabilities); Adriana, 25, single mother and homeless who has to beg to survive. And I met some other ones too.

2009 marks the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Romanian dictator Nicolai Ceaucescau. It was at the same time the West finally discovered the battery-like conditions of Romanian orphanages. More than one hundred thousand uncared and mistreated children were hidden in institutions all over the country. Liliana, Ramona, Daniel, Adriana were among them. Born in the 1980s, at the peak of Ceaucescu's regime, they experienced lives of hardship and poverty growing up in orphanages in the North of Romania.

With journalist Guy-Pierre Chomette, we went back to Romania in July 2009 to cover new stories of ex-orphans I hadn't met again yet. Guy-Pierre had also been to Popricani before, in the 90s, and he used to know some of the children too. Shown as diptychs, here is a series of portraits of the "children" almost 20 years ago and now.

Elisabeth Blanchet and Guy-Pierre Chomette