

FROM INSIGHT FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

# INSIGHTS

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## Remember Romania!

### How God Opened a Country to Hear His Word

by NEY BAILEY

Insight for Living Ministries Board Member



We're not trying to Americanize the cross. We must culturalize it without changing the message of the gospel, which must never be altered or softened.

— Charles R. Swindoll

It's an image I'll never forget: a sweeping valley dotted with elderly people transferring 20-foot-high piles of corn, stalk by stalk, from the ground to flatbed trucks. The weathered faces of feeble babushkas framed delicately by scarves, their backs bent unnaturally as they labored . . . the arms of thin, frail gentlemen hoisting corn continuously . . . both juxtaposed with the bored, robust young men who smelled of cigarettes and arrogance as they patrolled the elderly. It was a scene that perfectly captured the heartless absurdity of Romanian communism.

In the 1980s, communism's topsy-turvy division of labor and resources and constant suspicion and intimidation had left most of Romania living in fear. Nicolae Ceaușescu, the cruel despot, had forced thousands to flee the capital city of Bucharest and those who remained to go hungry and cold. Ceaușescu literally starved his people to build his palace and repay international debts. Those people in the valley? They could not *eat* the corn they harvested under this cruel regime. Their spirits and their bodies were broken.

This was my first impression of Romania when I visited in 1981 with a pair of missionary-interpreters from Campus Crusade for Christ. At that time, Romania was a corner of the world where Christians met in secret, longing to hear God's Word. The government was so hostile toward the gospel that we had to "cleanse" ourselves of anything—a bookmark, card, necklace, *anything*—that might identify us as Christians before we crossed the border.

Yet, despite such oppression, the seed of the gospel had already begun to take root in Romania's broken soil due to courageous Christians who had endured persecution, labor camps, and even death. I witnessed this seed

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COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNICATING BIBLICAL TRUTH AND ITS APPLICATION

# From Regime to Revolution to Restoration

God's Well-Laid Plan for Insight for Living Romania

## Anda

Anda Constantin shifted her weight from one foot to another and peeked out past her father's leg. She looked forward, then backward. She couldn't see the end of the line in either direction. She turned her worn punch card over in her little hand. It was her ticket to a half a loaf of bread that day, maybe three ounces of meat that week. Every person in that line that stretched beyond her vision held a similar card, even her father, a dedicated member of the communist army. His rank and service made no difference; hunger was the standard in Bucharest, Romania, in the 1980s.

For Anda's first eight years of life, her mother scraped together meager meals of cabbage and potatoes and their family's rations of bread and meat. Anda had no clue that in other parts of the world, children ate until they were full, had closets full of toys, and never knew a day without heat or electricity.

She also had no clue who Jesus was. Like many people living in Romania at that time, she had never even heard His name.



**Three-year-old Anda poses in her father's army hat. Her sad expression reflects the hard times of life in Romania in the 1980s.**

## Ben

Nearly 170 miles away in Transylvania, Romania, young Ben Mogos collected eggs from the hens in his grandparents' backyard. Unlike Anda, Ben knew the taste of milk and butter and eggs—foods his family made and gathered themselves on the small plot of land where their house stood. At Christmastime, he received oranges, chocolate, bananas, and toys. But his family, too, knew the harsh, stripping hand of communism.

Communists had confiscated all their farmland, everything other than the house and its yard. Ben's family had to portion their electricity. Heat and running water were scarce. His father—a preacher—and his grandfather—also a preacher—were enemies of the regime, simply because they were Christians committed to the Great Commission.

Ben scanned the horizon carefully. He glanced toward the stacks of hay where his father hid his Bible from the police. At that moment, inside the house, his mother



**This small group camps in the woods to evade the secret police. They studied the Bible using smuggled Christian materials. Ben is pictured on his father's back, lower left.**

was tapping away at her illegal typewriter, making copies of illegal Christian resources. His father and grandfather were making plans to show the *Jesus* film again under the cover of night and behind closed curtains.

They had received the film, as well as the resources Ben's mother copied, from Campus Crusade for Christ teams who smuggled Christian materials into Romania—people like Insight for Living Ministries' board member Ney Bailey. Ben's neighbors would come to watch the film that night, their interest piqued by whispered mentions of a God who loved them so much He gave up His own son to save their lives. They would leave with truth in their hands and hearts.

A chill ran up Ben's neck as he kept watch for anyone approaching the house. He had heard many times the stories of those who dared to proclaim the gospel in his communist country. Many preachers spent decades behind bars. Some endured torture. Others had "accidents" that took their lives.



In 1989, Ben and Anda, still miles apart, celebrated their eighth and ninth birthdays respectively. By December, they were also celebrating new life in their country. Revolution had finally arrived in Romania, setting the people free from communism.

"I remember," Ben recollects, "when communism fell and people could just go out and buy ice cream. Whenever you wanted, you could buy it! I'll never forget how colorful and wonderful that felt."

As political revolution shed new, colorful light across the once gray and dark country, an equally miraculous revolution happened in Anda's home. She shares:

*My father was raised by a believing grandmother who prayed for him to come to faith. However, at age 14, he went to the military high school. Nobody even bothered to tell my father that God didn't exist. They assumed that, as an intellectual, he didn't believe. They did tell him he wasn't allowed to talk to Christians or read the Bible. It was only a matter of time before he became an atheist and, eventually, an officer for the regime.*

*He became passionate about communism and atheism. In fact, he had a dream to*



**A former officer in the communist army, Anda's father converted to Christ and later rejoined the military as the first evangelical chaplain in the history of Romania.**

*write a book using arguments from the Bible to prove that God didn't exist. But after the Revolution, the people's interest in spiritual things grew, and we started having freedom of the press. My father began reading articles that talked about the spiritual world.*

*At first, he was just interested in these articles. But then, one day, he realized he actually believed there was something beyond this material world. And then, remembering the gospel his grandmother had shared, he thought, "If there is something more, if God exists, then I have to repent!" I was 11 years old when he became a believer in 1992, and it was the first time I heard the name of Jesus.*

Anda's entire family came to know Jesus as their Savior through her father's testimony. Soon after, with a diagnosis of leukemia, he found himself medically discharged from the military. He decided to go to seminary and become a pastor—a path that led him back to the military, this time as the very first evangelical chaplain in the history of Romania.

Anda recalls, "My father said, 'You know, I've fought against God in the Romanian military, and I now want to honor Him in the same place.'"

Luxuries like "ice cream whenever you wanted" served as the cherries on top of the now freely flowing necessities of meat, running water, heating, and electricity that the people of Romania finally had. Ben's father and grandfather no longer had to proclaim the gospel against terror. But they faced a new obstacle: a spiritual famine every bit as

severe as the physical one communism had imposed. Anda's father wasn't the only new believer who joined the effort to feed Romanians' starving souls. Within a year of the Revolution, Ben took up

**Ben is baptized in a small church his father helped plant by the pastor his father mentored.**



*It was on a Sunday evening in 1990 during a revival in a small Baptist church that I surrendered my life to Christ and trusted Him as my Savior. My parents had moved from Transylvania to the south of the country as missionaries, finally free to plant churches and share the gospel. It was during high school that I was called by the Lord to full-time ministry.*

the mantle too:

About seven years after Ben's profession of faith, the Lord finally crossed his and Anda's paths. They were teenagers and at a church camp outside of both of their hometowns. Anda caught Ben's eye when she fell into a river! He caught her heart when he sat with her afterward to keep her company as the sun dried her embarrassment and her clothes.

They spent hours talking and growing a friendship at that camp. But then they returned to their homes and didn't hear from or see each other . . . until they both "happened" to be called to ministry and both "happened" to end up at the same Bible college in Bucharest.

"I was in this new city where I knew no one . . . and then, there she was," Ben remembers with a



**Anda and Ben (center) celebrate their wedding: (from left) Emil Constantin (Anda's father), Carmen Constantin (Anda's mother), and Adina Heinle (Anda's sister).**

"That was nearly 16 years ago!" Anda chimes in. "We now have a seven-year-old son!"

And a son wasn't the only adventure the Lord had in store for this pair He brought together for His glory.

From regime to revolution, from Transylvania to Bucharest, and eventually from Bucharest to Dallas, Texas, and *back*—the Lord has paved the way for these two Romanians to change their country *together* with Insight for Living Ministries . . . and YOU. They've tackled the spiritual hunger in their homeland with the same fervor and commitment their fathers did, remembering the first time they felt full 30 years ago, first in their bodies and then in their souls. To them, the love of Christ and the nurturing truth and practical help of His Word add far more color and wonder to their world than even ice cream to a little boy free to enjoy it for the first time.



*Ben and Anda eventually attended Dallas Theological Seminary together and both became interns at Insight for Living Ministries. In 2011, they joined our team as full-time staff members working on translating our resources into Romanian. In 2014, they helped establish Insight for Living Romania, where today, Ben serves as the pastor and Anda as the executive director. They've also become the prototype of discipleship and training for **Vision 195**—Insight for Living Ministries' strategy to make disciples in all 195 nations.*

*Be sure to catch the next issue of Insights, where we'll share with you the amazing ways the Lord has fed Romanians through the Mogoses and Insight for Living Romania over the last five years . . . and the incredible feast He will continue to serve through their faithful obedience and the partnership of people like you. ■*



In Bucharest, Ben, Anda, and their son, David, stand beside the sign of Agape Church, the church Ben planted.



Ben records his Romanian translation of the *Insight for Living* program.



Agape Church began as a group of Christians meeting for Bible study in Ben and Anda's home.



In 2010, Ben and Anda graduate from Dallas Theological Seminary.



Left: Ben freely proclaims the gospel in Bucharest, a city of three million people.

bearing fruit in Ava, one of the soft-eyed babushkas in the valley. We had stopped our car along the side of the road to take pictures. As we were leaving, Ava whispered, “Go in peace,” to one of the missionary-interpreters. Later, I learned that *no* one would say “go in peace”—unless she knew Jesus.

All over Romania, believers gathered secretly, in 30-minute intervals, to hear someone teach the Bible. We taught one of these precious groups, who showered us with tokens of thanks. One token, a delicate apple cake, came from a woman named Anna. She must have stood in line for days to procure the ingredients to bake such a lovely dessert. I wanted a photograph of her, but we knew the authorities would harass anyone they recognized in our photographs. So I took only a picture of Anna’s hands.

Upon my return to the United States, I couldn’t stop thinking about Anna and about Ava in the corn field, the believers in Romania starving for spiritual nourishment, and so many others who had never heard of Jesus. Earlier that same year, Chuck and Cynthia Swindoll had invited me to join the board of Insight for Living Ministries—a ministry committed to teaching biblical truth around the world. I wondered if God might merge these two significant events in my life.

It took nearly a decade and a radical revolution, but God DID bring the two together!

In 1989, the wave of change that began with the fall of communism in East Germany washed over Romania. The revolution began in the city of Timișoara when word got out that persecuted pastor László Tőkés was going to be taken away by the communist authorities. As many as 10,000 people surrounded his church to protect him. The mayor told Pastor Tőkés to disperse the crowd; instead, he led the thousands in The Lord’s Prayer. Into the night, their unified voices cried out, “Deliver us from evil!” A few days later, God answered their prayer. Romania’s evil dictator was killed, and they were delivered into freedom. One young man, a



**Ney Bailey, an Insight for Living Ministries board member since 1981, ministered in formerly communist Romania. Pictured recently with Ben and Anda Mogos who lead IFLM’s ministry in Romania.**

Romanian believer, told me shortly after the night in Timișoara, “We had no weapons. We won the war with only spiritual weapons.”

Today, I’m overjoyed to tell you that God opened the doors for Insight for Living Ministries to establish an office in Romania in 2014. Ben and Anda Mogos, who serve as its pastor and executive director respectively, were growing up in Romania when I visited. Ben’s father and grandfather were pastors who used resources that Campus Crusade for Christ smuggled into their country!

As we motored away from the cornfield that day in Romania, Ava locked eyes with me and said: “Wherever you go in the world, greet the brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ for me.” So today, I greet you for her. We must always remember the gift we have to worship, evangelize, and teach in Jesus’ name . . . and the power of God to open closed doors. *Remember Romania!* ■

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