



(AN)ARCHIVE

CHILDHOOD, MEMORY, AND THE COLD WAR

EDITED BY MNEMOZIN



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Pink Flamingo¹

Iveta Silova

It was supposed to be a very ordinary spring morning in Stučka, a small town in Soviet Latvia named after Lenin's communist friend Petr Stučka. It was 1982. The statue of Stučka was towering on the town's main square, which was curiously located not in the center, but on the edge of the town by the river. In less than a decade, the town would be renamed Aizkraukle, after the 14th century Livonian Order castle, the ruins of which still remain there. And Petr Stučka would be gone.

The girl lived just a few blocks away from the square, in a 9-story 'high rise' apartment building by the riverside. Every morning she would get up and look outside the window—the river was usually gray and gloomy, but sometimes deep blue and playful. She could see the forests growing alongside the river, the concrete blocks fortifying the river dam and shores, and the hydroelectric station in the distance. The girl liked observing the subtle changes in the river—its colors and moods. Looking from the fifth floor down, the dominant colors were gray in the winter, with the sprinkling of white when it snowed. In the spring and summer, different shades of blue and green mixed together and brightened the morning color palette. Greeting the river was a morning ritual, marking the beginning of another day.

One spring morning, something entirely unexpected happened. As the girl looked outside the window to greet the river, the colors were all mixed up! Amidst the gray and blue and the budding green, there was a bright pink spot! What could it be? How confusing! The girl's mind was racing trying to figure it out. It took a few minutes. Flamingos! The girl could not believe her eyes. She knew they did not belong there. She saw flamingoes on TV before, watching

1 This is a childhood memory produced as part of the Reconnect/Recollect project discussed in the introduction to this book.

the 'Around the World' program, and she read about them in children's books, including her favorite Alice in Wonderland. But here? In her own town?! How could this be?

Excited, she called her parents and grandparents. She then ran to get her friends. Skipping breakfast, they rushed down to the river to greet the surprise visitors. Soon the entire town was buzzing with the news of the visiting flamingos. Children and adults were coming to greet them, take pictures, or simply stand quietly nearby observing the birds. And flamingos greeted people back, gracefully nodding their long necks. Visitors from another world.

It always remained a mystery—what were the flamingos doing there in a small Soviet town? How did they get to the girl's river? And why? And would they ever come back again? Staring outside the window every morning, the girl kept looking for new shades and colors to appear again.