

Réca Lakatos: My life's story – Light in the darkness

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The author of this text is one of the long-term local contributors of our participatory research projects in Tiszavasvári. She lives in a busy part of the Roma neighbourhood and supports some of her adult sons and looks after her grandchildren who share a household with her. She has participated in writing a Romani storybook, translating and authoring texts in local Romani, and in writing the volume summarising the outcome of our translanguaging project (Heltai, J. and Tarsoly, E. (eds.). 2023. Translanguaging for Equal Opportunities. Speaking Romani at School. Berlin: De Gruyter.)

First of all, I would like to tell you about my childhood. It is really hard to talk about it, because my father abused my mother. He was an alcoholic. It hurt me so much to see my parents like this. Even so, my mother was set on giving me and my siblings everything, so we did not lack anything we needed. She gave us all her love. My father loved us as well, but he drank. It hurt us deeply to see him that way. And I still hold this inside me; that's why I don't like people who drink too much – because they remind of him. My mother provided for us with whatever she could earn from her two hands. She was an incredible cook and I take after her in that. And also in the way I care for my family, the know-how of surviving on very little. I am grateful for that. I am happy I inherited these skills from her because she was a wonderful mother.

My mother used to work for Hungarian households, and I would go along with her. It was heart-warming. While my mother was working, I was playing outside in the yard. But as I got older, and my mother went to work again, I had to look after my younger siblings and do the chores around the house, so I was unable to continue with my studies after the 3rd grade of elementary school. Maybe this is why I was so hopeful to move out of the Roma neighbourhood, because I had spent so much time with my mother among Hungarians. It was my life's dream to get out of the neighbourhood, so that when I got married, I could raise my children out there. Unfortunately, this dream has not come true. But as my children were growing, I kept telling them stories about this, and they, grace to God, have succeeded in living amongst Hungarians. This fills my heart with joy.

But I still long to move out of the Roma neighbourhood, as the community is broken, and the neighbours are not like they used to be. Our community was more united and relationships were more loving. I always tell my children and grandchildren to respect the elderly, to study, and to support each other. It is so sad to see our neighbourhood the way it is right now. They are into reckless partying, drinking, taking drugs. I do not want my grandchildren to see this. I have always taught them to know better, and I am proud that they are all qualified professionals because they followed my advice.