Photo exhibition dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the barricades 1991

OUR PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

Curator ILMĀRS ZNOTIŅŠ
Those people in the photographs – that was us.

So courageous and fearless. Resolved and steadfast. Bewildered and hopeful, overcome by naive enthusiasm. So full of conviction and strong, so fervent and self-denying. Industrious and unselfish. Empathetic and just. And so joyfully radiant and happy.

Those five years – from the first feeble sprouts of daring planted by the human rights protection group ‘Helsinki 86’, to the spontaneous enthusiasm and fervour of the masses not yet cognizant of their power until the conscious demand for the renewal of Latvia’s independence – those years one cannot forget.

So firm was our stubbornness, our resolve, our will – to be free. We would be free. That conviction came from our parents’ and grandparents’ stories, from our ancestral legends, from memories of our childhood and youth, which had taken root in our senses and our conscience so forcibly that even an axe couldn’t excise them, from old photographs or the pages of a book that bear testimony that once there was a Latvia. Day by day it grew in strength, carrying all of us along, and only the rare person could stand aside and not get involved. The window that had been opened a crack to get rid of stagnant air, was flung wide open by a gust of wind and nothing could then delay the bracing tornado, that turned inside out all the lies, the myths, that which had been silenced over the decades under a layer of dust and rubbish to reveal a clean and shining vein of truth.
We did it. We renewed the independent statehood and honour of our country and, at the same time, our self-respect so we could hold our heads high. We were great, because our will was great.

But what is important and significant for one generation does not transfer automatically to the minds and hearts of subsequent generations. Yellowed images, family albums and memorabilia become worthless when no one remembers any more the events behind them and there is also no one to ask about them and when during spring cleaning they get put away untouched in trunks or tossed in garbage bins. Without a personal connection, personal memorabilia, testimony, events and even symbols lose their significance.

We, the creators of this album, firmly believe that as long as in these photographs, which bear witness to the renewal of independence for Latvia we still recognize our relatives and neighbours, the people of our village or our city, the ones whom we trusted and the ones we opposed, as long as we still remember the events immortalized here and are able to recount them, history will remain a living thing. And as long as it does we will be able to safeguard, protect, grow and multiply. And as long as it does we will again have our moment of greatness when the need arises. Until then let us stay our course as proof of our unity and spiritual strength.

GUNDEGA BLUMBERGA
translated by MARGITA GAILITIS, edited by VIJA KOSTOFF
Workers in Latvia during the 1980s, when the USSR economic and political systems were becoming more and more deplorable.
Line-ups at a store in Daugavpils — a common sight in Latvia SSR.
Mikhail Gorbachev’s Riga visit on February 17–19, 1987.
Future soldiers at the conscription point on Vilānu Street, Riga — service in the Soviet Army awaits them.
'Helsinki-86' members going to place flowers at the Freedom Monument on June 14, 1987.
The militia arresting people, who on August 23, 1987 placed flowers at the Freedom Monument.
Songstress for the Third Awakening Ieva Akuratere at the Mežaparks demonstration.
Representatives of the Latvia Women’s League march through Riga streets with portraits of young men killed while serving in the Soviet Army. At the forefront the League founder and leader Anita Stankeviča.
Protesters at the LSSR Supreme Council demanding a Latvia outside the USSR.
An Interfront demonstration in the Doma Square in Riga September 3, 1990.
Election booths.
The Popular Front of Latvia deputies have voted for Latvia’s independence.
Deputy Mavriks Vulfsons after a May 4, 1990 Supreme Council session.
A spontaneous crowd gathers by the Daugava River after the enactment of the ‘Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia’.
Celebrating victory on May 4, 1990.
The official red-white-red flag flies above Gaiziņkalns.
Armoured personnel carriers (APCs) guard the Lenin monument in Liepāja in the autumn of 1990.
January 13, 1990 at the TV tower in Vilnius, Lithuania.
January 1991 in Riga.
The erection of the barricades is begun on January 13, 1991.
A young couple on their way to be wed in the Doma Cathedral.
The paramedic created infirmary in the Doma Cathedral.
Trucks and other heavy machinery used for the defence of the Supreme Council.
Latvia’s struggle for independence is shown on CNN.
Lunch brought to the people manning the barricades.
Barrages placed around the Latvia Television building.
The militia too are pro-independence.
Behind us — all of Riga.
The Ministry of the Interior after a skirmish with the OMON.
In the attacks of January 20, 1991 five people — Vladimirs Gomonovičs, Sergejs Konoņenko, Andris Slapiņš, Edijs Riekstiņš and Gvido Zvaigzne — lose their lives.
Riga Film Studio director Andris Slapiņš passes away.
Funeral march for the militiamen fallen during the January 20, 1991 attacks.
Campfires by the Cabinet of Ministers building during January 1991.
Baltic Military District soldiers, commandoes and the OMON support the putsch and block access to the centre of Riga.
On August 21, 1991 four OMON armoured personnel vehicles (APCs) drive into the Doma Square.
So great was our determination.
The transition period has ended — the independence of Latvia has been renewed *de facto*.
On August 24, 1991 the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia makes a decision to halt the operations of the Communist Party of Latvia.
In the office of the head of the State Security Committee after the failure of the coup.
On May 4, 1995 the Skrunda radar facility is blown up.
A law is adopted in March 1992 to begin the removal of the Russian Army from Latvia.
Latvia has become a member state of NATO.
Latvia — a member state of the European Union.
Spectators at the parade for Latvia’s 90th birthday.
NATO member state soldiers participate in the parade for Latvia’s 90th birthday.