

FILM

End of the Word

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A small family in Rumania finds its daily life linked to the last year of Ceausescu's rule in Catalin Mitulescu's "The Way I Spent the End of the World" (Rumania, colour, 106 mins). School children are assembled in a hall, while a military brass band plays. Seven-year-old Lalalilu (Timotei Duma) is selected for a reception to important visitors. Lalalilu and a dignitary fight over a chunk of cheese. Next morning the child is at the breakfast table with his mother and seventeen-year-old sister, Eva (Dorothea Petre). Soon the children proceed to school. En route they learn that another child's father has been arrested. It is Rumania of 1989. There are constant cuts to passing trains. The village people are tense over political events.

Pretending a summons from the head master, a senior boy student pulls Eva out of class. In an isolated room, they embrace; and in the gestures of love, drop a bust of Ceausescu. At home, Eva's father amongst friends plays Ceausescu, begging for food. A student leader suggests that Eva be excluded from the Communist Youth Union, for breaking the sculpture. Eva remains quiet, when the students vote. She visits another child, Alex, admitted in hospital. The school principal announces the list of failures, who are to leave school and work. Students are to be built model citizens of the country, and efficiency in work ensured, Lalalilu plays karate with the other children. He asks a senior student whether his father wrote tracts criticizing the government. An old man Tit, takes off his trousers and repairs a roof. An orchestra plays a polka, and the villagers dance, holding hands. The ceremony of cutting a strand of hair, from a child's head takes place. Eva's mother requests Eva to dance with Alex. It rains, and the orchestra keeps playing. The village neighbours help each other in sharing the food. Lalalilu kills an insect with a big stone, while a frog jumps. He drinks wine from left over glasses.

The senior students prepare for technical school. Eva's class mates tease her, and demand a kiss. Boys fight in a playfield. The school headmaster, the teachers and students sing the national anthem in class. Students with guitars, rehearse songs for the next school festivities. Eva joins the singing group from Balesceau school. At the school prize distribution ceremony, Eva wins a 'Special Mention' prize. Along with a fellow boy, she takes a ride in a truck. An old man Nucu, who tried to flee the country by crossing the Danube, is picked up by the police. Eva and her class mate wish to go to Italy, via Yugoslavia. At home, Eva's father sends her to visit another fellow student, Andrei. Eva visits Andrei with a plate of cookies. He is nude on the loft of his cottage. There are no emotions, and they jump into ice water, in a tub. Lalalilu and other children peep; and Lalalilu is upset. Eva and Andrei later swim in the Danube. Alex's father complains to Eva's father. Eva gets slapped. Andrei has been sleeping in the forest. Militias arrive at Alex's cottage. Meanwhile, Eva and Andrei unlock a goods train, and venture on a journey. With sunrise, the train cuts through the countryside.

The train halts near the border. There are barbed wires and watch towers all around. Soldiers examine the train rakes. Eva and Andrei (Cristian Vararu) swim the Danube under moonlight, and cross to the other shore. On the bank, an old man is fishing, with a tackle. Returning home, Eva lies in bed. While

ironing clothes, Eva's mother informs that Andrei has been expelled from school. In the school class rooms, children sing songs, in praise of Nicholas Ceausescu. Lalalilu and two other children plot to kill Ceausescu. A friend from abroad sends photos and clothes to Eva. On a bright day, Lalalilu and his friends float a big balloon. Eva visits her school friends, playing football. Her old house was being demolished for a make over. She tells her mother that she was getting married. There is excitement in the village machine tool shop over TV news. In the political disarray, Ceausescu pleads for calm. The TV broadcast goes off the air. Eva's family hug each other in joy. The children and the villagers cry: "Down with Ceausescu". Bon fires are lit and car tyres are burnt. TV news display pictures of running crowds and the injured on stretchers.

Eva and her family are at home, while it is snowing outside. Post- Ceausescu politics unfold. Eva has emigrated, and picture post cards arrive from Italy. The village children play inside a car. Letters are written informing events in the village. A photo of a passenger liner is enlarged on the big screen. The ship keeps rotating with full lights on, "End of the World" is a metaphor on the confusion in the last days of Ceausescu's rule. A succession of tableau portray frenzy and breakdown of authority in village families and schools. The comedy assumes a reflection of protests and changes in the larger society. Marius Pandaru's camera, with rapid movements, plunges the spectator in the interior disorder. Mitulescu's derision arises from the visual anecdotes, and not from political tracts. The film was screened at KFI (Nov, 07). □□□