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## **“I discovered a world unknown to me”**

Liuba Lencova is Bulgarian but she lives in Argentina with her husband and three children. Having fled her country, she found freedom and faith.

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Liuba is a Cooperator of Opus Dei and helps in a school for underprivileged girls.

**How did you meet Opus Dei?**

I'm a lawyer and was halfway through a masters program in the University of Austral when I became pregnant with my third child. I went for an ultrasound and the doctor told me that the pregnancy was ectopic and was not going to take its course. As I heard the terrible diagnosis, I also heard the baby's heartbeat within me. It was very hard, inexplicable.

That same night I had to have an emergency operation. I was very nervous, very scared and could not sleep. Then Carlos, my husband, told me, "Pray." Until then, I had never prayed, and somehow I began to calm down and fell asleep praying.

Happily, the operation was successful and the pregnancy continued its course. When I returned to school, a friend invited me to an informative talk about Opus Dei. As I found it interesting, I asked a professor who

is a numerary of Opus Dei for more bibliography. So I read *The Way* and other books of St. Josemaría. Soon, I started taking classes in Catholic doctrine and I discovered a world that was unknown to me, non-existent till then.

## **What was it like growing up in Bulgaria?**

I was born in communist Bulgaria. My family belonged to the Politburo and I was a member of the Pioneers, a Communist organization for children. In my family, we were all proud of the regime.

As a child, I lived in Sofia, capital of Bulgaria, and with my friends we had fun looking at people who dared to enter a Church. Logically, they were older people who had nothing to lose. For the communist regime, religion was the opium of the people and if you practiced, you were

expelled from schools and the Party. There was no freedom.

I must admit, a couple of times, I went secretly to the Cathedral of St. George. I found it fascinating to see how careful they were with the liturgy in the Orthodox service, the candles, the order in which they are lit and extinguished, the icons adorning the walls of the church and other liturgical rituals that aroused my curiosity as a teenager. Apart from those few exceptions, my contact with religion was zero.

At age 16, I migrated to Buenos Aires with my mother who is a philologist and journalist. We had to leave separately because, otherwise, they would suspect that it was more than a tourist trip. There was no need for us to run away, because my family had a privileged position within the Communist Party. My paternal grandfather was a member of the

Politburo and was governor of a province in Bulgaria for 15 years, and my maternal grandfather was a diplomat. So it was not difficult to obtain legal permits to leave the country.

## **How do you find Argentina?**

My first days in Argentina were very hard. I did not understand the language, I could not relate with the people, I had no friends... Besides, I also missed the winter of Bulgaria, the ski slopes, the neighbourhood where I lived, school, friends, relatives... everything. While the lack of freedom under the Communist regime was obvious, for those who belonged to the Red Bourgeoisie, life was more comfortable than you think. Equality never existed; even though the State owned everything, schools, houses... the same privileges were not available to everyone. Then, suddenly, I left that

comfortable life and I found myself in an extremely hot and humid February 7 in Buenos Aires.

After a year and a half of weeping... I decided to return to Bulgaria. During that time I was absent from Bulgaria, a lot had changed. Maybe I myself had also changed. That year and a half I lived in Argentina helped me realize that there was another reality. When one has tasted a certain amount of freedom, one begins to think over a lot of things.

### **New country, old habits...**

Indeed, I noticed the lack of freedom when I returned to Bulgaria. I remember the day before Orthodox Easter, we were told at school that if they saw anyone in the church celebrations, he would be expelled. Without fear of the consequences and challenging the circumstances, I sneaked in with my cousin. I went to the Cathedral of St. George and it

made such an impression on me that I still remember how I felt like it was yesterday.

This stay in Bulgaria lasted a year. In the meantime, my brother was born in Buenos Aires, and I decided to go back to Argentina. Time had passed, and knowing the language, I arrived with greater optimism this time. I read law at University of Buenos Aires, then started working, making friends and living a normal life.

Until then I had not raised the question about the existence of God. I accepted as absolute truth what I had always been told: “God does not exist; religion is the opium of the people.” It's like being told that autumn leaves are yellow and therefore you do not pay attention to the greens, reds and browns that also exist in autumn.

**How did you come to the Faith?**

In 1996, after ten years, I went to Bulgaria on holiday for a month. One day I stopped by the Cathedral of St. George. I went in and said, simply, “I want to be baptized”. A few days later, all alone, my cousin and I were baptized in the Orthodox rite. When I returned to Argentina, I met Carlos. When we decided to get married, he told me he wanted to marry in the Catholic Church. After obtaining the dispensations, we were happily married in 1998.

After that first contact with Opus Dei, through the informative talk in the Austral University, I started taking steps in the Catholic faith. I began to know Christ and to talk with Him. I brought what I learned and discovered into my life: I started going to Mass and to read the Gospel. I think I had never seen a Bible before that; now, I read it every day, starting with the Gospel of St. Mark. I also read *The Way, Christ is passing*

by and other books of St. Josemaría to learn more about the life of faith and to live them in my everyday life. The truth is that St. Josemaría has become a message and a role model for me.

### **What is your daily life like?**

I keep doing what I did before, but now I try to do it with God. At night I pray with my children and try to educate them in the faith that I was lucky to receive as a girl.

One day I came across the College of Good Counsel, a school for underprivileged girls in Barracas attended to by Opus Dei, and I thought I could contribute something. This made me decide to be a Cooperator of Opus Dei. Last year, I prepared for First Communion and Confirmation, and I received those Sacraments with the students of the college.

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