women's side of war

žene u crnom

women

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A Letter
(In Lieu of an Introduction)

Dear women,

This letter, my favourite form of communication, is addressed to each one of you separately and, particularly; to every one of you who wrote or spoke whilst others recorded. Also, it is to those who will read this. Just as I saw those of you in my mind whose stories are here as I read about you, at the same time, I saw all of you who will read this in the future.

The women's word has often been used and frequently misused, distorted, and (mis)interpreted. On the one hand, women were the real victims of a specific war strategy, and on the other hand, this victimisation was used as a "case": a weapon of war propaganda, turning women into victims twice over. Those who listened attentively to what the women had to say and those who faithfully wrote down and promoted their words were, however, few and far between. It seemed important to me to obtain these records: collect them in one place, and thus, endow them with new force. I would not have ventured into this, had I not already seen that women wanted to hear these words; that they mattered to them, and that this hunger to know and exchange wartime experiences never ends. I see this book as an incentive to continue joining your personal experiences (in the ways you find best). Thereby also continuing to add to a women's history which is still in significant contrast to the other: an undoubtedly men's-only history, dry and mercilessly impersonal, not allowing any individual voice to break through and attain its legitimate place.

After all these years, perhaps we should take stock of all that we had to go through. We should take stock of the enormous effort we have invested. Our effort will allow us to realise how strong we have been and will make it possible to recognize our true strength by reminding us of all of the tragedies and the trials and tribulations that we have surpassed. That is the purpose of this book: to see how important female friendships were to us, how much we helped - or should have helped – each other; to enable us to rely on our own forces as responsible citizens; to refuse to be cast forever in the role of victims; to refuse to be allotted only an insignificant role whenever decisions are made. And still, we are confronted with our own tremendous expectations when it comes to the implementation of decisions which are not our own and are even dangerous for us. We must re-examine the traditions we have passed on and maintained, and we must see whether those are our

real values. Women, beyond our natural strife, we must establish new values for cooperation and peace that will signify - above all - life without fear.

I have attended numerous women's meetings and have seen how important it is for women to talk about what happened to them in the wars and, at the same time, to hear what happened to others. Surrounded by women ready to listen attentively, they found the courage to speak about things that they had kept silent about before. Because there had been nobody willing to hear their stories, or because it was too painful for them, or because they feared the consequences of speaking, they had remained silent. But each story was another story's beginning. I learned what should not be read anywhere, what did not fit into the "official version." Knowledge was weighed, questions and examinations were re-opened, opinions changed… The responsibility of others was established, one's own civil responsibility rooted. Support was created.

I am confident that in this book you will find some answers and perhaps learn something new as well. Even more importantly, I hope that you will find and feel compassion for the OTHER WOMAN - perhaps by simply recognising your own experience in that Other Woman's experience. Experience is always unique and therefore incomparable. Every record in this anthology is personal, and a collection of such personal experiences acquires the strength of the universal.

Our power can be great if we join together our modest strengths. Through a united effort, we can make visible this invisible women's side of war. No effort is worthless if our strong voice against the war can be made to prevail and prevent future wars.

Yours truly, Lina

***

This book, an anthology of women's records about the wars waged on the soil of the former Yugoslavia in 1991-1999, is the product of a yearlong exploration in cooperation with many women's organizations, human rights organizations, organizations which deal with the past and reconciliation, and the individual women who bravely voiced their experiences, recorded their experiences and/or endorsed these experiences. We made our selections from the sources within our reach. The available sources are listed in the Bibliography. We hope that this book will not remain the only one of its kind and that it will encourage further research and more books.

With the exception of some inevitable abridgements marked (…), we have reproduced all of the texts faithfully.

Share your thoughts.
Please send us your feedback. linavuskovic@gmail.com

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

In My Own Name

Throughout these past years we have learned to "exhibit" in various big cities: Rome, Madrid, Berlin, New York... We have learned to give "statements" to so-called mass media; we have learned to widen the network of counterinformation among alternative media in Italy, Germany, Spain; we have learned to give "speeches" at international gatherings while people barely heard us, they listened to us in order to ease their conscience.

Here, in front of you, I can neither "exhibit", "read a statement", nor give a speech. As was agreed, at this women's plenary session I should "exhibit" what we have done in glacial, icy Serbia for these past five years. I wanted to, however, I cannot. I thought, after all, that we followed the work of one another for all these years. But I don't know how much we were able to follow each other’s internal journey.

Despite my wish, despite my deepest respect for this place, and the theme, here in front of you I cannot read a text which these occasions demand. Here in front of you I wish to give a statement of tenderness and love.

I did not know how to do this, except to seek advice from my friends and traveling companions during the crawling nights in glacial, icy Serbia. Mostly because of Marina (Cvetajeva) and Ana (Ahmatova) and Cassandra. Let me tell you what Sonječka, "crying hot tears" said to Marina, in the winter of 1918/19 in icy Russia: "I know that in other towns... Only, you, Marina, are not in other towns, but them..." Because there is no Nela, Biljana, Neva, Djurdja, my friends before the war, in other towns. Because there is no Mirjana in other towns. I wanted to see her and her to see that we "women from the aggressor country did not change our relationship." I wanted to, however, I cannot. Because there is no longer Mirjana in Zagreb nor in other towns. In other towns there is no Rada, Sandra, Slavica, Tanja... my "war" friends. They live in Zagreb. And I love those other towns because in them are other people whom I love. "But them..." - the rapists, good-fornothings, warriors, patriot-killers, they are everywhere, though in Belgrade most of all. It is not because Belgrade is a big city, rather because the great evil originated from Belgrade, because the war began in Belgrade.

That which I can tell you passed through my body. This thought is corporal. Not only because for five years exhibiting my body in Belgrade's main square, together with friends, we have performed a visible resistance to the Serbian regime and war. Because I am a witness to the truth of Virginia Woolf: "women reflect through the experience of their own bodies" or because Penelope, through the mouth of Adriana Cavarero, left as an oath: "While philosophies separate, cut, Penelope does not do that, she just weaves and knits that which philosophies have cut, separated (spirit from body)".

The Cult of Encounters

When I go to Zagreb for the first time, I will see them all again. Again. Long ago I told Ana A., my emotional friend, my spiritual refuge since a glacial era had returned to this place. But Ana A. rarely ran into Marina C. though she informed her: "I see, I hear, I feel you..." And I heard and felt you. All over Spain I carried Biljana's "sensory" poem, sent to feminist groups from Belgrade:

"When we think of one another
Miles away from
together
We are not alone
Imagine
Outside the lines".

I translated the poem into Spanish. My friends, antimilitarists, Concha, Yolanda, Almudena carry the "Women in Black" exhibits around Spain, as well as Biljana's poem which I translated; my gentle friend, a poet from Madrid, Michele, "polished up the style". I carried Nela's networks of tenderness and sisterly devotion within myself. I called Djurdja's defiant refusal of the logic of classifying when I needed help: "There are no Serbs, Croats; there is Staša from Belgrade, Biljana from Pančevo, i.e. women are what they are, and do not belong to a national identity" each time someone would bother me outside and impolitely and aggressively ask: "And who are you: a Serb or a Croat or...?" I am what I choose to be. I am my own individual creation, as Brodsky would say.

Let Us Not Be Deceived by Our Own

While I write this, at night of course, October 22-23, 1996, we still do not know if they will give us a visa. A tactic of exhaustion. They assume that we will "get fed up". They "set lines and we walk outside of the lines." We know them well. On my own body I first felt that which Cassandra advised us: "Don't let yourself be deceived by your own" and we added "nor by others" then later, together we transformed it into a political principle: Disobedience to "one's own" governments and states is indeed a form of women's solidarity.

Us and them - it is an abyss which separates me from them, it is a "difference" which creates a knot in my stomach. And I cannot keep a promise to Ana A. that I do not want "revenge" or feel "bitterness." And you, Ana, wondered when the "stars of death" stood above us "when the punishment would be"? And I wonder, "when will the punishment be" for the administrators of death, who, "under blood-covered boots and loud police wagons," live in the same country as I do? And tonight I wonder "when will the punish-

ment be" maybe for selfish reasons - I want to see you all in Zagreb. And the personal is political. And the personal is international.

In Another Language the Pain is Lessened...

I did not write to you as often as I felt I should and as often as I wanted to. Mostly I wrote and received letters in another language. (Are other languages those from spacious houses of the Mediterranean to which I also feel a spiritual and emotional bond?)

I witnessed my inner turmoil in another language, like Cassandra: "I want to be a witness, no matter if not one living person would seek witness of me". In another's language despair seemed less horrible to me. In another language I shared pain with others, because often the causes of despair and pain of those around me were much greater and justified than mine. I was ashamed to complain. In another language Ana A. pulled "black shame from my heart". But in my language, shouting on the streets "Belgrade, wake up! Belgrade, be ashamed!" like with Biljana Jovanović in June 1992, when we climbed in that shaky truck and teased the police - and that is my public cry, that is my political choice. And now Ana A. continues to pull "black shame from my heart". I know, responsibility and not guilt. And maybe I accuse innocent people because "everything got complicated in this country", one doesn't know who is a beast and who is a person. The glacial era continues because many "complicated friendships" for me are still not defrosted, because I walk down the street or I take the bus in Belgrade and wonder: Was this person in Vukovar? Did this one rape in Bosnia? Does this one terrorize and kill in Kosovo? Did this one aim at Sarajevo from Pale?

Michelle wrote me poems of comfort in her language; in his language, my dear friend Alex (Langer) shared my/our hope. And then the desperation of others sparked insurmountable helplessness within Alex. His suicide was indeed "his choice of definitive solitude". For months Alex's choice troubled me greatly. And I wrote about it in his language.

In our language, the language of our mothers, I wish to share with you tenderness, pain and hope. I also wish to share with you the networks of disobedience to all militarists: fathers of nations, keepers of traditions, morals and nations, keepers of states and borders. Let us be disobedient to all women militarists of all colors and nations.

Friendship and tenderness will save us from them.

Staša Zajović
Speech given at the meeting *Women and the Politics of Peace*,
Zagreb - October 1996

(Women for Peace, 1997)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

vukovar

alenka mirković

voice against guns

Voice Against Guns

The Overture to War

(...)

To the relief of all of us who lived in Šapudl, cars seldom took that road on that day of the week and that time of the day. It was the time set aside for one of Slavonian rituals – the Sunday family lunch.

My aunt and I had just finished it. We panted, complaining to one another that we did not really need that last piece of meat and laughing at our gluttony because, although sated, we were still thinking about the cake, which was still untouched. The afternoon coffee was simmering on the cooker, my auntie was clearing the table and I was about to start washing the dishes.

Slowly, from afar, the sound of car horns started to break the silence of the street. It was approaching slowly, getting stronger and after listening for a while, we could conclude that a procession of vehicles was moving in our direction.

(...)

The pictures of Slobodan Milošević were stuck on the windshields of almost all the vehicles. On the trailer of a truck an "orchestra" was swaying – an accordion player and about a dozen men, embraced and with bottles in their hands, were howling at the top of their voices: "Who says, who lies that Serbia is small./ It isn't small, waged war thrice over/ and if there's any luck,/ will do it again..." The men in tractor trailers were standing and risking to fall off because of all the bumping. They held onto the sides of the trailers with one hand so that with the other they could flail about with three fingers in the air. Hands raised to the same salute were sticking out through the windows of the cars, trucks and buses, resounding with: "This is Serbia..."

How little credit I gave my neighbours! I was no longer surprised that they were gone from their balconies. It was a disturbing scene and for a moment I regretted having come out on the balcony at all. But, something wouldn't let me leave well enough alone and for some reason that I didn't quite get myself, I knew that what I was looking at was important.

Disturbed, I watched the scene on the street without understanding why I was so upset. A part of my brain told me that it was the electioneering craze, just like that of the CDU[1] the week before, but another part of it was sending signals that something was not all right after all. I watched feverishly, with great attention, until the picture cleared and it dawned on me. There was not a single Yugoslav flag in the column, not a single picture

[1.] The CDU = The Croatian Democratic Union or Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica = HDZ.

of Tito, not a single red star, not a single coat of arms with torches… People passing along the road in front of me were not shouting either "This is Yugoslavia" or "We won't give Yugoslavia"… They were shouting "This is Serbia". The initial unease and anxiety left me, but now I was indignant. What Serbia in Vukovar, for heavens' sake…? What are they doing…?

(…)

***

Towards the end of the summer of 1990, when the Croat-Serb friendships and marriages began to fall apart and when the Croat and the Serb communities were practically separated already by barricades or by irreconcilable positions, I discovered a characteristic of mine. Namely, the ones and the others still trusted me. Whether they considered me sufficiently moderate, silly or naive, I never found out. I assume that my Croat acquaintances and friends knew me well enough to consider me "one of theirs", and that my Serb friends and acquaintances were slightly confused by my last name: it was not very likely that someone, whose surname was Mirković, could be an ustasha. I contributed to it myself probably because I would not allow them to squeeze me into one drawer or the other, listening attentively and patiently to the views of the ones and the others, agreeing with things I thought were correct and arguing about those which sounded false, exaggerated or provocative. (…)

***

The Christmas of 1990 was the last holiday we spent in peace and Easter 1991 was the first in a series of holidays that made us sick.

On Easter morning I woke up very late. The holidays were an ideal opportunity to make up for all those morning shifts at school and the weather was nothing to write home about – as if made for sleeping. I ran to the kitchen on tiptoes, shivering from cold made the coffee and then returned quickly to the warm bed and switched on the television.

The news were on and the images of a road enfolded in fog flowed by across the screen: a bus with hole-ridden windows, ambulances, one of our policemen - special forces - who was quietly smoking and several others hiding behind the trees and observing the surroundings with rifles at the ready, bloodied snow on the road, olive-green tanks filmed from behind a shelter…

I put up the volume and gradually managed to realise that on Plitvice the Serbs had attacked a bus with policemen on their way to an intervention. One of them was dead and there were several wounded. After that JNA[2] units with tanks and APCs positioned themselves between the policemen and the Serbs who had attacked them and would not allow the policemen to pass through and do their job.

"It has started…" I thought. (…)

[2.] The Yugoslav People's Army also known as the Yugoslav National Army

May 1991

(...)

If, after all that happened yesterday, there was still a small ray of hope that things might calm down somewhat, it was dispersed that evening by the Belgrade Television with a story from Borovo Selo. Our neighbours were arrogantly bragging about how many policemen they had killed and laughed at the distress they had caused. Power, dominance and arrogance burst forth from every movement and the threat emanated from every sentence they uttered. *Ustasha*[3]*, fascists, butchers…* words spat through the hatred-twisted lips of people who yesterday had become murderers. It was not a justification, nor an explanation. There was no need for that. They had nothing to fear and nobody to apologise to. By firing at Croat policemen the Yugoslav "People's" Army chose the people it would defend and the people it would kill. It was a clear message to us on the other side of the barricade.

That night I fell asleep only after a good cry. I didn't know if I was horrified more by what happened in Borovo Selo or by what it really meant. Rage, fear, humiliation, impotence – it all mixed and boiled in me. I felt that my whole life would turn upside down, maybe the very next morning, and that I would not know either how or why or for whom or for what. I felt that my own life was slipping from my hands…

That same night, some people made plans to leave for a safer place. Others, on the other hand, were thinking about sending women and children to relatives on the other side of the Danube and then joining theirs in one of the "Serb" villages. Others, again, called acquaintances and friends to find out where to go to get weapons and join the preparations for the defence of Vukovar.

That night, the sides were chosen. That night the war began.

***

For days after the massacre of policemen in Borovo Selo, Vukovar was cut off from the world because roadblocks had been set up on all roads around it. Shortages of basic foodstuffs such as milk, fruit and vegetables started in the town because they mostly came from outside and you literally had to stalk bread. I was relatively lucky with bread: *Vupik*'s mini-market *Park* was on the ground floor of my building and the entrance into its storage room right beneath my balcony. So I didn't have to stand in front of the shop waiting for bread and would just every now and then step out on the balcony and when I'd glean the bakery's truck, I'd run down the stairs and a minute or two later triumphantly return with a loaf or two. Otherwise one had to queue because every delivered batch would "disappear" in a matter of minutes and if you didn't get any, you had to wait for the next delivery, an hour or two, again.

[3.] Ustashas: Croatian Revolutionary Movement, founded in 1929 as a nationalist organization that sought to create an independent Croatian state. When the Ustashas came to power in the Independent State of Croatia, a state established by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany during World War II, its military wing became the Ustashas Army. During the Yugoslav wars, the term "ustasha" came to be used as ethnic slur against Croats. However, some Croat nationalist and paramilitary organisations self-identified with the term.

The trucks with milk from Osijek could not get to Vukovar. The villagers from nearby villages who supplied fruit, vegetables, cheese and other foodstuffs could not get through and I doubt they would have dared even if they could make it to the town. Nobody could foresee where the next roadblock would spring up or what could happen to him if he was stopped at it. Vukovar *Nama* Department Store survived on the stocks of basic foodstuffs running thinner by the day, and the sales women idly passed among the racks with other merchandise that, it seems, interested no one. Relatives and friends who had gardens abruptly gained in popularity.

(...)

While the battle with arms was fought in Borovo Selo, the war of words raged on the waves of the *Vukovar Croatian Radio*. Croats called the Serbs chetniks[4], they wanted to know why were the Serbs in danger and what kind of friends were they to agree to shoot at their neighbours and their children because of Milošević, Šešelj and the likes of them. The Serbs called in frothing at the mouth, and explained how they would not live in an ustasha state, among ustasha butchers, threatened arrogantly that the JNA "would teach you all a lesson", yelled that they were not afraid of the ustasha police because they had already beaten them once in Borovo Selo, that Vukovar was a Serbian town and would remain so… One heavy word provoked another and another and another… Now and then somebody would call and ask people to gather their wits about and calm down because we would all perish…

I understood what Siniša wanted. It was better if people quarrelled and let steam out on the air rather than on the street. And even if it was hard to even listen, he persistently tried to marshal all this anger. I could imagine him sweating, nervously entering and leaving the studio, making calls to those who had not been allowed on the air and trying to be the voice of reason in a situation which had escaped control. (…)

August 1991

(…) When Ivica was wounded my attitude to the war rather changed. Until then death and injury were something that happened to other people, those I didn't know or knew very little. I think I saw the war as some ill-defined danger, something bad that could suddenly happen to me but I still did not realise what that bad really meant. My war experience still boiled down to the television images which always contains a certain amount of the unreal (because if you cannot watch something any more, it suffices to press the button and switch it off), straining the ears to hear explosions and gunfire, news and rumours… It is not that I didn't sympathise with those to

[4] Chetniks: The Chetnik movement or the chetniks were a Serbian-nationalist/royalist paramilitary organisation operating in the Balkans before and during World Wars. During the WWII, they were collaborating with Nazi Germany in fight against the partisans. In modern times, especially during and after Yugoslav Wars, the term "chetnik" came to be used as an ethnic slur against Serbs. However, some Serb nationalist and paramilitary organisations self-identified with the term.

whom this *bad thing* had already happened, that I was not afraid, that I was carefree and at ease. Nonetheless, it was only when I saw the bullet scars on Ivica's back, when I tried to imagine how he held his breath and concealed the pain so as not to reveal himself to the executioners standing above him, when I thought that it had happened to him in the most normal, everyday, daily life situation – as he was coming home from work – only then did I realise that it could happen to anyone, that it could happen to me…

(...)

That Sunday, the 25th of August, was very different from Sundays I had got used to, and even those that had become common occurrence of late – Sundays spent in the house, the ears, eyes, brain already "gauged" to the times of radio and TV news, with constant tension and expectation of "something". I remember how as early as July I spoke about this tension and expectation with Marija. I told her I was constantly feeling as one feels before a big summer storm: everything seems quiet but dark clouds are gathering somewhere on the horizon and one feels the tremendous pressure which eases only when the downpour or the hail storm begin. Marija shared my opinion: *"Perhaps I don't know what I'm saying but I'd like something to happen finally, anything, just to end this tension. This is unbearable."*

(…)

The danger signal sounded suddenly and hollowly. And, of course, I thought it was noon, but the clock handles showed it was only around eleven. And as if some guests long awaited had arrived at long last; my aunt stood up from her chair and said: *"Here they are…"*

I could not distinguish the alarm signals, but I had no doubt whatsoever that that one had sounded the air threat. I collected the things for the shelter, opened the windows which were still shut, firmly shut the tap on the gas cylinder next to the cooker, locked the front door and hurried after my aunt to the stairway.

The neighbours, some slowly and some very fast, were descending to the cellar; they opened their cellars, put there the things they had brought with them and then came out to the passage and fearfully opened conversation in subdued voices. No one was sure how one was to behave and what should be done now. We all had a precise mental picture that sooner or later we would have to go to the cellar but nobody knew what we were to do after that.

(…)

I entered the newsroom panting and still recovering from the fear a moment ago. Josip, aunt Gordana, Zvezdana, Danilo, Mirjana, Branko and Zdravko greeted me warmly with a cry: *"Here come the reinforcements!"* But their reinforcement, ashen-faced and afraid, stood in the middle of the room stammering incongruous answers. I asked them what they were doing but they couldn't even begin to answer when the alarm signal went off again. We started down the stairs and sat down on the stairs in the mezzanine. There was no shelter and that was the safest place in the building.

As the explosions resounded outside they chatted and the only person about whom you could say with certainty that she was afraid was

Zvezdana. She sat there pale and silent, just like me. I felt terribly exposed on that staircase. I felt chill in my bones, my hands shook and although I tried to keep control I'd start trembling after every blast. I felt an irresistible desire to flee from there but there was nowhere to go.

September 1991

***

Each one of us remembers the day when she or he went through the "baptism by fire". If I had to describe what the baptism by fire meant to every one of us, it would probably mean very different events. For some it was the first meeting with one's own mortality, for others the first experience of one's own or somebody else's suffering and trial; for some it was the as-yet inexperienced total destruction…

I think, though, that what was common to all of us was that the day of our baptism by fire was the day when we stopped just doing our job and started living it.

My turn came on 13th September.

It was an ugly night.

The citizens kept calling us all morning to come and record what the shells had done to their houses, buildings, cars, yards, the previous night. Dozens of years of toil and love vanished in a second in which somebody unknown had decided to aim his sights precisely in that direction.

(...)

One of the tenants took us to the cellar above which a shell had hit the building. The scene was not unfamiliar: part of the wall torn off, plaster all around, shrapnel scattered around the hole… What shocked me was what the cellar looked like. It was too cold even for summer conditions, it reeked of dampness and in several places the walls and the floor were completely wet. Between these walls stood makeshift beds covered with blankets and pillows. From the things lying next to several beds and the toys I realised that there had been small children in the cellar too. Oh, my God, I thought, if the shelling goes on, these children will be spending all their days in this stench, cold and dampness!

(...)

It took us three or four minutes to reach the entrance of *Borovo Commerce*. As we were getting out of the car I heard a sound and it took me several seconds to understand what it was and then, like everybody else, I threw myself on the ground. A sniper! The son of a bitch had seen us: he saw that we were civilians, he saw the regular PRESS sticker on the windshield of our car, saw the camera Vinko was carrying and – he fired nevertheless! Almost crouching, hiding behind a low wall, we ran to the entrance and head over heels took to the roomy cellar of the building.

We faced a large, light, almost empty space. There were some fifteen people there. They had come from different parts of Borovo Naselje

because their cellars were unsafe, inadequate for prolonged stay or simply because did not have any. Some were sitting, some were standing, and some were entering and disappearing somewhere in the depth of the cellar. The man who met us looked glum. He was not a soldier nor did I see any soldiers in the vicinity. He conveyed to us the worst possible news: several people had been killed, including a six-year-old boy. They were in front of the entrance when it blasted. It had been quiet before that for quite some time, so they had come out and were filling bags with sand to reinforce the shelter. And then it happened: one, single shell flew in and massacred them. Evidently somebody had seen them, just like us a while ago, and reported where fire should be aimed.

I asked if any of theirs had been wounded and bit my tongue immediately because of my "sensitivity". The young man sitting to my right moved closer and I offered him the microphone. He could be slightly over twenty and in all likelihood worked in one of rolling units because his complexion was of the colour that workers there get after working with soot and rubber for several years. He spoke softly but clearly and very, very calmly: *"Yes, my girlfriend was wounded. I carried her to the car and drove as fast as I could to the hospital but she bled to death... I could not help her."*

(...)

As I was puttering about the newsroom the telephone rang in the editing room. I lifted the receiver, automatically said "Vukovar Croatian Radio" and heard a trembling female voice. She said a polite hello and introduced herself. I felt goose flesh spread. I had seen her family name on the list of the killed. She hadn't been listening to the news but somebody told her that her sister had been mentioned as one of those killed. She begged me to check the name once more. I told her to wait although I knew that that name was on the list of the dead. I needed time to put myself together and think how to tell her that.

"Madam, I am terribly sorry, but she is on the list of the dead we've been given. Please call the hospital and check once again."

Quietly, but crying already, she thanked me and said good-bye before she hang up. We both knew that there was no need to call the hospital.

October 1991

(...)

The building was shaking from explosions now. The plaster was falling off the walls and one explosion was so powerful that the table at which we ate or played cards tumbled over. The shells fell one after the other and the thundering of rocket launchers from Bačka went on and on. The door to the yard opened every now and then under the pressure of the blast and Josip unsuccessfully tried to fix it with a chair. Broken roof tiles, bricks, glass, tin plates burst all around the building. The gate was showered with shrapnel and on the floor above us, through the open balcony door the walls collapsed with a loud thud. The four of us huddled on the benches in the broad-

casting area. Nobody said anything and even if he had we wouldn't have been able to hear because the noise was deafening.

(...)

I thought it could not get worse than what had happened that morning, but it did. I had the feeling that every shell was directly hitting our building. I cast looks at the staircase above me: until then it had seemed to me safe to have three or four concrete blankets above the head, but now I feared that all this concrete might cave in and bury us. The back door shook wildly in its frame, and as it was open, flapped left and right and everything in the yard was falling and breaking. We crowded again in the broadcasting area and like packed sardines crowded tightly against each other to avoid the shrapnel hitting us through the open door. The plaster from the walls rained on us, hitting our fingers with which we were trying to protect our heads, and the pressure had pushed dense clouds of dust through the door so that we were left without air and started to cough.

Josip and Zdravko took the blanket from the bench, covered Zvezdana and me, pushed us further into the small space in which we had crowded and then leaned against us and pushed our noses into the blanket to protect us from the dust. No thunderstorm could be compared with the sounds around us: never-ending, total thundering, so loud it could drive you mad, pierced the ears and I covered mine with my hands; I started to whine and tremble uncontrollably. When the thundering abated somewhat, the men jumped up to close the door to the yard and we got out from under the blanket. There was dust in the air, it got into our noses, eyes and mouths and all four of us were "grey-haired" from the dust and our faces were white. I looked around the room: as if we've never made order there. I didn't have enough strength to get back to work straightaway. I lowered myself down on the bench like a sack, picked up a packet of cigarettes from the floor, shook dust off it, took out a cigarette, looked around for a lighter and when I found it, I lit the cigarette and breathed in the smoke longingly. I don't know what I looked like, but when I cast a glance at Zdravko he said: "It's all right, Hale, it's over..."

(...)

The tanks were not the only acquisition in that enterprise. A few days after they were seized, somebody at the Staff pushed into my hands a frayed envelope addressed to a name I didn't know. The state it was in showed that it was an old letter, and numerous military post markings on the envelope showed that it had travelled a long time, by roundabout routes. It was a letter found in the pocket of a killed enemy tank driver. I opened it carefully and slowly as if there was a time bomb in it. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't see enemy soldiers as persons, as people, as someone to whom somebody might write letters.

The letter was by a woman, not particularly educated and very simple judging by the handwriting and orthography. She began by writing about the health of the members of the household, relatives and greetings sent to the soldiers by friends and neighbours, and then proceeded to complain about his prolonged absence and how hard it was on her with a small child

and old parents. She asked him to talk to his officers to release him from the "military exercise" because his salary meant a lot to them and he had been away on the exercise for a very long time already. She wrote how the child had grown yet another small tooth, that it looked more and more like his father and that it would begin to talk and the father was not there… She asked him why there was no news from him for such a long time and begged him to write as soon as possible. *Lots of love, your wife…*

I folded the letter and slowly put it back in the envelope. I felt sick. A strange, irrational feeling swept over me… It was as if I'd been communicating with that woman as I was reading the letter, knowing that she was writing to him in vain, and yet let her write it… She had the right to know that her husband was dead, and she didn't know it. I had no right whatsoever to read that letter, and yet I read it… I felt I had committed a terrible sin.

(...)

It was a kind of psychological therapy. Sooner or later everyone would join in the singing. Softly and timidly at first, and then ever louder. Those were the songs from our weddings, fairs, birthdays, graduation parties and summer camps. As likely as not we were calling to times when we had sung them without the artillery accompaniment. Or perhaps we were only trying to suppress its sound outside and the swaying of the whole cellar and everything in it, including our nerves and stomachs. The more it thundered outside the louder we sang and that feeling of letting off steam was beyond description. True, it didn't happen all the time. Every now and then somebody would leave the table and go to the passage so that the rest wouldn't see the tears. Those songs, also, reminded us of those who were no longer here, who had gone somewhere far away or gone forever. At times they provoked a feeling of hopelessness because life would never be again as it was before, the feeling that there was no end to this hell, fear and despair, the feeling that we had been forgotten and abandoned, that the next morning perhaps none of us would be anymore…

November 1991

(...)

Three days later, as I entered the shelter I saw Jadranka Semberac in tears.

"Jaca, what's the matter?"

"My Drago was killed…" she said and burst into tears. She wept and I hugged her, and on the mattress a woman was silently sitting next to Jadranka's child, tickling him and caressing its playful little legs and arms, her eyes red from crying. Jadranka suddenly put herself together, wiped off the tears, lifted the child and held it tight… *"What shall we do now, without our daddy…?"* she whispered to it softly as tears started flowing down her face again. For days after her husband's death Jaca barely talked to people around her. She changed her baby's diapers and fed it, sat next to it, rocked it in her arms and talked to it softly. Her whole world had narrowed down to

a small piece of the mattress on which lay all that was left of her life…

All these events, feelings and images deposited, like bricks, somewhere deep within me. But just as I had to develop a mechanism to control my own fear, fatigue, hunger, thirst and other physiological needs, I also had to develop an emotional protective mechanism. I switched it on every day when I went back to our shelter. As long as we were among the people in the shelter, talked with them, told them the latest news from the town, none of us wanted to show signs of his or her fear, worry, pessimism, disappointment… Nobody had given us any orders to that effect and we had not agreed on it previously. Quite simply, we knew that the morale of people was so low that our doubts, misgivings and faintheartedness would simply finish them off. And so, like clowns, we put on a merry and optimistic mask whenever returning from duty; we entered the shelter, chatted and joked with people, brought them at least some small piece of good news, which were ever harder to find…

I didn't even know how hard it had all become until one morning a shell thumped right in front of the entrance to the shelter. I was lying in "bed" when the room shook, and heaps of plaster, dust and chunks of concrete fell on me. I got up, started shaking off the blanket and cleaning the mattress and then suddenly I felt weak at the knees, looked around the overcrowded, dirty, mouldy room, dropped the blanket, slid down on the mattress and began to cry.

(...)

Of course I stank. I was dirty as dirty. I couldn't remember when I'd had a bath last, and I was wearing the same clothes for over a month. I used deodorant every morning but I knew that it could only poorly mask the stench spreading around me. My hair was dirty and sticky, I hadn't plucked my eyebrows for the past three months and I dared not even look at my legs. The only hygienic routine I managed to observe regularly was washing my face in the morning, brushing my teeth, combing my hair and using toilet paper. I received the last clean change of underwear a month ago, "through a connection".

(...)

Nobody ever begrudged us that we were dirty. After all, nobody in the town washed more frequently than I did. Except our neighbours in the cellar on the other side of the *Kapljica* yard. They bathed in wine. They'd found a big vat full of wine and used it to wash in. They thought it would be a lesser evil to stink as a distillery than to stink of sweat and filth. On some days, we barely had water to drink in the shelter, if you could call drinking water, a litre or two of liquid silt full of tadpoles. All one could do was shut one's eyes and drink it.

(...)

Accidentally or not, shortly after that morning when he saw me in tears, Branko decided to put aside a little water so that I could take a bath. I thought that a bath would only mitigate the problem because all my underwear was dirty. I remembered that not long ago Josip had received a parcel

with three pairs of men's underpants and I pestered him to lend me a pair. As I was sponging the pants, Branko heated a litre of water and left the other litre to cool it. I drove everybody from the little room, put a basin on a chair, poured in water and started to scrub. When I finished, I felt as if I'd removed ten kilos of my body. I dressed and with the towel around my head I went to Melita and asked her to cut my hair as short as possible.

Washed and with my hair cut I set off in search of a small bottle of perfume which was my birthday present and when I found it, I sprayed it on generously.

I was a normal female human being again.

(...)

Things were bad, very bad.

It is difficult to describe the collective mental state that prevailed in the town during those last days. The feelings were incredibly confused. We were desperate. We knew that the end was coming and could do nothing more to prevent it. We had reconciled with the fact that we would probably all perish whilst defending the town and that thought seemed less horrible than the thought that we could fall into the chetniks' hands with all those men, women and children. Although the Staff constantly received information about the dispatches of weapons and men, although in private conversations with Zagreb everybody promised to help, nobody and nothing arrived in Vukovar. So that, although there was already a taste of defeat in our mouths, although deep inside we knew that there was no escape, we would still, at least for a brief moment, believe such information, begin to hope, clutch at a straw...

(...)

Young Jastreb tried to establish radio-connection with people holding positions but it was impossible. The chetniks broke into the lines, interfered with the connection and with all that whistling, interruptions and "witticisms" we could exchange only a sentence or two. I had got used to that noise and probably it would have been less upsetting were it not for a drunken chetnik who persistently broke in with his "entertainment show". He behaved like a disc jockey, aired some unbearable folk songs and in between those musical horrors asked "what were the Croat women like" and threatened with what he would do to them once "they liberated Vukovar from the ustasha vermin". That voice and what it said and the *March on the Drina* he aired after every second song made me sick. They aired *The March on the Drina* also over loudspeakers mounted on an armoured JNA vehicle in which they cruised the occupied parts of the town. It could be heard from afar and it gave us shivers.

(...)

At *Kapljica* the mood was funereal. People went about their usual chores, ate, put children to bed and then sat down and talked softly, whispering. People were coming to realise that nobody would come to their rescue, yet nobody wanted to say aloud what sounded like the death penalty to them, their families, their children...

My thoughts were also very gloomy. Death as such would not be all that terrible if I could be sure that before it I would not be dragged about and tortured by drunken stinking chetniks. After what I'd heard on Jastreb's radio station I knew that as a woman I wouldn't be in only for a bullet or a knife. I thus started thinking how to force them to kill me before they could lay their dirty hands on me. I was not mentally ready for the suicide nor was it acceptable to me because of my upbringing. After all, a normal person does not want to kill himself until he really finds himself in a situation when it is his only salvation... So I made a plan: I had to get a grenade, a rifle or a revolver somehow. When I see the chetniks, I'll run towards them, raise the weapon and they'll be able to do nothing but shoot me...

Vesna and Siniša took a long time returning from the Staff and that was how we knew that something very ugly was going on. When they turned up at long last it was around two o'clock in the morning. They entered our little room very quietly. Vesna walked with her head bent down and then crouched by the mattress. Siniša sat on the transmitter box and was obviously thinking how to tell us what he had to tell us. Vesna raised her head and looked at me. Her eyes were red with crying and her lips formed the words "It's over." I put my head between my hands and listened to what Siniša was saying. Young Jastreb and the military police had decided to withdraw from the town that night and we could leave with them if we wanted. Siniša wanted us to think carefully: "It won't be easy so think about whether you can do it. On the other hand, you all know how we stood out and what can happen because of that. I'll be the last to say what I have decided..."

(...)

As if in a dream I became aware that the telephone was ringing. The lads at the post office had fixed it after all. One of the journalists was calling - I can't remember who it was - and asking me what was the situation in Vukovar. And as I was about to repeat like a parrot *"I-can't-give-you-any-information"* something broke in me. What on earth am I trying to hide? Why do I postpone something that was already becoming a bloody fact? So I simply said: "Vukovar is no more, dear Sir... it's all over..." The man, shocked, fell silent and before he could ask another question, I hung up.

(...)

I took out my purse and Krki's notebook. I dug in the purse thinking what I should keep and what should be destroyed. What if they capture me? What story shall I tell? I decided to keep the mobilisation document. It will serve as the excuse for the uniform and it is not bad as the excuse for the job: *"I am, incidentally, a teacher..."* In the purse there was also the card of the teachers' union which could corroborate that story. I also decided to keep my identity and press cards. There was also my September salary. There was nowhere to spend the money. I was sorry I did not have any German marks. They would have been welcome because if they captured me, perhaps I might quell their hunger for killing with the hunger for money... I'd left them together with the passport and Mother's jewellery in the building's shelter to save

them from shelling. Ha! Am I going to make some chetnik's day! I took out from the purse the electricity bill which had been there since September… there's a thing that needs to be destroyed without hesitation! Apart from the bill, my aunt's identity card and the pension slip… Auntie! In all that confusion I only then thought of her! My God, what shall I do with her? My brother will manage, perhaps he'd already got out, but she… There was no way to get her out of the town or even let her know that I was leaving. All I could do was hope that she would manage to survive the first encounter with the chetniks and that the neighbours would keep their mouths shut so that nobody could associate her with me… I took her identity card, her pension slip, the electricity bill and some other papers and moved to the last room in the storage where the lads were already burning documents of all sorts. I put the papers on fire and returned to the main room. I took the keys of the house from the pocket of the red jacket... I felt like crying but I managed to restrain myself and shoved the keys quickly in the pocket of the camouflage jacket.

(…)

The group had already set off and Josip and I joined it. We came out of the Staff cellar, not through the yard as usual but through a hole which a shell had made in one of the lateral walls of the building; we reached a side street at dusk. We heard explosions, *The March on the Drina* but it didn't disturb us much anyone any longer. We walked down Gundulićeva Street, my street, but only the contours of the town reminded me of it. Everything was covered with rubble, broken glass, bricks, roof tiles, pieces of tin plate and wire. Everything was grey, even the trees, bare, their branches broken, trunks wounded by shrapnel. Not a trace of colour… The air stank, saturated with dust and gunpowder.

(…)

We walked very slowly in a single file. Coming across bushes through which the wire of a mine had been strung, we would keep separate the branches for those who followed. Josip lost balance suddenly, stumbled across the wire and tightened it considerably. We all stopped dead in our tracks but nothing happened! We swallowed and continued. Somebody in the group that came after us was not so lucky. We heard the explosion and then a heart-rending scream. For a moment we stood quietly expecting gunfire but we heard nothing else and we proceeded. There was no time to stop, think and grieve. We climbed up a slope and at the top we entered a maize field. A man in a hat who was leading us stopped and waited for us to pass by and then went back towards the Vuka River. I didn't know who was leading us now but the column moved ahead.

I feared the sounds made by dry maize stalks as we passed between them but, as if on request, monotonous, cold rain suddenly began. A few minutes later I was soaked through and began to shiver but persistent fast walking helped me get slightly warmer.

(…)

Just before the day broke we came out of the maize into a small

clearing. A clean open field stretched ahead, maize fields to the left and right of it, and to the left from the place where we stood a small wood. The group came to a halt and we gathered close. Somebody said that only that field was between us and Vinkovci but that the day was breaking and it would be better to hide in the wood and rest until the next nightfall. People scattered and began to look for a place to sleep. Josip and I paused a little because I asked him to wait for me until I took a pee, and then it looked to us as if the shrubbery nearby could provide quite a good shelter. We made it to where it was the thickest and tried to sleep. Rain was dripping on us from the branches but we were so tired that we fell asleep in spite of everything.

When we woke up it was already daylight. Sun shone around, everything was peaceful, the birds were singing.

I was terribly cold. I tried to get the watch from the jacket but my hands shook so uncontrollably that I couldn't unbutton the jacket. My teeth chattered so badly that my jaws shook. When I tried to stand up I felt severe pain in my left knee and fell down. After several attempts I managed somehow to stand up. Josip was in an even worse shape. He could not stand up at all. His hips hurt like hell. I tried to help him and after a great effort, leaning on the rifle and me, he straightened up but still could not walk normally. He broke off a thick branch and used it as a crutch.

(...)

Shortly afterwards power transmission lines "surfaced" from the field and that was the first sign that we were near our destination. My disbelief intensified when I saw the first house and finally – a road. A clean, intact, normal road! We came out cautiously and after all that long trek through mud I felt as if I was floating. I guess my legs were moving of their own will. The houses by the road were intact but looked deserted. I could swear that I heard cows mooing in a yard!

(...)

I cannot describe the pleasure I felt under a hot shower after three months of washing in a few litres of water and two freezing nights. I inhaled deeply the smell of soap and shampoo. Streams of dirty water ran down my body and no matter how many times I applied the soap the water was still dirty. Clean hair! Toothpaste! Clean underwear and clean clothes! I thought such things did not exist anymore…

(...)

I fell asleep even before my head touched the pillow.

It was over. For me the war has ended and I have lost it.

It was nice to fall asleep and know nothing else…

Alenka Mirković

(91.6 MHz – Voice Against Guns, 1997)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

facing the wall of silence

seada vranić, 1996

Besima

***

Q: Have you been in Zagreb long?

BESIMA: It's my third day today.

Q: Is this your first time here?

B: Yep, sure.

Q: How did you arrive here?

B: Same as the next person, its not that I flew or anything.

Q: Did you arrive in a bigger group of refugees?

B: Nope, only the two of us.

Q: Did you have any problems getting into Croatia?

B: Nah.

Q: Does that mean you had regular permits?

B: Ship-shape. I cut my braids and put on these trousers into the bargain.

Q: Why did you do that?

B: ‘ave you ever seen a Catholic woman in a Muslim dress? Doncha know they ban Muslims from gettin’ in now? Took ‘er two months to get them permits. Luckily, among them Catholics - they call themselves "Croats" now - there are good souls and one of ‘em got ‘em for us. I never thought we’d get ’em, but she wouldn’ stop at anythin’ until we got these papers statin’ we’re Catholics.

Q: Is ‘she’ a friend of yours?

B: It's none of your business. She’s everythin’ to me.

Q: Why did you come to Zagreb?

B: Never mind that.

Q: Why do you say it’s not important when your friend ran around for two months to get your papers? You must have had a good reason.

B: I’d like to see you in me shoes! Pardon me, this just came out. It's easier ‘ere to find out what’s happened to your man.

Q: Where is your man, your husband?

B: An’ why are you so polite to me? I’m not that older than you.

Q: No, you are younger than me, but it is usual for a journalist to use formal language for an interview. Why do you avoid telling me the whereabouts of your husband?

B: ‘e got outta the camp in August an’ me son, too. Her man ‘asn’t. No one knows what’s happened to ‘im. That’s what we heard in Bosnia, but you can’t do anythin’ there. Those folks from the "United Red Cross for Refugees" can make arrangements for you to go and join your man even in another country. He’s already there and me son, too. Now they’re making

arrangements here 'cause I said I ain't goin' without 'er. Now this lady friend of yours - the one who's talked me into tellin' ya how the Orthodox raped me – she's helpin' too. The lady says it's all been arranged, only a few more papers so that we can travel. She'll also get us some nice clothes. No way I'll get to my man in these trousers. We joked that if they make me look too much like a lady, my 'usband won't recognize me. Not that he would recognize me in my clothes either: I used to look better than any girl in the village and look at me now – like a stork!

Q: When were you raped?

B: Same time as that other one from the village!

Q: Where did it happen?

B: Well, in the 'ouse, where else?

Q: In your house?

B: Nah, not in me 'ouse – where they kept us; there, where they'd taken us. Me and that Ta…, nah, I'm not telling ya that. They picked me out and another woman from the village and put us in a truck. They drove us somewhere and left us in a 'ouse.

Q: Whose house was it? Can you explain?

B: How should I know? It was big an' beautiful, with a big garden. They took us there when they stormed our village. The two of us – they took us there, and the rest – they either put in a camp or killed.

Q: In which village did you live? What was its name?

B: I'm not tellin'!

Q: Why not?

B: I'm not tellin' and that's that; you can't make me.

Q: Was it a village in the Ključ District?

B: In what?

Q: Is that village near Ključ?

B: Sure, if you're ridin'. What's it to you? You can't make me tell ya.

Q: What happened in the village?

B: Them Orthodox rushed in – the Serbian troops. They stormed in from all sides – burnt down the 'ouses, the ones they wouldn' raze – that is. They killed a lot of guys and women, too. Some women were dishonoured.

Q: Dishonoured?

B: Sure. We say "dishonoured", but now it's modern to say "raped". They forced themselves on girls and women right there – before their men and brothers – God forbid. The damned louts – those Orthodox.

Q: Is that when you were raped, too?

B: Nah – I'd be lying if I say I was. There, where me 'ouse was, they only razed everythin' and banished the folks; they separated men from women. It's in the lower side of the village that they raped and killed – we 'eard 'em shootin'. They even butchered some folks like chickens – they did. Two guys from the lower side managed to get away and tell us everythin' but they got caught with the rest of us. Same happened to me man and son. I thought they'd do 'em in. Then they took me and that other one aside – the

one I was tellin' ya abou' – and put us in a truck. They took us to that 'ouse. There were another nine… no, hold on – lem'me count – another eight women, an' all beautiful.

Q: And where was that house? Was it in Ključ?

B: It wasn't in Ključ – that's for sure. I'd know if it'd been in Ključ – Ključ is a town; I'd been there hundreds of times. I've no idea where that 'ouse was – honestly. She isn't sure either.

Q: Who?

B: She isn't – the one you saw; the one that came here with me.

Q: What's her name?

B: I wouldn' tell ya even if my dear life depended on it.

Q: Did they bring you two together to that house?

B: No, she isn't from the village – she's from the town. She went to school and knows things – very clever, I'm tellin' ya. She was already there when they brought me. She'd been brought from Prijedor and her 'usband 'ad been caught. Those folks who went to school but weren't Orthodox – they were either taken to the camps or killed. I asked why they'd taken away the clever folks an' she said them Serbs – the Orthodox – wanted to leave us – the Muslims like me man and me without them brainy ones. It's like you capture the shepherd and leave the flock – they'd go straight to the wolves.

Q: And the house where they put you – was it in a concentration camp?

B: What's with you, woman? I've told ya, it's a 'ouse – the 'ouse where guys just visited for doing it with whores. They made us do it there with the Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox – them troops.

Q: And who ran that house?

B: It's not a tractor that you run – you don't run 'ouses.

Q: Who managed the house? Was it a man or, perhaps, a woman?

B: Wha'cha mean – a woman? Are ya out'ta your mind? Women were hustled into a back room. We slept on the floor-boards. If you happened to have another dress, you covered yourself with it. If we'd managed the 'ouse, we woudn've been whores. You sometimes ask very silly questions. Of course it was a guy who managed us, and them troops – the Serbian Orthodox troops – they just kept coming.

Q: When were you brought there? When was your village attacked?

B: Right when the war started.

Q: When exactly was that? In which year? Do you remember the date?

B: Aren'cha listening? – I've told ya: right when the war started – in spring. As if ya dunno when the war started. They hemmed in the village from all sides an' started beatin'.

Q: What did they do to you when they brought you to that house?

B: They dishonoured us right away. Both of us – me and that other one from me village. They did it with me in a room upstairs and with her – downstairs. The troops who'd brought us there did it first.

Q: The troops? How many of them?

B: I dunno – two of them dishonoured me, but I dunno about her.

One of ‘em hit me and I passed out.

Q: What happened next?

B: Then that filthy pig told us to wash ourselves – but thoroughly.

Q: Who was "that filthy pig"?

B: Mile - who else? He was the boss, but mind ya – not of the troops – of us. He was the one to say which of us would go upstairs when the troops came. Sometimes we all went up when lots of troops came – them chetniks, the Orthodox. When Mile wasn’t there, those other three commandeered us. They weren’t troops either, but they had guns. Mile had a gun and a pistol – he was from Serbia.

Q: How do you know?

B: Well, he spoke like they do in Serbia. Those who speak like that are from Serbia.

Q: What happened when Mile told you to wash yourself?

B: Then he dishonoured me. He was worse than them troops – he banged me so hard that I threw up. He pounded me half a day. ‘e wore me out so much that one of his mates, one of those who were helping him, said he’d do me some other time – that’s how bad I looked. An’ ‘e did – the next day. The other two did it right after Mile. When they’d ‘ad enough, they shovelled me like a piece of dirt into the back room, where they kept other women.

From then on, they took me upstairs whenever them troops came and whenever Mile wanted me. Mile used only me and her – the one you saw. That’s why we had to wash ourselves so often – whenever he wanted us. So we washed ourselves all the time!

Q: Did the troops come often?

B: More often than you can count – day in, day out: we were all bone-weary and exhausted. You wouldn’t believe what those filthy louts used to come up with – all sorts of things.

Q: Did they beat you?

B: If you dared stand up to them, they’d beat the hell out’ta you; make ya black an’ blue all o’er. If you let ‘em ‘ave it their way, they’d do ya and then spit on ya or splash ya with brandy – that was the worst – when they’d splash ya ‘down there’ with brandy – that burnt like hell; they’d even stub out cigarette butts on ya.

Q: Did you fear pregnancy?

B: Nah.

Q: What about the other women?

B: I only had one baby – turned seventeen an’ had a son. Then I couldn’t any more – I got barren. Me man couldn’ care less – ‘e’d already ‘ad four with his late first wife. All of them’re doin’ well – got married an’ all. Other women fear’d it. Only me and one other didn’ get pregnant. That poor thing from me village – she’d just got married – that was her first one and she kicked the bucket.

Q: What happened to her?

B: She got pregnant and told us she didn’t want to live no more. An’

one day, while we were diggin' up onions in the garden, she laid into one of those who guarded us. She struggled with 'im and the others – with guns – rushed over and shot her. She died that minute – she didn' feel nothin'.

Q: Did Mile know some women were pregnant? Did it show?

B: Like he cared! He could've known about one – it showed a little, but with the others – it didn' show. We were all too skinny: that hogwash and stale bread they gave us – we had the runs all the time.

Q: How long did you stay in the house?

B: Until we all got mangy.

Q: You mean you got a disease?

B: Yep. We all got mangy. Me and this one that came with me – we got mangy last. Then they crammed us into a truck and handed us over to 'ulprofol'.

Q: Sorry, to whom?

B: Can't remember whether 'twas that "ulprofol" or the other one – they're for refugees!

Q: The UNHCR[1]?

B: That's them – the ones for refugees. One of 'em asked how they'd treated us.

Q: How do you know what he asked?

B: That slut told 'im. She explained to us whatever he said in that foreign tongue. Then she, the one you've seen here, wanted to tell 'im in his tongue how they'd really treated us. She knows that foreign tongue 'cos she'd been at schools in Sarajevo. She wanted to tell 'im what them Orthodox 'ad done to us, but that slut wouldn' let 'er. Gotta be an Orthodox – damn whore. He listened only to what she'd say an' she lied an' said that we'd been treated well – everythin' 'ad been ship-shape, she'd say.

Q: When exactly did the UNHCR take you over?

B: I dunno. It was a hot day in August. She's remembered and I've forgotten.

Q: You haven't forgotten; why don't you want to tell me? People won't believe your story if you don't even want to say when the UNHCR took you over.

B: That's no story – it's the naked truth. I don't care if anyone believes it. An' why wouldn' they believe us? Would an honest woman lie, sayin' that she was a whore? I was an honest woman. She was an honest woman, too, 'an all of 'em were. Is it decent to take off your blouse and show your jugs? Since you're insistin' – 'ere, 'ave a look: who would ever stub out cigarette butts on their own body? I 'ave 'em all o'er – that's why I'm not keen on seein' my man – he'd tell right away what'd 'appened. That's why I'm not travellin' without 'er. (Besima unbuttoned her shirt for a brief moment and revealed clearly visible burn scars).

Q: What did the UNHCR do with you?

B: Oh – the usual: they crammed us into trucks an' buses – it was-

[1] UNHCR = United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

n’t only us from the ‘ouse; there were women from all parts. Some of ‘em ‘ad been kept in the barracks and some in ‘ouses like ours. She says there were lots of ‘ouses like that. Many women threw up during the ride and many had to go an’ ‘ave that "bortion" (*an abortion*) in Travnik.

Q: You passed through Travnik?

B: I didn’ pass through it. That’s where they took us an’ put us into that big school – the ‘gramnar’ school, near the water – the Laštva. We didn’ stay there right away, but in another hall – not by the water – the Laštva, and a smaller one, too; it wasn’t far either. When that mange that we’d got passed, they moved us to that "gramnar" school. It was jam-packed there – as if the whole Bosnia ‘ad crammed in.

In Travnik, they listed the misfortun’d women – the ones that came forward, that is. You know, hun, no one wants to come forward without a real urge. But if ya ‘gotta ‘ave that "bortion" then they put’cha down for it. Then ya tell ‘em everythin’. If ya don’ want to tell ‘em, ya say it’s from your man an’ ya weren’t raped. That lady doctor wrote her down – this one that’s here with me. No one made ‘er do it, I can’t say they did. But she burst into tears.

It was difficult to live in Travnik. Serbs shelled it, too. Bombs fell, but not in the town centre. It’s a very beautiful town – a hundred times more beautiful than Ključ.

Q: I know – I know it very well.

B: How d’ya know it? ‘ave ya been there?

Q: How long did you stay there?

B: Until we came here – to Zagreb. We thought of staying there for good but then I learnt that me son an’ ‘usband ‘ad come out of the camp in summer. She – this friend o’ mine – she’d been makin’ inquiries about ‘er man at that "United Red Cross for Refugees" an’ I asked ‘er to inquire about mine too – whether he was alive or not. And she kep’ askin’ until she found out. Then she went on to get ‘old of these permits for us to come ‘ere. I told ya they don’t let in Muslims except when you have a paper that says you’re a Croat. Hey, why won’cha tell me about Travnik? Have you been there?

Q: I was born in Travnik.

B: Born there! Look at her – what d’ya know! Then you know it’s all true – I’ve not made it up – you tease.

Q: How would I know that?

B: Like you wouldn’t. I could be tellin’ ya about Travnik for days. I wasn’t born there, but I could tell ya. So you’ve been there. You can get there from Ključ any time, but only if you were a bird or if those who transport refugees picked you up if ya’d been dishonoured by them Serbs. You could tell right away it was all true, but you teased me. As if I didn’t have enough trouble already.

Zagreb, 25 February, 1993

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Enisa

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They took me away from my apartment on the evening of April 30. They had taken my husband earlier in the morning. I don't know the names of the people who came that day – two of them were wearing police uniforms and the third was in plain clothes. I'm not sure whether they were from Prijedor at all. During the several months since we had moved from Banjaluka, I hadn't got to know that many people from Prijedor. We had been a newlywed couple and we had been spending a lot of our time enjoying each other's company.

But we did have friends – a somewhat older couple whom my husband had known since childhood. They had found me a job in Prijedor and that's why we moved there in the first place. Being a school teacher, we had hoped I would have no problem finding a job in a suburban school or in one of the surrounding villages. These friends had fled Prijedor two months prior to our arrest. It had been a sudden decision and they had advised us to do the same. Unfortunately, we didn't listen.

We thought the war wouldn't break out. We believed that the Serbian louts would eventually calm down. They hadn't been threatened either in Prijedor or in Bosnia – Serbs had always ridden the crest in everything.

When they came to take my husband away, they said that it was only for a routine interview and that they would give him a ride from the police station to his workplace. We were unaware of the fact that during the previous night, Serb military police had taken control of Prijedor and had started arresting people. My husband didn't struggle – he went with them peacefully. He never showed at work that day and I have never seen him since.

I was picked up by the same person in plain clothes and one of the policemen who had taken my husband away. They said that I only had to confirm his statement that he hadn't been politically involved with the PDA[2] and that in a couple of hours I would be enjoying a warm manly embrace. I realized I was in trouble only when I was blindfolded in a car which did not have any police markings.

They drove for what seemed like half an hour, maybe a whole hour, and then they took me out and put me in a room. I know it was on the ground floor because we didn't climb stairs. Someone pushed me into a room

2. The PDA = The Party of Democratic Action or Stranka Demokratske Akcije = SDA, was the major Muslim party.

and I fell down on the concrete floor. When the door slammed shut I took off the blindfold but couldn't see a thing — it was pitch dark. I sensed someone breathing and mumbling in the room and assumed I wasn't alone in there. I didn't have time to find out who it was because the door opened suddenly and let in some light from the corridor. In the doorway, I saw a figure in the military uniform and it was only when that person bawled at me for taking of the blindfold that I realized it was a woman. She slammed the door abruptly so I couldn't see who else was there in the room.

She returned almost instantly with a new blindfold which she then put over my eyes and tied it with as piece of string. It was actually a dirty men's sock, the stench of which almost made me throw up. She then took me to another room and told me to take off my clothes and shoes. She took off my bracelet, my watch and my wedding ring, and then she ripped off my earrings. I had nothing on but for the blindfold which I didn't dare take off even when, for a brief moment, they left me alone in the room.

Soon after, my warden returned with another person and I heard her say: "The stinky bitch is all yours – do whatever you want with her." This other person was a man – I knew that the moment he grabbed me by my arm and pushed me onto a bed. "You really stink, you filthy bitch," he yelled in my ear pressing my breasts with both his hands. I don't know where I found the courage to retort that it wasn't me but the sock. I must have blurted it spontaneously as had never been so scared in my entire life.

"Aaah, you would want that blindfold off, wouldn't you teacher?! You'd like to look at me? Oh well, have a look at your Novica, but try not to forget that Serbian socks don't stink. You should be honoured that a Serb wants to fuck you… You remember Novica from Form 4A?" he enquired taking the blindfold off my eyes.

For a moment I couldn't see anything although the light was on. When my eyes adapted to the light, I saw his face but I didn't recognise it. I still find it hard to believe that he had been my student – that my former student raped me. Judging by his age, he could have been from that first generation I had taught. He looked younger than twenty, which means he could have been in the fourth form when I started teaching. Yet, his face was unfamiliar and I couldn't remember anyone with that name.

During that first night of my captivity, seven more men raped me but I couldn't see their faces since Novica – if that was his real name at all – put that blindfold back on my face. He tied me to the bed before he left. Tied to the bed-frame with my legs spread and my arms fastened above my head, I was an object of abuse for seven young men – the seven Jugović – as that woman warden called them. She would occasionally enter the room to see if I needed a "wash". Later I was to find out that the "wash" was a splash of cold water to bring me around when I lost consciousness.

The next day I was transported in a truck to another location together with other women-prisoners who were also blindfolded with their hands tied behind their back. After a long drive, we were left in a barracks without win-

dows where the light got in only when the door opened. I don't know where that place was – it might have been near Bosanska Gradiška, as one of the wardens mentioned to another he had to go to Gradiška to have a tyre patched.

I cannot say how long I stayed there as, in the dark, I completely lost the sense of time, but it seemed like an eternity to me. While I was kept there, the wardens battered me several times. They usually did that to pass the time having raped their prisoner first. One of the wardens, whom I heard they called the Skeleton (although he was rather corpulent), hit me with a riffle butt injuring my jaw and knocked out all my teeth on the left side. This scar on my face is a "souvenir" from the Skeleton. He was the one we feared most as he was a true sadist – he would thrust a beer bottle into a woman's… and forced each one of us to give him a "blow job". He tried to thrust a gun nuzzle into my… but I instinctively kicked him with the loosely tied foot (convinced that I wouldn't dare resist he hadn't fastened it properly). Caught by surprise and dismayed at my bravery he hit me with the butt-end of his riffle. I cannot recollect the blow itself – the last thing I remember was him turning towards the chair to grab the gun. I believe I was unconscious for a very long time.

When I came round, I was still in the room where the wardens used to rape us (they called the rape – a "pastime"). My jaw was bandaged with a piece of cloth, a taste of blood in my mouth and I had a splitting headache. The first thing I noticed was that I didn't have the blindfold. The Skeleton would always take off our blindfold bragging that he feared no one. Needless to say, he made sure we had it back on before he let us go back into the barracks.

Being all alone in that room, I had a chance to examine it carefully: it was pretty small – about fifteen square metres, maybe less. The walls were extremely dirty with visible blood stains on them. Some stains were very dark while others were bright red and fresh. Except for the bed and two chairs, the room was empty. There were no curtains or blinds on the window but the pane was covered with an old, partly torn newspaper. That small window tempted me to look out even for a brief moment but I was too frail to move. Lying on the bed I was only perceptive to the sounds and I could hear the wardens outside the room. I shut my eyes as I had a feeling my head hurt less if I didn't look around.

At one point, someone entered the room; I pretended I was unconscious. Just as I thought they had found me out, I herd a man's voice shouting to someone to tell Kosta I was still unconscious. The other shouted back: "Why is Kosta so interested in the Turk – he can't have fallen for her, can he?" The one in the room replied that Kosta had studied together with my husband way back in the secondary technical in Banjaluka and added that Kosta had wanted to be the first but the kid had outstripped him.

Then he ordered them to bring some water and then to take me back to the "pigsty". There was no point in pretending to be unconscious any more and I opened my eyes in order to avoid the "wash". However, this didn't stop them from pouring out a large container of water onto me – it was

easier for them to carry it back empty. Dragging me on the floor and then the ground, they took me back to the barracks having blindfolded me first, of course.

So, I was back in that dark stuffy place with cramps in my stomach that would go on for days (since I could not eat anything) – not even the sporadic, meagre corn-pudding meals that they fed us with. Yet, more difficult than pain and hunger, even more difficult than the mind-numbing humiliation we suffered continually, was the knowledge that I was not going to see my husband again. Although I occasionally tried to sooth myself thinking that the fact that Kosta knew him did not necessarily mean that he was dead, something told me he was not alive any more. It was then that I made the decision to do something – either to get out of that inferno or – die. I knew that if I didn't succeed, they would kill me – and death I did not fear.

As I was spared the guards' sadistic routine for a while, I had time to think and look around a bit, better say – feel around, as the pitch dark we lived in made us change our eyes for our hands. I knew that none of the prisoners, who were all in the equally sorry, exhausted condition – molested and battered like me, could not put up any resistance to those bastards. Yet, worse than their physical state was the despair that absorbed them – I heard many of them whispering prayers to dear God to take them.

At first I thought that just listening to them muttering the death wishes would drive me insane; then, somehow, it occurred to me that it wouldn't be such a bad idea at all; and thus I decided to "go mad", to act insanity. Yet, I didn't know how to and I haven't got much of an acting talent. Singing sprang to my mind as the only resort.

As soon as I felt a bit better and could move my lips, I started singing a little and the woman sitting next to me, whose face I had never been able to see clearly – a Hatidža J. – moved swiftly away from me and shouted: "This one's cracked – she's gone bonkers."

I felt the other prisoners gather around me. They touched my face, my hands and asked me various questions. Nihada, a fourteen-year-old and the youngest among them, burst into tears, but for me, there was no going back now. I went on to sing the songs I had sung with the children at school. The women around me started commenting that I had gone berserk because of the Skeleton's blow to the head. One of them, I don't know which one, said it could be because I'd learnt the Serbs had slain my husband and instead of screaming, I started singing even louder.

Can you guess whose song I remembered? – A Serbian's! I started singing an old Serbian love song. I had never liked it very much, although, at parties, we would sing Serbian folk songs along with the Muslim ones.

At this, one of the wardens rushed in, the others following close behind. They dragged me out. They must have been completely baffled by my singing as they had forgotten to blindfold me. They yelled at me to stop and I, blinded by the sun, squinted and sang as loudly as I could. Like through a haze, I started discerning things around me. From the outside, our

barracks looked like a prefab service hall – it could have easily been a warehouse, a small factory or a workshop. The windows were boarded on the outside. Further down, there was a cottage and a tractor with a trailer parked in front of it. I concluded that it was the house where they raped us.

The wardens, still baffled by my singing, dragged me to the house and dumped me by the side wall. The younger one pointed his gun at me but I kept on singing. Then the older one pulled out a knife from his boot and put the blade to my throat. That was the Skeleton who I recognised as I had seen him before. I froze and fell silent. In actuality, I just could not hear my own voice as I desperately mouthed the lyrics.

I fretted that I wouldn't be able to keep it up; I wasn't so afraid of the gun, but the notion that the Skeleton might slaughter me, fazed me completely – I knew he was capable of it. I still cannot figure out how I managed to pluck up the courage to go on singing. I can't remember which tune I sang – I only know I sang it as loudly as I could and my jaw hurt terribly. I reckon the noise made all the others come out of the house. One of them, the only one who looked neat and tidy – the "suave" one – asked what was going on and why I was not blindfolded. The Skeleton replied: "Looks, Kosta, like this 'sweetheart' of yours won't be needing it anymore – she's definitely gone off the deep end!"

I carried on and Kosta – the one who "knew" my husband – ordered them to "wash" me. They "washed" me several times, slapped me across the face, held the knife to my throat and then, finally, gave up. Encouraged by this, I started jumping around pretending to dance. At one point, I even wanted to reach out for Kosta and dance with him. That was the person who may have slain my husband. I know this sounds incredible to you, but I really wanted to convince them I was insane. Before I could grab him, Kosta ordered them to take me back to the barracks.

From then on, they tried me for days; they would take me to that little house, beat me and splashed me with water, but they didn't rape me. At first, they kept blindfolding me whenever they would take me out of the barracks, but they eventually stopped. Unfortunately, I could not confide in the other women about my fake insanity. I still feel a pang of remorse whenever I remember how I used to drive them crazy with my yelling but I was afraid that one or another could tip them off just to save her own skin or to ease her suffering a little.

They were all taken in by my "insanity"; as for myself – I, too, sometimes doubted I was still in my right mind. For, not only did I sing in my waking life, but I had 'singing' dreams as well. That delivered me right out of hell – I survived.

Zagreb, 16 July, 1992

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Fatima

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Q: How long have you been in the camp?

FATIMA: Where?

Q: In this place for refugees?

F: Oh, it's my second week. We are waiting to be resettled.

Q: You are from Foča?

F: No, I am from Džihanići.

Q: Džihanići is a village near Foča?

F: No, Džihanići is near Prusac, but you can go everywhere from there — to Balića, Bugojno and to Donji Vakuf.

Q: You mentioned Foča and Goražde and I thought you lived in eastern Bosnia.

F: Of course I lived there. I was married there. My husband is from there, but I was born in Džihanići.

Q: So, where did you live?

F: I lived in Djidjevo, actually – near Djidjevo. Our place was set on a hillside, but we belonged to Djidjevo. That's how it was registered in the District Office. You can get both to Foča and Goražde from there, or anywhere else for that matter, only it's a day's ride to get to Goražde. My man went mostly to Foča to the market place and bought whatever we needed at home. We lived in the mountain and it was really a beautiful spot. When he first brought me there I thought I could never get used to living in such a remote place. I was very young then – only sixteen. He had come to Prusac to a get-together and I had been there with my sister. She was older than me – twenty-two at the time, but he had eyes only for me – and I for him. God, he was handsome – the best-looking of all the men at the party. He said he came from Foča. I asked whether it was a big town and he said it was. I eloped with him. I just couldn't help it – his eyes were a deep shade of blue like the waters of the Drina.

Yet, he'd lied to me, the devil – Foča was nowhere near there. I only saw it years later when he took me there to give birth to a baby girl. After my first-born, a boy, six had been stillborn. That first one also had difficulties staying alive, too. When I got pregnant with the baby girl, he'd had enough of it: "You ain't seeing no midwives and witch-doctors this time. I'm taking you to Foča to see a real doctor." In the hospital, they said I was negative – probably faulty. They did the blood-test on him, too an' he was positive – all

right, I guess. I asked him if he would send me back home and he said to me: "Don’t be silly! I wouldn’t send ya back for anything in the world. I love you more than anyone ever; you belong to me." And so, I gave birth to the Little One in the hospital. She was four and a half kilos. She is thirteen years old now, my poor baby.

Q: Is your husband with you now?

F: No, God forbid. The Serbs are keeping him in the prison in Foča if he’s still alive. Thank God he’s not here with me, although I know he misses me.

Q: Why? Why don't you want him to be here with you?

F: Well, at least he’s spared the embarrassment of my shame. It would kill him to know how they tainted me.

Q: Were you happy in your marriage? Do you love your husband?

F: If I hadn’t been happy, I wouldn't have stayed in the wilderness with him. My father would have taken me back if my life with him had been bad. Yes, I loved him very much. Who wouldn't love such a kind soul. He never said as much as a bad word to me, never hit me, or anything. But this would be too much for him.

Q: How did he get to prison?

F: He went to Foča to sell some cows. He left home in the afternoon and stayed the night at some relatives’. The next morning, he left for Foča and never came back. These relatives sent their son to tell me that he was in jail. They had heard he had been caught by the Serbian militia, the one that had broken away from the regular Bosnian police force. That man also said that Serbian troops could be launching an attack on Foča any time. It was all my fault – I had told him to go to Foča and sell the cows so that we could go and stay with my folks. We saw the evil coming.

Q: What evil?

F: The same evil that had befallen my mom’s family in that other war – in 1941. The chetniks had massacred the whole village – only four had survived out of three hundred. My mom’s family is from the Višegrad area. During that war, she (only a little girl at the time) and her aunt were saved from chetniks by German soldiers. They gave them a lift to Sarajevo. From there they went to Donji Vakuf. My mom got married and moved to Džihanići. The chetniks massacred seventeen of my grandfather and uncle's family – that’s what my mother told me and that’s why I was scared when I heard on the radio that the Serbs feared us, the Muslims, and that they were threatened by us. How could they have been threatened by us when the state took from us and gave to them? On *Radio Belgrade*, they kept saying that some "Mujahedins" intimidated Serbian civilians and that all the Muslims were some "Green Berets". They kept saying that allegedly the Muslims want Bosnia to become like Iraq (or Iran) and that we want women to cover their faces.

Those were all their lies. Once my man returned from Foča and I asked him whether he had seen any of those "Mujahedins" and the damned "Green Berets" and he swore he hadn’t seen either although he had walked up and down in Foča for five solid hours.

He also went to Goražde but said he had seen neither there, too. He asked a Serb, Vasa – he was a good soul – whether he had seen those "Mujahedins" and "Berets" – as you call them, and he said it was all tripe and that it was all Milošević's doing because he wanted to draw Serbs and Muslims into a conflict.

I became anxious and started coaxing my husband into selling the cattle and moving away. I reckoned Serbia was near there and that would be where they would attack from, so we'd better move further away. But he went to Foča that day and never came back. I wanted to go there to look for him but the Little One wouldn't let me – she said: "They'll arrest you too; I heard on the radio the Serbs have started shelling Foča."

The Little One kept trying to talk me into leaving, into not waiting for her father to return because he wouldn't, but I turned a def ear to her. One day, that relative my husband had stayed with, showed up at the doorstep with all his family. He said they were heading for Goražde but through the woods and asked us to come along. I promised we would leave the next day. I said to him: "We need to get ready." And he replied: "That may be too late. The Serbs are burning down houses and killing people. They've gone wild, the filthy scum."

Just before the dusk, the hill stated glowing and we knew the village was burning – they had set Djidjevo on fire. Later I heard they had attacked it that morning. The Little One and I didn't dare sleep in the house. We took the blankets and went to sleep in the woods under a beech tree. (The wood was right there behind the yard – not a hundred feet away.) In the morning, when we woke up, I peeped through the trees and saw everything was quiet. Actually, it was too quiet somehow – you could only hear the birds chirping. We went back to the house to take the things and food. And then I made that crucial mistake and went to the cowshed. Only one cow had remained – and that one was a neighbour's cow. We were keeping an eye on her until Zejna returned from her daughter's. I went in there to untie her and let her out to graze but then I saw that her udder was bloated – it was a dairy cow and she produced a lot of milk. She needed to be milked and sat down to it. I was about to finish when I heard a scream. I turned around and in the doorframe of the cow shed I saw him…

Q: What happened then?

F: A disaster, my dear, a true disaster.

Q: Did he attack you?

Instead of replying, Fatima bowed her head. I repeated the question but she kept silent. I left her alone for a short while but then decided to chance it and asked her: "Did he rape you?" She stood up abruptly and without saying a word remained standing for a moment. Then she sat down again. Later while I was listening to the recording of the conversation I realised she would have gone away if only she had known where to go.

I let her collect her thoughts and then I repeated the question. She did not reply. I asked her whether she knew the man in the doorway, but she

kept silent. Yet, this time, she showed no wish to leave. I repeated the question. She looked at me briefly and, to my surprise, reached for the cup of tea which had already gone cold. I waited while she drank it and then asked her why she didn't want to answer. "Would you be bragging about your shame?" she replied with a question. I assured her that there was nothing to be ashamed about. She made no comment but I felt the tension easing a little. I decided to jump at the opportunity and ask another question.

Q: Was the man alone?

F: No, he wasn't. There were many of them – fifteen, maybe, but I didn't count. You count sheep, not people.

Q: Were they armed and in uniforms?

F: They were Serbian troops from Serbia – *The Eagles*. The Little One says it wasn't them but Arkan's troops. They burnt everything along the Drina, killing the men and dishonouring women. They turned my life into a sheer misery and brought shame on my child, may they rot in hell.

Q: Did they rape your daughter, as well?

F: I wouldn't tell you that – not even under torture. Why are you like that? Haven't you got your own children? Have you got a daughter? Would you be willing to speak about her disgrace? You've got to have more understanding for a mother.

Q: I know it is hard for you to talk about the rape. Other women who I also talked to were reluctant to talk about it.

F: You can't grasp it, can you? If you haven't gone through it, you can't fathom it. But you've got to believe me in this – it's a disgrace for a decent woman. I won't be able to look my man in the eye if I ever come to see him again. They're telling me to try to talk the Little One into giving them her address but I don't have the heart to do that. I know she wouldn't be able to face him.

Q: Whose address?

F: My son's – he's in Germany. He's been there for six years now. He got married two years ago. He went there right after the military service. He has a good job – he's a mechanic. He wrote to us – invited us to go there, he said there was going to be a war in Bosnia; but we laughed it off – how could he have known it from that distance?

Q: And why wouldn't your daughter give her address? Who is she supposed to give it to?

F: To those folks from the UN who visit us and to the Red Cross people. But she wouldn't give it to anyone. I wouldn't either if I were her. How would she look her brother in the eye being dishonoured like that? She says she'd rather die.

Q: Don't you know his address?

F: How would I know it? I can't read those German letters. I only know there's "osten" and "strasse" in it.

Q: Did they force you to watch while they raped your daughter?

F: You're too nosey, damn you – why do you want to know all that?

Haven't you got any shame? Not even the "psychiatist" or those who keep records of raped women ask questions like this. I would have kept it from them too but the Little One had to see the doctor. They do you from the front and the back and, God forbid, in the mouth and then they beat you and kick you in the kidneys – you hafta see the doctor whether you want to or not. You don't need to say a word – he knows everything right away. And how wouldn't he know – trucks and buses packed full of misfortunate girls and women arrive all the time.

Q: Did they beat you hard? Did they beat your daughter?

F: They beat me because I couldn't watch what they were doing to her. They hit me all over the body. She says they didn't beat her but only splashed her with water. Maybe they would have battered her too, but she managed to run away. While they were "doing" me, she came round, regained her consciousness – if you want, and when she saw they weren't watching, she sneaked into the woods. Two of them went after her, fired guns and searched the woods, but she was in a thicket. There she hid until Zineta and Sena came her way. I didn't see that. It was later, sometime about noon, that I came round. Zineta washed my face with water. She and Seno took me down from that mulberry tree.

Q: What mulberry tree? What were you doing in a mulberry tree?

F: We have a mulberry tree in front of the house. I was hanging from a bough – but I don't remember it. Zineta says I was tied by the ankles and hung head-down – my face as red as a cherry.

Q: Who is Zineta?

F: Oh, she is a worldly lady, clever and kind. She is from Foča and Seno – Senad, was her son – a very nice young lad and a year older than my daughter. They had left Foča when the Serbs had taken her husband away. They had set off for Goražde on foot and through the woods as the road was blocked by the Serbian troops. Little Seno had a map – he said it could hold the whole of Bosnia but I didn't believe him: how could you put the whole of Bosnia on a piece of paper as small as that map – as they say – was? My Little One said it was true and that they had a map like that at school, too, but they called it a "card" and the whole of Bosnia and Yugoslavia and other countries were on it.

Seno and Zineta stumbled upon my daughter while she was hiding in a thicket. She tried to talk them into going to the house with her and helping her bury me – she thought I was dead. Zineta was opposed, she was afraid to go, but little Seno went forward and she followed. Later she told me they had had trouble taking me down from that bough. The house had still been on fire and the shed had already burnt down. Zejna's house and cowshed had also been burnt to the ground. I hadn't seen all that, they told me so later when I recovered a little. They stayed in the woods all that day and night because of me. I couldn't walk. Zineta gave me her clothes to put on. The Little One put on Seno's slacks and shirt. All our belongings had been burnt. I can't say whether those bastards had taken anything away.

Q: What happened to the other villagers?

F: What villagers?

Q: Those from your village. Where were other villagers? Had their houses been burnt too?

F: You're acting silly – haven't I already told you that Zejna's house had been burnt down, too, and her shed, but she – Zejna – had gone to her daughter's in Mostar long before. Her husband had died three or four years ago. The village of Djidjevo is on the other side of the hill. I told you it had been on fire the night before the bastards came to our place. I have no idea what happened to the folks from the village. I heard recently that some had been killed.

Q: And where did you go when you recovered a little?

F: I didn't know what to do, where to go, but Zineta said the only place we could go to was Goražde and that we'd better go through the woods as the road was dangerous – it was full of Serbian troops and tanks. Seno led the way – he checked the trees looking for some red and white circles on them. The Little One explained that those were used by mountain climbers. And indeed, we got to Goražde although it was dangerous on the way there. Once, we almost ran into chetniks and twice they fired guns over our heads. Outside Goražde we came across our troops and they couldn't believe we'd passed through that area. One of them, a young man, led us to Goražde.

Q: How long did you stay in Goražde?

F: Almost two months. We stayed with some friends of Zineta's – very kind people, but very poor, too. They spent all they had and at one point they stayed without food. They fired weapons and shelled the town all the time. One day, Zineta suggested that we should move forward to Konjic. That road was much longer and much more difficult. We went through the woods for days. Just outside Konjic, we were with two guides who were supposed to take us into the town for half an hour, a grenade hit Seno killing him on the spot and a piece of it hit Zineta in her arm. More than a hundred grenades fell and that one had to hit Seno – if only it had been me!

In Konjic, Zineta had to see the doctor because she'd lost a lot of blood. They put us in a large hall where children had exercised before the war, I just thought we'd suffocate there: it was packed full with refugees – you didn't have enough room to stretch your legs, let alone walk around. As soon as she felt better, I told Zineta we should move on, but she couldn't. She had become listless – broken by Seno's death. In the end, she too, realized we couldn't stay in Konjic – scarce food and constant shelling were too difficult to bare.

So, two months later, she met some Croatian people who were heading for Mostar and we joined them. Mostar was a huge heap of rubble and I remembered Zejna telling me how she had never seen a more beautiful town. Yet, for us, it wasn't good at all. They were not happy to see refugees coming. When I asked why they were so against us, a woman who was a Catholic and a refugee like us said she had heard Mostar was to

become Croatian and that was why they were not happy to have more Muslim refugees coming. I could never understand that and I could hardly wait to move somewhere else. And, one day, they came from a commissariat and told us we were leaving the next day. And indeed, two buses full of women with children and a few elderly men set off the next day. All the women had been dishonoured.

Q: How do you know that? Did you talk to them about what had happened?

F: No, you don't speak about such things.

Q: So, how do you know they had been dishonoured?

F: How could I not know! They all had their eyes fixed to the ground and even if they looked at you, their gaze was empty. It was all those Serbs – chetnik's misdoings, may they rot in hell.

Q: And where did they take you?

F: To the seaside. That was the first time I had seen the sea. I could have never imagined it was so much water – you can't grasp it from TV. The Little One's spirits lifted a bit for the first time when she saw the sea – her eyes widened as if she wanted to take it all in. Later she withdrew back in again. Then they moved us around for days until we landed here in this refugee camp. Zineta stayed in "Promaja" (Promajna). There were many refugees there too. We're now waiting to be sent abroad. People here say other countries have agreed to take us in but I doubt it – why would anyone ever want such a misfortunate lot as us?

Zagreb, 5 November 1992

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Selma

Around mid 1991, the Serbs I had known seemed to have changed somehow and in them I could no longer recognize the people I had been friends with for years. I'm not saying they were all war-mongers but they suddenly all started speaking of how threatened they felt, saying that we couldn't go on living together in the same community and that we should all go our separate ways. Some, who were more outspoken and claimed that the Muslims should move away from Banja Luka, I tried to keep away from to steer clear of any disputes. I went about my daily routine as if I didn't notice anything unusual, as if I could not hear the ominous, Muslim-threatening rhyme[3] they were chanting day and night.

In December of the same year, I took on a Serb woman, even though a Muslim woman had applied for the same job as well. Two years earlier, I was given my shop as a part of the divorce settlement. My ex-husband – whom I had met on a school excursion to Serbia – had remarried. I heard that just before the war started, he sold all his property and returned to Serbia.

When the war broke out, I knew that I, too, would have to move away from Banja Luka soon. The Serbs, who had seized complete power, had started harassing the Muslims, placing bombs in their houses, demolishing their shops, and offices and cafés. They also started arresting Muslims and Croats and firing them from their jobs.

I had saved about 15 thousand Deutsch Marks, but I happened to put my trust in the wrong person who had promised (for a 3,000 DM fee) to make me a contact with a Yugoslav Army officer who would make arrangements for me to fly to Belgrade in a military plane and from there to any destination I chose. I was planning to go to a friend in Munich. Some people said my 'contact' used the money to fly his own family from Banja Luka, but others claimed he had been arrested. All in all, I didn't have the time to investigate further – I had to find another solution.

Sometime later, a Serbian woman – my school friend – promised me that her brother would help me get out of Banja Luka – this was otherwise impossible without a special permit. One afternoon, she visited me in my flat which I hadn't left for days since I had been prohibited from working. She promised that in two-day's time, she and her brother would come to pick me up. She didn't ask for any money in advance but told me to pack the money

[3]. The rhyme in Serbian can loosely be translated as: "You devil Muslims, your days are numbered".

I had, all of my documents and only the most necessary of my personal belongings. She kept her promise – two days later she turned up on my doorstep only to find that I was no longer there. At that time, I was staying on the floor below, in my neighbours' flat. I don't know what the new 'tenants' told her because she rushed out of the building and into her brother's car waiting outside, which left immediately.

I was watching it all through the curtain. I didn't dare show up to go with her. No one was to know that I was there or that I was alive. And alive I was: a battered, raped and disfigured heap of flesh and bones.

I had been raped the day before, on 21 August. It was early in the morning when they broke into my flat. They neither rang nor knocked on the door – they simply forced it open.

I don't know what time it was. I only remember that a crushing noise woke me up. I was about to jump out of bed when they burst into the bedroom. First I saw two of them in uniforms without any rank markings and with those Serbian military caps on. "On your feet, you whore, and give us your money," one of them said calmly, grinning menacingly. I stood up and the other one tore my nightdress. I tried to reach for my dressing gown but the first one said it wasn't a fashion show and to give him all the money I had, right away.

I said the money was in the living room and started for the door but he stepped in front of me and grabbed me by the breasts. His grip was so tight that I screamed. He slapped me on the face and the other one told him to be patient until I handed over the money. He let go of me and I went into the living room where I saw another two in uniforms. I recognised one of them – he had been a regular in the café opposite my shop. He had worn plain clothes then. I didn't know his name but I remembered his face.

He had already found my purse. In it, I had some dinars and the 3,000 DM that my friend had told me to prepare, together with my passport and a few photographs. The other one was searching through the wardrobe but he couldn't find any more money since I had hidden about 5,000 DM in the lining of the dress I had intended to wear on the trip. The rest – 4,000 DM was in my shoe. They went on searching, collecting my gold jewellery along the way (I didn't have much of it, but among other things there was a very valuable ring – a gift from my father, and a bracelet).

My "acquaintance" lost his patience and hit me, demanding the rest of the money, and then he put a gun to my temple. I told him about the money in the shoe and explained that the rest of the money I had had, I had given to a Yugoslav Army officer for the flight to Belgrade. "What Yugoslav Army? There's no Yugoslav Army anymore, we're Serbian troops now," he shouted, cursing.

He was the one to rape me afterwards. He did it on the floor having tied my wrists with a belt first. Actually, he tied them fast and fastened them to the table leg. The other one slouched in the armchair watching it all and shouting vulgar remarks. I tried to scream but the rapist hit me hard in the

mouth with his hand. I almost choked from the blood dripping down my throat.

The other two who had burst into my bedroom raped me next. One of them beat me as well, but the other one didn't. When the fourth one's turn came – the one that had been watching it all along – he first whipped me with his belt and then, having untied my hands first, made me kneel in front of him. He unbuttoned his trousers and shouted: "Suck it, you whore!"

Afterwards, he kicked me several times with his boots, but the other three had already left. He had stayed behind, probably hoping to find more money. I remember this only vaguely – I lay there on the living-room floor in a pool of blood yet feeling no pain, the heavy boot-stepping echoing in the hall. Then the thumping sound died away and everything became quiet.

When I tried to get up, I felt the slight pressure of a hand on my shoulder. I gasped, fearing it was him, but it was a neighbour from the flat below. I couldn't believe my eyes – she was the most unlikely person to come to my aid as she hadn't spoken to me since they had moved in three years earlier because, due to my negligence, her newly-acquired flat had been completely flooded. She had been so profoundly persistent in staying away from me that she wouldn't even accept the compensation we had offered for the damage made or the help my husband had offered in refurbishing the flat. Her husband had followed suit and when he couldn't avoid me on the staircase in the hall, he would avert his gaze and look down.

So that very neighbour was the only person in our block of flats to come to my rescue. "Please, hurry – they may return," she said helping me back to my feet. She led me to her flat – actually, she dragged me there as I was in no shape to walk.

She crammed me into a wardrobe which soon started feeling airless and stuffy. The last thing I remember was the swishing sound of a mop on the floor outside (later the neighbour told me that in order to cover my tracks, they had had to very quickly clean the blood stains on the hall floor from my flat to theirs, as well as the floor inside their flat).

A painful and cold sensation on my face woke me up. At first I couldn't see anything, but when my blurry sight cleared a little, I could make out the face of my neighbour who was kneeling beside me and wiping my face with a wet cloth. Everything became dark once more and when I came round again, I was lying on the floor. My body was stiff but I felt no pain – only a mind-numbing buzz in my head. I managed to raise my hand to my face on the third attempt and I felt the rough surface of a bandage under my fingers. Raising my hand, I noticed a blue and greyish striped sleeve on my arm – someone had dressed me in men's pyjamas.

I lay motionless except for trying to move my toes. The fact that I wasn't paralysed didn't mean much to me at that moment. In fact, I was completely indifferent – my mind was numb. After a while, the neighbour entered the room and when she saw that I was awake, she bent down close to me and whispered: "Don't be alarmed; I'll give you a pain-killer." She brought in a glass with some white liquid in it and a straw. To drink through

the straw was a strenuous feat and took what seemed like an eternity; the content of the glass had a bitter, retched taste.

I don't know whether I fell asleep at once, but that bitter taste is the last thing I remember. The next time I woke up, the room was completely dark. My whole body ached, but the buzzing in my head was gone. I started remembering the events of the previous day: my flat had been broken into and I had been raped and battered… For hours, I just lay motionless in the dark, and it was almost dawn when I fell asleep again. I had slept for what seemed like only a moment when a baby-cry woke me up.

I remembered that the neighbour had had a baby in March. Soon I heard a woman's and then a man's voice blending in with the baby's cry. I heard a woman say "Perhaps you could call in and say you won't be coming today. You'd better stay here in case those scumbags decide to return."

It was already daylight when she came in with a glass in her hand. I thought she'd brought that liquid again, but it was milk: the tastiest, most scrumptious glass of milk I had ever drunk, despite the pain that the straw-drinking provoked. She asked if I could move and I mumbled in confirmation.

"Look what they've done to you – the beasts," she said leaving the room.

Later, while she was taking the terribly stinky bandage off my face, I managed to ask her what day and hour it was and she said it was August 22 and that it was almost noon. She put raw meat (a beef steak) compress on my face again, explaining that the raw meat would draw out the pain and the swelling. She added that she would help me onto the bed as soon as her husband returned from the shops. (Fearing I might have had spinal injuries, they had left me lying on the floor.) While talking, she bandaged my face skilfully, like a real nurse.

Later in the day, with her help, I managed to make a few steps: an achievement equal to a summit climb from my point of view. She caught me looking at the pyjamas and explained that they were her husband's because she couldn't find her own. "I haven't had the time to bring anything from your flat except for this dress which I should have already soaked in the suds although I doubt these blood stains will be removed that easily," she said recovering a bundle from under the bed. It was the dress I had planned to leave Banja Luka in. I remembered the Deutsch Marks and the friend who had promised to pick me up. But I couldn't recall whether I had broken down and admitted to the louts where I had hidden the 5,000 Deutsch Marks. I asked her or, rather, mimed to her to unfold the dress and pull out the thread from the seam. When she pulled out the first banknote she smiled and said that it was a tiny bit of justice done. When she had pulled out all of them, she asked me whether I had been planning to flee from Banja Luka. I nodded and somehow managed to explain about my friend and the plan to fly on the plane to Belgrade. She eyed me for a few seconds and then uttered her suspicion: "She may have had her fingers in all this. If she doesn't show up again today as planned, she's in it."

At half past eight, actually a few moments earlier, my neighbour

came into the room and helped me move to the window. She held me while I peered through the curtain onto the street. When my friend's brother's car pulled up looking for me, I felt enormously relieved. "I'm glad for you," she said to me.

I stayed in that flat for seventy-six days and no one ever found out. They concealed it even from their closest friends. All that time, my life depended on them. Had it leaked out that they were hiding me, they could have both gotten killed even though they were Serbs. I hope you now understand why I am so reluctant to reveal their names although they deserve (and have) all my gratitude. Rare are such people who would risk their own and their child's lives to save a person whom they had been at odds with.

A fortnight later, I felt much better although I was still bruised a lot. I could walk. One day, the neighbour told me what had happened that day after they had dragged me into their flat. Those scumbags, the rapists, had returned to my flat an hour later. This had given my neighbour and her husband enough time to clean the blood traces in the hall and their flat. Expectedly, the louts had asked around, even searched a few flats, but luckily, had trusted my neighbour completely when she said I was the last person she would ever hide considering she hadn't spoken to me ever since she had moved in.

The life of a fugitive was difficult to get accustomed to. I had to hide my existence perfectly, down to the smallest detail – even a tiny bit of cigarette smoke would have been tell-tale. Not only did I quit smoking, but I also learnt to stay still for hours on end. When they had friends visiting them and staying late, I would squeeze under the bed in "my" room and sweat under there until they were gone. When I was alone in the flat, I never moved around, switched the light on or, indeed, used the toilet.

I never suspected anything when I missed my period: I reckoned it was a post-traumatic reaction. Any pregnancy was out of the question since I had been a long-standing fertility patient of many clinics in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Lipik (I have heard that it has been completely razed by Serbs) and Daruvar. I had had a problem getting pregnant. My husband had left me because of that: his parents had wanted a grand-child.

I began to have an idea something was amiss when the morning sickness started occurring regularly, and when all of a sudden I became queasy from smells. I confided in my neighbour and she turned pale. That was the first time I saw her really frightened. Yet she collected herself and told me not to worry and that we would get out of it somehow. She then admitted that her husband had already tried to ask his brother – an army officer in Serbia – to get me out of Banja Luka, but that he had refused. I felt miserable, but worse than that feeling of helplessness was the knowledge that after all I had done to try to get pregnant, I was now carrying an unwanted child. I thought…

At this point Selma fell silent. Then the tape first recorded faint sobs which gradually became louder and she ended up weeping desolately. I

turned off the tape-recorder at which point she reacted almost hysterically: "We have to finish this," she cried and pressed the "record" button.

How could I have born it? That child would have been marked for ever, and that only because I wished so much to be a mother. My neighbour suggested that I could give it up for adoption, but I wasn't brave enough to do that. If I had born a baby I would have never been able to give it away. Did I have any other choice except that blasted abortion? If it could have been done there, in Banja Luka, I would have had it done without a moment's hesitation.

For the next few days, my neighbour was very reserved and I knew she was apprehensive - she didn't know how to help me. One day, her husband came into my room (this was somewhat unexpected since he had never done it before). "Don't be weary, please, and don't despair – we'll find a solution to all this. I'll get you out of Banja Luka even if that is the last thing I do," he said trying to comfort me.

After a few days more, she brought me the money I had left with her, saying that I would need it soon. Then she brought me a pair of shoes – they were not new, but the size was good. She never filled me in with any details, but her cheerful mood suggested that there was still some hope that things might go well after all.

My spirits lifted when she asked me if I could sew a jacket and a skirt which would look like a uniform. I replied that if I had a sewing machine I could whip up something for a whole unit to wear. She left the room, only to return a minute later carrying a bolt of grey fabric and said that it was for me.

That very same evening her husband brought in a second-hand sewing machine which looked almost new. He had bought it from a street vendor in Gospodska Street for a mere 50 Deutsch Marks. He advised me to set to it immediately since I needed to get completely ready in two days. I was dumbfounded.

That evening found me cutting out the shape of my latest design with pretty blunt scissors. The next day, my hostess cut the buttons off of her raincoat since they perfectly matched the colour of the uniform material. I had almost finished sewing them on, when her husband returned from work. He could not believe his eyes: "You aren't just one of the best, but the very best seamstress I have ever seen," he said approvingly and turned to his wife suggesting that she could find me a matching blouse in her wardrobe. However, she didn't have any light blue ones and finally he searched among his shirts and managed to find an appropriate one. He then explained that my transfer to Croatia had been unofficially arranged with some of the UNPROFOR[4] staff – but for a certain fee, of course. And I was supposed to look like a member of the staff.

[4.] UNPROFOR: The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), was the first UN peacekeeping force in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav wars. It existed between the beginning of UN involvement in February 1992, and it's restructuring into other forces in March 1995.

I could hardly wait to set off. That night and all the next day I was elated but also apprehensive that something might go wrong. Luckily, as you can see, everything turned out well. I left the flat – my hideout – at 2:45 a.m. on November, 5, my neighbour, that dear friend, all in tears. I wept, too. Her husband drove me to a house in Nurije Pozderca Street where a person who was my liaison with the people from UNPROFOR was to take over. While still in the car, my neighbour instructed me on when and how I was to pay the UNPROFOR people their fee (there were four sets of them: two in Bosnia and two in Croatia).

At three o'clock on the dot, we arrived at the meeting point. In an attempt to make the parting less dramatic, my neighbour asked me to take good care of his shirt since it was his favourite one. As I was about to open the car door and get out, he thrust a piece of paper into my hand - it was a Vienna-based telephone number which I was supposed to ring and say that "The Petrovićs are in Zagreb and they are all well," meaning that I had arrived safely.

In an UNPROFOR jeep and wearing a blue army hat, I left the outskirts of Banja Luka at seven o'clock in the morning. The ride went smoothly and without a problem even when we drove through the territory occupied by the Serbian forces and when we crossed from Bosnia to Croatia. The only complication we met was a two-hour delay when a set of UNPROFOR staff arrived late. I arrived in Zagreb early in the afternoon. I was lucky that the first person I talked to in Zagreb was Mrs V. – she took care of everything. I will forever be indebted to this wonderful person.

Three weeks ago, she found me a job. I am moonlighting in a designer boutique. I will be paid less than my work is really worth, but I'm not complaining. As soon as I recover completely, I will sit down to work. I am still 1,800 DM short for an illegal transfer to Germany. Yes – illegal; how else could I go? I am a person without an identity.

Zagreb, 5 December 1992

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Suada

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I know you would like me to describe what it was like in Brčko at that time, but I cannot really tell you much since I went out very little during the Serbian occupation of the town and had very few contacts with people in general. All our friends had taken that last chance and moved out before the bridge was destroyed. We wavered, and that cost us dearly.

My husband was taken away on May 16 between 9:00 and 9:20 in the evening. I wasn't at home then because as soon as the children had fallen asleep I had gone over to my neighbour's on the first floor. Her husband had been taken away two days earlier; they were Muslims, too, and apart from us, the only ones left in our block of flats. By that time, sixteen Muslim families had moved out and some Serbs had moved in immediately.

I went over to her place because she had been expecting a Serbian acquaintance to bring her news of her husband later that afternoon. It was just before 9:00 when I left our flat on the third floor. My husband stayed at home. He had been the one to suggest I should go and see whether she had had any news. I stayed there about twenty minutes, finding out nothing since her acquaintance hadn't called yet. When I returned home, my husband was no longer there.

I panicked because I knew he wouldn't have gone out for a walk at this late hour. In those days, he hadn't even dared to go out in the daytime, let alone at night, since Muslims were said to be disappearing by the hundreds. Personally, I think it must have been thousands who were apprehended or killed, rather than hundreds, since I haven't met a single person from Brčko ever since then who didn't have a family member or a friend imprisoned or killed in Luka.

When I had collected my thoughts a little, I looked around and noticed that everything seemed to be in order. Naturally, I first checked on the children – they were fast asleep in their bedroom. No trace of violence could be detected apart from an unfinished note left on a paper bag on the table: "Don't worr..." He had obviously been taken away by force, although, apparently, without much noise since the children would have woken up otherwise. I sat motionless for hours not knowing where to go or whom to turn to.

In the morning, I rang his good friend, a Serb, at home but there was no answer. I reckoned he was at work. I rang again in the afternoon and his wife picked up, but again – he wasn't at home. I rang several more times

that afternoon and evening but it was always his wife who answered the phone. I finally told her about my husband. She promised she would pass on my message. Following her suggestion, I rang back the next afternoon and she said she had told her husband about what had happened and he had promised to do what he could, although it was dangerous. That last thing she needn't have mentioned at all – I knew that myself.

It was twilight four days after my husband had been arrested when two men came to my flat. They wore camouflage uniforms and they were armed. I had never seen them before and I don't think they were from Brčko. They took all our money – 900 Deutsch Marks, a watch, and my jewellery: two chains, a bracelet and three rings. They said it was my donation to the Serbian people and Republika Srpska. They carefully looked around, but they never touched anything. One of them who seemed to be my husband's peer (a thirty-five-year-old man) even asked my daughter what her name was and petted her on the head. The other one asked me why I hadn't moved out of Brčko and I said I hadn't done anything wrong and I had nothing to fear. He replied that my "breed" was wrong and that I should clear out of Serbian territory as soon as possible.

Having checked the flat thoroughly, this other one ordered me into the bedroom while his "colleague" was to stay behind with the children. He raped me on my bed. He never hit me and even said he disliked hitting women. He warned me not to try to resist or scream since his "colleague" was rather jittery and would readily pull out a knife.

I never uttered a sound nor did I shed a tear. "You've been like a lamb," he sad putting his gun back into the case. Then he ordered me to go back into the room where the children were and to ask his "colleague" if he wanted some as well. "Address him politely as it befits a Serb: 'Please sir, would you also like to f*** me?'" he sniggered facetiously. When he saw me wavering he threw my dress at me and bellowed: "Get the f*** outta here, now!" I obeyed.

The other one, the "colleague", first sized me up from head to toe and then said slowly, carefully rounding out every word: "I'm really fed up with these Muslim cu**s, but what needs to be done – needs to be done. How can I refuse you when you've asked me so nicely?" He raped me in the bathroom. He forced my head into the toilet and raped me from behind. He didn't beat me either. Yet I had a bump on my forehead from being pushed against the toilet rim.

While still in the bathroom, he ordered me to clear out with my "litter" in five minutes. Later, when he saw me taking a biggish travelling bag, he said I was to take with me only what I needed to put on and nothing else. I only managed to take a sweater for each child but they didn't allow me to take a bottle of milk for my boy.

It was already dark when I left, and I had no idea where to go or what to do. My first idea was to go to that neighbour's on the first floor – the one whom I had visited the night they had taken my husband away, but as

I was approaching the second floor I began to hear distinct screams and moans coming from the first floor. The nearer I came to their flat, the louder the screams were. I still don't know whether she and her daughter were being raped or beaten because I have never heard anything about them although I've kept making enquiries both with other refugees and with the Red Cross ever since.

The only person that came to my mind and who lived the nearest was a Serbian woman I knew. We used to work together and got along well. When she changed jobs, we stopped seeing each other. Not long before, she had moved into a place further down my street. I sometimes ran into her but we didn't visit each other at home. She had told me that she had divorced and re-married and that her husband disliked women gathering in the house. That had been the reason we had never visited each other.

Her husband answered the door. I shuddered because his face was so grim that I would have left at that moment if I had had anywhere to go. He said his wife was not at home but that he was expecting her any minute. He added that if it was something urgent I could come in and wait for her. When I got inside, I said that two men – two soldiers had thrown me out of my flat and the expression on his face changed visibly and became softer, much softer. He helpfully asked if the children were hungry and opened the fridge stuffed with food, like mine had once been, too.

He offered to let me use the bathroom and when I came out, my daughter was eating a sandwich and my son was sitting on his lap. He said I could make him a milk and biscuit meal and apologised for not having any other baby food.

Before his wife and his mother-in-law returned (his mother-in-law had already been staying with them for two months), he asked me if I had anywhere to go. I said I didn't know where to go and told him about my husband. He said nothing. He kept quiet while I was feeding the baby and then, all of a sudden, he asked me if I had had any kind of control against pregnancy. I almost dropped the plate from my hands – that man who had known me for a mere half an hour knew exactly what had happened to me.

Unfortunately, his wife took a completely different stand and behaved like a real bitch to me. As soon as her gaze landed on me, she lost that cordial smile that I had always found so friendly. She told me right away that their life was hard and that, by coming there, I had put them all at risk. However, she did say that I could stay the night, but that she could not take care of my children and that if she had wanted any similar responsibility she would have had children of her own.

Later, when I had put the children to sleep, she wanted to squabble about politics although her husband hinted more than once that it was an inappropriate subject under the circumstances. I was completely irresponsive since I was really feeling low, but she babbled on and on. Even if I hadn't been at her mercy, after what I had gone through that night, I would have been in no condition to argue – even though the things she said were noth-

ing more than nonsense and a downright pack of lies. Her husband interrupted her pretty harshly when she blurted out that she had never seen bigger liars than Muslims who fabricated lies about alleged liquidations and slaughter, and that her pet peeve was the stories of alleged rape. Her mother, a really primitive and backward woman from Krepšići, seconded that by adding that not even a dog went for a bitch unless she wagged her tail.

In the morning, before he went to work, her husband said to me (so that both his wife and her mother could hear) that I should stay put, not leave the flat and make myself at home. In the meantime, he said, he was going to try and arrange a transfer for me to Croatia. I felt embarrassed because my acquaintance’s face turned scarlet as she tried to explain how she was fed up with the Serbs always being stamped as ruthless plunderers and murderers and that she couldn’t bear all the lies about her own people any longer. Before she left to go to work, she said that I could help myself to whatever the children needed from the fridge and to disregard "the old grouch’s malicious prattle".

"The old grouch" pestered me continually, trying to make me leave since I would allegedly ruin her daughter’s marriage. If I had had anywhere to go, I would have left, but unfortunately, the only people I could think of – my best friend’s parents who had been living in Austria for quite some time – had openly said to me that they wouldn’t even think of risking everything to help a Muslim.

Around noon, the telephone rang and I let "the old grouch" answer. Someone was obviously asking for me because I heard her say I had taken the children out for a walk. Half an hour later, when the phone rang again, I forgot my manners and went for it. It was a good decision, because it was my acquaintance’s husband on the phone and he said that he would be coming to pick me up in an hour and asked me to be ready by that time. He also said he couldn’t help wondering why I had been out at all, and he added that I should not worry if he was late.

He came after 3:30 and his wife had already returned from work. She said her husband was going to be a little late because some minor problems had occurred. She was obviously in a better mood now and offered me some food, but I couldn’t eat. I hadn’t eaten for longer than twenty-four hours, yet I didn’t feel hungry at all.

We left Brčko in an ambulance and drove for about forty minutes until we came to a spot on the Sava riverbank where a boat was waiting. We were accompanied by the driver and my acquaintance’s husband. Before the children and I got into the boat, this big-hearted, selfless man gave me a blanket – in case we had to spend the night outside – and thrust a fifty Deutsch Mark banknote into my hand to help me get through the first day. He also promised he’d make enquiries about my husband and if he found him, he said he would help to get him released. I don’t know whether it was him or someone else who helped, but my husband managed to escape from the camp. A day prior to his getaway, a guard tipped him off that he should

get prepared, and, on the day of his escape, he left him unguarded for fifteen minutes – having first instructed him as to exactly which route to follow to get to the territory controlled by the Bosnian troops.

On the other bank of the Sava River, in Croatia, we spent the night in a grove of trees. No sooner had we disembarked from the boat than an attack was launched. Missiles flew over our heads and I would be grossly understating it if I said we were only in the middle of gun-fire: we were in the middle of earth-shaking thunder as they fired much heavier weapons than guns from both sides. It was already dark when the shooting ceased; the children and I wrapped the blanket around us and spent the night there.

In the morning, we ran into a Croatian patrol group. They showed us the way and even escorted us for some distance. We were given a lift to Županja by a Croatian soldier. From there to Zagreb, everything went well except that the trip was long and tiring. We both surprised and inconvenienced our relatives there – eight of us now live in their two-bedroom flat.

Zagreb, 3 September 1992

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All stories in this chapter
were translated by **Dubravka Radanov**

man is a
horrifying force
of violence and pain

J.H.

It was Sunday, 10 May 1992, around four o'clock in the afternoon, when Arkan's men, some 30 of them, pushed against the cellar door where I was hiding with my family, relatives and friends. They threatened to throw a grenade in. My aunt asked them not to do it. One of Arkan's men appeared in the doorway and very roughly told us to surrender. We came out of the cellar with raised arms. They aligned us in a column one by one and took us along. We covered about a thousand metres like that. Shells were falling all that time. They led us into a half-destroyed house. We stayed there about half an hour whilst they plundered and took everything of some value. Then they took us from there towards the town centre and into an apartment.

One of Arkan's men approached me and ordered me to enter a room with him. He demanded that I undress. I trembled, wept and begged him not to do it to me, that I was still young and a virgin. He swore at my "balija[1] mother" and put a knife to my throat. He demanded that I hurry up with undressing because he also had other, more important business to attend to. I took only my trousers off. He ordered me to strip naked, from head to toe. As I did not obey him again, he tore all the clothes off me. I was naked and began to step away from him. He hit me with such force that I fell and fainted. It did not prevent him from doing what he intended to do. When I came to, I saw him next to me. He was holding a bottle and drinking. I tried to stand up but he pushed me down and lowered himself next to me again.

Somebody knocked on the door. Arkan's man stood up and went out, but another one came in. He had black hair, black eyes and a small beard. He said hello and sat on the bed next to me. I turned away and started dressing. Abruptly, he caught me by the arm and started kissing. I struggled because I was feeling awful. He warned me not to do it or else I would fare even worse. He raped me, too. After that I was left alone. I wept and tore at my hair. I was telling myself that I was no longer mother's innocent little girl.

The thought of my mother made me even sadder. I felt I was a completely different person. I could not believe that that outrage had indeed happened to me. I tried to stand up but I felt faint. I hurt badly. Still, I managed to stand up, open the door and go to my folk. I passed by four Serb soldiers sitting at the table. They looked at me with surprise. I looked down because those two who had raped me were with them. When I reached my folk, my mother jumped and hugged me. We started to cry but a Serb soldier silenced

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[1]. Balija – a derogatory term for a Bosniak (Bosnian person of Muslim faith).

us and separated us. As soon as I sat down I noticed that my aunt was missing. I wondered where she was and what could have happened to her. The thought passed through my head that she had also been taken like me. I was telling myself that perhaps that wasn't so, but it confused me that everybody was silent, why was it so quiet. Finally a Serb soldier stood up and said he'd be back in a tick. He returned with my aunt who was pale and looked lost. I looked at her thinking of myself and burst into tears. The Serb soldier grabbed his knife and shouted: "Enough!" I stopped crying but I continued to sob silently.

Shortly after that a Serb soldier entered our room and told us all to get out. They put us on a truck and took us to the Luka camp. We found many people there but we did not stay there long. They kept my grandfather and my grandmother and made the rest of us climb onto a truck again saying as there was not enough room and took us back to that earlier apartment. But we did not stay long in that apartment either. We were again ordered to board the truck. It was already getting dark when we fetched up in front of the Red Cross building. There, again, they could not take us in, so they drove us again to the Luka camp. They took us into an office where a man, with traces of blood on his head, was picking up things scattered about. He looked very scared. I panicked too, thinking they would kill us. We spent the night there. In the morning they told us they would have to move us from Luka but that there was no room for us anywhere. My aunt suggested that they take us to our apartment in the Kolobara locality as it was empty now and they agreed.

The apartment was a sight. The front door was broken, things scattered all around and everything of any value looted: video, TV set, cassette player and many other things. We stayed the night there, but did not sleep as they kept coming in and out all night. They raped me, my aunt and my mother. They forced my mother to watch as I was raped, to look how they took their pleasure with me. I was raped by two of them. I fell asleep at dawn exhausted by the ordeal, pain and sorrow. A shell which fell nearby woke me up. That morning they put us on a bus and took us to Brezovo Polje.

In Brezovo Polje we were left in relative peace for about a month. Then they came and took us to Lončare. We stayed three days there. They said we'd all go home and that made us unbelievably happy. Ten buses arrived and they put us in them. We entered Brčko and didn’t stop. As we were coming out of the town some women asked the driver why wouldn't he stop, where were they taking us. He merely shrugged his shoulders and said he knew nothing. We then passed through Brezovo Polje and again the bus did not stop. The women jumped off their seats, started making noise, screaming and crying but to no avail. The buses stopped after two hours only and it was amid some hills. We learned that it was Majevica. We spent horrible five days there. We slept in the buses standing and were given only a slice of bread a day. On the third night Serb soldiers began to enter the bus and take the girls out to rape them, and it was the same with me. They raped

us in the woods. One could hear cries of pain, wailing and screams, and even shots at times because they killed some of the girls.

They put us into the buses again and took us in an unknown direction. I hoped that was the end of our trials but that was not so yet. They brought us to Caparde in the municipality of Kalesija and into a big hall. Mother, brother and I sat down and looked around to see if there was anybody of our folk there. At that moment a Serb soldier caught me by the arm and ordered me to follow him in silence. I nevertheless asked him where and why he was taking me and he moved his rifle and aimed it at me. I realised what lay ahead. Mother cried out to him to leave me alone, that I was her daughter, and he turned the rifle to her with his finger on the trigger. He pulled me by the hand and I moved. I turned back and saw my mother and my brother crying. He brought me to a house where everything was scattered about and told me not to cry but I couldn’t stop. He sat on the sofa and ordered me to undress. I took only my T-shirt off. He approached and pulled all the clothes off me. I was still crying. He slapped me in the face and told me to lie down. He raped me. When he finished the "business" he stood up and left and another Serb soldier came in and raped me too. I learned that the first one's name was Slavko. I don't know the name of the second one, and the third one who raped me in that same room, said his name was Dragan. That Dragan and two other Serb soldiers alternated on me all night. In the morning I ached all over and could not move a limb. A Serb soldier came and said he would take me to the others. With a great deal of effort I got up and followed him. My folk hugged me, happy to see me alive. I saw my friend Alma sitting sadly next to me. I approached her and asked her softly if the same thing had happened to her. She confirmed that she had been raped by two of them.

(Brčko: Genocide and Testimonies, 1998)

In Front of My Parents*

I was born in Brčko in 1958 and I'm a mother of two children. When the war broke out, I was at my parents'. In the beginning of May, when the town was already occupied, two Serb soldiers came and ordered me to dress and come with them. They took me to the already deserted Ciganluk locality and into a house. They both raped me there. Before that they ill-treated and tortured me. One of them was from Belgrade and I don't know where the other one was from. He was dark and short, barely more than a metre. After they returned me, I told my parents that they had taken me to the garrison to sew the Serbian flag. The next day they came again. I fled to the neighbouring house, but they found me and under the threat of weapons took me to the same house in Ciganluk. They did again what they had done the previous day except that this time they brought some people from that locality to watch what they did to Muslim women. It was terribly degrading, but there was nothing I could do.

I was taken away again on 28 June, on St Vid's Day, the Serb holiday. Five or six of them came after me then. Now there were Serbs from Brčko among them. They ill-treated not only me but my parents too. They demanded money although they'd stolen it already. They threatened my father that he had to leave the house or else if they found him there again, they would kill him. One of them took me to another room. I knew what he wanted and I refused. He warned me to remember that he was a chetnik, that he slit throats and that I had to make up my mind quickly because he didn't have much time. I refused again. He then said that he would rape me and slit the throat of my sick mother who was bed-ridden and that the same was in store for me. I had to go. Father could not help me any. The name of the one who raped me was Predrag. I remember that name because they called to him not to let me dress. I heard my father cry out: "Not the others, too?!" They all raped me and did other abominations, and before my parents too. My parents tried to comfort me but I wanted to die.

I was raped anew shortly after that. Somebody banged on the door at night. I woke my father and he went to open it. It was an unshaven tall and thin Serb soldier. He told my father to move aside or else he'd kill him. I knew what he wanted and begged him not to do it to me. I lied that I was married to a Serb, but it didn’t help. He put the rifle to my belly, cursed "bread" and said he would make me a hole there unless I calmed down. He hit me on the mouth and threw me on the concrete in the yard. He tore my clothes off and took me behind the house. He put the rifle aside and took the knife instead. He ill-treated and raped me.

(Brčko: Genocide and Testimonies, 1998)

* Title - Ed.

Sena

I was raped several times and in several places, mostly because I did not want to tell them where I had hidden the money and other valuables. Immediately after the occupation of the town they raped me in my house in the locality of Grčica. It was Dragan and Zoran who did it. Zoran was from Paraćin in Serbia. They beat me first. After that I was raped in the Luka camp. There I was raped by Konstantin Simonović, the camp commander at the time. He raped me in his office where I was serving coffee. In the camp at Luka I was also raped by a soldier from Serbia, whom they called Dugi.

Zoran came to fetch me one day and from the camp at Luka took me to my house in Grčica. He asked for money again. As I still refused to give it to him, he put me in the bathtub full of water and switched on the power. I could not endure the suffering and I gave him 3000 German marks. He threw them at my face and said: "It can't be all you have!" I could not give him any gold as I didn't have it there because I had already taken it to my neighbour Đuka Pavlović. She took it reckoning that they'd kill me and so she wouldn't have to give it back. I told Zoran it was all I had. He approached me and from a small black pistol fired at my forehead. Although it was a dummy, blood poured down me. After that Zoran took me to my husband's lawyer's office and ordered me to write a contract making the business premises over to him. Since the contract had to contain personal data, I learned that his last name was Tolić and that he had been born in Paraćin in Serbia.

(Brčko: Genocide and Testimonies, 1998)

Saida

It was the night of 28 June 1992 when the Serb troops called Arkan's Tigers came to Brezovo Polje. They were looking for ten young women to clean apartments for them in Brčko. They claimed they would not harm us and said not to worry. They took me, my sister and a friend of ours. As we stood no chance if we tried to resist, we boarded the car with them. However, when they brought us to an abandoned Bosnian apartment in Brčko, they said that we would never again return to our mothers and they would think about whether to let us live. They threatened us like that for an hour and then started taking us away one by one.

My sister was taken out by a young man called Nenad. He was from Brčko. He said he wanted to take revenge on the Muslim women, to disgrace them and destroy their youth. I was taken out by a young man I knew by sight. His mother worked in the *Irma* boutique in Brčko. His name was Saša. He was born in 1971, big, tall, chestnut hair. He wore glasses with big dioptre. He approached me and said: "The day has come when I can choose which 'balinka[2]' it'll be, because they cannot refuse the Serbs now." He took me to another room. He asked me about my father and mother and promised he would save me if I voluntarily agreed to what he was asking of me. He wanted to know if I had a boyfriend and where he was. I said nothing. He said it would be better for me to talk as killing me presented no problem for him, especially since he had been ordered to do it and that, in fact, we did not deserve any better. I cried all the time and implored him to return me and my sister to our mother. He asked if I was a virgin. I said I was. He was glad because as my first male he would leave a mark on my life. I still cried, begged and implored him not to do it to me. He slapped me in the face and ordered me to undress. I did not do it. He threatened that, unless I did it, he would bring five of them to rape me. I undressed and surrendered to my fate.

He was brutal, disgusting and all the worst imaginable. Weeping and screams reached me from the neighbouring rooms where they'd taken my sister and my friend. The sounds of beating could also be heard. I was further devastated by the thought of my sister who was only 14 although I wasn't much older either. After Saša did it to me and after I recovered a little, I went to see how my sister was. Nenad who had raped her, stopped in front of me. He was thin, tall, fair-haired. He said my sister had nearly died and to help her if I could because he wasn't going to do it as he'd done what he wanted to do. My sister was lying on the bed and weeping. Through the tears

[2.] A derogatory term for a Bosniak woman (Bosnian woman of Muslim faith)

she asked me what had happened to me and was I all right. After me Saša went to my friend Alma and raped her. They kept us there for two days. They gave us drinks laced with some drug.

The next day, around six o'clock in the afternoon, their superior Goran Petrović came and asked them if they wanted to keep us any longer. They said they didn't and asked to have other girls brought to them. Goran took us back to Brezovo Polje. Our mother was ill; she fainted when they took us away and was in a critical condition all that time. She survived but just. I shall never forget her happy tears when she saw that we were both alive. She told us not to worry and not to suffer, that what had happened simply had to happen, that it was important that we were alive, that we were young and that life was ahead of us. I knew she was merely comforting us and that she was suffering as much as we were.

We had no peace in Brezovo Polje either. Serb soldiers broke in and ill-treated us every night. They said that our fate depended on Captain Dragan (Dragan Vasiljković – ed.) and that he would decide what would be done with us. Some ten days later they said we would be transferred to Bijeljina. They advised us to leave the money, jewellery and other valuables with them as they could present a danger to us on our way. In fact, they wanted to be the ones rather than Bijeljina Serbs who would plunder us. They put us in nine buses. When we arrived in Bijeljina, Serb soldiers irrupted into the buses and demanded that all the young women get off as they needed them for work in coffee shops and taverns. Those escorting us prevented that. They said they were taking us to Caparde where there were Serb troops. They warned us not to rejoice that they'd saved us because there was nothing nice in store for us in the place they were taking us to, that we were at their disposal and that they could do with us as they liked.

When we arrived in Caparde, there were several hundred Serb troops waiting for us. They brought us into a big hall. Before that they seized what little money and jewellery we'd managed to keep until then. In that hall they put at least a thousand women, girls and children. There wasn't a single adult male there. They said they would keep the girls and that mothers with children would continue towards the territory controlled by the BiH[3] Army. They singled out one hundred fifty girls. There were young women among them, and three pregnant women too. They broadcast over the loudspeakers a recording of a woman's scream. They intended to frighten us, to make us think they were killing our mothers.

I stepped aside with my sister and three other girls. A Serb soldier approached us, by the way he spoke I'd say he was from Montenegro, and promised to help us. We were happy because we'd already been raped. He kept his promise. The others were not so lucky – they were all tortured and raped.

(Brčko: Genocide and Testimonies, 1998)

[3] Bosnia and Hercegovina

Bijeljina

The attack on Bijeljina began in April 1992. The night raids began immediately, men were arrested and taken to the Serb police. We were not allowed to wear our *šalvare* (baggy trousers – trans.) and religious services were not permitted either; the mosques were constantly fired at. The funerals could neither be performed following the religious ritual. Shortly, they started moving Serb refugees into our houses. They'd occupy the houses, even in advance.

My husband managed to dodge mobilisation until January 1994. Then he was caught and taken to dig trenches on Majevica and after 15 days he was killed. I was on my own then, pregnant, with six children.

In January 1994 a uniformed young man, Serb, from Kozluk, a refugee from Zenica, broke into my house. He introduced himself as a military policeman. I was alone with my children. He told me to stand next to the wall and started touching me. The children were present also, the children sat on the couch and cried. I had a long skirt on, he tore it all off. I cried out and when I saw that he had no weapons I began to struggle. As I was wrestling with him, he said: "If you won't, there's always your daughter." My daughter Z. was 14 and pretty well developed. Then I summoned more strength and wrestled with him, fighting with superhuman powers to save my daughter. He heard me when I told the children to go and call their father. To lure him away from my daughter I said: "If we are to do something, here I am, let's go into the room." I managed to shut him in the room, hoping that J. would soon come and that I'd manage to fight him off. And that is how it was. Although I'd locked him up, he managed to break the door and get out into the yard. At that moment my husband rushed in. The one who'd attacked me was the brother of a refugee living next door; they'd moved in from Zenica. He grabbed a rifle from his sister's house and wanted to shoot. Luckily, there were no bullets. The people from that house took him inside.

My husband, powerless, sat and trembled. He realised he was not allowed to touch him. He went and reported the case to the Military Police. Three policemen came and took him to the police station (the attacker). It did not happen again. My husband was killed seven days later. None of those troops came to ask me how I was managing.

I didn't move around Janja much because I have many children. I withdrew especially after my husband's death and looked after the children. And that was so until August this year.

V.Dj. arrived in Janja then. Ethnic cleansing began. He told us: "If

you won't go, you'll go down the Drina." As my husband had been killed while digging trenches, I didn't have to pay anything. Muslim families were taken away in large numbers by night. In our first group they did not separate men of military age.

In a spinney they seized our money. They threatened they would kill a whole family if anyone hid the jewellery.

In September 1994 we arrived in Tuzla. I am now in the Višća refugee settlement with my children.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Višegrad

In June 1992 I was in the house with my mother, my sister and four neighbours when at 2 o'clock after midnight a group of chetniks broke in; there were eight of them, including Ž. They all reeked of alcohol. They swore at our "balija mother," broke things around the house, yelled at us, demanded money and gold, asked where my father was, was he with "green berets" and the like. I recognised only one lad from Višegrad, his name was N., about 24 years old, in a camouflage uniform, with a black scarf round his neck and a red beret on his head. Ž. stood out because of his aggressive behaviour.

My little sister, 3 years old, cried and screamed, cuddled up to our mother and Ž. approached her then, put that big knife to her throat and screamed: "Shut up". The child went silent right away. Then they took the neighbour I.K. to the next room, ordered him to lie down and then hit him on the spine with the rifle butt. He had had a spine operation earlier; then they pushed a rifle barrel into his mouth and he coughed blood. The next day they took him away and all trace of him has been lost since.

That same day they ordered us all to undress and we had to do it due to physical ill-treatment, and there were myself, my mother S., aunt R., four-months pregnant at the time, sister E. and neighbour S.K. Ž. approached R. and dealt her a strong blow in the stomach. We were all naked. They grabbed me by the arms and told me to come with them. They ordered me to stand against the wall and then one of them scratched my arm with a knife and blood began to flow. Others laughed as he shed his clothes and assaulted me. I screamed all the time, kicked and waved my arms, and then I fainted. My only thought was to save myself and through a daze I heard them swearing at the Muslim mother. I don't remember anything else until my mother's hug, who was rousing and comforting me saying that everything would be all right.

I heard from the wife of F.H., my acquaintance, that their daughter had been forcibly taken to the *Vilina Vlas* Hotel where she spent 9 days and was raped many times over. She is now abroad. I heard that a chetnik helped her to get out although he had been tasked with killing her because she had seen many killings in the *Vilina Vlas* Hotel. S.S. told me personally that her former school-fellow, I can't remember his name, from Višegrad, had raped her in her house and in the presence of her six-year-old daughter. I know that a certain J. from Višegrad, about 23 years old and very pretty, was raped by chetniks in her apartment and after that she committed suicide jumping through the window on the third floor.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Grbavica – Sarajevo

I heard K. scream frantically and how they pushed her brutally into the apartment. I hastened to change but before I was done, they appeared the doorway. They asked for my identity card and presumably they kept it then; after that they started rummaging in the packed bags, separated and kept the food, medicines and cosmetics and said they needed it for the Serb troops. In one of the bags they also found my university diploma, threw it on the floor and said: "You won't need this at Alija's." They seized all my jewellery from the bag and a transistor radio.

After that they pushed me into the kitchen and the first one of them began to shout: "Where did you hide foreign money and jewellery?" Then he ordered me to take off my clothes and the boots. I started to cry and beg them not to undress me because I was old and they had already taken the jewellery. At that, the first one threatened me to undress or else he would do it himself. Through the tears I told him that such a thing was not done and that I had a son who was older than they. The first one then, pointing his pistol at me as I was completely naked, told me to enter the room. The other two went to another room and I heard them going through things. After I was left in the room with the first one, he drew his knife and ordered me to sit down or else he'd carve me. After that he raped me brutally. Then he told me to stay in the room and invited the other two to do the same but they refused. The first one then ordered me to dress quickly, pick up my things and head towards *Šoping* and if I came back said that he'd come in the evening and bring some more company. As I ran out of the building one of them fired a bullet over my head.

I ran up to *Šoping*. It was around five o'clock in the afternoon and in front of the *Šoping* there were troops of the so-called Serb Army with badges on the left side of their chests. They asked me why I was late because the crossing over the bridge had already been closed. I replied that I was late because I'd been raped and one of them asked why hadn't I reported it to the police. I said that it had been done by their police. That same soldier told me that it had been done by the last Arkan's men. At that a Serb soldier in the camouflage uniform with a red beret on his head and armed with an automatic rifle came along. He asked who's this one, meaning me, and when he heard that I was a Croat, started yelling at me to stand against the wall and cocked his rifle. He repeated over and over again that all the Croats should be killed and that the Miljacka would stink with all their corpses.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Kalinovik

I lived in Kalinovik until my arrest in August 1992. The arrest was carried out by M.V. and an unknown man. My daughters and B.I. and J. were arrested together with me. Other Kalinovik Muslims had already been detained in the Elementary School. Women and children from the village of Jelašci were brought at dusk. The classroom was too small for all of us, but at some point during the night we all lay down next to each other under and on the desks while some remained sitting throughout the night. We were given no food for the first five days and after than we began to get breakfast and lunch. In the morning they would give us a piece of bread and half a tin of pâté and for lunch a stew which looked more like water than stew. We had nothing to eat the stew from so we used pâté tins.

In August 1992 girls from our classroom were taken out at sunset.

The next day, at sunset again, a shortish, fattish chetnik with cropped hair entered our classroom and asked for jewellery and money. He walked up and down the classroom warning us to turn them over and we had to turn over all that we had. It all happened in August 1992. That same day after horrible ill-treatment and ordeal they killed K.S. and B.E. I saw P.E. grab S.K. and start beating him in the corridor but as soon as the door closed we were not allowed to peek even. E.B. was brought from another classroom and an unknown chetnik called Z.R. to come out; when she returned she told us that she had witnessed the ill-treatment and beating of E.B. and she said nothing more, she just kept silent. After that we heard shots and M. told us that they were merely sowing fear among us, that it was nothing but in fact it was the murder of S.K. and E.B. and a 35-year-old man from Gacko.

The next morning people from Gacko told us that three bodies had been taken out. In August 1992 they took us to Pavlovci, to a farm. With us on the hub were six chetniks who kept beating Z.H., kicking him in the head, giving him their flag to hold, forcing him to make a sign of cross, swearing at his "balija mother." Two other unknown chetniks were in the cabin. At Pavlovci all 12 of us got off while Z.H. stayed on the truck. We were immediately sent to make beds and when an unknown voivoda arrived in a luxury car, they invited us to take dinner with him at the same table. We did not want any dinner and we said we were not hungry. After his dinner we moved to another room where the voivoda talked with us. He asked a Gacko girl how old she was and she said 13, and his son, who had come with the voivoda, said he was also 13. After that we were again sent to make beds: I, B., two women from Gacko and a 13-year-old girl.

We prepared the room for the unknown voivoda. As it was already dark, the chetniks who had come with us carried candles or camp lamps and

selected the women who would make his bed. At some point the chetnik called Ž. took us back to the Elementary School in a luxury car. As I left the car, I ran to the school and banged on the door but the silence reigned in the whole school and the door was bolted. I screamed and banged and managed to open the door and the children ran towards me crying.

The chetniks demanded 1,500 Deutsch Marks for Z.H. and threatened they would kill all our children if we didn't give them the marks. Two chetniks entered, asking for marks again. The one who had taken me to a room in Pavlovci frisked me to see where I'd sewn in the marks. He said I didn't have the marks. He asked me if the children crying around me were mine and then left. They demanded from us to strip and some women had begun to strip, but when they saw we had no money, they gave up.

One evening towards the end of August 1992 a man came, called me and asked me what my name was and was I the wife of M. The children were crying around me; he asked me to come out and take the children. In the corridor he asked me if I knew him and said he was D.K. and lived in Trnovo.

Five hours later I returned to the classroom. The next day he called me by my full name and told me to come out. I came out with my younger daughter S. and he told me to send the child back. I took her back to the classroom and gave her to Z.R. They took me to another empty classroom. D. entered and said that two of his uncles had died and that my brothers-in-law had killed them. I said why should I have to pay if my brothers-in-law had killed someone. I begged him to let me go, but he told me to undress or he would rape my children. He took his pleasure with me and all the time his companions from Serbia kept coming in and out. Later on he turned me over to that chetnik from Serbia and they took their pleasure with me for 2 or 3 hours. Finally he threatened me not to tell anything to anyone. He said he would return the next day. Although I did not say anything to anyone, the women guessed that we were being raped and the next day they all pressed against the door to protest against the rape and the way they treated us. We were ready to get killed because we could not endure their terror any longer. They managed to get us back and calm us down.

In late August 1992 the exchange for the chetniks killed on Jakomišlje started. Forty women were brought for exchange and as they failed to find one of the chetniks, they took 10 women back but they were exchanged the next day. When we arrived at Jakomišlje they ordered us off the truck and after we had found and loaded onto the truck a dead chetnik, they permitted 3 women to cross to our side. As we didn't find the eleventh one that day, they threatened they would kill our children if we didn't find him and surrender him to them.

Of the bodies, none were known to me, they were all Serbians and Montenegrins. The children were with me but as they could not stop crying and screaming, I was allowed to take them to our S.M. and after I turned over the second dead chetnik, they allowed me to cross to our side.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Stolac

During the CCD[4] aggression on Buna in May, June and July 1993, in the house in Buna were besides me, my father, my mother and my brothers. In May and June 1993 the CCD undertook a broad and planned operation of disarmament of the Muslims, former CCD members from Buna. They frequently broke into houses, searched the houses at all hours, looking for the armaments of the Muslim population. They plundered the vehicles and property of the Muslims from Buna.

In June 1992 around 12 o'clock CCD troops in a van burst into the locality we lived in. Massive arrests and detentions of the Muslims started. The arrests and removal of civilians were carried out by troops not known to me. The soldier who took my father away was tall, dark, with a moustache and short black hair.

After the men were taken away my mother, my brother and I spent the nights in the house and the cellar of H.'s house. By day we went to our house and performed various chores in and around the house, and we continued spending the nights in H.'s cellar.

The situation in the locality did not change until mid-July 1993 when we were all woken up by intensive shooting we could all hear. We assumed that a battle was under way, the military operations were intensive; one could hear loud artillery fire, shells fell all around, and we were in the cellar.

At some point CCD troops burst into that cellar, saw women in the cellar and fortunately did not see M. who had hidden in the part of the cellar with coal. The troops left the cellar and when the shooting stopped, we came out of the cellar. At that a soldier turned up and addressed my mother asking for 500 DM to free my brother. Mother could not do it as she did not have that money.

In July 1993, around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I was with my mother and brother in H.' s house. Three soldiers entered; one of them was rather tall, fair, thin, with an earring and in a camouflage uniform. They ordered us to come out. They took golden earrings from H. and as we stood in front of the house after they'd expelled us, they torched the house. Before that they had demanded 1,000 DM from H. if she did not want her house torched but

[4]. The Croatian Council of Defense (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane, HVO) was a main military formation of the self-proclaimed Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia during the Bosnian War. It was the first organized military force with the aim to control the Croat populated areas. It is not to be confused with the Croatian Defence Force (HOS) which was a separate Croatian military unit.

as she did not have that money to give them, they torched it. H. cried and begged them not to do it, that she did not have the money, but one of the soldiers nicknamed J. entered the house and set fire to it. We watched it frightened and silent and H. wept in pain.

In July 1993 around 4 o'clock in the afternoon a red *Lada Niva* fetched up in front of the house we were in. In it were two soldiers, a soldier nicknamed R. and another one who introduced himself as a colonel; he had an earring in his left ear, around 25 years old, medium height and build, very fair, or rather yellow; he wore a black T-shirt and the camouflage uniform. His hair was short and he shaves his beard and moustache. These two went to B.'s house and then through the window of the house I was in, I saw B. take coffee she'd made into that house.

Shortly after that soldier R. came to our house and ordered me and my mother to follow him. They brought us to B.'s house and began to question us. The soldier I described as markedly yellow, started to ask all sorts of questions which made no sense whatsoever and which were intended more to intimidate us than to get any kind of information.

After half an hour of that questioning R. ordered my mother to follow him and the two of them left the house. That yellow soldier who was with me, moved to the kitchen and I saw him sharpen a knife. While he was in the kitchen, he began to undress and said he would have to rape me, that the circumstances were such, that he could not change anything and that he simply had to do it. I was shocked. He ordered me to undress but I did not want to do it. He picked up the rifle, aimed it at me and fired a bullet. I thought and accepted that he would kill me but he had fired at the ceiling.

He was already down to short underpants only. I wore the lower part a blue sweat suit and a short orange top. I begged him and implored him not to do it to me but he was relentless. He ordered me to undress immediately and lie down on a part of a couch in the living room which I did. I don't recall the act of rape itself, I know he lay down on me and raped me. He did not beat me in the process. It did not last long and I was all bloody, it was my first physical contact and sexual intercourse with a man. After he finished, he got up and dressed. I got up and was still beyond myself; I tried to dress. R. then burst into the room. Seeing me dress, R. called me to come with him. He took me to a room in the same house and made me lean again a glass cabinet. In that position R. raped me brutally. The rape was in a sort of a semi-standing position, he never even undressed, merely undid the fly and raped me. After he was done, he told me I could go back home. I was still in shock and as I was leaving, he gave me a small bag of ground coffee to "take home" As I was leaving R. told me that he would hang me if he heard that I'd told anyone about what had happened.

When I returned I met my mother. I burst into the house crying and told my mother that I'd been raped by two men. Together, my mother and S. bathed me, gave me a tranquilising pill and made me lie down. It took me time to stop the tremor and a strange feeling of fear and pain.

That evening members of the CCD Military Police came to our house and ordered us to get ready, around 7 o'clock, and with other Muslim civilians from Buna I was taken to Čapljina. That evening we were brought to a silo in Čapljina which was closed. From there, after a brief delay because the silo was full, they took us to the camp in Dretelj and from there to Počitelj.

In July 1993 they took us all from Počitelj. Somebody in our group asked D. what they were doing, where and why they were taking us, but he pretended to know nothing and that he could not say anything. Presumably because they could not fit us anywhere the CCD soldiers drove us all over Western Herzegovina, the ride lasted 24 hours, and at long last, not knowing themselves what to do with us, they returned us to Buna and from there expelled us to Blagaj on foot.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

I Begged Them to Kill Me

From the attic of a deserted building I watched strangers steal my belongings from my apartment in Čapljina.

I have experienced personally the Golgotha that is war.

I have three sons. The oldest one is married and he lives in Croatia.

The other one was 19 years old when the war broke out. At the time, he was in Prevlaka. He went to Split, than to Zagreb, then all the way to Hungary. Finally, after 3 months he arrived in Belgrade. The youngest one had been studying in Sarajevo and he went to Banja Luka, then to Ključ and finally to Belgrade as we were not able to finance him anymore.

My deceased husband Desimir and I stayed in Čapljina. He had already been receiving invalid pension for one year and I was still employed.

Camouflaged people used to come to our place during the night, they threatened us... they were bringing us in for questioning. Each time they were in our apartment, they used to break everything, they destroyed the television and they damaged all the things in the apartment. Their faces were under masks, with kerchiefs on their foreheads. They had knives and bombs.

One night they took us in front of the building. Behind the same building a certain S.E. was killed. They pushed us into the car where three camouflaged persons were already sitting. They took us to the outskirts, in some house. The agony started; abusing, they turned the light on and off, they held their finger on the rifle's trigger and they laughed at our distress We got separated. They were lighting candles and beat me with their boots. I was pushed around and they took off my golden necklace and than my clothes. I recognized some of them by voice. They were from the village Sović (Ljubuško) and Živinice near Tuzla. One of them was called by the name of Chicago. He looked a lot like my son and they were approximately of the same age. The youngest of them took his knife. I heard the door opening and closing all the time. It was an endless night. They put my husband by the door to listen. When I awoke, I was all in blood. Next morning they took us to Kravica. There was a terrible story of a family Tripić who used to run a cafe in that village. Two more women were raped in Čapljina. I knew one of them very well. Her name was Jelena and the other one was D. Olga who was imprisoned in the camp Dretelj. In case I was killed, which did not happen, it would have been a relief for me.

They took me back home. The people who helped me the most were my neighbor Kata and a Catholic priest who use to go to police station and ask them to take us back home and leave us alone. Each shift brought other

people. The worst was when there was shift from Ključ, especially when there was certain B. Vinko. We had the Croat neighbor who delivered us food in garbage bags despite all the danger. I was crying and praying for these sufferings to end.

One morning I was brave enough to go and see a man who was one of the commanding officers in the Čapljina Main Staff (a certain Luburić) and asked him to kill me which would have ended my sufferings. That night they did not come to our apartment. We were peaceful. We found out from Kata that harassers had spent that night in prison, but as soon as next day they released them. Everything was depended upon who was on duty. I only know that on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, invited by our neighbor Sejo, Vinko used to come to a cafe where he would get drunk and then break into our apartment. Later on, as soon as neighbors would see him, they would warn us time. Doctor Maćin informs Kata, Kata informs the priest and than he goes to the police. This repeated day after day. He was often locked up, but when another shift arrived, he was released again. On one occasion I spent the night at a radio station with Sudo, a reporter who now lives in Norway.

The building was guarded by four people. I often asked myself, why this all is happening: we were common people. We were not even members of any political party... Our telephone line was restored. We had to report in Main Staff every half hour. Compared to our life in that period, imprisonment would have been very pleasant. The last time when Vinko came to break the door of our apartment, I took a vacuum machine cable and tried to hang myself, but I was rescued by Kata and the priest who had warned the police. Since then I don't know anything except that Vinko lives normally in Šibenik like nothing has ever happened. My brother knows him very well - Vinko used to be his teacher.

Even the security of the building did not help. I had to leave my apartment. They moved us to an attic. Tenants from our building came out and observed the arrest of three extremists ordered by CCD, in other words certain special unit members from Zagreb (Žarko). After that, I was taken to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs. Some people who knew me were crying. Finally, a certain Ozren from Domanovići decided to help me and tried to get me out of Čapljina. At that time, everybody were talking about two dentists, Dr. Kuzman Nikola and his wife Duška, who were brutally murdered. The young man who found them and buried them got sick and died after a year.

I got a pass on 19/20 January 1993 with Žarko's help. I decided to leave. My husband stayed. I entered the bus in Čapljina. A woman dressed in Muslim national outfit set beside me. She told me that she was leaving Mostar and that she lost her daughter. There was check point in Split but fortunately they did not come onto the bus. I continued traveling to Zagreb. Then I remembered that Kata packed some food for me. I opened it... it was kiwi. Believe me; even now I remember that moment when I look at a kiwi.

My sister-in-law’s father met me in Zagreb and bought me a ticket

to Hungary convincing me that I could not stay in Zagreb. I did not have proper documents based on which I could leave Republic of Croatia. I only had a pass to Zagreb. I sat beside a woman who told me she was a Hungarian and that she was traveling to Subotica. She was in Split visiting her family. At the border she had a long discussion with an officer convincing him that she was guaranteeing for me, saying I was going to Subotica with her. Finally they let me go. She told me how she was harassed (stoned) in Split just because she was from Subotica. Her husband was working in Subotica Secretariat of Internal Affairs. She invited me and woman in Muslim national outfit to have a rest at her place. I instantly refused because I was scared of police uniform. She understood my feeling. She helped me by buying me a ticket to Belgrade because I did not have local currency with me. When I reached the platform at the bus station I couldn't believe that the moment came when I could freely leave the bus without fear that somebody would attack me. My son met me. That was terrible. Everybody in the bus was crying. Soon instead of happiness in peace, psychological problems appeared as a result of experienced trauma, for which I have been treated for several years. They continued to abuse my husband, they used to take of all his clothes, lock him in the garage... they beat him in Domanovići... God forbid anything like this happens to anybody, not even to those who did this to us. One night, somebody came and opened the garage. He went out in the street where people found him and took him into church to dress him up. He lived like animal. He couldn't get a pass because he did not have any documents. He was exchanged in 1996 by intervention of the Ministry and signature of Mr. Veselinović even though he was born in Valjevo, therefore he was citizen of Serbia.

In Serbia and Montenegro he was not entitled for pension and he couldn't return to BiH to resolve that issue there. As he was born in Valjevo, he did not have the right to refugee status, consequently no right to humanitarian aid or accommodation in some of the centers. Being so sick and tortured we became subtenants. We changed 33 landlords. No one from Serbia or BiH institutions has ever visited us. During many years of medical treatment in Belgrade I also decided for expertise with specialized gynecologist. That was very painful for me. This is only the part of my story... this is nothing comparing to what I went through in Čapljina.

I am still scared of men in uniform and I sleep with the lights on. Every criminal regardless of his nationality deserved more than punishment... I don't know that punishment... I can't think of one.

My husband passed away at the end of September 2005 in Belgrade.

N.D.

(At the user's request, instead of full name, initials are used)

(Women, Victims of the War, 2006)

Prozor

Normally I lived in Škrobučani, with my parents, and that is where I was until July 1993. We lived in constant fear because CCD troops never stopped going around the villages and sowing panic among the people. I, my mother and father decided to go and visit my uncle and aunt as it seemed safer there. So, on the said day we went there and spent the night with them.

CCD troops, 16 of them, came to the house where my uncle lived. They were all in uniforms and armed, and some had their faces smeared with paint.

They started sort of questioning us, who else did we have there and where were other men from the village. They stayed in our house almost until the night. They requested coffee, to heat tins for them and other services. We were not allowed to leave the house. During the day they brought into the house two more men from the neighbouring village of Parcani and locked them together with us in the house.

Just before dark N.M. ordered me to step out in front of the house and my father, my mother, my uncle who had returned in the meantime, and the aunt stayed in the house. I.S. was taken away a little before that and later on I heard that he had been killed but I don't know under what circumstances.

N. took me some 500 m from the house, to the edge of the wood, next to a trough. There N. raped me. As he was doing it, I could hear shots from the direction of the house. Meanwhile they were looking and calling for N. Two soldiers were coming towards us and N. moved to meet them thinking they'd all rape me. One of the two, M.S., approached me while the other soldier called D. and the abovementioned N. went towards the house. When M.S. approached me, I was still sitting in shock and crying and he told me then to come with him because I had nowhere else to stay. So I came with him but neither he nor those others let me enter the house and see what had happened or to take anything.

As I was going with M.S. I asked him if all my folk had been killed and he answered: "I think so but believe me, it wasn't I who killed them."

Later on, on the way to Prozor, S. told me that N. would have undoubtedly killed me had he not thought they would also rape me, the two of them as they were approaching.

Along the way, as we drove towards Prozor, S. asked me if I had any relatives in Prozor to leave me there but as I had nobody, he said he would take care of it and that somebody had to take me in. So I was put up at some old woman's and the next day I went to P.Z. who agreed to take me in. I stayed only one day there because that same evening around 12 o'clock soldier A.V. came and took me along; allegedly the police commander was look-

ing for me. They took me to R.M.'s house in Prozor. First P. and then K. raped me. It lasted all night and nobody else came apart from those two. In the morning they threatened that I was not to go out anywhere or try to flee because they would kill me, and if I hid in somebody's house, that they would set us all on fire.

So I stayed in that house in total shock and fear. The next day B.A. and P.V. came and raped me too. They forced me to drink with them and smoke grass which I had to do as I was practically left at their mercy and without a chance that anybody might protect me. And so it went on day after day. Many also came from the Croatian Army who raped me. Thus I remember that they were from Karlovac, Osijek, Vinkovci and some other places but I do not recall the names. In daytime they often took me to clean coffee shops and soldiers' apartments and there I was ill-treated further. I know that they also brought other girls to the house I was staying in. I saw only two, and others were taken to other rooms so that I don't know who they were, I only heard laughter and debauch and from what was being said I could realise what perverse things were being done as it could all be heard in the room where I was. I know that one of the girls was called S. and that she was from Zenica, then A. from Gornji Vakuf and I didn't know the names of others.

And so it went on for four months, over and over again every day and night so that I even stopped being aware of all that was going on around me. At times they also brought Muslim men there and beat them in another room demanding money and jewellery, I listened to it all although usually they turned up music to the hilt to cover up the cries of pain.

B.A. told me once that they had put fire to my parents and that they were also my rescuers, like, they would spare me suffering. They often talked about their crimes and if they noticed that I was listening, they' d send me out of the room.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Sanski Most

In May 1992, somewhere around one o'clock, somebody knocked forcefully on the front door of our house. We heard a rifle fire twice, and then unknown voices demanded that we open the door. They did not say who they were, and we did not recognise these unexpected visitors. We dared not open the front door which was locked that evening. They broke the front door of our house by force and forced their entry into the house. Five young men entered, they could not be more than 25 years old. Four were in civilian clothes, and the fifth one wore the camouflage uniform and had a green sock over his face, with slits for the mouth, eyes and nose. They were all armed. The one with the sock over his head talked rather oddly as if he was speaking a foreign language.

Of them all, I recognised two. The name of the first one was M.G. from the neighbouring village. This M.G. went to the same school in our village, which I had completed. He was a year or two my senior. That I. G. had to know me, too. Before the aggression he was prone to fighting and didn't work anywhere. After the aggression on BiH the Serbs referred to him as the greatest combatant; the Muslims, however, were afraid of him. He plundered villages, beat our people and killed them. With other young men from his village G. dispersed the inhabitants of the villages of Modra, Skucani Vakuf and Gorica, all in the Sanski Most municipality.

The second among these unexpected visitors in our house was J. M. M. was born in 1972 and went to the same elementary school as I did; before the aggression he was not a problem and no bad things were said about him as about M.G. The other two young men I saw well that evening and committed their faces to memory although it was the first time I saw them.

As soon as they broke the door of our house, they entered the living room on the ground floor where we were. One of these young men hit my brother in the stomach area with his rifle, without any reason whatsoever. Z. lost his breath and fell on the floor. My father said: "Let my children be and do to me as you please." After these Father's words, one of the young men hit my father in the head area with a pistol. I cannot state now who did that. After that blow blood poured over my father's face area. I stood closer to my mother when M.G. approached me, caught me by the shoulder and took me a little further in that same room and put me against the wall. As soon as he put me against the wall so that I faced him, M. G. started to touch me in my chest and face area. I started to move away and cry. And my mother shouted then: "Don't touch my child!" As soon as he heard Mother's words,

M. G. took me from that room in which we were all in and pushed me into another room on the ground floor. He placed me in a narrow part of the wall between the wall unit and the adjoining wall. There he literally wedged me in so that I still faced him and my arms were lowered. In that room we were alone, I and that young man with blond curly hair down to his shoulders, with a red bandana around his forehead. I was not aware at all of this curly-haired young man entering the room. As soon as he took me into that room and put me against the wall, M. left the room.

The door of the room remained open. Through the entrance door one could easily see the place where I was leaning against the wall, that is where M. put me. I saw that behind the door leading into this room where I'd been taken, they beat my father who was in the kitchen. All the young men who had come to our house that evening, were beating him. I gleaned that my father was all bloody from those blows; he could not endure the blows and was crouching on the floor and they kept hitting him. From the place where I was I could not see my brothers and my mother. At some point I heard my brother Z.'s voice who said: "Mother, I can't stand this any longer, I'll jump through the window." He uttered those words when he heard me cry in the next room. I cried then because I knew what would happen to me and because they'd already ordered me to undress. That young man with curly hair first asked me how old I was. I answered that I was born in 1974, he did not believe me. He said he was born in 1973 and that we went to school together. He claimed that I was older and that I deliberately said that I was younger. I could not remember even then that this young man really went to school with me.

In my room I suddenly saw four of the young men and only the one with the green sock over his head was not there. They kept ordering me to undress but I did not obey. Then two of them grabbed my legs and arms and the other two undressed me forcibly. For a little while I was on my feet and then they pushed me to the ground and I was lying on my back.

The first to rape me was J. and in the presence of his three friends, too. At the time of this I was slightly over 18. I had never had a sexual intercourse with a man before. Before they raped me, some of them even asked me if I had already had sexual intercourse with men. I answered that I had not. They said they did not believe me and that they were about to check that. As they raped me one by one, at times the light was on and at times they switched it off. In about an hour, which is how long they stayed in the room, I was raped by all four young men except that fifth one who was masked with the green sock pulled over his head and in the camouflage uniform. These young men did not take off their clothes, they only pulled their trousers a little down and the underwear. I tried to defend myself from the young men and avoid the rape. I tried to wrestle away from them but I did not succeed because there were four of them in the room and I was on my own. They helped each other in overcoming my resistance. They held me by my legs and arms whilst one of them raped me. During that time I lay on the

floor of our room without a shred of clothes on me. Some of them even, while one of them raped me, tickled me on the soles of my feet.

As they raped me they demanded that I give sign that I was also enjoying it. They bit different parts of my body, hit me when I tried to wiggle out, slapped me in the face when I cried, and turned me as it suited them. I felt terrible about what was happening to me, it hurt me badly and I was very embarrassed because my parents and brothers who were in other rooms, could at least guess at all this and may have even seen some of all this. I suppose that my father even saw a major part of this ordeal because he was lying injured right in front of the door of the room in which they raped me.

As I was being raped by that young man with curly hair and the red bandana over his forehead, one of the young man addressed him saying: "Stop, R., no more, what do you think would happen if this was done to our sister, what we are doing to her." Hearing the name R., this curly-haired young man with the red bandana, swore at his mother and said: "Don't mention my name."

During this whole incident, J.M. treated me the worst of all. In fact, this was the first young man who raped me and deflowered me.

After more than an hour one of the young men warned the others: "Leave this house or I'll shoot." He repeated it after a time, after which they all left the room in which they had raped me. As they were leaving the room in which they had raped me, that young man who warned them to go or else he would shoot, said to me: "Don't stand up and look in which direction we're going because otherwise we'll kill you." This was said by that tall, thin young man with short hair, combed to one side, dressed in jeans and a white T-shirt.

As they raped me the young men swore at my "balija mother", demanded that I be more active in what they were doing to me by force, but I could not accept it. They hit me on all parts of my body, but mostly on the head, right at the beginning of the rape while I still had enough strength to resist them. Afterwards they did it when I moaned because I could not endure the pain they were inflicting on me. They were all brutal, did not spare me, bit different parts of my body and in this way left traces in the shape of bruises and dark patches. I observed the largest number of dark patches and bruises in my neck area.

These young men left me naked in the room. After they left the house, I got up from the floor, approached the wall unit which was in the room, got a house frock and put it on. I was so exhausted by the rough treatment those young men gave me that I could barely move. I was ashamed to look for the members of the household although I was not responsible for what had happened to me. In the living room I found my brothers standing over our unconscious mother. I think my mother fainted because she was aware of what was happening to me although she was also ill-treated before they raped me. I began to pat my mother's face and call to her through tears. At some point, Mother opened her eyes and realised I was standing above her. The first words I heard then from Mother were: "Woe, daughter, you've

been raped." I only cried louder because I lacked the strength to say anything to Mother.

The next day my father and I were taken for examination to Sanski Most. We were taken by the Serb police although we had not reported the incident. I realised that because of the multiple rape I had also suffered some internal injuries which I could not see with my own eyes. After all that, I felt horrible and my nerves gave in. I had frequent crises. Fortunately, I did not get pregnant and didn't have to perform the interruption of pregnancy. After everything that happened to me, I again saw only M. and J., that is persons whose particulars I know well and who I know with certainty participated in the rape.

I came across J. more often because as a policeman he was assigned, together with some other policemen, to allegedly guard our village in which I went on living. When I would accidentally passed by J. I could feel well that he was be embarrassed to see me because he turned his head away from me and pretended not to see me. He wouldn't show with the slightest gesture that the two of us had met, and in a way horrible for me at that. Because of the situation I was in, I did not dare let J. know in any way whatsoever that I knew well that he had been with that group of three other young men who had raped me in the evening of 1 May 1993 in my house. I saw J. for the last time in August 1994 when we were about to leave the place in which we had lived until then.

I often saw by chance M.G. also, in passing, but I did not talk with him. On such occasions I would be seized with great fear which paralised me every time. I continued being afraid of that person. Every time I came to the conclusion that M.G. recognised me too, but he always turned his head away and avoided to see me. The remaining three young men I never saw again.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Kozarac

I no longer remember the date when I was captured or when I was transferred from the camp in Omarska[5] to Trnopolje[6]; I'd only say I think it all lasted for about a month and a half. Two chetniks came to my place and took me and my neighbour K. to the police station in Prijedor. There they ill-treated me, physically harassed me and sexually assaulted me. Two chetniks held me, they were armed, and the third one did it over me on my breasts; before that they forcibly undressed me and threw me on the floor of a cellar or something. I do not know that threesome but when they brought me to the police station I saw and found in the interrogation room my neighbour B.B. in the military many-coloured clothes and armed with an automatic and a pistol. When they brought me in, he recognised me but did not respond to my hello and instead went out and I was interrogated by another man. The next day they took us in a van to the camp. In Omarska they put me with detained women straightaway. There were more than 30 of them.

During my detention in the camp the worst thing was the interrogation. I was beaten by two chetniks, ill-treated, threatened and thrown into the passage. I slid on my chest some 2 m. He shouted also "you'll squeal yet" Two or three times or so they took me in and interrogated until D. came along and said through the window: "Let her go, don't you see she's elderly, what do you want from her." They did not take me out after that.

Other women were taken out. I don't know what they did to them there, all I know is that they cried after their return, kept silent, said nothing and that they couldn’t even say anything because we were forbidden to talk. Only once J. managed to show me the scars of what they'd done to her, the scars went down her back and she told me that her ribs were broken. I was the oldest there, I was 62 then, and there was also another elderly detainee

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[5] Omarska camp was a Serb-run concentration camp in Omarska, a mining town near Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina, set up during Prijedor massacre. Functioning in the first months of the Bosnian War in 1992, it was one of 677 detention centers and camps throughout Bosnia during the war. One of the most infamous camps where non-Serb civilians and Prisoners of War were kept and often brutally tortured and killed.

[6] Trnopolje: village near city Prijedor; Trnopolje camp was a detention camp (also referred to as ghetto, prison and concentration camp) established in the village of Trnopolje near the city of Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first months of the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Nominally "a transit camp" for members of the non-Serb (mainly Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak) population of the Prijedor region it was described by a United Nations Security Council report as "a concentration camp".

of over 60, a Serb, I didn't know her before. I saw her in Omarska once, and all the other women I knew, either by name or by sight.

I was one of the last women to be brought to the camp. Only M., pretty and young, was brought after me. When I was brought, those women, about 30 of them, whom I found there, asked only: "Have you seen my children, my husband, my brother?" and so they asked only about their families. While we were in the camp we managed to whisper softly among us about men who had perished, especially in the "white house".

Five or six days after my arrival I was sitting in the passage next to J.C. and Z.R. when D.T. came along, I know him personally from Kozarac, and another one with him, both in many-coloured clothes, armed with automatics and pistols. The other one then pointed at me and said: "Look, the old hag' s here too." And D.T. answered: "The old hag won't own up to anything, the old hag'll squal yet." I didn't recognise anyone else in Omarska, but in Trnopolje I did recognise many Serb neighbours from Prijedor, but I can't remember their names now.

In Trnopolje, 30 of us, got only 5 kg of bread during those five days. I have a certificate about the time I was in Trnopolje, P.C. gave it to me, he worked for the Red Cross. The certificate also says when I left. I didn't even look at the date but I think I was in Trnopolje five days altogether. After that I go to Prijedor and am subjected daily to ill-treatment and threats. So it was day in day out and in early April 1994 under terrible pressure I left Prijedor.

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

Prijedor

After the attack on my village I witnessed the massacre of civilians as the worst possible tragedy. I did not know that anything worse than death could happen. My sister gave birth in the cellar where we hid during the attack on the village. After the village of Rizvanovići and after the chetniks arrived, I saw dead children aged three to eight near my house. I saw the destroyed mosque and a man who had been taken away. Some more prominent men were taken away and simply shot in the head. They fell and lay in grotesque positions. My grandfather was accused of killing Serbs and they killed him. We hid in the cellar of a destroyed house. Our house was intact.

Several chetniks arrived that day. They were looking for a man hiding in the nearby woods. One of the chetniks, about 30 years old, ordered me to come with him into the house. I had to. I was scared and didn’t know what was in store for me. I knew that if I refused, my whole family would be in danger. When we entered the house he demanded money, gold and other valuables. He could take whatever he liked. He demanded from me to admit where the man was hiding. I did not answer. He ordered me to undress, I was scared stiff.

I took off my clothes and suddenly everything split in me. Under my bare skin I thought I was dying. I closed my eyes. I could not look at him. He hit me and I fell. Then he jumped on me. He raped me. I cried and screamed and there was a lot of blood. It was my first time with a man. He ordered me to get up. I wanted to collect my clothes and cover myself but he told me to leave the clothes alone. He ordered me to remain standing and wait. He told me I'd better be careful because I was responsible for the fate of my family. He went out, looked around to check that nobody had seen him and then invited two other chetniks to come in. I felt lost. I didn't feel anything when they left.

I don’t know how long I remained lying on the floor. My mother entered and found me lying down. Her look, as I was in such a humiliating state, was even worse than everything that had happened to me. Suddenly I realised what had happened. I realised I was perverted, raped and deformed for life. My mother knew what was going on inside me. It was the saddest moment of our lives. We both cried, screamed. She covered me. Together we went back to the cellar. I remember what happened afterwards as if through a fog, a distorted dream.

We were transported to Trnopolje and from there, on foot, to Travnik, over Vlašić, some 30 km away. In Travnik I recovered from that

dream, the confused condition. Now, I sometimes ask myself if it all had happened to me. To me – of all people. My mother was of very great help. I want to be a mother some day. But – how? To me, a man is a horrifying force of violence and pain. I know that they are not all like that image I have, but the fear I feel is stronger than a rational feeling. I can't help myself.

(Source: Croatian Information Centre, Zagreb)

(The Sin of Silence – the Risk of Speech, 2000)

All stories in this chapter were translated by **Mirka Janković**, except the story *I Begged Them To Kill Me*

**they took
everything away**

Forced to Grow Up

In 1991 I lived in a town which for me was the only place where I could be completely happy. My home, my parents and my friends all around me. We were all equal. We listened to the same music, read the same books; we were young people without a care in the world. We lived from one day to the next. Although one could feel war in the air in Pakrac since March 1991, we paid no attention. How could you feel the war in a town of unity, a town full of harmony? To whom could it even occur that we would have to part? And then that August, fatal for all of us, came. We are leaving the town not realising that we shall never meet again. We did not even say good-byes. "We'll be back." That was the last sentence we uttered, unaware that we were wrong.

I was leaving the town looking at all those buildings, streets, parks and they seemed to be telling me that I would never come back. The war has started. Shooting all around me, the noise of planes, blood, fear. I felt I had to help those people although I was only 17 years old. As I had completed two years of the secondary medical school I went to the hospital to help. I didn't realise that I had become a part of them, that in a way I had become a part of history written there. They, however, sent me to a village right next to Pakrac.

It was the frontline and I was a nurse on that frontline. Night fell. I went up the hill and watched Pakrac. Pakrac was ablaze. Imagine the feeling as you watch while the town in which you spent the best moments of your life disappear. As if a part of you is disappearing. Watching the town, I realised that this was not a bad dream and that it was reality. That moment I grew up. I was forced to grow up.

Two months later I arrived in Belgrade; a new environment, new people. I was a stranger to them. Different speech, different mindset. I did not belong in that milieu but I had nowhere else to go.

Three years have passed since then. I am still a stranger but now I am a stranger in my town. Some new people have come there, some new kids and the town has lost its soul. And to the other part of the town, where I grew up, I cannot go. The enemies are there. And I am an adult. I've jumped over that boundary between childhood, serenity, and the real, sombre and hard life. I've jumped across the wall. I left happiness, serenity, lightness of life behind me. I found myself in an environment ridden with worries. I am expected to be independent and take life seriously.

I cannot go back. I cannot go back across the wall. I have to move

forward. Life is ahead of me. I knew I had to suppress my emotions and forget the past. I've begun a new life and I defy it with my behaviour and my persistence. I move through it turning towards my future and forgetting the past.

Romana Romanić

(Feminist Notebooks 2/1994)

Darkness over Stradun*

At that time the situation in Dubrovnik was pretty bad because we had power cuts and were without electricity from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon. As there was no electricity, the pumps which, how shall I put it, take the sewage further away from the city, did not work either and the beaches were therefore pretty polluted. Salmonella appeared because when there is no power, there is no hot water and so on, so that after arriving in Belgrade, the first thing I noticed was the Sava River, which shone with a kind of beauty and I immediately said to my children: "Let's go to bathe." I've been to the beach near the residential bloc where I live three times already. The Sava is really clean so that it is, let's say, a very good substitute for the poor sea, which looks like nothing now. We hope it'll get better.

As for the war and occurrences in Dubrovnik, it is rather difficult to talk about it because I believe there are many people who are fond of Dubrovnik and what I might have to say will certainly cause them a great deal of pain, namely that the old town is very, very badly damaged. I shall speak only of my personal impressions. For instance, I loved to pass up and down Stradun late in the evening when there were no crowds because it seemed to me that that stone had a special colour, glow and transparency. There are forty-nine holes made by shells on that same Stradun. So that people wouldn't fall in them while walking these holes are now temporarily closed with so-called soft concrete or something of the sort, so that in the evening, when Stradun is empty, when you look at that surface, it looks smeared. Rays project from those smears and it all looks very ugly. Some four houses burnt down completely and are being restored now. Considerable aid in building materials is coming from Belgium and France and I think that the roofs in the Old Town have been relatively repaired.

The population in the Old Town is by and large relatively advanced of age and those people suffered a very great deal... However, everything was organised rather well. First, some sort of tea shops opened straightaway, then soup kitchens and people somehow rallied, and there was a convoy called *Libertas* which took care of the old people and so on... I also took some small part in it...

However, the effect of that devastation is terrible because, while the shelling went on, while there was gunfire, people struggled to survive somehow and did not think much, and also, we were without electricity and water

* Title - Ed.

for three months. One had to collect twigs to prepare lunch. On several occasions I happened across people, in the street, on the stairs, lighting small fires with fruit crates and then get a tripod and cook on it I don't know what, truth to tell… perhaps some polenta or something warm, whatever, just something to eat.

My experience with those old people came as a huge surprise because I somehow imagined that old people are those people who grumble, protest and so on… However, I came across infinite patience, acceptance, an attitude to life - that it was something transitory, that one only has to weather it, not hate anyone and that it will all pass – as if it were some natural disaster. Several times I saw a scene on Stradun – the cistern with water would come and people took water and then the cistern would leave. The hose would remain on Stradun – it needed to be dismantled and then people captured drops of water still dripping from those pipes. I also saw some very ingenious contraptions such as, for instance, the neck of a *Coca-Cola* bottle with another piece of the bottle put over the end of the drainpipe and on the bottle neck the hose one waters the garden with and then that hose went where people wanted it and that is how people got a little bit more of water. For the toilet purposes the sea was mostly used. That is how I met a man of seventy-three who had come to Porporela to capture some seawater and in the middle of the winter fell into the sea fully clothed. But, I presume, as our saying goes, God looks after the mad, the old and the little children. He didn't get pneumonia even, nothing, went back home… People rescued him from the sea – I could not believe my eyes when I saw him safe and sound.

Unbelievable men and women emerged, believe me. I met a girl who went from shelter to shelter and organised games for children. Since those large shelters, that is fortifications, had some generators, they had light and people could make coffee or women brought whatever they had at home and cooked joint meals and then distributed them to the neediest, the elderly and children. Otherwise people tried to make do in all sorts of ways.

During the blockade the shops were completely empty; only bread could be found every day. There was not a single day without bread. How, I've no idea, but that is how it was.

That shelling, I mean, the general alarm would be sounded in the morning and would not stop, say, for a month. Then you are afraid for three days, hide, gunfire and so on, then no gunfire on the fourth day, then people cannot stand it any more. One day I also came out and went to the top, over there to the cascades. I simply could not bear it any longer. I wanted to see from there if there were any ships in the sea. At that moment a shell fell in the park above my house and I was showered with stones. Well, then I realised that it was not time for jokes and that that was how one got killed, when the devil tempts you to go and see what's going on. You should take shelter and stay put while it lasts… And what happened was mean – shells were fired, and fired, for five or six hours, and then silence, and then you

think it’s stopped, and then another one comes when you don’t expect it… That is largely how the civilians were killed. Because you cannot stand any longer neither the mental siege nor… one absolutely goes crazy at some point. I mean, it depends. There were people who did not leave their shelters even when it became possible. They stayed in for another month and lived there. They’d completely come to terms with the idea that they were in some, I can’t really call it cellars, but well, some such space where they felt safe.

Dubrovnik was not used to shelling in its past. During World War II it was not shelled when there was Hitler… So that, really, nobody expected it. I would meet my school fellows and we would say: "Gosh, it’s terrible, you’ve no idea what’s going on, they will shell Dubrovnik". And I really thought to myself that they were some disgraceful cowards who were so scared of everything that they thought Dubrovnik would be shelled. I would say: "Come on, are you crazy, what’s got into you, it’s out of the question that somebody could shell Dubrovnik, why, it’s a monument", and all that nonsense that one thinks.

I did not think at all about people who shelled Dubrovnik. For, to my mind it’s anyone who… I cannot describe it, the mental state defies description I really, truly, cannot tell you what I thought because I did not think. It would simply not get into my head that the things that were happening were really happening. When I heard the first shell which… And it’s very typical, there’s a big difference when the shells fall on the Old Town, on the stone, that is, or somewhere farther away. That sound when a shell tears at that stone, you, simply, cannot understand that it is happening. I don’t know how to tell you that. I watched through the window the *Imperial* Hotel on fire and I saw how the ignited beams caved in two floors down and it was as if I was watching a film. I was totally… like in those disaster films, when tin plate and all the rest fly about… The *Imperial* Hotel and the *Inter-University Centre* burnt at the same time. I thought the end of the world had come. I thanked the providence that I was alone at home and I probably kept my sanity because I could do as I liked. That is, when I felt like howling, I really wept, as the saying goes, at the top of my voice. I was completely… I howled, truly, I cried full blast… And then I would calm down, because it’s a vent when one can cry if one feels like crying, you don’t have to hide from anyone… Then for a while I prayed to God, like that, from the bottom of my soul, not to let the wind rise because then whole Dubrovnik would burn down. Those two pyres were beyond belief. That *Inter-University Centre* which had been done up, all wood, full of books, you can imagine what it… It was a spectacle around it, Gradac, the park, all pine trees, resin and so on… How is it that it did not catch fire, I’ve no idea.

I heard many people express some kind of regrets, that they had friends, that they had people they’d known for years. The sentence repeated over and over was roughly – "And they didn’t even send us a postcard, to ask if we were alive?" That is the sentence you hear, really, if you talk about it, almost everybody will say that. "And they did even send a postcard to ask

if we’ve survived?" They mean their Belgrade friends who spent their summer vacations there and so on… Needless to say, I always replied that the propaganda in the media was so disgusting that people were probably afraid to cause harm. That it was not the heartlessness and so on... However, I think that people have now, in a way, become terribly hardened, dehumanised… I must admit I am a little disappointed. I don’t think that people are evil but… The conversation mostly runs like this: "How are you, when did you arrive, well, so help me, we’ll hardly go to the sea-side again!" At times I say to myself: "Hardly, indeed" thinking of that mentality because if someone’s house has burnt down and he was left with nothing, he must have it worse. And the seas are many, the Adriatic is the not the only sea…

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

May Devil Take Their Happiness

Split is a city where there are many people without a job. The economy is rather blocked, communications broken. No communication by road, no communication by rail. You know what, it's over when you're in that situation. So you feel it in Split.

I was in Split on the Day of Croatia's Statehood. You know, I have to tell you, I was surprised. We went out; it was a nice sunny day. We came to the seaside promenade and I say to this friend of mine: "Do you notice something?" She says: "What?" "Don't you see? There isn't a single flag all along the promenade and it's a state holiday today? Look, just one flag, down there, on St Francis's."

On the whole Split promenade, from the Bellevue Hotel up there to the market, not a single flag. Clearly, there was discussion later – who was responsible that the flags had not been hoisted in Split, but it's, well, a symptom. You know what, people are worried: you have to survive and there's no work.

People I met, I've got to tell you, they are people who've had enough of war! There was not a single person that I saw, believe me, who did not say: "We've had enough!" One of them was good, though, I ask her: "How are you?" – She yells: "Devil take me for living through this. D'you see what happened to us? Devil take them, them and those who brought'em!" She's an old woman. "I have no one", she says, "on the frontline, but I've enough just looking at those youngsters they bury." I have to tell you, right, that I move in certain circles, and I didn't move in the circle of representatives of authorities to tell you how they saw it – but these common people had had enough of war.

In Biograd, what can I tell you? Biograd is practically on the frontline. I was used to Biograd bubbly, Biograd swarming with people, Biograd with the shortage of vacancies in summer. Now you come to empty Biograd and horribly so, like a ghost town, everywhere. You walk along the beach, there isn't a single soul, you walk along the quayside, nobody dallies in the street. There are few Biograders in Biograd, they've fled to the islands because they're shelled every once in a while. Biograd, it's such a situation. The hotels full of refugees, summer cottages full of refugees and you see people who are not at home and none of the locals are at home. So that, as far as I'm concerned, Biograd, I have to tell you, made me depressed. Not the impression, it's not the impression, I rather left with it – sad. It's sad all over, you know, but people live. As for my meeting people, I was surprised when some from whom I didn't expect it approached me and said: "How are

you, so you've come, why, thank God, we haven't seen you for three years, so how are your folk, so how are you doing?" and so on… I was a little surprised when some spoke to me. I knew them just to say hello, cheerio, and that was all, in passing.

Nothing disagreeable ever happened to me when I met various people. However, I must tell you something that I find sad. All that shelling, that you're on the frontline, provokes terrible mistrust towards those others. I could watch TV Belgrade there. You can see it better than Zagreb TV because Čelevac is in the hands of these… Krajinians, and when I compare them – I watch Channel One first, then HTV's first channel, right, and then one sees – it's the spitting image. But people are developing aversion. And what? How long do they think to go on? There's no water because the springs are up there and have been shut, there's no electricity, and that is a special problem, right?

In a shop, the two of us came to buy something. An old Biograd woman in that costume of theirs, a peasant woman, says: "So you've come, have you? You've come. Well, it's worth seeing. Devil take their happiness, have you seen where they've landed us?" And I tell her jokingly: "Whom you chose, whom you voted for, that's what you got." "Who voted, me? I didn't vote for them, may devil take them, see what they're doing? Our children are dying. For whom and why?" Or another case, and almost on the tail of that one: from the shop we went to the Health Centre. This friend of mine went to get medicines and at some point a woman recognised her and starting shouting at the top of her voice, addressing her by her name: "My Miro's gone, dear, my Miro's gone, woe to me. Devil take their happiness, they killed him. They took him to the front in the evening and the next day he died. Never asked for money from his mother and yet was jobless, lived off fishing. Came from the sea and they took him away. Devil take their happiness, they killed our children." And this one here calms her down and says: "Come, come, calm down, please." "Calm down, why? That one from the police came to me to express his sympathy and to tell me that I should be proud that my son died for Croatia and I said to him: 'May God make you kiss yours stone-cold.'"

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Rijeka in Black*

When I arrived in Zagreb I did expect some minor freedom, my personal freedom, I mean my feeling of freely moving around the city but there was a surprise in store for me. I saw Zagreb as a completely European city, with lots of lights, goods, women clean and perfumed, their clothes not too posh because in Zagreb women never dressed like that and what I keep explaining to everybody, this impression I gained, in one word which is, I think, really appropriate, and that is that Zagreb is a trim city. Everybody observes some urban laws and regulations about life in a city, which means that they are clean, tidy, polite... I moved around the city, say, around bookshops, bought foodstuffs every day and because I live in Belgrade, that's where I grew up, I couldn't always control myself to always say: *kruh* (*hleb* in Belgrade – trans.), *mlijeko* (*mleko* in Belgrade – trans.) and so on. So I would slip into the Belgrade dialect and nothing disagreeable ever happened to me.

As my relatives live near the former JNA (Army) Club, now the Guards Club, every morning I met truly large numbers of the military going to their places of work and there, too, I used an expression which I think is a plastic description of what I felt when I saw them: they walk in the street like ballet dancers. They're clean, without weapons, step aside when civilians come along and there isn't a trace of any bullying behaviour. At least, I did not see it. I think one can feel that need that Zagreb and those authorities have to present Zagreb in its best European shape.

When I arrived in Rijeka, I thought I would feel as if on my own turf. I have a sister in Rijeka and I used to come several times a year and simply, although it is not my native city, I thought – it's the right thing. Besides, these last years I've been hearing that Istria, Rijeka, was something else. And there I had a surprise because Rijeka is flooded with black. Almost every second household has somebody who was killed, wounded or otherwise suffered in Dalmatia because very many Dalmatians live in Rijeka. And destroyed houses in Posedarje, Biograd, Zadar... Then those reports, particularly from Zadar, Šibenik and those towns, here we know nothing about it at all; they are systematically destroyed and I think there isn't much left. Those folk there truly live in major hell. And in Rijeka, when I came across the military, they were not those Zagreb ballet dancers, as I call them, but "Rambo warriors". They often wore those many-coloured bandanas round their foreheads; they were all big, well-built young men and they reminded me strongly of our men from

* Title - Ed.

Krajina moving about here in Belgrade. Unlike the Zagreb military, they carried weapons and when they walked in the street they had their arms apart, wide apart, like cowboys, and I, subconsciously, made way for them. And I saw that others did the same. At night one heard the gunfire; they partied and at times even squared their accounts with weapons. Some were killed precisely during my stay in Rijeka.

Due, I guess, to those family tragedies and general wretchedness, many young and even middle-aged men volunteer for the front, and a large number of them have been drafted in Rijeka, especially of late. So that I didn't exactly get the image of pleasure and freedom I thought I would experience in Rijeka. Although I also went about on my own, and also went to the beach, not too often, and there on the highway, in a waiting-room, I came across graffiti I'd already seen three years ago; it said, in black: "This is Serbia." It was crossed over and somebody added: "This is Rijeka, and then that was crossed over and it ran: "This is Croatia", and underneath it said: "You moron, this is a waiting-room." I heard something similar happened on a post office building in Istria.

In Rijeka people are rather allergic to the Ekavian dialect and they even caution the Dalmatians, who always say *lična karta* (identity card), that now you must say *osobna karta*, – so that even people who are Croats but are, above all, Dalmatians, need to learn the new speak.

Since I went out every day, shopped, I saw that people also grumbled. The inflation is rampant. Their inflation is assessed monthly, and ours, I guess, twice a day, from what I can gather. They can buy the basic necessities, which we can't do here any more: bread, milk… The green market is, well, pitiful; I made a joke and said to my relatives: "rhapsody in green".

And in Zagreb, especially in Zagreb, but in Rijeka, too, I attended that MIK, Melodies of Istria and Kvarner. In Zagreb, on the square next to the cathedral, they performed Dalmatian airs and so, when I rounded it all off, on my way back I stopped in Zagreb for a while and then I gained the same impression as at the beginning that, in fact, as people say, by and large, fascism is on the march in both states. Except that somebody here put the emphasis self-confidently on Croatia as a fascist state. I think that they are absolutely the same and that, since fascism is invariably accompanied by kitsch, kitsch is there, in capital printed letters, red, and that the difference between their kitsch and ours is just as big as the difference between the mindsets of the two peoples, the Serbs and the Croats. Over there the kitsch is the Austro-Hungarian operetta-style, the Czardas Princess and all that jazz and in Serbia, it is, as they say, Byzantine. So that this also left me with the impression that we were really brotherly peoples.

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Grandma Maca
The Broken Cross

(...)

Ever since I was a child I had to work hard; I learned that nothing came free early in my life. I was born in Žumberak and there I spent my childhood and early youth. It was not a life of plenty but like all the young people I was full of joy and contented. I got engaged to a good young man but he was killed in World War II. I grieved for him but life pushed on, one could not look back.

We moved house to Berak, I married a hardworking and honest man. Those were difficult post-war years. All we had were our ten fingers. We started from scratch and, thank God, made it. We had three sons; our toil acquired a new meaning: we wanted to help the children to provide for themselves a normal life. They knew how hard we were having it and they also struggled. Then time came when they could breathe more easily, I was happy – the sons found jobs, built their own houses, founded their own families...

And then – a war again. I remember the last war, but, believe me, this one was much worse. I thought: "Whom did I do wrong, old and ailing as I am!" So I stayed in the village even when the troops entered. There were all sorts of people among them but they were kept under control and were not allowed to go on rampage. Our former neighbours did it instead.

What is it that happens in somebody's head to torment so his former neighbours and acquaintances? It's hard for me even to think let alone talk about it, as I remember those tormented faces, all out of shape, broken bodies. They beat indiscriminately, the old and the young. They beat me on the head with a cross until it broke to pieces. They tied me to a plum tree so that I could watch as they plundered and destroyed my son's house. They took everything away... The hardest of all was that they kept saying that two of my sons had been killed and I didn't know whether to believe them or not.

I am sorry that these people did not account for their misdeeds. Men who have their first and last names did it, not the people. Honest and just men, of all faiths and nations, suffered at the hands of such darkened minds. They may never appear before the human court but before God's court they will, I am sure.

(Stories from Berak, 2001)

Vjera Solar

As my husband Jovan is of Serb ethnicity, he went to his brother in Zemun; my daughter graduated from the school for beauticians in Belgrade in July. As her boyfriend was in Sisak, she returned here when she finished the school. She was at home for a little while and then went to her boyfriend; she lived with him, they were about to get married. He is from Sarajevo, by the way, from Sokolac, and that day, when it happened, he left for Sarajevo, he was to go to Sarajevo, how far he got I never learned because in the evening of that same day, 17th September, after eleven o'clock at night, when the curfew started, my child was killed.

I feel as if I don't belong to anyone. Nobody's. Because you've no rights. Although for fourteen years I've been fighting for my daughter, and, alongside my daughter, for other people too. They were taken away from the refinery, engineers were killed, managers… I know that before this war you couldn't take a bottle of petrol from that refinery and I think that it is impossible that they could kill people, take things from the refinery and that nobody saw that. Until '95 one could say that they were over there, by and large all the Serbs who were disappearing, that they had fled over; but after Operation Storm they are not over there, so where are they now?

Until the judiciary dispenses justice, regardless of the ethnicity, for all, for all those who perished in this war, there won't be justice, no reconciliation. Until I find out who killed my child and why. Because how can someone who killed a hundred people walk around free? How? I know that the Serbs were slaughtering, but by God, the Croats were doing it too. And indeed, they were slaughtering!

(Everybody Would Like to Cast a Stone, 2006)

All stories in this chapter were translated by **Mirka Janković**

the siege of sarajevo

Letter

Happy New Year

Sarajevo, 16 January '96

Dear women of Belgrade,
I have read your letter in which you say
how sorry you are for us.
You sympathize with our pain,
sorrow and grief,
and I thank you for that.
I am an old woman and
I've been through a lot of hardship,
but anyway,
I am glad there are still
some good people around.
My dear women of Belgrade,
Sarajevo is a sacred city.
Come over and make a wish
and all of them will come true.
Angels fly above Sarajevo
and they will bring joy to everybody,
and the fulfillment of their wishes.
They brought us courage.

With kindest regards
Mubera

The Siege of Sarajevo
March 1992 - March 1996

Sniper Shoots at Crowd
Radmila Stojadinović, Translator

1992, April

On that day, the 5th of April 1992, I started off with the other citizens of Sarajevo who were in front of the National Parliament. A group of one hundred people at the most, I think, started walking towards the Vrbanja Bridge. And we got to the bridge; none of us had so much as a rock in our pockets, not to mention any kind of weapon. We wanted to cross the bridge, however, on the other side they were pointing guns at us by the Chimneysweeps' building and by that gas station there, just across the Vrbanja Bridge. I had almost crossed the bridge, but they didn't, at that moment they were not shooting. One woman simply provoked them; she opened up her coat and said, "Come on, shoot." I was out for a walk; I was dressed, you know, in my Sunday clothes. I had a navy-blue suit, glasses, a handbag, and high heels. In one instant over the barrier on the side of the bridge, I saw a group of people who were coming closer, who had already crossed the Brotherhood and Unity Bridge. I waved to them to come over to where we were. In that second, Serbs wearing masks started shooting. I heard some people screaming. And one man who was standing in front of me was staggering. I thought to myself, "Look, some of these people are drunk." However, the man fell; someone pulled him by his legs and behind him was a trail of blood. I was totally confused. Then I heard people saying, "Lie down, get down on the ground." I looked around and everybody was lying on the ground. I was the only one standing on the bridge. And I was so confused that I lay down on my back. After a while someone started shouting, "Retreat, retreat!" And again I looked around, and everybody else was running back over the bridge. I was almost the only person left in the middle of the bridge. Then I ran back, too. And right then I was slightly wounded in the back.

Advice for Survival
Šemsa Mehmedović, Telecommunications Engineer

1992, October

Everything that could be burned was put in our oven. At the beginning I had some wood to make fire. My family had a few planks. But this

reserve went very fast and after that, I was forced to use my imagination to solve this problem. I personally chopped wood; I learned how to do it. I would make briquettes out of coal dust. We all had our own techniques. We had to find a way to prepare wood so that it could be burned. It is hard to remember everything those fires were made from. We used all kinds of things that were not important to us. Books, for example. Plastic bottles and everything else made from plastic. Plastic was very good to make fire but it smelled badly. We burned pieces of carpet, or sheets. Some people had to burn their wooden floors and furniture. Thank God, I was not as desperate. But once I burned a whole set of volumes by Sholokhov, I still remember - it was *The Quiet Don*. Nevertheless, whatever was burned, clothes or something else, sooner or later, it was gone. And we had to find something new. It was '95 and we had to organize heating during the whole summer, but we did not have anything to make fires with. It came to my mind that I could make fire from little branches. They were tiny, thin and small but I made little bundles wrapped together with old socks. I guess it was my original invention. But the result wasn't great. It took a lot of work to make such a bundle and it would burn up in a second. I made lots of those bundles with my son. That effort was not only useful for heating but also it was healthy for my mind. Because when I was doing something useful, I was alright, I felt O.K. I believe that this manual work saved my sanity.

The Birch Spared from Destruction
Zdravka Gutić

1992, October

The birch tree had been planted 15 years ago, when we moved in. It was a small tree that we were all taking care of, as if it were a child. The birch tree had grown up to the sixth floor. The only nice thing was that we could look through the window and see the birch tree that gave us shade, and simply the leaves flickering meant something. It meant that there was a kind of life in the yard. Then one evening, when it was unusually quiet and we were just expecting the sound of shells or anti-aircraft guns or machine guns or whatnot, we heard the sound of a chain saw. And that was a sign that somebody had come to cut down our birch tree. Whether to burn it or to sell it, we knew that nobody would really get warm from it. It wasn't much of a tree for heating. But for us, it was a symbol of life in that yard. We all ran out. I even took my husband's pistol. I was prepared to shoot anybody who would cut down that tree of mine. And then we were even, I wasn't alone. All the neighbors came out. Some with the Molotov cocktails that we had prepared in case the chetniks got to our building, so that we could at least defend our building by throwing those cocktails. We all got out, everybody who had something; there were guys who had returned from the front. One had a bomb; another,

a pistol; another, a cocktail. And the two young men who had come to cut down that birch tree got very scared, because they realized that we were defending a birch tree as if fighting a whole company of enemy troops.

Tršćanska Street
Amina Begović, Actress

1993, January

The 4th of January was important for me. It was one of those days when one says: "From now on, I will celebrate my second birth." I found myself right in the middle of that Tršćanska Street, because I was crossing to the other side. I had to go to the *Unis* building - to the Children's Embassy. And because it was foggy, I thought they wouldn't see me on the street. And so I slowly went across and - what happened? They started to shoot. And, of course, I didn't see them, they saw me. I hear shots and I see something ricocheting off the ground. And now, those are the things one experiences only in dreams. I suppose all of you have had that something when one dreams that one is running, but cannot move one's legs. They are terribly heavy. This happens in dreams and it used to happen to me often when I was little, much more often. But it happens in life, too. Suddenly you find yourself stuck in the middle of the street. You are aware of what that street is and suddenly somebody shoots and you cannot move. And this is it - just for one moment - and then you move and go. I mean, on the whole, throughout the war, people did not go into Tršćanska Street because they knew what it was. I also knew what it was. But nevertheless, there were several reasons why I went into that street. Because there was a system of getting out through the side door. We all went out through some side door. Fortunately we had an entrance into a yard and one could go through that yard. But those are old yards, with soil on the ground, and when it rained it was muddy. I clean my shoes and have to go out, have to do a performance or have to appear at a book promotion, and it is important to dress up, to look nice, we all wanted to look nice. So I clean my shoes and in God's name, how am I to walk through that yard when it's muddy? Who cares that a sniper is shooting on the street? He won't hit me and I won't make my shoes dirty. And there was another reason. In my yard there were two dogs, the neighbors' dogs. And they let them run around. However, I'm terribly afraid of dogs, ever since I can remember, I've been terribly afraid of dogs. But ever since I can remember, I haven't been afraid of snipers because I didn't know what they were. This means that I don't go into the yard if Chichi and Riki are in the yard because I'm terribly afraid of dogs. And the sniper won't hit me, so I can go into Tršćanska Street.

How to Cross the Runway
Nermina Kapić, Flower Shop Owner

1993, January

Moonlight; for days I couldn't sleep thinking how I couldn't get across the airport runway. I came to the runway on March 28, 1993 and I tried to cross, but no success. The first night there were 11 of us with children and we all went together, but we had no idea what the runway was like and that we wouldn't be able to cross. I tried the same night, but no success. The UNPROFOR brought me back. A soldier who crossed the runway several times came and told me; he saw I couldn't cross and he said: "Let's try together." And he took my child, who was 16 months old and told me: "Run after me." I went and took my sister's daughter who was 13 at the time with me. The soldier crossed; we were taken back by the UNPROFOR, so we stayed. They put us into a personnel carrier and took us to Kotorac. Then when I got back from Kotorac to the crossing from where we had tried to get across, he came back and said that he had given my child to a woman with a child. I didn't understand anything, I didn't know - only that night my sister-in-law had crossed. So I asked: to whom, how, what? He says: "I gave it to the woman with a child." I tried again that night; the UNPROFOR took us back again, and so again another three, four times that night, but no success. So we went back to the *Colony*; now I don't know where my child is. The phones don't work - only one, actually, from Hrasnica, - but there was no chance, we would sooner reach some other city than Sarajevo. And then my husband managed to tell me on the radio that the child was safe, although the child didn't recognize his father. The little one had left, then come back - he had no idea who his father was. So we stayed that night in Hrasnica. We didn't sleep, we were just sitting there. So then, again, at some time in the night (it was two in the morning), we started from the *Colony* towards Butmir on foot, slowly, and there was moonlight again. We said, "We can't get across", because this is the worst: the moonlight is shining upon the whole runway, so that there was no chance. We tried again that night once, twice, three, four times, without success. We returned to the *Colony* again, and then I crossed the third night - that is, my husband sent a guy who was in the Army, who knew the runway by heart as they say, and then I went - that night he took me across, with my sister's daughter again. He literally dragged me, because I couldn't; I took off my coat, I took off everything: my shirt, so that it got easier, so that I could run. When I had crossed halfway, there were women sitting there lighting a cigarette. I couldn't understand what they were doing in the middle of the runway. "Do people get killed here?" I asked and then continued, "In what direction are you going - to Sarajevo or Hrasnica?" They said Hrasnica. And then I rested for a while; I ran to a trench, then waited again, because it was the worst there - I mean the machine-gun shooting. So I rested there for about five or six minutes

while the guy took my sister's daughter across, then me, then he said: "How much strength have you got now?" to run to the nearest buildings. And so I came to Sarajevo.

Water Line Massacre at the Brewery
Maja Tulić, Citizen

1993, January

On the 16th of January, my friend and I were on our way to the *Brewery*, just like every, any other day, to get water for the family. It was a very beautiful day and clear, and when we were half of the way there, she asked me, "Why didn't you put on your sunglasses? They look so good on you." When we reached the Old City Outpatient Department, I looked towards Trebević[1], because there was an opening between the houses through which I could see all the way to Trebević. And I thought to myself, "If it's so clear that I can see every fir tree on the mountain, they can see me, too." We came to the first public fountain, which was about fifteen or twenty meters from the fountain at which six or seven other residents had been killed that day. It was my turn, and I had just put my 20-litre canister under the running water, when I heard a whizzing sound and I saw that shell; it was going down the street like a car, down that narrow, steep, narrow street. It occurred to me that I should lie down, crouch, or something. But I didn't manage to do anything. The shell hit a building. People fell to the ground. Everyone automatically started running into the large building of the Outpatient Department, which was concrete. Only I separated from them and ran to a traditional Bosnian house whose door was closed and locked. I banged and banged so hard on the door, until an old woman opened the door and led me to her storeroom, where she and her grandchild had taken cover. Because her son was on the lines at the moment and her daughter-in-law was at work, she sat in that storeroom with her grandson. And so I had been sitting with them in that storeroom for another 15-20 minutes when another shell fell from somewhere near by. I heard my friend calling me: "Maja, where are you?" But I just yelled back at her, (her name is also Maja) from that courtyard: "Maja, where are you?" When I went outside - how steep that street was - it was icy; water was running down it, washing the blood down with it. An ambulance had arrived already, and they were taking away the dead and the wounded. I knew that I mustn't go back for my cart and water canister. My friend did it for me. I just ran, ran with no reason. The shells had fallen, and there was no more reason to run, that was it. I ran home and into my apartment, I just ran in and for four months after that I never went outside. Not even out on the sidewalk in front of my own house. During those months I often dreamt of hearing that sound and seeing the shell, but in different loca-

[1] One of the hills overlooking Sarajevo

tions in Sarajevo. I even dreamt once that I was driving my husband and children from the department store towards our home, because back then Marshal Tito Street used to be a two-way street, and then that same sound and that same shell came and slammed into the Old Town. And it has happened to me so many times, and for such a long time since that event, this dream has recurred with that sound. Those people, that blood, that street. And to this day, I still haven't walked down that street a single time.

Sarajevans Write Diaries

Šemsa Mehmedović, Telecommunications Engineer

1993, May

I wrote a diary. I am one of those people who wrote a diary. Since the first day, when we left Dobrinja where the chetniks drove us out, I started to write a diary. I cannot explain why I was doing it, but it was like some kind of ultimate need: I had to write. It was a space where I was trying to make it easy for myself, where I expressed my feelings. It was very hard for me, but not harder than it was for the others. My husband fought in the war, and he kept coming and going back. Every time he left, there was a terrible emptiness that had to find its place on the paper. When I remember certain situations, I feel that I'm about to start to cry. I wrote my diary until one day in 1996. It was the beginning of 1996. And I gave birth to our daughter. I had waited for that moment for seven years. After we had a son, that miracle took place during the war. People were in despair, there was shooting all over the place, and I was the happiest person in the world. At the same time my husband got out of the army after four years of trenches, mud, and fear. My mother came back from Germany after three years and seven months. Until that day I was writing my diary every day, but then I had to destroy that witness. I wanted to forget everything and put it behind me, because the most beautiful things were happening to me. We had no place to live, we were without material things, but I gave birth to my daughter and that was the most beautiful thing at that moment. I burned my diary. I wanted that, when the ship sank, the water would cover it and that no marks would be left on our souls. We will keep it in our memory, but we have to live on.

Appeal to the Artists of the World

Jasna Diklić, Actress

1993, May

We succeeded in that we were organized and in that the actors were able to come to the theater between the shells and sniper fire. There weren't

many of us. We made a point of going every day. I was one of those who went with great yearning, with great need, and with a certain amount of stubbornness. You know, I think that those people up in the mountains had an idea: a way in which they wanted to break that - and us - by taking away our human dignity. Theater workers were fighting that very battle: the battle for human dignity. If we had chosen to not perform as a means of resistance, I believe that human dignity would have been in greater danger. We did the right thing; there was an oasis of illusion in the theater, the illusion that normal life exists. I say illusion because it lasted for two hours.

Advice for Survival
Jana Grebo, Student

1993, July

I listened to music, rock. Took down the words and then sang them hundreds of times. That's how the days went by. When things got a bit quieter, I went out. But I didn't feel safe even then. But then you think again "it won't happen to me" and so you behave normally. Then, when it happened to someone I knew, then I'd begin to worry about myself and all those I love. So you start going to the cellar, then out again and so on. Then you think "it'll end and then I'll have something to talk about." But that fear of death that I tried so hard to hide could be seen. People who know me noticed it. But it was just that whatever was happening - that shooting and war - I was aware of it, but I tried, in every way I could, to not show it. Because the way I behaved affected my surroundings and my family. When something really terrible happened to someone, then I'd simply try to forget it, to go on. But somewhere subconsciously I was thinking about it. But I just had to try and go on.

Hunger in Sarajevo
Minka Muftić, Actress

1993, July

We went to find the costumes because we couldn't afford to make new ones. I picked one costume out from the wardrobe of that tailor shop and tried it on. I turned sideways towards the mirror, and Kaća said, "Oh great, it's good, we'll take it." It only had one sleeve. When I turned around to the other side, the dress was so asymmetric, and I was so thin that I asked, "What we were going to do with this Biafra[2] design detail?" As absurd as it may sound, the war was one of the most beautiful parts of my life. It is horrible to be face to face with death all the time, with tragedies, with

[2.] A reference to being overly thin due to hunger, such as the starvation stricken citizens of Biafra, a former secessionist state of south-eastern Nigeria

injuries. But there was another side as well: that purity of emotions which we shared with each other. Everything was clear, everything was simplified, and that made it human. Which was wonderful. When someone was scared, he would say that he was scared; when he loved someone, he would show that. If we wanted to help each other, we would act as if we did. As much as we could, under the circumstances.

Hunger in Sarajevo

Gordana Šerić, Housewife

1993, July

Every little bit of land - I don't think there were any real garbage scraps - was in use. We planted all kinds of vegetables: parsley, celery, carrots, tomatoes. On the balconies, even down the middle of Tito Street beside *Šipad*, you could see rows of wonderful tomatoes that summer. People used to stop and look at them. Vegetables seemed to take the place of flowers. But we completely forgot about flowers. In all the flower beds and in the parks where there had been flowers, there were vegetables. We especially cooked sort of thick soup with chard (a leafy green vegetable) and a bit of parsley and a little potato - it was really a delicacy when you added a potato - it improved the taste and the smell. We all lost a lot of weight. Ten or fifteen kilos. We could only satisfy our most basic requirements to stay alive. We didn't have any vitamins. They were lacking. Mainly vegetables, no hope of fruit, we couldn't even dream of it. We cooked the vegetables using minimum energy. With, say, fifteen pages of a magazine - in my case *Burda* - you could make soup. My husband called them disgusting messes but they kept us alive.

More Readers than Ever

Hatidža Demirović, Director of the City Library

1993, August

Somehow we reorganized the books in the beginning of '93. And after that we worked every day in spite of the fact that we had lost 130,000 books. We were in operation with 150,000, but that was about 40% of the total fund of books. Readers came, found peace of mind in the library; they found their peace in our books, in old novels, in old newspapers. They read everything from *Doctor Zhivago* to contemporary novels and scientific books. We had the feeling that people really needed us. Another thing that happened was that our central building, or rather our central book depot - where we kept scientific books, about 100,000 books at that one address - well, anyway, the building had to be evacuated so that one of the foreign embassies could move in. So in the middle of '94, when the war was going strong, when you couldn't pass because of the sniper fire, 20 or so women

literally carried those 100,000 books across the Skenderija Bridge, moving them manually. True, we did receive a little bit of help from the Civil Defense, but those women evacuated and carried periodicals, sometimes 50 kilograms at a time. Large bound volumes of newspapers and so on and so forth. We had some wounded, and some were even killed, but that didn't stop us from coming to work every day and being there to help the children, the students, and the scholars. Whole books were written, you know that yourself, scholarly works, all on the basis of our book fund.

Advice for Survival
Zlata Huseinčehajić, Owner of a Boutique

1993, November

Before the war I used to make and sell bridal gowns. I thought that this business was a luxury, and that I probably wouldn't be able to make any money from it in times of crisis. At the beginning of the war, we spent the money that we had pretty quickly, everybody did. Then they started, and my boutique was on the front line, so we took everything out of there and stored it in an attic, just in case. And then we forgot all about those things. Until people started coming to me, some time in the end of '93 or in the middle of that year, let's say. My friends started coming around, asking, "Zlata, do you have any more of those things?" "Yes, I do." And that's how I started to literally earn our living. Bridal gowns, we sold bridal gowns, we sold less, but we sold more then, than we do today, because then war profiteers would come. For some people it wasn't expensive, and we would rent gowns to them. I started making - I had a little baby at that time. I don't know - I would make one flower at home; you know, like a hair decoration, something specific. And for that I was able to go out and buy a package of disposable diapers. Otherwise, at that time, there was no way that I could afford it, because diapers were really expensive then. But then again, my flower was expensive. Still, someone did buy it. Anyway, I love the work that I do, but I am especially happy because during the war I supported my family to a major extent by doing the work that I love, and it turned out not to be so unnecessary and silly after all.

To Remain Normal in Bosnia
Nurdžihana Djozić, Editor in Chief
of the Magazines *Koridor* and *Žena 21*

1993, December

By the morning I had sketched out a plan for a paper that’s aim would be to help people retain their sanity. To help them stay normal in an un-normal situation. Barbara Smith said that nowhere in the world had she

ever heard of a popular publication available to a wide readership on how to keep one's sanity. But she said - let's try, and if we succeed, then O.K. At first, people bought *Koridor* and came to the first Mental Health Clinic with a certain amount of scepticism. But we worked in tandem and both were a success. We managed to break down people's feeling of suspicion. In the first 6 months 130,000 people came to the clinic - so that after that, a second and a third clinic were started. In the end there were seven in different parts of the town. Their aim was to provide a place in busy parts of the town that people could easily get to and talk about what they were afraid of. People at that time were saying that we would all go mad. I lived on Dobrinja then. I moved about a lot and listened to people who were frightened of the shells landing all around us - of the shelling - of the fires - it was hell. Of course people couldn't feel normal, it wasn't a normal situation. One kept hearing the refrain: "We shall go mad, we shall go mad!" All in a popular style - and we used it in all kinds of situations, and people began to understand that it was all right to be afraid, that one should be afraid, should cry, scream - that those were all ways we could free ourselves from stress. That it was especially important that people should stick together, that what was happening to them was happening to others too. People would come kilometers and kilometers even when it was dangerous to walk about the town. Finding company, belonging to a group, kept them going. Going to the clinic where they could just talk about what they felt, what they thought. It was very important to people and it kept us up; there were so many people. A while ago I mentioned one number, now I remember another - 200,000. Two hundred thousand people came to the clinic just to talk about their troubles, their fear.

Massacre in the Market Place of Markale[3]

Vahida Tvico, Vendor

1994, February

I was working at the market. Around noon, while we were working, I told my husband: "Let's go home." I got scared somehow and I said: "Let's go home." He says: "Let's finish our cigarettes." So we stayed. At that moment, the grenade fell. When the grenade fell, I was sitting on the table and because of the fear at that moment I wanted to hide underneath it. My husband caught me, and I didn't know anything after that. When I moved, when I got up, when I moved, I only saw that it all fell onto the market, and because of the fear, we started running. I don't know where or what. He took me to his cousin's coffee shop. I was shaking. I don't know what I was doing

[3] The Markale (marketplace) massacres were two massacres committed by the Army of Republika Srpska on civilians during the siege of Sarajevo. The second attack was the stated reason for NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serb forces that would eventually lead to the Dayton Peace Accords and the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

during that time and what was happening to me 'til I, 'til I got home. When I got home, the picture of the market place came back to me. I just heard them screaming, running. I have no idea what or how it was. Well, I remember that and the fear. I was pregnant at the time. I gave birth to my daughter. Now the child is sick. She's got a high fever. The fear must have passed over to the child during pregnancy. And what will happen, we'll see. I keep taking her to see doctors.

The Roses on Tršćanska Street
Amina Begović, Actress

1994, September

On September 11, 1994 the snipers were again shooting at Tršćanska Street as they had been doing every day before. That was the only light in the dark. That means that for a few seconds when the tracer bullet flies by, you can see what's in the room. And September is one of the most beautiful months in Sarajevo; it can be very beautiful. Everywhere around it was grey, the town was destroyed, everything burnt, the *Unis* building had been burnt; it looked very ugly. Suddenly in that greyness, on the other side of Tršćanska Street, in front of the *Unis* building, I saw beautiful roses. Roses that somebody had planted when there was peace and when it was supposed to look like that. Those roses went somewhat wild during the war. Nobody cut them, or watered them or whatnot. However, they were there, then, in all that greyness. Meaning, at a time when nobody could clean up Tršćanska Street. When nobody dared to go out, to take a broom and clean up all that glass, suddenly, the roses sprang up from the midst of all that. My feelings were that beauty couldn't be described, nor the happiness I felt. I dressed and went across Tršćanska – you know, one sets one's teeth and runs as fast as one can, because it was a clear day. And I took some scissors and I cut those roses and brought them back into my room. Later, people asked me: "Where did you get those roses?" I said: "From in front of the *Unis* building." They said it was impossible: "You didn't cross Tršćanska Street because of the roses, did you?" "I did," I said.

The Quest for Wood
Sabiha Nadarević, Housewife

1994, September

It was terribly expensive. Nobody had the money to buy it. Personally, I would go looking for wood every day, both in the morning and in the afternoon. But I would wear brown pants, a green blouse, and a green kerchief over my hair so that the chetniks wouldn't be able to see me from Borije or Trebević. I would go up past *Džavid Haverić*, up past the school,

every day. I would bring back five bags, two under my arms and three I would kick. But it wasn't hard wood. It was pine needles from fir trees. They were just pine needles, you understand. And when I took them home, then we had this little stove that I used for making coffee. It was just a miniature little thing, that stove. But whenever they felled a tree, I would get up in the morning, whenever I heard a chain saw being used up there, I would run up there in the woods, believe it or not, and try to get some of the wood. Whenever a big tree fell, a swarm of people would attack the tree. And I would take whatever little was left over. I was satisfied though. And if I got a branch, that would be like a bonus for me. Then I would tie it to my back with some cord and carry it back home so that we would survive.

A Journey trough the Tunnel

Gertruda Munitić, Prima Donna of the Sarajevo Opera

1994, November

It was five in the morning when the car drove me to the entrance of the tunnel. The tunnel was so small that I hadn't even noticed it, all the time I continuously asked the driver where the tunnel was. "Its right here," he said, and I could not believe it. I said that it was a hole. How are we going to pass through that tunnel? And to be honest, I have a fear of closed spaces, some kind of phobia. I don't like small rooms and I don't like heights either. But I had no idea what was yet to come. So we stepped closer to that tunnel and waited for my luggage. The person that pushed the little wagon with my luggage on it advised me to sit on it because the tunnel was so narrow and small that it was impossible for two people to walk through it at the same time from opposite directions. And there were a bunch of people besides me: ten or twenty of them. It was an interesting situation - funny, I should say. As I'm always in a positive mood and I always want to make the best out of gloomy situations (and of course, I was afraid of that tunnel - more than I was afraid of the shells in Sarajevo), I sat on my suitcases and while that man pushed the wagon I started, "La la la la, O sole mio, la la la." It was still in a quiet voice, "Kore, kore, ingrato," and then, "haaaaaaaaa," and the people behind me said, "Please don't, Gertruda," but again, to give me some strength, I started, "Aaaaaaaa." They begged me to stop: "Please, Gertruda, don't do that - this whole tunnel is going to collapse on us." And then we started to laugh and that hundred or more meters of tunnel just disappeared in a moment and we were on the other side. Outside, there was fighting. We kept our heads down, waiting, in the same mood, for things to get quiet. We went to Mrs. Fata to spend the night and she was very kind. But it all lasted for a long time. Not until the next day, four in the morning, could we continue on our way to Igman. Everyone was on foot. They had some kind of rope pathway there but people walked and it was very, very high. When I saw how

high it was, I said, "Mama mia, I can't climb this, no way. No way, I'm not going." But I got a wagon and I took my chances. I had a "feeling", a sixth sense. I always paid attention to what my instincts were telling me, to what my guardian angel was saying. Because we all have it, you only have to listen to it. And I developed that during the war. I said to my driver, "Don't worry. I can feel that not even one shell is going to fall while we are climbing Igman." And he said, "I don't think so, Mrs. Gertruda. I was here yesterday and a shell fell two meters from me." But I repeated that, today, it would not. So we started to climb. I watched people climbing from one side while we were making turns. I was very calm, but the driver was nervous. He did not know which way to choose where to go. He showed me all the positions from where we could be shot. Finally, we got to the top and he said: "This can't be true, they haven't fired a shot and I can't believe it." And then the tire exploded.

Wedding under Siege
Smilja Gavrić, Citizen

1994, September

Well, that wedding of mine, the decision itself to get married in the middle of the war, was just normal to me at that time, regardless of everything else. I mean, the total poverty, how we would arrange the wedding, how we would entertain the people - our dear friends who would be there and so on, nothing could discourage us. Not even the fact that I had no wedding dress, nothing to wear, nor my husband who was also a refugee. But he got shoes from a dear friend of ours, a jacket from a relative of mine, and a pair of pants. And I say: "What am I going to do?" He says: "Well, look in your closet, you'll find something." And so it was, I found a little dress that I bought a long time ago somewhere in Athens and of course, I had to wash it. There was no dry-cleaner's, nothing, but after all, after washing it, I couldn't iron it, you know. So, dressed like that, in my crumpled dress, I received the wedding party and everything. I still remember to this day, how my husband's best friend Goran said to me: "How can you go to your wedding in such a creased dress?" But I really didn't mind, nor did that creased dress bother me or mean anything to me. We were still in all of that: we were so… (how shall I put it?) in that lovely atmosphere. And even as we were going - we went on foot, you know, to the wedding - we didn't even have a car, there was nothing, we all went on foot. And when we were coming back, unfortunately, they shelled, so that we had to, we ran in different directions just after we got out. We ran to separate from each other, and then we went to a little restaurant where my husband's company had organized a sort of luncheon for us, and there, we even had real meat.

Giving Birth

Hatidža Demirović, Director of the *City Library*

1995, June

On the 7th of June 1995, there was a massive attack on Sarajevo. Of course, I didn't know that it was going to happen. I had made an appointment that day to give birth, for a caesarean section, and everything (from the medical standpoint) was over. I remember that the nurse woke me: "Hatidža, you gave birth to a boy." I knew that, and I remember that I was cold. I was half-conscious. Next to me I saw another woman who had given birth. She had a visitor. I kept on losing consciousness, and then it happened. At one point I heard shots, and then I was out again, and this kept on happening on and off until one moment when I opened my eyes and realized that something was wrong. My first thought was that it was a shell, because I had already had such an experience in '92, when I was wounded by a piece of shrapnel from a mortar shell. And just in case, I pulled my hand out from under the covers and saw that it was bloody. And I said to myself, "Yes, this is what happened in '92." I look around the room and see that no one's there. I'm alone there and so I just call the nurse. She appears at the door and I say, "mortar shell". And she says, "What are you talking about? There wasn't any explosion." I just show her my bloody hand like this, and she runs over to me to take a look. Then she goes out to call the doctor, and he takes a look and goes out again, and then they all started running. They pulled out one of those - it wasn't a wheelchair, but a bed. They pulled the bed out into the hallway; I remember they were in the hallway. I found myself between two rows of men who had come to be on a medical committee. It was a military hospital, and from department to department I saw that those men were crying. I simply saw tears in the eyes of every other one. They were all sorry, all of them were afraid. But I just didn't feel scared at that point, because I was suddenly conscious that I had given birth and that the baby was safe, and that I had been wounded by either a bullet or shrapnel from a shell. But they'll patch me up because they patched up Marko, my neighbor, who lived next door and was wounded by a sniper bullet. If they patched him up, then they'll do the same to me. That was my first thought, and then we were wandering from laundry room to operating room, because they were all confused. They didn't know where to go next, or how to call the elevator. But I still wasn't afraid yet - up until Dr. Nakaš arrived and said to me, "What's wrong, Hatidža?" Well, then I remember that I took his hand in both of mine, and then I was afraid. But then he said to the nurse, "Give me the small kit." They probably have their own set of code-names, and then I knew that I wasn't badly wounded. Because if they were going to use a small kit on me, there must be some bigger kit also, which meant that I wasn't badly wounded. After that, I don't remember a thing, until when they brought me out to the hallway again. And that's when I felt the pain in my belly, because

that's also when they explained to me what had happened. A bullet shot from a machine gun had come through the window of the hospital room where I lay, where I was being treated after the caesarean section. They explained to me that I was not badly wounded. After that, I liked to tell people that a bullet that had gotten twisted in the doctors' bulletin board grazed me. It went through the metal window frame, through some mattresses, the bulletin board, through my three blankets, through the cover that the nurse had put on me because I was cold and just grazed me. But my little Hamza was O.K., and I stayed in the hospital for eight more days. My baby came out alive and well. I left the hospital on my own two feet and went back to work. I was on maternity leave for 18 days and then I started to work.

(Encyclopedia: *The Siege of Sarajevo 1992-1996, 2005*)

Longing for Daybreak
Letters from Sarajevo

My dearest,

Thank you a thousand times for the parcel you sent in March, which we collected a few days ago. Thank you, most of all, for the letter which always makes me rejoice the most. And thank you for the sugar that is being sold at 20-25 marks in the market place, while the humanitarian aid had given us 400 grams for two persons. That was quite a long time ago.

My hands are much better now. They only react to the change of temperature, so when I put them in water, they turn purple. That is a consequence of the winter cold. All my fingernails have a bulge growing towards their tip. But when there is no water, and the water tank doesn't come – it is horrible. And when it comes, we have to pay five marks to fill every canister, no matter how much it can hold. We did not eat one kilo of vegetables altogether last year. Let there only be bread, which has not been available for days now; we have planted some tomatoes on the balcony and we'll be fine…

No one seems to be concerned with their weight any longer, but people have problems with loss of hair, splitting fingernails, skin cracking, etc… It seemed to me that nothing could be worse than last winter and this summer without water, but the worst thing is the ghetto atmosphere and the *Gestapo* mentality. I won't go into any details here. I believe that every single person here, no matter what ethnicity or religion they are, wants this to stop and to leave this ghostly city. If I was to be transferred to a normal city now, I would probably feel as if I'd arrived from another planet and it would probably take me a very long time to get used to a normal way of life again.

And when I – if I ever live to see my son again, who is so far away form me, it will be someone else: a grown up, a slightly estranged young man, and not my little son whom I last saw a year ago, when he was fourteen. I don't know how he is going to spend the holidays, or where, and with whom and how, and that makes me infinitely sad.

Dear Mother,

Erna wrote to us and said that she had spoken with you by telephone and that you were very sad and worried about us. I would like to tell you not to worry, but I am very well aware that's not possible. We would all like to live as we used to live and to have our children back. We haven't had any letters from you in Belgrade lately, nor did we get any from Zagreb or from Požega. My heart is so torn apart, but still, we hope for the best and

that keeps us going. When they were making this survey the other day and asked us what the most difficult thing in this war was: the shortage of fuel, water or electricity, I replied that for me, the most difficult thing was the isolation and separation from those I love. Mother, I will come to you soon. You can be sure of that, just take care of yourself and wait for me. I love you all very much. Do write to me, please.

Dear everyone,

There has been no decent news from you for four months. Your five parcels have been a lifeline for us. The onion and potatoes we got from you made a whole world of difference to our diet. Now that spring has arrived, nettles, dandelions and other grasses have come out. We all have our little gardens on our balconies. We exchange seeds and various things that we get in our parcels and we help out one another this way. I feel terribly bad because of all of you there. Please, tell me this frankly: how is mother? Please…

Cherries must be ripening where you are. I can barely imagine how great that is. Mother's real condition is not completely clear to me, but I have a notion. There is nothing I can do, really. That's why I keep silent. Out of shame. I hope that I will be able to leave for Belgrade on the 3rd of June, at best. I can say that I live for that day.

The hardest part of this ghastly and dirty war where everyone cheats everyone else is not the meager food, or the cold, the mortar shells and the water and electricity shortages, but this hopelessness… Our nerves have cracked. We can no longer stand to see what we see and hear what we hear around us. We listen to the news from both sides, and it is all about evil things. You can rarely hear of somebody having helped someone else.

I wonder what my children will come back to, one day. I don't know what they think, or how they have changed over the past year. Hoping to see you again, I send you all my love.

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Inja

Sarajevo, 24 July '93

Dear everyone,

If I am to talk about this city, I'd better start with notes about things we don't have and things you can live without.

Electricity is the least painful. Most of the city hasn't had a regular supply of this form of energy since '92. We were among the few lucky ones who were connected to some of the priority supply lines, so that we enjoyed that luxury throughout April and May. Then it was cut off again, so that since April, we've had electricity twice, from midnight till six o'clock in the morning. During those "lucky" nights you could hear all the appliances buzzing and tumbling – we were all up and about. Washing machines, irons and chargers were plugged in... All in all, electricity is not such a big problem. You see – laundry can be hand-washed, rooms can be cleaned with a broom, the iron can be heated on a gas stove and we listened to the news at our neighbors' who had charged their batteries... so, we were generally ok. However, when there was a power cut throughout the whole city, then the water supply was stopped, and the telephone lines were cut off. It has been like that for 45 days now. Fortunately, public fountains have been organized (our authorities bluntly call them WATERING PLACES) and we can fill our canisters there. Those did not exist last winter and we had to wait in the basements (where water reached the pipes) for five or six hours, in order to carry 20 or 30 liters of water home. The fountain is a couple of kilometers away from our apartment and I can tell you that water is by far the heaviest natural resource. You need at least 25 liters a day for the bare necessities. I was desperate until I learned to ride a bicycle, and since then, getting water supplies has almost been fun. I can carry five five-liter canisters on my bike, so that I can make two or three journeys a day, as they are considerably shorter and easier, so that I usually have some water in stock. Actually, you have to have these stocks, because as soon as fighting begins, these journeys are out of the question and the only solution is collecting rainwater.

And, finally: gas. The shortage of this fuel is by far the hardest. The gas shortage means running up and down the parks, collecting twigs and paper (that have all been scooped up) and burning all that in stoves made of tins and having to blow at them all the time until a small loaf of brown bread, a handful of rice or one or two bowls of soup made of some grass blades come out of your pan. At the moment, we are out of electricity, water and gas. However, the most horrifying thing is the invasion of rodents. Our apart-

ment is full of mice, like all the others. We can't get any deterrents against this pest, that's why I will be bold enough to ask you, if that is not too expensive, to send us some glue or any other product against these nasty creatures that keep me awake for nights (for fear that I might wake up with a mouse or rat on my hand, stomach or face…) Let alone the invasion of cockroaches – I've been sleeping with a slipper under my pillow for a year now.

In time, all these things become part of our everyday lives and this frightens me the most. Our individual potential to adapt seems boundless, and we are being overwhelmed by the Beirut syndrome: "Normal life under mortar shells and gunfire". Also, I am terribly scared of the growing number of people whose only occupation and source of income is war. When I say this is a drastic figure, I mean that next year this percentage will be 90 percent. War and war trafficking will be the only means of support for a vast majority of the people who stay in this area. All the normal occupations (except for doctors and firefighters) have become useless. For over a year, it hasn't made any sense to say that you are a lawyer, hairdresser or tailor, an economist or architect, a builder, miner, actor, painter or anything else. If you don't have one of these modern occupations (I am not going to catalog them because, after all, I want this letter to reach you) you simply do not have a chance to survive.

Amid this pandemonium, some nice things also happen, which are pushed to the limit of absurdity. In a situation where garbage has not been collected from the streets for more than two months and where our stomachs are in no better state than the city – my friends form jazz bands in the basements and a perfect comic-strip library has been opened in our neighborhood; we sunbathe and sprinkle ourselves with water and have never been reading so many good books in such quantities. You simply can't be bothered by "miserable", down-to-earth problems such as water, electricity and gas after Jung, Borghes or Kant, and it is much healthier to observe war from the angle of social pathology than through the screen of mortar shells – one of which has just slammed into my yard.

I do not see a way out of this. I keep in touch with my father with laconic phrases such as "we are alive and in good health", without going into details (and it would be dangerous to say more) but I really wonder where that endless inner energy is coming from. As I see it, all this can go on for decades and I would be very happy if this situation remained unchanged this time next year, because I believe it can only change for the worse.

I hope I have not been a drag going into all these details. I wanted you to get a notion of the atmosphere here. What just crossed my mind is that the people of this city are trying to send cheerful, optimistic and humorous letters to their folks, and their recipients out there go to pieces when they read them. That is why I want to finish by saying that you must not be depressed by all this (I am not too depressed myself) because things are simply the way they are, this is our casual "daily routine", our "normal circumstances". Believe me – however unconvincing this may sound – it is easier to

go through these things that to write about them and to read this, I am sure.
Walk through the park for me and have a cold beer. Take care and everything will be ok.

I love you very much.
Your, Inja

Sarajevo, 3 March 1994

Dear everyone,

Saša brought us your letter. I have been sitting for two or three hours already, thinking about you and my father and about the relationship you have with him. The only thing I know about him is that I love him very much and that he is a wonderful person. I know why I'm saying this – it's not like I was an infatuated child. Everything nice that I have, I got from him. This has especially been true in these war times, when everything is so filthy and miserable. Throughout my life, Dad has been instilling me discreetly with a serum against all this and has eventually worked a miracle of pedagogic genetics. That miracle is called – having no dilemma.

I am simply resistant to diseases such as – hate, envy, feeling miserable… Don't get me wrong. I don't think that I am at all perfect. Far from that! I am not saying my father is perfect, either. I only know that I am happy to be as I am and I am very grateful to him for that, because it is exclusively to his merit. Many people I know have fallen apart in this war, or will soon do so, and that explosion is louder than all the mortar shells in this world. But there are still many things I have to learn about this martial art called life, so tell him I need him, urgently, to continue my education. I won't mind him retiring when he has finished the job, but as I am a dull child, he must count on many decades of hard work, without playing hooky. Having to exchange curt letters with him really hits me hard, but with the sword of censorship above my head, I cannot say any of these things to him.

The wonderful parcel Milica sent us arrived twenty days ago, but the envelope with a letter from her and Omer arrived only two or three days ago. These things are such a drag, so I take this opportunity, which I consider to be more reliable than the Humanitarian Aid, to send this letter for Milica. I hope you won't mind sending it to her, since I am always asking you to forward some letters for me. In this letter, I tried to explain to Milica the phenomenon of parcels in this city. I think that it is a curiosity which you may also find interesting.

Beba told me about the project you've been working on and I have been trying to reach you for days, without success. I have just given up (at 10 p.m.), having tried really hard. I invest so much effort in these things because every change is a gift for our senses that have been all ears these days. We have more or less neglected everything else. But we keep listening for a whole range of sounds, day and night: from remote and close detona-

tions, to the distinct exclamations from the neighborhood. Through our nylon window panes, we get breaking news of major events in the city: "Water has arrived in the basement!"; "Edo, go get the humanitarian aid."; "Has bread arrived?"… That is why, trust me, you have a brilliant and discriminating audience in this city where we have been deprived of everything except that for our ears. During the long months without electricity, we live on the entertainment we obtain through half-empty batteries and adapted transistor radios to gratify our avid ears. Those ears will devour just about everything. On top of everything, comes the coarseness and vulgarity that floats in the ether. A specific form of entertainment is commenting on the news out loud – which its authors see as a very serious matter. That is one of the forms of collective entertainment that induces roars of laughter. For the most part, comments aren't even necessary, as some radio stations keep us in hysterics all the time. There is only one thing that most people find difficult to digest: pathetic comments that make me feel sick – for which, if you asked me, I would prescribe a life sentence in this area. There is nothing more humiliating and hurtful than a pathetic fool in front of the microphone, or with a pen in his hand. People here are very sensitive to it and take in only the smallest doses of it. That's why I dread my own letters. Perhaps some things that are really part of our reality and happening to me or around me, can sound like trash somewhere else.

I am so happy for you, because you are where you are and doing what you are doing. We can watch the First Channel of TV Belgrade and I think that all those who want to be kind to their brains have to get away from there. People like you, particularly, don't deserve to live in such a chaotic environment. I have been very worried about you, and still am; about all the people there whom I hold dear. I wish all luck possible to those who have remained behind. I also wish that you could finally live a normal and dignified life. This will all be over one day. But until that time, we all need a lot of good and strong nerves. This is the first time I have written to you so openly and unreservedly. I have always feared that I could get you in trouble with some of my comments. There are so many maniacs everywhere. All this is contrary to nature – not human nature, but nature in the sense of the change of the seasons, the rising of the sun, gravity and everything that surrounds us. It really seems to me that this cannot last long. It will crash down to where it belongs and perish in its own absurdity. It is well worth waiting for that day. I do hope it will arrive in my lifetime. Until then, stay happy in the normal world.

When I think about you, your suffering seems to be much more subtle and painful than ours, because you have the possibility to choose. Do not listen to the hollow stories about the Courageous citizens of Sarajevo and do not admire us. My courage is not my choice. I have developed it unintentionally and all I can say is that I am a mutant of this war. The fact that I (no longer) thrust myself on the floor when a mortar shell slams into my building or the neighboring one, or that I run across the intersection where some-

one was killed three minutes ago, still under sniper fire – that is not courage. This is my life and the life of all the people here. I sincerely hope that one day I will be able to indulge in the luxury of being the biggest coward in this world. I cannot be that now, because if I allow myself to chicken out, I simply won't survive. There is no fear, there is only HORROR.

That horror has penetrated some things that used to be casual. A line of cars speeding along the street and honking used to evoke images of a wedding. Nowadays, this is the sound of death. Following every massacre, a spectral orchestra of honking cars rushes through the streets. Those vehicles howl instead of their mutilated passengers. That sound makes my stomach turn and I am sure it will, as long as I live. My brain has imposed some kind of censorship and simply stops taking in information beyond a certain point. But the sound I am talking about breaks that barrier. I viewed the death at Markale as something that had barged into my city from another dimension. I realized what was happening only when I heard the sound. The Death at Markale is something a normal human brain cannot fathom. No wonder those idiots from Pale say that those were puppets. But still, one of those puppets' names was Zlatko Ćosić, and we'd been together at university. That market place did not belong to our dimension that day. That was pure sci-fi. Many other scenes and events could also be ascribed to this genre. My Dad also lives in another dimension. Otherwise, how could I possibly live with the knowledge that he lives one kilometer from my window in a straight line and that I haven't even been able to find out whether he is alive for months now.

As for myself, I am still idle and this has been very hard for me. In November, I will meet the requirements to enter the *Lawyer's Body* and I hope that by then there will be some normal work to do. At the moment, even if I possessed a working license, most of the cases are criminal, which, in this war, are really heinous. From time to time, I draw up a power of attorney or a contract, predominantly for friends.

On the other hand, I have learned to do a great deal of things that make my life easier. For example, I have learned to make thin layers of dough and to knit socks. So I am going to knit a multicolored pair for each of you. I love you very much. You are the nicest surprise that happened in my life. I thought that all Dad's friends had long forgotten that I existed. And then you came up.

Your, Inja

Sarajevo, 5 March 1994

My dear Milica,

It's been two weeks already since we received your wonderful parcel, and yet it is only now that I have found the time to thank you infinitely for it. Sarajevo has been a big mess for the past month. These two words –

big mess – have a special meaning, because the notion of MESS has exceeded all the limits of normality for a very long time now. There was a lot of noise, pain and uncertainty. However, the shelling has stopped and that's the most important thing. Statistically, ten people a day were being killed in this city until recently. So it is not hard to figure out how many lives have been spared since 6 February. Everything is easier now.

You have really touched us with your attention. I know so little about you, barely a few details I heard from my father. I have read your beautiful letter to many of my friends. This kind of support means so much to me. All of them send you their regards, because they feel reassured that the trust they have in human beings has not been in vain, however much they have been trying to convince us of the opposite.

I suppose that you are interested in knowing what trying to live in this city is like. I am afraid there are few things around me that you could possibly understand and it should stay that way. For our part, we also get a faded image of the horror you are going through. The most important thing is that we are on your side – you wonderful and normal people, who have not changed, which must have been extremely hard to achieve.

I would like to tell you how much joy your presents have brought to us. This was something special. I will try to explain the experience called – a parcel: a cardboard box filled with food acquired a very special meaning here a long time ago. When I carry it home (i.e. drag it, usually on a sled or trolley cart), I have the feeling that I am taking a dear friend to my place for coffee. And then, when I manage to push it all the way to the kitchen (that is where the opening ritual usually begins) and when I open it, the first smell that comes out if it is that of attention and love that instantly begin fueling your brain and soul with the knowledge that you are not alone, that there's someone on my side who loves me and cares about me, who understands me and wants me to survive. Then I also feel a surge of responsibility to pull out of this alive, healthy and sane. I want all of this just so as to not let down my dear friend and her great love packed up in a simple cardboard box. I also have to say how strange that feeling is – the feeling of receiving love in a brown cardboard box tied with rope. It (that love) flutters out of that parcel first and starts hopping around the house, touching every one of us and endearing us, making us happy. The opening of the parcel is, by all means, an act which is performed in front of the whole family. We all clap our hands, caper about, rejoice and cry a little. We invariably take everything out of the parcel first and dig in the bottom to check whether there is a small note we failed to see. Then, we take out things that are wrapped in newspapers and read the papers. After that, we leave everything lying around and imagine who bought that food and from where it came, what they were thinking at that moment, how they carried it home and packed a parcel and then went and queued to send it. I think how you must be wondering, just like I do, whether and when the parcel will ever reach us.

Eventually, when the parcel is completely unpacked, all the family members assemble. We engage in long and thorough discussions as to who

will get what. I am describing a custom that is as old as the relief parcels, which I haven't mentioned to you so far. Namely, small items are taken out of every parcel (a package of soup, a few prunes or onions) and given away to the people we love (they do the same when they get a parcel or obtain food in some other way). Those are seemingly small things, but every such small thing means a great deal to us. In this way, one single parcel cheers up and makes at least five or six families happy. Once we have concluded our discussion, we take these goodies to our friends in the neighborhood. We hand over the gifts and talk for hours about how the parcel arrived, from whom and through whom, and how we carried it home. They admire our generosity and we try to comfort them by saying that their parcel, which they have been expecting for months, will surely arrive soon. And if they really get it, they come to us, and this goes in circles…

Let me tell you just one more thing: you will never know to what extent the parcel that reaches us is exploited. The final point in the fate of every parcel is that the entire packaging and wrapping (I mean, the wrapping of every single item in the parcel) goes to the stove and fuels the preparation of a rich and wonderful meal.

Please do not get this letter wrong. My intention was merely to convey to you part of the atmosphere around me; moreover, its bright side.

I hope that life is a bit easier for you, too, now. We've heard that prices are falling and that things are going back to normal in a way. Anyway, I wish you a lot of strength and courage. Madness is bound to come to its logical end. We will hold on until then, out of sheer curiosity, at least.

I send you all my love and a big THANK YOU for your cheerful guest in a cardboard box.

Your, Inja

Sarajevo, 9 August 1994

Dear everyone,

Yesterday I came across my friend who was supposed to send my last letter to you and I was astounded to see that he had not got out of the city yet. I hope that this mail will eventually leave tomorrow and that you'll be getting two of my letters at once. Had I known this, I would've found another way to get in touch with you.

I visited Beba recently and we enjoyed ourselves on her balcony with a lavish, good breakfast and a lot of coffee (she had just received a parcel from Emir). We kept saying, "If only Omer could see us now". We had such a good time, that finally, it became embarrassing. So we decided to convince you that there is no need to worry about us.

The news is that Beba got this flat at Ali Pasha Field, which is on the front line. It's on the eleventh floor. The journey there is a real adventure: a two-hour game called "Be Rambo". The moment you get on the tram at

Marindvor, you have to lie on the floor, because there are still many who would like to target their sniper guns at your head. If you survive this and if the traffic does not come to a standstill, (because someone gets hit every now and then, and it stops the traffic) this means of transport will take you to the Television building. Afterwards, you go hiking for about 45 minutes in strange landscapes. The high frequency of pedestrian circulation has resulted in burgeoning trade in this area. People are selling things all over the place, which is reminiscent of the all-too-familiar Oriental commotion: people pushing one another and bargaining, eating roast chicken wrapped in newspapers, merchants storming the passers-by shouting some rhymes (the refrains of which are often lewd). As every patch of earth in Sarajevo is being cultivated and something has been sown or grown on it, I make my way between the buildings and corn stalks, while some goats follow me all the time, watching me (I panic at the sight of a horned animal). But the worst thing is that it is unfamiliar terrain for me, which makes me feel totally insecure because I don’t know where the snipers can "have me". Eventually, when I reach her skyscraper, I invariably run into some persistent fool imploring me to enter the elevator.

Because, "We can be sure that, if there is a power cut, Meho will get us out. He is such a reliable and conscientious person, why is everyone being so suspicious?" Anyway, I am not so easily taken in and stick to the stairs. When I knock on Beba’s door, I am in urgent need of a GP and a good shrink.

Not long ago, I returned from there on a tractor because the trams were not running. Luckily, I was appropriately dressed – I was wearing a gray and green Italian ensemble, Italian shoes and a polished handbag (which served as an endless source of amusement for all the other passengers). All in all, the visit to Beba is a real tourist adventure with a remedial effect on any claustrophobic feelings you might have.

There is another place I go to in order to feel better. That is the large park in the center of Sarajevo, where I can spend five or six hours. It is the only park in the city that has remained intact and it is really beautiful. I find a position from which I can see nothing but greenery and I perform my own photosynthesis for hours. I have an insatiable urge to be close to nature. So many abnormal things have entered our systems that I wonder whether we will ever go back again to our old selves.

A friend of mine works in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and he has been urging me to visit my father. Needless to say, I would do this immediately, but Dad has sent me several messages insisting that I must not do that. I am waiting for someone I can trust to enquire about it again. If I could be sure that he was sending me these messages just because he is concerned about me, I would not hesitate to go, but I am afraid that I could get him in some kind of trouble.

He still lives in an old movie. We recently got two messages from him through the Red Cross. Let me quote a few things from there. The message dated 23 June ’94: "... If she is still in Sarajevo (referring to our secre-

tary), you could start working together and I am sure I will be able to come and help you by the end of the summer." The other message dated 10 July '94: "… Judging by the speed at which these messages travel, your letters full of concern will probably be arriving for another six months after the end of the war, which will be over any day now."

This optimism of his drives me crazy, because there is nothing left to justify it. It occurred to me that he might be writing this way because my letters are all the more depressive, in order to encourage and help me. On the other hand, if this is not the reason, then his escapism is such that I simply can't see how a reasonable man, who has always been motivated by just and realistic aims, could have embraced this utopia. He has been repeating these and similar ideas for two years, allowing himself to do nothing, because things will be resolved automatically anyway. I am afraid of this condition of his, because I don't think it is natural.

I do hope this letter won't get lost on the way and that it will reach you alright.

If, by some miracle, this came to an end, it would be so great if you could live in Sarajevo. One day, when this is over, I think that this city stands the biggest chance of going back to what it used to be. Although atrocities have happened here, only a relatively small number of people have been infected with hideous hatred. I might be wrong, but I am not at odds with this city.

Do send me a short note.

I love you. Inja

Sarajevo, 30 November 1994

I have just read my unsent letter and I don't want to throw it away. I am going to send it along with this one.

Good God, is it possible that I have lived to be relieved and happy?! I am writing this some ten minutes after I spoke to Dad and Omer. My head is still buzzing. Only now that we have finished talking have I realized that everything is true, and that no one will awaken me from this wonderful dream. When I look in the direction of Dad's house, I feel pain. It is that type of physical pain you feel when you suddenly let go of a terribly heavy burden you've been carrying (only this time, the pain is not in the small of the back, but also in the head). Then you need a few minutes to straighten up, to realize that the burden is no longer there; the pain goes away and you can relax. Nevertheless, the fear is still present. It has become chronic and difficult to get rid of, like any disease of this kind. I have to fight against it.

Omer, when you told me that you would put me through to Dad[4], the first thought that crossed my mind was: I must not faint and I must not

[4] Her father had arrived in Belgrade, having gotten out of the part of Sarajevo called Grbavica.

start crying because I could lose my voice. I still can't understand that I could have been struck with so much luck without paying a price for it (this is an incurable fear). His voice… My Goodness!!! His normal, unchanged voice, his intonation and sentence rhythm… everything sounded so natural. I would never have imagined that simply hearing my Dad's voice over the phone could make me so happy. Everything else was contained in that voice: his face, his smile…

Old boy, you have no idea what a good deed you have just performed!

Kisses to all of you, Inja

Inja Pašalić

(Letters from Two Sarajevos, 1996)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

My First Admission

Many of us who feel like Yugoslavs deep down – large numbers of us – have been driven into such a position that we don't dare say what we are and how we feel. We have been forced to declare ourselves on the basis of the origin of our names. It was a terrible experience having to "confess" to my five-year-old son – confession is such an ugly term for a situation when, for the first time in my life, I admitted that I was a Muslim woman. It was on the occasion of my son's fifth birthday: I had to explain to him that the Muslims are not inferior or dirtier that the others, or an uglier people. This is how it happened.

My son was going to have a birthday party and I recounted the names of the children that should be invited. When I came to "Muhamed" my son said: "No, mother, we won't invite Muhamed." Surprised, I asked him why we shouldn't invite Muhamed (I thought that they might've had a quarrel). He answered: "We won't invite Muhamed because everybody says that he is a Muslim."

"What of it?" I asked.

My son said: "Muslims are dirty. I am not going to play with Muhamed anymore and I don’t want to invite him to my birthday party."

That was terrible. When I tried to explain to my son that his grandmother was Muslim, that his dear aunt was Muslim and that his own mother was Muslim... he began to cry...

That was terrible. He told me: "All other people can be Muslims, but not you." I embraced him and kissed him, and then tried to give him an explanation. I drew a map of Yugoslavia and told him which nations lived in which republics. I told him that it was not important what ethnic group someone belonged to and that there was no reason to hate anyone just because of their ethnicity. That was terrible... For the first time in my life I was forced to declare myself as Muslim, although to this day, three years after the incident, I still genuinely feel like a Yugoslav...

It is, however, no longer possible to declare oneself as a Yugoslav. It first began in Bosnia: your name was enough for a permanent ethnic ID. People were being told: "No, that’s not what you are. You belong to that people." And then, when I escaped to Germany because of the war in Sarajevo, I soon found out that the Germans had accepted this model. If you declared yourself as a Yugoslav, you were automatically labeled like someone from "the bad new Yugoslavia, from terrible Serbia". If you insisted on being a Yugoslav, you ran the risk of losing your residence permit. Or else, without

even asking you, they would infer: "Oh, you were born in Sarajevo – that means you are Bosnian". And that would seal it. I come from Sarajevo, from an old Muslim family, which was religious, but never nationalistic. My husband is from an Orthodox Montenegrin family, who, under the pressure of vicious political games, had to declare themselves as Serbs. There was no place where my husband and I could live in peace. They are a decent, good and homely people. So, my husband and I were driven to such a crazy situation, not only because the war broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but because we simply did not have a place where we could go on living normally, we no longer had a space for us. Whose army should we have joined? Whom should we have shot at? From Sarajevo we could shoot at our relatives (the dear grandparents of my children) and friends in Pale, or, from Pale and the surrounding mountains, at my mother, my sister and our friends. The only solution we could think of was to leave the country.

Only a few days after the outbreak of the war in Sarajevo – the Muslim militia (the so called "Green Berets") ransacked my parents' apartment just because their son-in-law was a Serb from Pale. A month after that, a neighbor said to my dear mother-in-law: "Dear God, what have you lived to see: your daughter-in-law is your greatest enemy now!"

My family is still in Sarajevo: my mother, my sister... My husband's family is, of course, still in Pale. Pale is just eight miles from Sarajevo. This is terrible, those are two incompatible worlds... and it is difficult to imagine that within such a short period of time an impenetrable wall has been erected between people who used to be friends, who loved each other...

Here in German exile, we get letters both from Sarajevo and from Pale... They send greetings to each other via Germany.

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

A Musician by Nationality

A Suite for my Native City of Sarajevo

My name is Violeta Smajlović. I was born in Sarajevo and I am a musician by profession – more precisely, I am a pianist. I currently live in Dallas, where I am doing some professional training. My family is scattered. I often say that, fortunately, my parents died before the war. My brother has remained in Sarajevo and what he is doing is a very nice gesture, indeed. He is fighting, but that is not an armed fight: he fights with music. He is a cellist and he expresses all his sorrow and all his anger that way. On the other hand, I have three sisters who are in Ljubljana now. Two of them have been living there for a very long time, and the third one fled there from Sarajevo in November last year. Among other things, she weighed forty-four kilos when she arrived…

What happens when I think about Sarajevo? I often find streets I never used to notice when I was there. However, in my thoughts I find some hidden places, inconspicuous corners and streets on Baščaršija... I try to nourish them in my head. The thought of them not being the same any more makes me sad, of course. However, I am aware of the fact that there is nothing I can do about it, so I am trying to do my best at my job and to express all my pain and all my sorrow and after all, my anger.

I believe this is the only contribution I can make. I have seen several types of reactions: some cry, others grieve, then there are those who fight: for example, by talking, but none of these can save the people who have stayed there. And although I am certain that my music cannot do that, it is still the biggest contribution I can make. First of all, I think that music is a very powerful means of communication. Let me give you an example: an English composer, David Wild, who was deeply moved by what has been going on in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and particularly in Sarajevo itself, and who was touched by my brother's gesture (to play for all the victims and express his outrage that way) dedicated one of his pieces first, to my brother and then another to me. This suite is called *Bosnia and Herzegovina Weeps*. When I first played it in Paris, it happened that the audience cried and I cried on stage. Having played the piece, I actually stood there crying, which had never happened to me before… I could hear people sobbing literally… it's not like you saw them wiping away tears, but weeping… Those were the French. It was then that I realized the power of music and the amplitude of emotions it can convey… Therefore, there is so much music can do and that is why I think I have chosen to express my views that way: it is extreme-

ly difficult to risk being engaged in some political debates and to broach some nationality issues I have nothing to do with. When people ask me what nationality I am, I answer "I am a musician by nationality."

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

run, move the children

More Bags than Hands

My neighbor drove me as far as Tilave and left me there. Leaving, he whispered to me, "Don't tell anything to anyone, no one needs to know who you are." Those words upset me, but I looked around silently. My two children held on to my trousers and I held my ten-month-old baby in my arms. Armed men wearing different uniforms with different symbols stood around me. A helicopter landed on a nearby field and coffins were being slid into it. I shivered, and stood there, hopelessly waiting for some means of transport. My first destination was Pale, where I was to stay the night. I nervously crumpled a piece of paper with the name of the man who could put me up. I had never seen him before. All I knew about him was that he was my neighbor's father. A van finally stopped and we managed to get in. There were no seats inside. I put my baby's blanket on the dusty floor so the children could sit down; I sat in the dust.

The journey to Pale lasted for two hours, because we used the long way. We finally reached our destination and got out of the van, white with dust. I turned around, everyone seemed to have somewhere to go and I just stood there confused, not having anywhere to go. A little frightened, I entered a restaurant and politely asked for the telephone. A young man pushed the phone toward me, not asking any questions. I dialed the number and waited. The phone rang but no one answered. I wondered if my host was spending the nice spring day outdoors. Disappointed, I put the phone down and gathered my children and my bags. I had a lot of things because of the children; I could not pick up all the bags with my two hands so I tied them together and began dragging them. We proceeded slowly, but still we moved on. I had walked a hundred meters when a car stopped in front of me. I saw a uniformed man and I winced, stepping back. I quickly recovered, thinking: "This man does not know who I am." I got in the car with my children and the man drove me to my destination with no questions asked. My host stood in his yard watching us without interest. In order to get out of an embarrassing situation, I ran up to him and said, "Uncle Duško, you have guests." The man looked at us in disbelief, because he saw a person he had never seen before. I quickly explained who I was and why I was there, quietly, so the soldier who was approaching would not notice anything. Our host took our bags and put them under a tree. Green grass spread like a carpet and the spring sun blinded me because I had spent the last forty days in a cellar. I refused the host's offer to go into the house, wanting to breathe the fresh air as long as possible. He gave us a room and nice clean sheets. I took my clothes off for the first time in a month. At home, I had slept fully

dressed, never knowing when the shooting would start and when I would need to rush down to the damp cellar with my children. The quiet and safety of the room were so alluring and we fell asleep.

At about six o'clock we were awakened by a gentle knocking on the door. Our hostess had made coffee and invited me to drink it with her. The good woman insisted on seeing us off despite my protests. When departing, I cried and kissed her as if she were my mother, and as the bus left for Belgrade, she waved with tears in her eyes.

The journey was filled with constant police and military checks. No one asked us women anything. A group of people waited for us in Vlasenica, where I was born and through which we passed. I expected to see my only sister in the crowd; she was to give me some money. The driver just rushed by the people, but I saw my sister. My children and I instinctively started shouting to the driver to stop, and a hundred meters later he stopped. My sister ran to the bus and gave me the money and a bag full of home-made cakes. My sister (together with her husband) was later arrested in Vlasenica and taken to a camp, and I still don't know what has happened to them. I will always regret that I did not take her with me that day. People around me on the bus talked about the horrors of war; everyone had his own point of view. I sat, confused, watching the places I had once loved so much, now wishing to go away from them as far as possible. I listened to unfamiliar music on the radio. Chetnik songs, I knew, but I had no comment. We had been brought up differently. We had read many books about the chetniks, ustashas and other name-smearing low-life of our people. My God, I wondered where I had come from. I wanted to cry, but I didn’t dare; tears glistened in the corners of my eyes.

A few hours later, the bus stopped on the highway and the driver indifferently warned the passengers going to Šabac that they had to get out then because the bus would not stop in the center of the town. We got out; the same problem again: too many bags for just my two hands. I stood there for some time and again I tied the bags together and started dragging them over the dirty and bumpy pavement. People walked by and silently watched, but no one wanted to help. I had very little money so I was not able to pay for a taxi to the bus station. It was a two-kilometer journey and we made it, but I still don’t know how I did it.

Tired and sad, we reached the station and I sat down to relax a little. I didn’t hurry, all my buses and trains had departed a long time ago – had it been April 3 or 4? When I had pulled myself together a little, I went up to buy a ticket for Sremska Mitrovica. The bus was leaving in a few minutes. People pushed each-other in a hurry to get a seat, and I was left with my bags at the end of the line. I had to sit on the dirty and half-torn bags because there were no more seats. People glared at me and I started crying. Nobody asked anything. A younger man approached me and asked me if I was a refugee. I just nodded; I didn’t have the courage to look at him. I felt as if I would start to scream. He pushed a crumpled banknote into my hand

and told me to buy juice for the children. This made me even sadder and I started wailing loudly. I was not able to control myself.

The journey to Sremska Mitrovica was very short, or so it seemed. At the bus station, we immediately got on another bus to take us to the village which was our final destination. It was a rich village in Srem at the foot of Fruška Gora. The corn had just started to grow, the sunflowers and other crops were bending under the gentle touch of wind. Full-grown wheat looked like waves on the restless sea. The blood-red sun, far away to the west, began to set. I watched this site through the windows of the bus, a site that could not be seen in Bosnia. There, the still-yellow sun sets behind the big mountains. My soul was empty, my eyes dry because I had no more tears.

The house in which I was to live was at the very beginning of the village. My two friends who had left Sarajevo earlier were sitting there while their children were playing in the yard. The driver stopped the bus in front of the house at my request, although it was not the bus stop, and we jumped out immediately. My friends were not surprised to see me because when we had parted in Sarajevo, I had promised them that I would leave the city if the situation deteriorated. We did not need to tell each other anything – our tears said everything.

The arrival of a Muslim woman in a village which was 100 percent Serbian did not pass unnoticed. The men watched me with curiosity and the women with suspicion. My first and only task was to convince them that I had come there with good intentions and that I had nothing to do with the war that raged in Bosnia. I began to work diligently. For the first time in my life, I worked with a hoe and I learned quickly as if I had done it all my life. I learned about what it means to work for a wage although I had only read about it and seen it in films before.

In the village, some people began to like me and I returned the emotion willingly. I helped older women work in their gardens, wash clothes, slaughter pigs and so on. In return, they gave me food and clothes. Life went on, I thought, trying to pretend like it was alright. But it was not alright. People who had come from Bosnia in the 1960's still lived in the village. They threatened the owner of the house in which I was staying and other people who were friends with me that they would kill them. My friends did not pay much attention to them. But when I realized that I was creating an embarrassing situation for my host, I tried to find another house in the village where I could live. People in that village are rich and they all have two houses: an old one and a new one. But not one of them wanted to let me live on their property - even in the worst, oldest house with no electricity or water. They all found an excuse not to accept me. I saw many old women cry while searching for new accommodations. When I finally realized what the problem was, I stopped searching for a house; I stopped torturing myself and the villagers, too.

The more time passed, the clearer it became that I would have to leave. During the summer and fall, I could earn enough for my basic needs

along with the Red Cross packet (which, alone, was not enough). I was far away from the city and thus, far away from what the Red Cross gave to some others (school supplies, clothes, etc.). Winter came and there was not much work. I could not allow others to pay for my needs (milk for the baby and other necessities), so I decided to leave. But where to go? I had no idea that refugee holds where I could get accommodation and food for free had been organized. I decided to return to Bosnia. The destination was Fojnica, the house of my friend's parents. But for that journey I needed a passport, because I had to travel through Hungary and Croatia. My Bosnian passport lay in my bag, valid until 1990, and this was 1992. How could I extend the validity when I had no money and did not want to borrow it from others? I decided to sell my husband's wedding ring, the one he had given me when we had parted. I didn't have my own wedding ring because we had gotten married without one for me, but that's a completely different story. The passport pictures cost nine Deutsch Marks and I could sell the wedding ring for eight Marks, but I still had to cover other costs.

I entered a photo studio and asked the photographer to take my picture for the cheapest price. I explained my situation and he, having thought it over for a few seconds, decided to charge me half the usual price. Good people still exist, I thought. That one act of kindness suddenly encouraged me.

The next day, I took the children to the city centre to have their photos taken. Like in any other town, the usual temptations were everywhere. My younger son asked for a pretzel, but I couldn't afford it. I had the exact amount I needed for the passports. I, too, craved a nice, hot, crispy pretzel but to no avail. I tried to explain to my son that it would be better to forget about the pretzel, but he childishly went on crying: "Please mommy, just one bite."

After a month of extensive interrogation by the Ministry of the Interior about my arrival and my husband's whereabouts, I was granted a passport valid until 1995. I was happy. I had to pack my things again and decide what to take and what to leave behind. The things were all old, but we still needed them. After I had thought about it for a long time, I packed three bags and was ready for the journey.

On April 16 – what a coincidence – we left exactly one year after I had left my home before, neighbors waved goodbye and we all cried.

Our first destination was Novi Sad. From Novi Sad, we were to go to Baja, a town in Hungary, and then to Zagreb and Fojnica. We waited at the Yugoslav border for a long time, but we passed through without problems. Then came the Hungarian border and the Hungarian customs officer came and inspected the passports. He asked me where I was going. After I explained our situation to him, he demanded a certificate, three hundred Deutsch Marks, and a letter of guarantee (for financial support) before letting us into Croatia. How was I, who barely managed to scrape together the money for the trip, supposed to have three hundred Marks? And I didn't have anyone in Croatia who could send me a letter to vouch for me. I was a former sportswoman who had traveled abroad a lot, yet I couldn't understand

what was being demanded from me now. I was dumbfounded. The officer left, but he soon came back ordering those of us with red passports to leave the bus and take our things. The Hungarians didn't like red, but I could not believe that they would not let us continue our journey. At that moment I hated the Hungarians; I watched their blank faces, but not one of them wanted to talk. I gathered my children and my bags again and headed back for Yugoslavia.

All four of us sat helplessly on a bench and cried. Where now? I did not want to go back to the village. People stopped and asked us questions. They all wanted to help. Our stupid Balkan people. In one part of this wretched country they fight and in another part they want to help. Nobody asked me who or what I was. They only all asked what they could do to help us. An expensive-looking bus with foreign license plates stopped in front of us and a beautiful lady got out of it. I hadn't seen such a nicely dressed woman for a long time. She approached us and explained in Serbian that they were from Vojvodina and that they worked in Austria and were going to visit relatives for the Easter holidays. She offered to take us with that bus anywhere we wanted to go. I accepted the offer. People looked at me with curiosity and pity as we got on the bus. They all offered sandwiches, juice, and chocolate. The lady next to me cried, saying that she had no children, but that she sympathized with all the victims of this war, especially the children. My children happily unwrapped and ate the chocolate. Their faces were covered in chocolate. Let it be, I thought. I didn’t even attempt to wipe it off them. I let them eat. They hadn't seen chocolate for more than a year.

I was thinking of where to go: Sombor, Subotica, or somewhere else? I chose Subotica, not knowing why. When parting, the woman gave me a few banknotes and some change. I glanced at the money and smiled. They were Deutschmarks. Not much, but enough to help.

Night fell. I didn't know where to find accommodations. A man offered to take us to the Red Cross for a fee of five Marks. We arrived in front of an old building in the center of Subotica. The windows were lit, which meant they were still working. A man was sitting in a big room, reading something. I knocked softly and entered, my boys stained with chocolate coming in after me. When I explained everything that had happened to me, he phoned someone. I heard him say: "I have a hopeless case, accept them even if it’s for one night only." The man told us that we would spend that night in an orphanage called *the Cradle*. We went there on the public transport and were received by a kind nurse. A wing had been designated for refugee mothers with small children. Everyone wanted to know who we were and where we had come from. Having exchanged the basic information, we took a shower and hit the bed. The children fell asleep immediately but I lay awake worrying about what lay ahead of us. But, thanks to the Commissariat for Refugees, we were granted the right to stay at that establishment.

We spent an unforgettable five months there. The lake of Palić brought us peace and safety, and we felt as if we were at the seaside. We

forgot who we were and why we were there. We walked the city streets because we were eager for that long-awaited experience and it excited us. I spent all my free time with abandoned children. I was especially fond of one-year-old babies. I couldn't decide whose fate was worse – theirs or ours. Tragedy was our mutual bond.

But happiness is always short-lived. The director of the orphanage decided that refugees could no longer stay there, and we had to go again. New farewells and new tears. My eldest son had to leave school and his newly found friends, again. The question "where now?" arose once more. The answer to that question was easier now that the UN High Commission for Refugees was taking care of us. The bus came to pick us up in front of *the Cradle* and four of us with children got in and left. The others stayed in Subotica looking for private accommodation.

While riding on that comfortable bus, I remembered my youth and the days when I was care-free, traveling through our beautiful country from Triglav to Djevdjelija. I felt as if I was traveling to a basketball game or a tournament. The excited voice of my son brought me back to reality: "Mom, look – a forest!" I was in disbelief – this was Banat, Vojvodina – there were no forests except on Fruška Gora. But I looked out of the window and, indeed, there was a forest. Checking on my geographic knowledge, I remembered that these could be the woods of Deliblatska Peščara.

We quickly came to a refugee settlement built in the forest. A group of children brimming with curiosity met us. We got off and took out our baggage. The driver was in a hurry, not giving us time to change our minds and go back to Subotica. My friends were disappointed with the place and protested loudly. I had no choice; I had to stay there. I tried to discover everything that was nice about those surroundings: sports grounds, forests, peace, and the nostalgic sunset. But I was afraid of the people. I was curious to find out what nationality they were. My God, what times these were! Never before had I paid attention to such things. I had been married to a man of a different ethnicity and I had never considered it a disadvantage. The director of the camp explained that there were people of different nationalities there and that no one should tolerate discrimination. I soon discovered that the people working in the settlement never did discriminate, but the refugees who lived there did.

My arrival at *The Danube* tent was commented on with the following words: "A balija has arrived – but why in our house?" My boys didn't leave our room because they faced constant fights with other children. The kids, like their parents, used bad words: "balija," "'ustasha". I was sorry for my children; they were not strong enough to defend themselves. But, also, I could not resent the children and what they said. The first distribution of clothing for children up to two years of age brought me discomfort and sadness – my youngest son only got house slippers, because we supposedly did not need other clothes. But my child was happy because the slippers had bunnies on them.

One day, during lunch, a woman came up to me and spat at me in front of fifty other people. I heard her say, "You got slippers, you balija, and my grandson didn't. What are you doing here? Your children should be going around naked and barefoot." She said some other things but I did not hear her. I felt a buzzing in my head and my whole body began to shake. I thought I would faint; I left the half-eaten lunch and ran out of the cafeteria. The tears came by themselves. I felt as if most of the people in the cafeteria approved of this evil woman and her behavior.

I felt terrible in those days. I wanted to die, but then what would my three small children do? With the help of my new friends, I managed to overcome the situation. I used to cry often at night, and during the day I would wander aimlessly, holding my youngest child's hand. Just when everything had passed and people had begun to forget, a friend whom I saw every day came up to me all upset. She told me that a professor from Sarajevo (another refugee at the camp) had threatened her because she was my friend. I had also heard him threatening that all Muslims – balijas – would be banished from Serbia the moment the Radical party came to power. I knew that the Radicals didn't stand a chance – at least for the time being – to win an election, but this sounded ominous and brought about another round of sorrow and tears. Many nights, I used to wonder what I had done to make people behave toward me in such a way. I knew that my desperation came from the fact that I was not capable of getting used to it. I had lived for so long in a city of love with the greatest possible mix of ethnicities.

A parcel arrived from the village where I had been staying before the New Year. It was sent to me by the people who loved me and who still love me. My happiness was infinite, not because of what was in the parcel, but because I was reminded again that there are people capable of loving regardless of nationality.

Merima Nosić

(Feminist Notebooks 1/1994; The Suitcase: refugee voices from Bosnia and Croatia, 1997)

Translated by **Dubravka Radanov**

No More War

I will try, if I am able, to briefly tell you something about myself.

I am from Bosnia; I am called a refugee. A sad label.

I fled with my husband from the whirlwind of war on November 17, 1992 from Kulen Vakuf in Bihać. The war started there on June 11, 1992. Unexpectedly, without reason. It was terrible. During that time everything was burning, tanks and shells destroyed whatever there was to destroy. There were many casualties. You remember those war images from TV. That noise of shelling remains in my head and in my nightmares; although I am often sleepy, I am afraid to close my eyes because they again come out of nowhere. Although in that panic of flight many were able to escape, the sparse spring forest revealed us, and we were taken captive. We were returned to looted homes, abused, handcuffed and subjected to daily interrogations. We were hungry and fear was embedded in every part of our bodies.

One day while I was helping a neighbor gather plums to make jam (something I loved to do), we were taken off guard by rounds of gunfire directed at us. We got out of the way (it was so loud) but our hearts pounded out of fear. Later, when I wanted to call the neighbor to find out if he was alive, I was not able to speak. This lasted several days. After this, my unknown difficulties began. I stuttered and had trouble forming words. Even today, in spite of all attempts, I have not been able to rediscover my old strong and fluid speech. My voice now comes through some strange impassable canal. Some sort of lid in the stomach prevents me from breathing correctly, and my lips cannot always catch up to my thoughts. As a result, my head feels as if it were being pressed by something, and under my body it's as if there are ants hurrying - when they wear me out I guess they leave and come back again.

By chance, my husband escaped execution with 53 innocent civilians looking for vegetables in abandoned gardens. He came home utterly frightened. We decided to flee. At night, near many guards, with two suitcases, we had to cross the then cold Una River. Across the forest we found a French UNHCR base. They took care of us, protected and fed us, and eventually transported us to Zagreb. There we came upon new difficulties: I am Catholic, my husband is Muslim and as refugees we did not have equal rights to food, health care and accommodation.

Through Martin Fisher and many others with the good will to help us, we left for Bonn on March 5, 1993. Again, everywhere as refugees.

Now that the war has ended, Bosnia is destroyed, and there are

200,000 graves, let me tell you how I feel. I cannot recognize myself now, compared to five years ago. I was a happy, working woman, with enough money and property to last the rest of my life. Our Bosnia was small but beautiful. In my city, (like here in Bonn) we had everything, except for streetcars and cigarette machines. Now, a year after the war, my little town of Kulen Vakuf belongs to the Federation; there is no more electricity, no more water. Telephones do not work, factories have been destroyed and looted.

Here in my apartment in Bonn, I constantly have the feeling that my lock is too small and I often feel the need to lock every room I enter. I have bad dreams with images of war and bloody corpses and their screams. I carry all this as a terrible burden; I am unable to rid myself of this.

When I have to return to a nationally divided Bosnia, how will I, as a Catholic, and my husband, as a Muslim, be safe when they have all killed each other? I will have problems because of him, and he because of me.

It would have been better that I stayed in Bosnia as a grave, rather than this now - a worn out refugee. Welcome nowhere and always driven further and further away... to death. Oh God, I wonder how you will send it [death] to me. Probably then I will no longer be a refugee.

Thank you to all those who help us. To those who think that we can already go back to Bosnia, let them try to make just one hole in the roofs of their homes, let them cut off the electricity and the heat for just one month, let them take out just one window in an apartment and let them carry and drink water from the Rhine... then they could try to experience a small part of what life is like now in Bosnia. Let them try to survive on 100-200 Deutschmarks - this is how much we now send a family of four.

This is a message to every parent throughout the world, "Tell your young sons: Don't ever go to war!"

One more thing: I love my Bosnia, it is most precious to me. One day I will RETURN.

Bonn, October 4, 1996

Refugee

(Women for Peace, 1997)

I Beg*

There’s nobody to support my children. My husband, Živković Sreta, was killed. How shall I put it – he’s a Serb. But when we could find work, I mean when we were free to move around, we used to collect scrap iron to sell. We were at the dumpsite in Knin for seven years. We worked there to earn something for the children, to have something. But he was very upset when he looked at his people, when they said, "Get off the screen" - to get off the screen because they were going to show corpses – it was very hard for him. He said, "I’m going to defend my children, my country, my Republic – and if I die, I die."

I have three children. I have to beg to support my children because they don’t have two parents. Only one – and that is me. I get twenty dinars and I get twenty-five kilos of flour and a sanitary parcel. In it are two shampoos, some toothpaste, a tooth brush, three kilos of detergent and some three, maybe four tins and toilet paper for the WC. There’s also a shaving kit, but I don’t have a man in the house anymore.

So I said like this: "Sreta, don’t go if you’re not summoned because those kids depend on you". He said like this: "I’ll go to defend my country, my children and if I die, I die." He followed it non-stop. When there was that, the supplement to the news, if you remember, it was two winters ago, he could sit up all night, just watching the news. I tried to talk him out of it and I said to him: "Don’t do it because we have three children." I don’t know if he’d go to meet that first bullet, to be hit or anyone, to destroy him, but all he said was: "Who cares if I’m destroyed by Croats or by Muslims or what do I know, anyhow, I’ll go and if I come back, it’ll be all right, if I don’t come back, it won’t be my fault." I was trying to talk him out of watching the news. His nerves were bad even before that and when there was that story about a woman called Manda digging out children’s eyes or I don’t know what, and when he saw it, he said: "Look, a woman killing our children and I sit at home and eat and drink, and others get killed? No!" He ate nothing for twenty days. He just drank coffee and smoked. And all he thought about was that, how he’d go and how it’d be. I asked him more than once: "Why are you like that and what’s in it for you?" He says: "So that I can take revenge on the Croats or the Muslims." I said: "It’s not important, you can’t do anything alone." But I couldn’t talk him out of it.

* Title - Ed.

And I was treated afterwards. I was in the hospital in Mitrovica, neuropsychiatry department, after all that. I take medicines for nerves. They came to let me know that he was gone and I came to Belgrade to identify him. I can’t pull myself together. When I saw him, he didn’t have eyes at all. He was all deformed. They drew a rose here… I can’t… They drew a rose on him here… I can’t go on…

I don’t have a real home. I have a dugout, if you know what a dugout is, that thing – earth dug out. My daughter tells me every time: "Eh, Mother, if Daddy were alive, it wouldn’t be like this." Because when he was alive, I never ever begged. And then she says: "If Daddy were alive, we wouldn’t be having it so hard." I try while I can, not to let them feel it. It’s not a problem. I’ll beg out ten dinars today so they can get bread and milk. The little one is not weaned yet, the older is two and a half. I find it so hard; I don’t know what to do with my life. I feel like going and killing myself.

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

Run, Move the Children*

You know, they brought me to the hospital in a body bag. Ah, if the Lord didn't take me then – then God, He must be choosy. Maybe it's better. Who'd be looking after my Janko now? He's only fifteen and a very good child, he is. In the hospital then, it wouldn't sink in that my Mira had been killed.

I live in Biošća. It's a village near Ilijaš. Ilijaš is at the foot of the hill, and on the hill are the Serbian lines. On 28 December 1992 the balijas set off from Visoko and broke the lines. The shooting went on all through the night. We didn't know that balijas had taken the position. Well, in the morning, around half past six, I stepped out on the terrace. I see shooting going on, children asleep, daddy on the position. In front of me - the terrace strewn with bullets. Mother got up, says: "Get away from that terrace, it'll hit you." I look across the street and what do I see – Muslims. They have the same uniforms, but with lilies on their sleeves. They shout, they yell and beat something. They always do it when conquering, motherfuckers. And my aunt was there, too. She says: "Pack up. Get the children up and let's flee." When I roused my Mira, Janko, oh dear, I say: "Dress well, son, help your sis, warm clothes, we've got to flee."

My Mira doesn't understand a thing. What does a child know about war? Oh, dear, when I only think of it. Mira was crying all the time. She couldn't even eat. I would ask her: "Darling, shall mommy prepare something?" "Never mind, mommy. Just be here with me, be here." We set off to my aunt's house. Everybody was on the run. The whole village towards the shelter by the same road. Fuck him who made it down there. As if we couldn't have dug it in our village. All columns managed to get away, except ours, the last one, and we got it bad. Mother, myself, my Mira, Janko, my aunt, all running. You run and run, then crouch and look around. You can't run just like that, there were shells and bursts of fire. Falling in front of you, and behind you, and we on the road. My aunt took shelter in a ditch by the road. I tell her: "I can't, what'll I do with the children?" And she says: "I'll help you."

No sooner did she say that, Mother was hit. She wailed: "Rada, run, move the children! They'll get us all, I've been hit." My aunt jumped to help her and a burst of fire mowed her down. She died less than three days later. I don't know where to turn. There's blood all around us. All I knew was that I had to hide the children at all cost. So I envelop them in my arms and make them crawl in front of me when something hits me in the legs. I didn't feel pain, only my legs turned numb. I felt something warm and saw blood spilling red like a rose. Blood smelling, heavy and sticky as it is...

* Title - Ed.

I try to pull my wits together, to move the children. I shout to Janko: "Janko, son, take care of your sis." And my Mira saw it: "Mother, you're bleeding!" And she started to turn, didn't lift her head more that 20 centimetres, just to see where I'd been wounded, when a bullet hit her in the back of her head and her little head fell onto Janko's chest. Everything danced before my eyes and froze suddenly. I still see her little head and Janko's bloody jacket, as if somebody sprinkled blood on it. I try to shut the eyes. I open them again, I think this is not real, but every time that same picture – her little head blown to pieces on his chest. I don't know how long I just stared and blinked.

Janko's scream brought me back: "Mommy, they killed my sis!" "No, sonny, no, just keep crawling." "They did, Mother, look!" Oh, Lord, what do I do now? If I could only pull Janko out, but I can't, I'm wounded. Shells are falling, bullets whizzing around. I say to Janko: "Put your sister's head down, son, get out slowly and run, but don't stand up, just crawl." "No, Mom, if they kill you, I'll jump up so they kill me too." "They won't, son, just crawl." I persuaded him, but he still stood up and set off running. I'd call out to him, but I'm too weak. While he was running there was no fire or I didn't hear it. Maybe they'd run out of ammunition, who knows; anyway, I hear him shout: "I'm alive, Mom, I'm hiding!" Thank God. And now, I, woe to me, worry about my Mira. I keep thinking she's alive, but her little head is shattered. I hear an armoured vehicle coming. I said, now they'll flatten my child in the middle of the road, I have to move her. I'll move her just a little bit to the side, but I can't stand up – my legs are wounded. Somehow I made it crawling, got her under the chest and legs and slowly made it to my knees, nothing hurts, I feel nothing. I don't know how long it took. But I barely made it to the edge of the road when something hit me in the stomach, oh my God. But I don't leave my Mira. I push her to a side, turn and see that my guts are beginning to come out. With a hand, I pressed down and lie on the asphalt. I say, fuck it, I'll kick the bucket, so what.

I also remember that the armoured vehicle pulled up and picked us up. I didn't know it was ours. They took my Mira to the morgue. Me they took to the hospital in Ilijaš, then to Pale where they operated me the first time. There I suffered clinical death and a nervous breakdown, all in one night. Afterwards they took me by helicopter to the Military Medical Academy, then to *Dragiša Mišović*[1] where they did six operations and I survived.

I'm telling you, God won't take just anyone. If only my child hadn't been killed. My mother was wounded, the bullet went just through, she recovered quickly but now moves slower. My father then freaked out completely. I was lucky, God looked after Janko. All I want is for the blasted war to end and God to preserve my Janko.

(April 1996)

(The Age of Reason 2, 1998)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

[1] Hospital in Belgrade.

My Story

War years, I mean I don't remember the dates. I know very well what happened when, but don't ask me which year and what date.

I remember well that it was winter and that hunger was already knocking at the door of my family and, well, the doors of many people in Goražde. To manage somehow for a loaf of bread, my husband Ferid went to work for some people who paid him in flour and even that was pitiful, a handful of flour for the whole day or they'd give him slivovitz as they knew he was fond of that drink. The worst of all was watching the children go to bed as soon as it got dark and try to sleep, hoping to deceive hunger. We ate only once a day and it was beans - if there were any - with a small slice of bread that you could see nine heavens through.

One day we decided to go to Grebak. Before that we heard many rumours that it was dangerous, that we could freeze to death, that people got lost and that they were captured by chetniks or, again, that people were mean and wouldn't help you if you fell in a muddy puddle to mud through which hundreds of people have passed before you. Those stories frightened me, but I also hoped that it wasn't all that bad. When I told the children that I wanted, I mean that I had to go to Grebak; they wouldn't even listen but then decided to come with me thinking that we would be safer that way and look after one another better. Ferid didn't want to stay away, saying if it was fated that we all die on Grebak, or freeze to death, we'll go all together.

And that is how it was.

The day came. Sometime around half past four in the morning the four of us left the house and we didn't look back once – we'd been told it brought bad luck. It was freezing cold. We had to dress well since a part of way we covered in open trucks. A column over three kilometres long formed at the meeting point. Man behind man, woman behind woman, child behind child. Foot after foot. When we came near the chetnik positions, whisper went down the column to keep silent. On our way we came across exhausted old women who could not go on; children tried to help them stand up and they begged them to leave them to die there because they could not move on. Somebody would fall asleep in the column and would step out of the file, taking a way known only to him. I kept watch all the time. I didn't hurry the children but asked them not to sleep, to hold onto one another. The bags we'd taken to put flour in were terribly heavy, even empty, I felt like throwing them away umpteen times, but then I'd take Meliha's or Mirso's to help them a little. Ferid did the same.

On a clearing we were told to rest because a big and difficult climb was ahead. My Mirsad fell asleep as soon as he touched the snow and sat on it. Meliha likewise. I tried to keep them awake because I knew what it meant to fall asleep in the snow. They implored me, let me, Mommy, just a little bit, just to close my eyes, I'm not sleeping, just squinting, let me rest. My heart wanted to break. I pushed them, cooled them with snow, called to them. At times I was successful, and at times one of them would start snoring.

When we were ordered to move on, all those who had fallen asleep remained sleeping in the snow; people passed by them silently; if they recognized someone they'd try to wake him, but they had to go on because the column was moving, there was no time to wait.

I think that more than five people froze to death in the snow that night. When we arrived on Grebak we found there a cowshed, half-empty, collapsed on the floor and fell asleep. Finally, I could relax too.

After three hours of rest we loaded the flour and took the same way home.

The return was much more difficult because now we carried a load. Our backs broke, there's no way you can fix the damned backpack to avoid it cutting into your shoulders. The children carry theirs, they stumble but don't complain. Mirso only said, Mother, when we come to Goražde make me a biiig bread and I'll eat it all by myself.

And that's how it was.

The story told by **Magbula Dizdarević** from Goražde,
noted down by **Vesna Kuljuh**, *2007 (published for the first time)*

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

A Child's Story

I was only 14 then. It was 1994. I remember well… it was a beautiful winter. January… I liked best the twilights of that beautiful winter. I always looked forward to seeing my friends. Somehow, we all loved each other more then. It helped us to go through the war easier. And we had to go through it…

Shells, killings, woundings, flights, nights in the cellar, no contact with the close relatives living less than 5 kilometres away, waiting for the father from the line, concern for my mother and brother in my own way… these are all the things I grew up with. My serene disposition kept me up and helped me to survive. As it does to this day.

Of all the evil that happened to me and around me I remember that winter the most. We were hungry. The distribution of humanitarian aid stopped suddenly, all the stocks were exhausted; there was nowhere to take anything from any more. There was no grass either, it had disappeared under the snow; it was a harsh and severe winter.

My father was on the frontline; he had been sent to Treskavica and somehow just at that time, he was absent longer than usually. In the house, or rather in the cellar, there remained, with other women and children, my brother, my mother and I. My brother was 12. For seven days non-stop we ate only boiled rice. I don't remember where we boiled it; I think that many did it on melted snow. And why should we be different?

The only thing we still had in store was the popular *Kabbash* soap. But how can one eat that?

Quite by accident a friend, not particularly close, asked my mother, thin, emaciated as she was but brave: "Your boy is still small; would you let the girl come with me?"

"Where to?" - Mother asked.

"I have a brother there and they have potatoes, but no soap. You can get a kilo of potatoes for a cake of soap. How many of them do you have?"

Mother gathered the soap cakes around the house and managed to find 10. She had no other choice but to send me, hungry as I was, to cross Mount Igman on foot on the way to Pazarić.

We set off early and we climbed and climbed and climbed. I was excited, scared, and I also worried how I would manage several days without my place, my mother, brother and pals. It was the first time since the beginning of the war that I was going somewhere. Rather different from sitting in a cellar. We put the soap in a small army backpack and set off. I remember I even did up my curly hair as if I was about to go out with my

girl friends rather than on such a long journey. I even dressed up a little. I didn't find the climb too difficult although every bit of my body ached and every step up the mountain was a struggle.

We had to hurry all the time because they could see us from the surrounding hills and fire at us. I understood then that the survival instinct can beat all fears. We walked without a rest. It seemed to me that we would never arrive. When we finally did arrive at night time, I was welcomed by the best food in the world at the brother's of Mother's friend. I ate like crazy and was sorry that my mother and my brother were not there. We were to move on the next day. I remember I could barely get up, I was so sore all over. I knew there was a long journey ahead of us and also that there was no knowing that we'd be successful in swapping the merchandise we had. I merely asked myself: "Have I become a smuggler? I don't want that." And then I comforted myself by saying to myself that I wasn't a smuggler but somebody who was helping her mother and brother to survive. It kept me going.

I was very lucky and already in the first house where an old man lived, I managed to swap the soap. The old man took pity on me and instead of 10 gave me 16 kg of potatoes. I begged him to give me less because it was too heavy for me to carry. He cried and begged me to take it. I did not know then why he cried, but I also felt like crying as I begged him to reduce the burden.

I finished my part of the business straightaway. These people were not all that happy so that we spent the next four days walking. I carried my all too heavy backpack all the time. It tore at my shoulders and I suffered more than can be endured. I hid my tears, cried but kept carrying it. The pride would not let me allow anyone to help even though people asked. "No, I can do it", I would say and that is how I still behave.

The happiest moment in my life was when I turned back home. It seems to me somehow that the return took less time. I wasn't afraid of anything. Not even going down that same mountain.

"Let them see me, let them fire, at least my mother and brother will get the potatoes. Somebody will take it to them if something happens to me."

They awaited me at the window, even thinner and weaker somehow. They were very happy to see me. Full of pride, I turned over the potatoes (for which we later got a lot of flour) and that same evening, heedless of the aching muscles and fatigue, I went out and met with my friends as if nothing had ever happened.

I lived in Hrasnica near Sarajevo throughout the war. I was 12 when it started and 16 when it ended. Fortunately I did not lose any member of my family during the war, but, like everybody else, I lost a great deal.

Tamara Mišković, 2007.

(published for the first time)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

A City That Is Denied the Truth

I left Mostar with the help of my Croat and Muslim friends, with the help of friends who also helped me to survive during those eight months there. They did it either by bringing me food or offering me protection as much as they could, but at any rate they did it simply for the sake of all those years we had spent together before and I never once felt that they looked at me differently because of everything that was happening in Mostar. Although some of them had lost their next-of-kin, although members of their families had been raped, their houses burnt, they, quite simply, did not see me as somebody who was responsible for it.

That is why here, today – in a situation in which I no longer have a home of my own, in which I am not sure if I will ever go back, and whether that past in which I lived once really existed— I dare not even think about the future. Also, I do not lay blame on any one people for what happened to me. Simply, I do not hate any people. I think that some day people will have to realise that both good and bad things were done by individual persons.

At first, when I arrived here in Serbia, because I did not want to ever say things that might improve my standing – that all the Croats and Muslims were genocidal, and all the Serbs naïve and innocent –I really faced a big wall around me at first. I was very much down. I thought, during that early period as I listened to the news and read the newspapers I managed to get, that here, simply, nobody wants to admit the truth. Later on, now that I've met some of my friends, the Women in Black, first of all, of course, and some people who are committed to make the truth known, now I feel much better. Now I have a circle of friends and no longer think as I did in those early days when I first came to Belgrade, that Belgrade is a city that does not want the truth. Belgrade is a city that is denied the truth.

(The Age of Reason, 1994)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

The Nightmare

When I decided to write about my wartime experience, I believed that I'd be focusing on some specific events. Now, as I've sat down to write, memories spill over. They are so vivid and so painful. Fear emerges, that fear which forced me to be on the move all the time during the war. Fear, hatred, helplessness. It was all in me, like a time-bomb. I feared and hated at one and the same time. I was afraid of, and hated, all those I did not see, all those who were leaving Zenica because every departure left me ever lonelier and more insecure. It took me long time to realise that my hatred was not aimed at any one in particular, that it was an expression of my helplessness, disbelief that this was happening, disbelief that they were fitting us into some ethnic frames, that they were killing each other because of that, that somebody could hate me and that somebody could be afraid of me only because I was Naira – a Muslim.

When I realised that, my hatred turned into support to other people and thereby to myself.

During the war I lived in a part of the town that was mostly shelled. It was an old building, unsafe and inadvisable under wartime conditions. No cellar, no concrete slab, no double wall. It all intensified my feeling of helplessness. The shelling was not intensive, but it happened almost daily. Just a few shells, just so that we lived in incertitude, and incertitude drives one crazy. It was the game of nerves. My daughter Meliha was 6. Like very child of that age, she needed to play. Where? The unanswerable question! To let her out or keep her in the house? Whichever decision I made, I felt unhappy.

1993. The year of blockade. Without electricity, without water, without food. My daughter is about to start school. It was the saddest day in my life. I suppose it is natural to want that one's children have better conditions than one had. My daughter was far from having the conditions even similar to those I had. I remember my first day at school. Mother put on a new, green suit. I was decked up, new clothes, braids. My teacher had a wonderful haircut. I remember that solemn atmosphere. I was so proud to have started school. I was so happy. It was one of the important days in my life. I remember it gladly.

Meliha's, first day at school filled me with sadness. I cried. Instead of a festive atmosphere – cramps in the stomach. Will the danger alarm sound? Meliha's bag was bought on the green market. And we were lucky to find it! The child is going to school and has no shoes. The shops are spookily empty, only an item or two here and there. I spent a whole day walking from one

shoe shop to another, looking for size 33. At long last in *Beograd* Shoe Shop (what irony!) I found rubber boots without lining, size 34. It doesn't matter that there is no lining, she can wear woollen socks. I was so happy to have found them. When I gave the money to the sales lady and she said she could not take it because she didn't have any change, I was seized with panic. What if somebody comes and buys that one and only pair of boots?! How will Meliha go to school? I sat down and waited until a salesman appeared and brought small change. At long last I held in my hands those rubber boots size 34 and was happy! That year was totally crazy. They spent more time in the cellar than in the classroom, but, most importantly, they survived.

Spring 1994. The blockade is finally lifted off Zenica; end of the conflict between the BiH Army and the CCD. We have friends in Žepče, some 40 km from Zenica. The BiH Army was in Zenica and the CCD in Žepče. We are Muslims, they are Croats. When the clashes started, the telephone connection was broken and we could receive no news from them. And then, one day, at the peak of the conflict, a message through radio amateurs. They inform us that they are alive. They want to know how we are doing. I was so happy that they'd communicated, that they thought about us. It was the confirmation of our friendship.

When the conflict ended the first convoy set off from Žepče to Zenica under the umbrella of the Catholic Church. It was headed by Brother Stipan. That man had done a lot for Zenica. People loved him and respected him. They nicknamed him Brother Suljo. Parcels arrived from Žepče. Friends and relations had prepared them. In the evening, around 9 o'clock, as we were sitting as we were, without electricity and breathing the smell of the tallow candle, we received a call from the District Office. They said that there was a parcel from Žepče for us too. I received it as the most normal news in the world. I went to bed, but I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned and then I said aloud that I was thinking about that parcel. The parcel was a sign that I, that we were in somebody's thoughts. So many times I had the impression that we'd been forgotten by everybody, that nobody cared about us any more. And then, when you get any kind of confirmation that you matter to somebody, that he thinks of you, it prompts you to look for the meaning of life, especially in war.

We went to the District Office at half past eight although we'd been told to come around 11. We simply could not wait. We took the parcel and hurried home where our daughter was awaiting us. When she opened the parcel, on the top we saw pâtés tins and chocolate. One chocolate had been opened. Afterwards my friend told me that they'd found out about the convoy suddenly and had only a couple of hours to hand in the parcel so that they just crammed in what they had in the house, including that opened chocolate. When Meliha saw the pâtés and the chocolate, and she'd long forgotten that they ever existed, she began to cry. She sobbed. It defies description. Even as I'm writing about it, I can hear her sobbing and crying.

Flour, vegetable oil, sugar, lentils, rice and occasionally cheese were the staple during the war, all the rest one could only dream about.

That year I managed to get to them, for Easter. The trip which normally takes 40 minutes lasted several hours. Checks, papers… A part of the way by bus, a part of the way on foot… But when I saw her! Incredible! As if we'd parted only yesterday, not a whole year ago. We sat in her kitchen and, sipping coffee as we used to do, we talked. At some point I realised that nothing had changed between us, except that we talked about different things. Our stories were different but our relationship had remained the same. It made me happy. We no longer talked about children, the faculty, things we did to our houses; we talked about what we'd been through during the war. It confirmed to me that nothing could destroy the true friendship. I felt immensely happy. I had the impression of freedom because I could go and see my friends.

During the war I worked at the NPA Centre for Women. I worked with children of pre-school age and at the same time underwent training for psycho-social support. The fall of Žepa and Srebrenica marked 1995. Some of those who were fortunate enough to leave Srebrenica, were to come to Zenica, temporarily. At the entrance to the town a reception centre was set up, or rather, tents were pitched there. They were fenced off to protect people from journalists and other inquisitive individuals. The journalists crowded on all sides and waited for the buses. Our group from the Centre for Women was to help with the accommodation in the tents and lend initial psychological help.

We arrived at the reception centre around noon. I thought I'd take some tranquiliser but a colleague said she wanted to experience it all. I thought that she was right. One had to experience it indeed.

I was quite jittery at first, but then we started making little jokes. It was dark humour, it couldn't be darker. It was our defence. We waited. Hours passed by. Night fell and there was not a trace of the buses. We had received suggestions as to what we should and should not do when they arrived. We were told to be ready for all possible reactions of those people. Fear began to surface. Each one of us was to enter a bus, help people to accommodate and talk with them. Enter the bus? Tell them what? Welcome to Zenica! How ironic! So, what is one to say? That question drummed in my head. Exhausted, frightened, lost, I fell asleep for a brief moment. I was woken up. It was past midnight, the buses were arriving. One could see cameras around the entrance to the reception centre.

I was to enter the first bus. I did not realise that I was trembling. A colleague of mine told me that the next day. She said I'd been shaking all over. I asked somebody, I've no idea whom, to enter with me and stand behind my back to give me some feeling of security. I entered and looked at them. They looked so lost, harrowed, lifeless. Only old people, children and women. As if there was no life in them. I said salaam to them. That is what occurred to me. They only looked at me and bent their heads. I said I'd help

them with accommodation. Again nothing. Strange – the bus was full, yet spooky silence reigned in it.

People were quickly taken to their tents. Some asked for tranquilising sweets. Some peformed abdest[2] to pray. Some sat in front of the tents and stared wordless. An old man had lost his wife and we looked for her. A man felt a chest pain and developed spasms. I ran to get the doctor. On our way back I saw four men carrying him. One holding him by one arm, another one by the other arm, one holding his one leg, another the other leg. As if carrying a bag, not a man. He had contractions. They lowered him on the ground. The man expired. He had come to Zenica to die! That was my first meeting with death. Face to face.

I moved on to check, from one tent to the other. I heard silence. Eerie silence. So many people in one place and such silence. Horrible, unbearable, fearful. I hope I'll never experience it again. The silence which breaks, maddens, hurts.

That morning I arrived home around half past four. With me I carried telephone numbers, the numbers of their relatives and friends in Sarajevo. I arrived home and started to call. I didn't care about the time because I knew that people were waiting for information, that they wanted to know whether their relatives and friends were alive or not. I called and talked. Those were moving conversations. The relatives, barely believing that they had reached Zenica alive, cried, talked and I listened. I remember a conversation: a lady, after hearing that her daughter-in-law was alive, all flustered as she was, started to speak: "Just let her come…. Not to worry… We have everything we need to eat and dress… Tell her to pass through the tunnel carefully, to bend her head down so she doesn't get hurt…"

We visited the camp regularly during the following days. Little by little, people began to talk. I met a ten-year-old girl who had been on a visit with her Granny for holidays and stayed there. Her mother had stayed in Sarajevo and given birth there. They haven't heard from each other for a long time. It dawned on me that I could take her home and that she could call her mother from there. Her grandmother approved. When we were in the car and on the way home, panic began to seize me. What if her mother was killed? What should I do? I decided that I'd call her mother first and then, depending on the situation, decide what to do next. When we entered the apartment, her behaviour and her reactions were touching.

"Oh, look, it's a bed... You've got TV too… Look, the table…" she said delighted, going from one room to the next. It only then dawned on me that they had retreated to the woods and lived like that for months. To her, my apartment was something she had lost a long time ago: security, cosiness, simply – home.

I called her mother. Fortunately, the woman was alive. The conversation between a ten-year-old and her mother could leave nobody indiffer-

[2] Religious ablution

ent. "What is it, Mother? I'm fine, don't cry. We had enough food. How's my brother? How are you? Don't cry. What's the matter, Mother? Don't cry..." Those were the words of an old woman and she was only ten.

Memories keep coming back. The war separated us from people we loved. Some we may never see again and some we manage to find after all. I found my friend after 14 years. She is a Serb and my daughter's godmother. When the war started, she was in Banja Luka. When the war ended, I tried to get her but the telephone number had been changed. She had changed her place of work; she had changed her surname. Whenever I met somebody from Banja Luka, I begged them to help me find some information about her. And nothing. For years on end. And then, by some miracle of God, in 2006 I went to Banja Luka again to a seminar and happened to see a man who looked familiar. We began to talk trying to find out where we'd met before. And so we came up with the Bjelava Student Hostel in Sarajevo where we lived as students. This gentleman knew us both. He told me that he had been talking with my friend about me a few days earlier. She was in Banja Luka! We called her right away. The first thing she said: "Woman, d'you know how long I've been looking for you!" And I had been looking for her. I never stopped. After 14 years we were together again. My daughter had finally found her "kuma" (godmother) from Banja Luka as she used to call her when she was little. And again, that feeling that there never was this interruption in our relationship. We just continued, true, a little more mature and a little older. Friendship will always be friendship.

This war made me feel helpless, become familiar with the most intense forms of fear, when you fear for your own life, your child's life, your parents' life, your friends... This war showed me how unendurable was incertitude... how silence could be horrifying... I'd like to never, ever live through it again, I, or anyone else. I'd like nobody to experience that silence, that incertitude, that helplessness and that fear.

This war made me assess myself, my values, my friends. It was a major test. I am proud and glad that my values were not shaken and that my friendships were confirmed.

I'd like as many people as possible to experience that pleasure, to be proud of themselves, to be proud that they are humans. Only people who are content, can build peace; the discontented ones can only lead to violence, to war.

To assess oneself and one's values, to get confirmation for one's friendships, one only needs the will and the courage.

Naira Hodžić, 2007.

(NGO Sezam, Zenica)
(published for the first time)

Translated by **Mirka Janković**

Biba Metikoš*

My name is Habiba. I was born in 1942 in Višegrad. Immediately after my birth, my family fled from Višegrad to Sarajevo for the same reason that, today, I find myself with my child in Zagreb. It has been said, "History repeats itself," which my case confirms.

I spent all of my life in Sarajevo. I completed law school. I married Vasilije. We lived, happily married, and in 1979 had a daughter, Dunja. Our life would have been really beautiful if this war hadn't happened.

After the war erupted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), now already a while ago in April 1992, I moved with my child along the "Way of the Cross" *(path of suffering)*. That sunny spring day we abandoned our home in Sarajevo - certainly the most recognized city in the world now. The bombs were falling, people were dying and cemeteries were raised. Today in that beautiful, multinational, multicultural city, full of youth and vigor, there are more dead, than living.

We arrived in Zagreb. We thought that the war in BiH would not last, that the national divisions would be quickly resolved because in BiH there are not many families who belong to only one ethnic nation. But no, the war did not stop, and my daughter and I did not have anything to live on.

My world began to fall apart. I thought about suicide. I was once a successful, independent businesswoman and now I was no longer in a state to provide basic necessities for my child and myself.

Not long ago, the entire space of the former Yugoslavia was my home. Now they say it is no longer so. In Croatia, I do not have the right to work or obtain an identity card because I do not have an acceptable national label. I tried, unsuccessfully, to find any kind of job which would provide me with food.

One day while wandering without hope, searching for the light amid darkness, I found myself in a completely unknown, but pleasant environment. That was the *Center for Women War Victims*.

It was not important to them who I was, what I was, where I was from. It was important to them that I am a WOMAN who needs help, and who, tomorrow, will be able to help other unfortunate women.

I began to aspire to live again, and to work. I passed the training and started working on forming self-help groups in the refugee camps. That is extremely painful because to work with women refugees is to work on my personal trauma and to overcome it.

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* Title - Ed.

Meeting with women from the camps seems like meeting with misfortune. There is the sense that these are human bodies that have taken ill. Each piece of sick tissue must be treated separately and connected. It is a job that demands a lot of patience and understanding.

When you realize that patience and understanding are really the only instruments for the work, then you strive to develop them as much as possible. Not quite always, but still in considerable measures, you can see results. Women on their knees begin to rise.

At the *Center*, my life experience gained a new quality. I had grown up without a father and had been obligated to do even the "men's duties" at home. I thought it was the same to be a man or a woman, but today I no longer think that way. I am lucky because I look at men and women with completely different eyes. I think that men, if they would reflect on their sex the way that I reflect on my own, would see their sex as handicapped. In most cases, men who are subtle, gentle and devoted are treated as feminine; whereas, when women become "course", they are really decisive and do not become something very different from the norms of society. They become wonderful human beings to me, and very dear.

After a year of working on myself and with other women, I still always feel pain. Sometimes I think that the entire world is falling down on me and that I will not succeed. However, the pain becomes less every day and my hope for a better life increases.

The entire world will be my new home.

To hope - that is one of the tragedies of humans.

(Center for Women War Victims: Collected Papers, 1994;
Women Recollecting Memories, 2003)

Translated by **Esma Trejić**

Goga M.'s Story

Vesna and Dinka: *Did you pack everything?*

Goga: I did more or less. I left some things. How do you think that we should start our conversation? With my personal information?

V: *Let that be the story. Begin with how you came from Sarajevo, why you left, which family members you left behind, whom you brought with you. And why, at this moment, are you returning to Sarajevo? How did this war change your destiny?*

G: Essentially, my mother is Italian, therefore a "fascist," and my father is a Serb, and therefore a "chetnik". I married a Croat, therefore an "ustasha". What am I in all of this? I have a birthplace, but no nation, no citizenship. I was a Yugoslav, which is now a great sin isn't it? Although I felt good and every place was like home, amid all of that I wasn't able to get accustomed because I was not raised as a Serb. My father is a Serb, but no one in the last fifteen generations of his family has ever lived in Serbia. He was born in Sarajevo, when four generations of his family had already lived there. My Italian mother was a Catholic woman, but not a great believer. She didn't go to church, but she had her God and her faith.

(...)

D: *Do you still have family connections in Italy today? Were they able to help you during the course of this war?*

G: Yes, I have connections, but they were unable to help me at all. First, they are mainly elderly people and I was unable to go there because I could not travel. I didn't have a certificate of citizenship, or a passport - no papers; I couldn't pass through the border. You know the story: if I left Croatia, I would no longer be able to return. I would lose my refugee status. I was in contact with them by telephone and they offered me some help, but I wasn't able to count on that. I didn't have the desire to go to them because the move seemed too far and final. Considering that my mother was in Sarajevo, I didn't want to go anywhere abroad. To tell you the truth, I was constantly waiting to return home. When everything happened in Sarajevo, when they entered and seized my Grbavica, without shooting, without anything, I mean the chetniks…

V: *Was Grbavica a part of Sarajevo that was predominantly inhabited by Serbs?*

G: No, absolutely not. In my building not one single apartment was nationally "clean". They were all mixed. If the parents weren't mixed, then the children of all nationalities were marrying each other throughout the country. The Serbs immediately captured Grbavica because it was connected to Pale, a favourably strategic area for them.

V: *Had your undefined nationality in Sarajevo presented a problem in the past?*

G: Oh no, absolutely not. In Sarajevo, no one could ever say that he was in danger or had problems because of such things. I personally don't know what ninety percent of my friends were, even today, because their names (especially Croatian and Serbian names) are, in fact, the same. In my family, we celebrated everything: Orthodox, Catholic and state holidays. We loved our house to be filled with people. I think that this was beautiful. The most wonderful image I have from my childhood memories was when my father returned home and brought my mother a small "crystal ball" for Christmas. I grew up in complete tolerance. When all those Serbs came, those chetniks, I didn't recognize anything of myself in them, regardless of my father's religion. I'm not a believer. I don't go to church. My faith is what you call my love, my integrity and such… you love people and you do as much good as you can.

D: *Did you have problems when the soldiers came to Grbavica?*

G: I didn't have major problems. Alright, they searched my house, but we fared well. One of the three men who came was a young man, the only Muslim and a schoolmate of my neighbours, so he spared our house.

V: *How was it that a Muslim was with the Serbian army?*

G: I think because it paid well. He came as a Serbian soldier, as a "chetnik", during the first attack when Šešelj's and Arkan's soldiers invaded…

(...)

V: *Who lived with you in the apartment at the time?*

G: It was my mother, my son and I.

V: *You were separated?*

G: Yes, I have been separated for seven years now. It just so happened that my husband was on that – our side.

V: *You still call the Bosnian side "our" side?*

G: Yes… I really don't know how to define things. Can you tell me?

V: *No, I cannot. I am interested in what you think and feel.*

G: I don't feel anything. I only hope that Sarajevo will remain Sarajevo. I don't believe that the smaller places will be as lucky. Too much harm has been done, people have lost and suffered too much, endured too much. The media has contributed to it with their propaganda. Since the beginning, my apartment served as headquarters where we all gathered: Jasna, a Muslim who was married to a Croat; Safeta, a pure Muslim (although her sisters-in-law were Serbs) and I. They seemed safer at my place because a Serbian name was written on my door… we spent entire days at my place in an attempt to protect one another.

D: *Were you afraid?*

G: Yes. Later I had some problems when I was threatened about things such as who I was keeping company with and what we were doing. They said, "You should all be raped. You are not real Serbian women."…

D: *Did they enter your house often?*

G: Yes, they came into the house.

V: *How? Did they invade brutally or did you let them in?*

G: The war was full of absurdities. When the Serbian army entered, chetniks in the lead, we were sitting in front of my house. Prior to that moment, some twenty days before, we hadn't left the cellar at all because there had been shooting. We didn't know at all who was shooting or at whom the shots were being fired. We didn't know that, in fact, it was from Grbavica that they were shooting at our city. We thought that someone was shooting at us. The radio spread total misinformation, always telling us, "Watch yourselves, they are coming in groups of two to three men, vandalizing houses…", and this and that. In our building, we barricaded the door (which even ten men could not break down), and we spent all night in the cellar. There was already no electricity. One night, our men, who had some kind of weapons, peered out through an opening and said, "A tank is aimed at our house." Panic swept over us and when they banged on our door, we opened it quickly because there was no other choice. It wasn't three or four people, but chetniks who definitely came down from Grbavica. When they came in, they searched the place for weapons. They took one man away to Pale and later he was swapped for some Serb from Sarajevo. We didn't dare go outside until we knew what was happening and what might happen to us. We didn't even take out the garbage, but when we eventually saw that we could get as far as the dumpster, our curiosity piqued… at that moment, we all came out. We were standing in front of the building when about twenty of their men came. In front of all those soldiers, there was a man whom I knew. I couldn't remember where I knew him from. Later it turned out that he had worked for my brother. He called out to me and kindly asked if we needed anything or if anyone had bothered us. I told him, "No one has bothered us." One time, our next-door neighbour, Šišo, a Muslim, was told by some soldiers, "You are a Muslim, so don't leave your house. You are in jail." That's how it was for a couple of days. I felt sorry for the man – like a dog in his house, imprisoned, not daring to go near the window, or even to peer through it. I said that I was going to make a plea to the commander to at least allow the man to sit in front of his house. I said to the commander, "Let the man go, he's not going to do anything. He's old." He replied, "All right, let him go." We made a bench and sat in front of the house - in front of the doorway only - because no one was allowed to move further. And Šišo sat with us like that. He liked to drink and got drunk one day with some chetniks. The women went home. We mainly sat in the house because we were afraid that someone might see us. Everyone was "attractive" in that war. Once, at noon, someone knocks on my door. I open it and see a chetnik standing there – the type of chetnik from the war films that we watched as little kids: guns, bombs, beard, drunk, dirty and all that. I say, "Can I help you?" He replies, "I came here to have a cup of coffee." I say, "This is not a café." He says, "It doesn't matter, I'm going to drink coffee." I tell him that I'm sorry, but I can't make him coffee. However, he entered anyway and sat right in the kitchen. Sitting, straddling, he started to provoke me by saying, "pretty girl" and this and that. I said to him, "How can you not feel ashamed since you are younger than I am? For

you, I'm an older woman!" He says to me, "You don't like the Serbian army?" I tell him, "Listen, I don't like any army." I was terribly frightened.

D: *Stories about rape have already been heard…*

G: Yes, everything has already been heard. I was terribly scared, but I tried to show him that I was not afraid of him. Then I stood by the window – we're on the fourth floor – and I thought to myself, "Dear God, if he tries something, I'm going to jump through this window; what else can I do?"

D: *You thought about jumping through the window?*

G: At that moment, my mother came over. She's fairly old and doesn't hear well. I heard her voice saying, "Why did you come here? Why do you want coffee? How can my daughter make you coffee when there isn't any?" She didn't for a moment comprehend what had occurred, but fought with him, saying, "You Yugoslav men are very dirty, always arguing and fighting." Then he began to say something to her – granny this, granny that – as I passed by them and went out to my neighbour, telling her to go and find the police (or anybody) because there was a drunken chetnik in my home. The poor woman knocked on door after door, but no one dared to open one. On the road, she found some policemen, three of them, who then came in and asked what had happened. I returned again to my window, so that I wouldn't put my mother at risk should the chetnik get any ideas. Luckily, he was too drunk. They took him out of the apartment. I thought that he was going to kill us all because he didn't want to give up his weapons.

V: *How did the army behave during that time?*

G: The police were Serbian. They told us that no one there had anything to worry about. If there were problems, we should call them. All around the house were soldiers, police and soldier headquarters, a medical clinic and five transport vehicles. On the front was one real soldier who took a really fair stand right from the beginning. He told me that when he was in Zagreb, he lost his apartment, and while in Slovenia, he lost his country, and now he had come to defend his honour. His purpose was not to harass anyone: neither Muslims, nor Croats, but rather that everyone would stay where they were. In fact, I can't say that there were expulsions where we were; people left out of great fear. There were so many of those groups who vandalized…

V: *What did they do?*

G: In one home nearby, lived a family. He was a Muslim, but had died. He had been married to an Austrian woman, and she had two daughters-in-law. Three men had invaded their place - including the notorious Batko, who had raped even eighty-year-old women. Serbian women, Croatian women, there was no difference to him. A completely deranged man, set free from a mental hospital in order to serve certain goals. When they invaded, the sons were taken to Kula and jailed, and the daughters-in-law were taken to an apartment where, for three days, the men unleashed themselves upon these women.

D: *Was this known?*

G: It wasn't known until one of the daughters-in-law jumped through the window, and then it was learned that something was happening

there. Then came the police, who arrested Batko. The woman was completely crushed. She was taken away somewhere in Serbia to a sanatorium. Her mother-in-law had disappeared. Supposedly, she had called from Austria. The other daughter-in-law was found in the apartment, and she had been raped. A Serbian soldier, Mišo, one of God's emissaries, took her to his parents'. I was acquainted with him because he was one of our clients at the bank. He asked me if I could help him with something, and then told me the story. He said, "Would you mind going to see her, having coffee and talking with her, because she is so isolated after surviving those terrible things?" After that, I told my friend, Jasna, about it, and we went to visit and have coffee with her often. She never spoke about that experience, but instead, we voluntarily spoke about our lives and former lives. She acted as if everything was fine. I was always asking myself where her energy and strength came from - even her ability to seem happy. Now when I analyze it, I know that it was something else. I know many more things now that I didn't know before. Mišo was able to get her false documents, put her in his car, and they left for Belgrade. I think that she is in the Netherlands now. That's one of the terrible cases that I know about.

V: *Did that soldier report anything to anyone?*

G: He was bitter and even tried to leave Grbavica, to pull out of that army, but he couldn't because his entire family still lived there. He even went to Belgrade, but returned again and said, "All I can do is stay here and get killed." There were so many incidents where someone came to chase people from their homes, and then Mišo would bring these people back. He helped many people, and saved many, too. He provided a kind of peace for me. He's a young man, maybe 33 or 34 years old, a mechanical engineer. He protected my friend, Jasna. Wherever there were tough situations, we could always call on him.

(...)

D: *When did you definitely decide to leave Sarajevo?*

G: In fact, I was thinking about it the entire time, but one finds herself tied to some damn things. These are not simple things: it is your home - it is something that you have been building your entire life and it represents something. The question was how to preserve your honour and give your own contribution to the city. The way time passed, there was little that I could build. I could have helped someone over there so that something would get done. When our neighbour died, no one wanted to go and bury him because they were all afraid. You had to go all the way to the top of Grac where there were snipers from our side, and it was dangerous to get to the funeral service. How is it possible to say, "Come to bury a Croat"? No one dared. Then I said, "Okay, I'm going to go. I'm an Orthodox." When I arrived, three soldiers were sitting there, and I asked them if that was the funeral service, and they replied, deceitfully, that it was. I said, "One of our neighbours has died and we don't know what to do." One of the soldiers asked, "Is he a Muslim?" I replied, "No." He said, "Good. What is he then?" I tell him that the man is a Croat. He says to me, "No problem, we bury our dead the

same." They were actually very kind and insisted that someone come with them to see how well they worked and to prove that it wasn't true that people were thrown into sacks. The daughter of the man who died actually went with them in their van. The soldiers had come to the front of the house. They brought a casket with them and took him away to Lukavica. There were no funeral services. Muslims, Serbs and Croats were buried separately, but correctly. I could do some small things and expose myself more than the others could, but I constantly felt this terrible fear. I was afraid since there was this myth that existed that all children of mixed marriages were bastards; (regardless of the fact that my father is Orthodox and my mother is Catholic) for them, I did not exist.

D: *No one asked about your husband?*

G: They always asked me, and I would tell them, "I'm separated and I have no idea where he is." And then it all started… Men boarded up the empty apartments, snatching things and taking them away. We had to clean the apartments in which there was meat rotting and worms throughout the rooms that were already starting to smell terrible. Then we received an order for all of us to go to these boarded up apartments. The army boarded them up and took with them whatever they liked, and the women stayed behind to clean. Never in my life have I seen anything like this – cleaning and throwing up at the same time. There was food in the refrigerators of abandoned apartments where forty days had passed without electricity. It was really terrible. The men were useful only in taking away the things that they liked; transforming them into horrid predatory figures… they took away everything. It was awful, and a child was watching all of this. I had seen that there was really nothing more that I could do there. And that's when I reached the decision to leave, but also to come back for my mother because she didn't have any papers. Her passport had expired - I could have had it extended on the Serbian side, but then it wouldn't have been recognized by Hungarians or Croats. Then I thought that I would go to Zagreb and sort things out at the Italian Embassy regarding her papers and then return for her. However, that was a naive decision since all the roads were closed. Namely, when I came to the Hungarian border, the Croats had closed their border. I sat around Hungary for two days and then one of my relatives came for me. She had been able to gather many signatures and papers for me, and drove me to Croatia. I was without status for a long time since I was only given permission to stay for fourteen days starting from the 23rd of September in 1992. My relative tried to secure forty days, but because my son's name is Miloš, we only received fourteen days. Still, we stayed. When there was that registration in the third month of 1993, it was then that I received refugee status and an identity card without any problems.

(...)

V: *How long did that period of doing nothing last after coming to Zagreb?*

G: From September in 1992 until January in 1993. It was late January that I heard about the *Center*.

V: *How did you overcome that period?*

G: I was terribly lonely. A relative whom I had grown up with, who had been like a sister to me, whom I had spent my summers with and had never had any kind of quarrels with - she started to make awful problems for me. First, she begged and begged me to come to her, and when I came, then... "How is it that your child has this name? I can't call him by this name anymore. People are starting to cause problems for me because I have Serbs in the house..." As for me, I was terribly depressed... Christmas passed and my mother's birthday passed. I wanted to return to Sarajevo immediately (after twenty or thirty days), but there were no more bus lines there. I couldn't find another way to return at all. I was in a trap. I didn't leave the house because I knew that I couldn't go anywhere.

D: *What else happened with that relative?*

G: I can't understand those people... No, I can't understand. I can't even justify it. I knew that I had to leave, and, in the middle of January, I found myself out on the street. I have a friend – I was her maid of honour at her wedding. She is from Sarajevo, and I grew up with her. She lives here. She helped me so much. She found me an apartment and so on... I escaped from Sarajevo because of the terrible hatred and because of Serbophilia. They brought their own people, employed them there, and created some communities. I thought that in Zagreb it would be different. Zagreb was always very dear to me; I terribly love Zagreb because I used to spend my summers here. When I encountered hatred again, horrible hatred, I felt completely defeated. It defeated me terribly and I think that we need to at least try to understand that. The war does everything to people. And friends knew how to provoke me by asking how my little boy came to have such an ugly name, how he is dark-skinned, how he is like this or that. They were allegedly saying that only Serbs were dark-skinned. Does anyone have a handkerchief? It hurts terribly. This wasn't the common experience, because there were some people whom I liked. When I began to work at the *Center*, it changed my life. It helped me. The only thing that tormented me during the entire time was that my mother was still over there, all alone, sick and elderly. She is an unhappy, poor woman, whose nature and character changed in that war. It's been a year and she won't forgive me for not coming back, even though she doesn't want to leave.

(...)

V: *Why did you decide to go to Sarajevo now?*

G: Because I've heard that she is really weak now. You know what? Maybe it's my cowardice because I simply can't stand the thought that my mother might die with some curse on her lips and that I didn't do anything for her; I didn't help her. I could not live with that... I'd truly suffer. I have a strong bond with her and have practically never been separated from her. She was a wonderful mother. Throughout her whole life, she has been a wonderful mother. She raised my son, and now she has been abandoned. I tried to convince myself that her life is near its end; that she's had an excellent life and an excellent marriage, and, I can also say, a good family and children.

She never had any problems with us, and my father was a wonderful husband. They had money, and I think that she really lived a beautiful life.

V: *Why did you still decide to return? What is that feeling?*

G: Well, it's simply my obligation, my debt to her. I should probably think about my son first and stay here, but I can't. Even though I am horribly afraid and I ask myself: if it were now, would I be able to get on that bus today? That's how afraid I am. Nela gave me addresses of women in Belgrade…

(...)

V: *Tell us something about your relationship with the group of women here at the Center. How do you remember the beginning of our activities?*

G: (...) I learned a lot there, but, in fact, I have had a lot of life experiences which have helped me, too. I have better instincts than brains. The workshops were super. The ones held by the Englishwomen were especially good. You could always do something good somewhere. I would love it that the project continues, that it works, that it expands, because this is something wonderful. During this time, and in this environment, and amidst the hatred - to find so many wonderful women with such strong wills - it's a great thing. It gives a person hope that everything is not so terribly dark.

(...)

V: *Did you work with women who were raped?*

G: There was one woman, Azra, from Prijedor, an older woman who eventually left for America. She was raped, quite brutally, in every way… with a gun and this and that, and in front of her husband's eyes. She didn't want to tell anyone her story. She turned to me, which I took to be an encouraging sign. First, she spoke to me in private, and then, later, in front of the whole group, she told her entire story. Owing to her age (and she was 69), it seems to me that… she left, in the end, with a sense of peace.

V: *How did the group relate to her, and how did you work in the group?*

G: The group accepted her quite well. Azra was an extraordinary woman… she had some bad moments, and you needed a lot of patience with her. The other women did not expressively react – instead, they talked. They related to and understood her. There were no open conversations or statements among them in relation to that; in fact, they didn't want to comment.

V: *Do you have the impression that this woman was helped because she told her story in front of a group of women?*

G: I think that it was because in the past she did not want to talk to anyone about it, and then she started to talk to me. Several times we sat privately on a bench in the camp and talked and then she slowly began to open up to me. The first time we talked, she said to me, "I've been through everything," and then the second time she said, "If you knew…" I simply moved at my own pace. At the end, she told her entire story in detail in front of everyone. She was even the head of the group for a while. She had a way of animating everything. She knew how to be happy, knew how to tell good jokes and stories from her youth; for a time, she maintained a good atmos-

phere in the group for us after telling us about what had happened to her. There were moments when everyone was silent and we wondered what to do next, and then Azra always stepped in and said, "Come on ladies, what's wrong? Let's hear how you're doing, what you have to say..." It was super. In the end, she left for Chicago.

V: *How does her husband behave towards her?*

G: Very normally. I had also asked her how Dedo reacted to that. She said, "He feels sorry, poor soul." He is old and diabetic, a lot older than she is. He never reproached her; he simply didn't speak about it. She's illiterate you know, but a very smart woman. She doesn't even know how to sign her name, but she has all the wisdom that one finds among the village women, and she waited for how and when to assess things on her own. And she acted quite wisely. One must actually respect her.

D: *Have you said goodbye to the women in the camp?*

G: Yesterday I told my women that I was leaving. I thought about not telling them, but that would be cowardly. They started to cry so much that it couldn't be stopped. And then we began to remember our beginning - how there were only six or seven of us then. We told them that they will be getting two new girls who might be better than us, and that they shouldn't be scared and worried. Besides, four of them are leaving for Germany and Puškarica is going to California in a month, so our group was taken care of in some way. These new young women are going to join our work on Tuesdays. This way I am somewhat calm, but I just feel badly that I won't be there to send them off.

V: *What were your experiences working with the group? I don't think that anyone here has ever done this type of work.*

G: It was excellent and we came to that same conclusion just yesterday. They say that not having any goods... furniture, cars... none of that is of any importance. It is important when we are in a group like this, when we are talking, when we have feelings of compassion for someone, when we have someone to cry with, and someone to laugh with. That is really good. I was sceptical in the beginning, wondering if it was going to be alright with these people with so many concrete needs. What can I do for them? Poor me, what can I give them besides addresses of places to seek money... but I'm not talking about that. They said, "We come here an hour earlier than you, gather around and wait for you." I think that they feel most importantly that this is a place where someone cares about them a little and provides them company, and that they have friends. And they, themselves, say, "The only thing that is valuable in this world is friendship."

The interview with the Center's activist was conducted by
Dinka Koričić and **Vesna Kesić**, July 1993

*(Center for Women War Victims: Collected Papers, 1994;
Women Recollecting Memories, 2003)*

Translated by **Esma Trejić**

One Woman – One Story
Carmen

This story bears this title because it is a story that one woman dedicated to another woman (to my Carmen), and at the same time, it is dedicated to all those women who have gone through a similar experience or who at least sympathize with those of us who were forced by war to struggle for bare survival.

My story is, unfortunately, just one among thousands of similar stories which took place in the one-time land of prosperity, peace and carefree life – Yugoslavia. It used to be my homeland.

My present homeland is Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it will always be that, regardless of whether the power-holders of the world decide to divide it or to destroy it as well.

… However, I don't want to talk about how it was to leave Sarajevo in a hail of grenades, while my son's eyes were beaming horror; how horrible it was to face friendless and hopeless uncertainty... I want to talk about something else: about female solidarity, about the female view on the position of women in this war. The remark that 'no man can endure as much as a woman can' is not just a figure of speech. My story confirms that.

I survived thanks to my female friends. In Belgrade, where I spent some time after escaping from the hell of Sarajevo, I received help mostly from the courageous activists of Women in Black, the volunteers of the *S.O.S. hotline* and the members of the *Women's Parliament*, who were among the few to raise their voices against the regime's policies and against violence, especially violence as a means of morally destroying an entire nation. I didn't dare tell anyone that I had worked for the Sarajevo newspaper *Oslobodjenje*, which, despite all its difficulties, still appears on a regular basis and advocates the concept of a unified civil Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nor did I dare pronounce my name, because it would immediately incur the comment: *She is a Muslim and does not belong to us*. Nevertheless, I believed that I was a child of this planet, a citizen of the world and nothing else. Fortunately, my friends took no heed of names or nationalities.

After Belgrade, I took part in a conference in Trieste dedicated to the women of ex-Yugoslavia, organized by Italian women of the *Women's Center* in Via Gambini in Trieste. I stayed in Trieste even after the end of the conference waiting for my husband (a journalist who spent over a year in the hell of Sarajevo), with whom I hoped to start a new life far away from all that. There I met Carmen, a woman of great knowledge and strong charac-

ter, who instilled new life into me. How did that come about? Carmen simply does not admit defeat and never ever gives in. And she will not allow any woman to surrender. I listened to her saying that she had paved her way all alone and fought all her battles by herself. Carmen is a woman who has never acknowledged a division between the "stronger" and the "weaker" sex.

Such divisions are only notions that exist in this world – without facts to support them. Carmen taught me that. We were not able to talk a lot due to the language barrier, but I understood her messages. Those messages empowered me. I simply realized that I was responsible for my child and for myself, and that I had to fight instead of pitying myself, in spite of the fact that the situation I was in was more than cruel. I lived in her apartment, watched her and learned from her. The objective circumstances in my life have not changed for the better to this day, but I am ready to go forward. I refuse to let go, and I see my situation in a different light than I used to. Why is that? Because I repeat to myself silently, every day, time and again, the lesson that I have learned from my Carmen: *When you view yourself as a victim of war and an eternal loser, you will always be that. You must overcome self-pity.* And it works – I tested it for myself. I did not feel like a loser, or a miserable, tormented woman. Many people were surprised, because they had expected me to act as a victim. I persuaded myself that everything that had happened was not my fault, but a consequence of collective madness.

I often think of ways to help other women whose situations are even worse than mine. I try to convince them that they should not be pathetic nor try to elicit pity, because this is not likely to bring out goodness and generosity in people.

In workshops dealing with the problem of women raped in the war, I insist that the lives of the women who have been raped have not come to an end, and also, that they are not the ones who have brought "dishonor" upon their families. It is their husbands and fathers who speak of shame – and not the raped women. Actually, they are not the real victims; the real victims (of their politics, their views, their passions and urges) are the men. They have lost their honor, and not the women. A woman does not need decorations in a system of values established by men…

I reflect and I talk to women; I want to relay our "secret" female message to them: the message and truth my friend Carmen gave me.

As long as only one such woman stands by me, I will not be afraid.

Merima Trbojević

(Women for Peace, 1994)

women of krajina

women of krajina –
war, exodus and exile, 1996

Kosa

***

When we left home, nobody had told us nothing. There hadn't been no bomb-raids – not a single bomb had been dropped. I was born in the village of Kovačić near Vojnić, the district of Vojnić; I've been married in Vile village near Kolarić, the district of Vojnić. It's a lucky chance that I was born and married in the same district. Both villages were near and I didn' hafta go nowhere, not to Karlovac, not nowhere for those (Croatian) papers. It's only that I had to wait for the passport, that travel document for two an' a half months. It's hard. I'd never thought I wouldn' see me children again... I've got nothin' left, but I wouldn' want for one single thing if only my son was alive... (*weeping*). If only dear God 'ad saved 'im for those two days – to stay alive, it would all be good now... (*weeping*).

That Friday, when they came with the bad news, no one wanted to tell me. But I could see it on their faces: I knew two of 'em, the third one – I didn't. They told me later. When Branko M. got out of the car, he did it slowly and I saw 'im standin' an' realised sumthin' was amiss as he'd never look'd like that. I came up to 'im an' said: "What is it, Branko?" He said nothin'. When I saw he'd gone all purple I asked again: "Please tell, Branko, where's me only child got to? Where's me Ljuban?" The three of 'em kep' silent. On that, I passed out. Then I saw me next-door neighbour standin' beside me and the three of 'em too and me seated in the courtyard. I dunno how long I had sat there, I was all soaked as they'd been tryin' to bring me round by splashin' water on me. Those three came back. They tried to tidy up a bit, to find a place to put the coffin and still said nothin'. "Will ya tell me where my son is?!" They still said nothin'... Nobody'd ever said to me – "Your Ljuban is gone, he got killed." They all just gazed aroun' and wept. I knew what 'ad happened the moment I saw 'em around me sayin' nothin'. He should've come home on Thursday. He'd been gone for three weeks.

On Saturday they buried 'im rashly. In the evening everyone was gone; I was all alone again. I just sat on the couch all night. No light, the candles had burnt out... I sat there... like a log, all alone. I couldn't hardly wait for the dawn to break. I went outside... then back in again. I looked at the clock – half past five. "Good," I think, "it's nearly dawn." In the morning, I went about, did the chores and then Granny Anka, me mother-in-law, show up. She stayed with me. We got ready to go to the cemetery. She said: "I'll go with ya, daughter." I said: "Right." Nobody else 'ad come, no neighbour, no one. They all gettin' ready to flee. Then a neighbour come by with her

son; her gran'son said to Granny Anka: "Don't stay put. They're gonna bomb now." She didn' want to leave me and I knowed how easily scared she was. I say: "Mom, you go – you're panicky, an' I'll stay." "But you can't stay neither, come with me." I wouldn't go nowhere.

Then comes me neighbour and asked to take me tractor-trailer; it's bigger than 'is. He asked me to come with 'em, but I wouldn'. I picked me some flowers and went to the cemetery. I climbed up and, as I was carryin' flowers in one hand an' candles in 'nother, I hit me knee into a concrete prop on a grave (it's still sore, I keep puttin' a compress on at night). The pain was so much that I fell like a log and pass'd out… When I came round, I realised I was lyin' in the grass, the flowers all scattered, the candles bent from heat. I saw the sky an' tombstones around me. I remembered I was at the cemetery. Then I got up slowly an' cried an' wailed to my heart's content. When I got down to the village, no one was there. They'd all went. Each an' every one… I could only 'ear dogs barkin'. They'd rounded up the cattle an' took 'em along. Even me next-door neighbour's wife who was gravely ill – 'ad cancer, was almost completely bed-ridden an' kept sayin' she wouldn' go nowhere – even she was gone. Her room was left all untidy 'cause they left suddenly, hurried by relatives. Yet, even if I'd known they'd be fleein', I wouldn've left with 'em – my place was there…

So they went on Sunday and on Monday at two o'clock, Muslims from Kladuša come to loot. The Croatian Army come by the upper road; they 'ad twelve tanks. They stopped seven kilometres short of me 'ouse. Had they left the tanks and came on foot to ransack, or was it somebody else? – That, I wouldn' know. There were three different kinds (of armies)… Who could tell…?

On Monday night I slep' in one of me fields and on Tuesday, nine Muslims came to me 'ouse. They crushed all the doorways since the doors were locked… I'd went to the garden to pick turnips for the pigs. When I heard the noise, I went back to the 'ouse and saw six of 'em. "What on earth ya doin'?!" I asked, "I'm not dead yet!" One fled, the others follow'd. The candles burnt in the kitchen and the living room all night. I started stashin' things away. What I buried in the dump-site, only I could find. I'd stashed guns an' they didn' find 'em. But my poor son, what they'd buried 'im with – it was all looted – by his mates, brothers, pals.

I had a good mind not to go anywhere until, on Tuesday, a neighbour's 'ouse started burning – the Croatian Army 'ad set it on fire. It's less than half a mile… From bus after bus, car after car – troops kept comin' out, past me neighbour's 'ouse and up to make an ambush. I reckon'd, if they came by, I'd hide in a thicket, wait for dusk and go back 'ome again. They'd be gone and I'd lock up quietly. But, what d'ya know, they'd spread about the village and on the hills, they were ev'rywhere. They'd settled in the woods where I'd planned to hide. Not a meter apart – lyin' in an ambush.

I went down to hide behind a thicket but when I look'd up towards the hill, they'd already set the ambush. And down there, the Muslims were startin' to ransack 'ouses and were loadin' up a truck with the loot which

they'd overturned. When it thundered, you'd say a three-storey 'ouse 'ad collapsed. I heard that, but I didn' see that the 'ouse was on fire. When I went out onto the road – my 'ouse is by the road – I saw the 'ouse burnin'. Could be that there was some ammunition in the 'ouse since they'd set it on fire. I saw they'd divided into two groups – one bunch went up a hill towards one 'ouse, the other – up another hill towards another 'ouse… And those four Muslims, goin' up the road, pas' me and pas' me barn. Now, I wasn't carryin' nothin', only a sweater in the hand. I asked them: "Where should I be goin' now, fellas?" "Wherever you wish, granny." I went with 'em. As I was talkin' to 'em, I saw troops goin' up the hill, firin' guns to the sky. They saw 'em too, they turned aroun' an' started for the overturned truck. Then I thought: 'I'll go to that grove o' mine - no troops there; that's where I'll hide.' I walk in the middle of the road, they furtively walk'd on the sides. They stray'd into one of me fields an' I went on. I look'd ahead to see if I could pass an' hide in that grove, stay there till dusk - there weren' no troops there. Wrong – the grove swarm'd with troops all firin' guns. I just walk'd on to one of me cornfields an' stayed there for a while… Then I saw those same Muslims goin' into the village on tractors an' with horses to go lootin'. I stayed there maybe an hour – I didn't dare come out… Then I thought I'd go up to the top of the hill to see if my 'ouse was on fire. I walked through the maize an' into me sister's cornfield – our fields bordered each other's. What now? Then I saw a man. I thought he's a Muslim, he's got a coverin' thrown over 'is shoulder – like this. But then I recognised 'im – it's not a Muslim, it's my next-door neighbour. He got left all alone there, too. He'd stayed with a Croatian friend thinkin' that would make him safe. On Tuesday he'd come back at ten o'clock in the mornin' an' saw Muslims 'ad already slaughtered 'is sheep, let loose the cows, the horses, the pigs – all the cattle, everythin'. When he 'ad got there, he saw three sheep butchered, skinned, the innards taken out... All he had left was what 'ad dropped out from that Muslim's truck. I called to him: "Hey, Ilija, is that you?" "Yes, it's me." Then I say: "Where can we get to now?" "I wouldn' know." "I'd go," said I, "up to the 'ill-top to see if my 'ouse is on fire." "And then what?" "Then I'd go 'ome." So he tagged along an' we got near that thicket; but I couldn' go on – I got all weak, it all blackened before me… I couldn' see nothin', couldn't hear nothin'. I sat down to rest an' he walk'd on. I bowed me 'ead an' buried it in me 'ands an' three Muslims walked up to me an' one said: "Havin' a rest, granny, huh?" My heart twitch'd. Then I saw me Ljuban's T-shirt on one of 'em – I thought I'd die. I was sure they'd nick'd everythin' from the 'ouse, that I'd nothin' left… Ilija walk'd quite a bit an' then turn'd an' saw me far behind. When they'd left, he walk'd back, saw me hands all tremblin', nails all blue an' asked me if I wanted some water to drink. I only shook me 'ead. So he stood there above me an' they started shootin' around his 'ouse… I sat like that for a while an' when I felt bett'r, I walk'd up to 'im, said I was thirsty an' couldn' walk on, an' that we should head for the well.

When me strength came back, I climb'd down to me sister-in-law's

an' her aunt's… an' the troops were there, pillagin', takin' whatever they could carry into the car. They'd let loose the horses, cows, pigs, sheep – everythin'. When they'd left carryin' all that, I went to an ol' woman's 'ouse. I knock on the door, on the window – no one's home. Then I 'eard a noise. I took a bottle to get me some water an' saw two goats lock'd in a room, makin' that noise. I wash'd the bottle an' fill'd it. I drank a little, walk'd to the front, but the sickness came back. I felt dizzy again an' start'd throwin' up. I threw up all the water as fresh as I'd drunk it – 'adn't even warmed up in me belly. Then it dawn'd on me that I should hurry, should get away. I look'd around – from one 'ouse to another an' saw some Muslims or some troops. If they shot, so be it… I walk'd up the road slowly, carryin' that bottle in me 'and. I came up to Ilija an' he said: "Why're you takin' the middle of the road? Don'cha see the troops?" "Let 'em kill me – what do I care; only they do it quickly," said I. "No worries, they'd do it quickly." When they were about to return to their village, we mov'd from that hillside to one of the 'ouses an' watch'd from there. They took everythin' they could…

It was gettin' dark. It started to rain. A strong, cold wind pick'd up. I was bare-footed, only in flip-flops an' in a T-shirt, with that thin sweater I'd put on – nothin' else. We headed for Perići. Ilija said we should go an' I said: "Oh my, Ilija, what're we gonna do there – it's all been taken away." But we went there anyways – through the cornfields. At a corner, near an 'ouse, I folded several corn-stalks an' sat. Then Ilija said: "I'll get in to look for some tobacco to smoke." It was drizzlin'. He called to me: "Come in – there's a chair here. We can stay in until the rain stops." My God, when it dawn'd an' we could see it all in the daylight: it'd all been ransacked, scoured – the couches an' other furniture - all turn'd upside-down, you couldn't hardly get into the room. Then there was no food. I wasn't hungry but he was. I 'adn't eaten for days – except that I 'ad a coffee with Granny Anka on Sunday.

We stayed for three days in that empty 'ouse. Troops went by – one army, then another. I couldn' recognize their uniforms. Some 'ad those cowboy hats, those black ones. Some 'ad black scarves tied on their heads. Some 'ad caps. One of 'em said to Ilija: "Are you alone there, grandpa?" "No," 'e said. "And who else is there?" "There's a granny here, too," 'e said. "Is she your wife?" they ask'd. "No, she's a neighbour. She stay'd behind, all alone, like me." "Listen," they said, "the Muslims told us that an ol' woman 'ad fled from that big, nice 'ouse by the road, the big wood'n 'ouse overlookin' the road. Tell her she can come back; we won't hurt her." That'd be me. I said to Ilija: "I'd rather go home now." Then Ilija said: "Don'cha go there, Tsitsa. It's a 'ouse o' mourning. All that food you made for the wake, they've found it. They'll ask you who died an' you'll pass out an' they'll bully you an' strangle you an' all…" So, I didn't go.

On Thursday, the rain stopped but it thundered loudly. I wanted to go. We'd heard a granny 'ad stayed behind an' I wanted to go to her – I knew her well. But it started to rain again. On Friday morning there was no rain but a strong gale 'ad pick'd up an' it was cold – you couldn' go out. Then they

came again an' asked who was there an' said there was that ol' granny, they wouldn't hurt her an' then they added: "If she 'as nothin' to eat we'll share our food with her." Why would they feed me when I 'ad fifty pigs, over eighty chickens, nine cows? An' again, I wanted to go 'ome. It'd been three long days away from 'ome… I longed to go an' so I left. I almost reached the 'ouse of that woman I wanted to see, when I spotted four of 'em comin' me way. I went back. Ilija said: "Why'd ya come back?" "Quiet," I said, "here they come." "You really got it into your head to go today. I've told ya a hundred times an' I'm tellin' ya again – it's not good at your place now." When the troops 'ad gone, I walked out into a field to go to a friend's place where I later stayed for six months. I said to Ilija: "I'll be going over to kuma[1]-Ranka, she hasn' gone nowhere. If she won't have me, I don't know where I'll go next." Ilija said: "I'm stayin' put." "I'll be off, then," said I. So, at 5 o'clock on Friday, I went to kuma-Ranka's. Her sister-in law, who was doin' poorly an' stayin' with her, saw me firs'. She saw me comin' from 500 meters afar. She said: "Hey Ranka, here's Tsitsa, comin' this way." Then she walked 50 meters towards me. She saw me an' said: "Hey Tsitsa, is that you?" "Yes, it's me!" "Where have ya been all this time, hun?" Then I started tellin' her. I came down to where she was waitin'. When I got there, Ranka was all 'appy – she'd 'ave a hand now. She needed someone to carry the water; the power was cut an' we needed to draw the water from the well by hand. So, then we talked an' cried a lot. Then came Ilija, although 'e'd said 'e wouldn'. She ran off to make sumthin' to eat, but I couldn' eat anythin', just drank some water… Saturday mornin' – I got up at five an' said to her: "I'd be goin' home now." An' she said: "Don'cha even think about it. The Muslims are there – they'll kill ya…" Then she added: "I've only this little coffee left – for three cups… I'll make it for the three of us." And I said: "That'd be good for my soul." When I drank that coffee, I felt like I could climb Velebit – that's how light I felt. An' I'd left a kilo o' coffee an' maybe 20 kilos o' sugar at 'ome… Then I begged: "Please don't say anythin' to kuma-Ranka – I'll be goin' 'ome." An' she said: "I won't, but don' stay too long, I'll be worryin'. I'll sit down there in the orchard an' watch ya. If anything happens, you start screamin', you hear me?"

Then I went 'ome an' saw it all. Haystacks uncovered, bales missin'. The 'ouse – unroofed from the court-yard side. But the road side, where the troops went, wasn' damaged at all. It gave off the look of not bein' ransacked – no doors or windows, no window or door frames, three stoves, a washing machine, a deep-freezer – all gone. An' the things they didn' need – the toilet, the bathtub – all smash'd to pieces, all they didn' need in the bathroom, they smash'd. The rooms – they didn' even look like rooms no more; they

[1] kuma = an informal, colloquial title given to very close family friends denoting that members of the two families have either been God-parents or God-children to each other, or best men and maid of honour at each other's weddings. The masculine equivalent is 'kum'. This title is widespread among Serbian, Montenegrian and Macedonian populations.

were more like where they keep pigs. Such a mess… All couches – gone, all wardrobes, cupboards – nothin' was left. In the middle of a room, they'd spread my coat an' raincoat an' poured three tubs o' lard onto 'em. They'd taken the tubs. All was gone – they'd even taken the coffee cups an' saucers. An' the sewin' machine – they'd taken it out to the court-yard an' smash'd it to pieces; the tractor rake – no tips, the tractor itself – all taken to pieces, its tyres – slashed. They couldn' start the tractor, they tried to push it down a slope to start it, but they couldn'. Then they stripped it of all the parts. The harvest tools – looted. The thresher 'ad been taken further away an' turn'd over. The last two months, since the troops 'ad come, I 'ad no way to go an' check if it's all in one piece…

So, the Croatian army 'ad a prefab barracks just next to my barn. Ranka would come outside her 'ouse an' say to me: "Look, Tsitsa, there's some light over there at your place." I'd say to her: "No light will ever fall on me from there." It was a hard time. I could never go to the cemetery on a fine day. Only when it was foggy or when it rained. The cemetery was on the hill an' the troops were in the valley. They could see who went to the cemetery.

Then came Sunday an' I went to the cemetery. When I got there, it 'ad all been rampaged: the earth was freshly upturned – you could tell. They'd scattered the vases – all of them, but they hadn' touch'd the tomb-stones – they wouldn' do that, only the vases. An' there was that man, very old – born in 1914; he didn't want to flee an' all his family 'ad gone: first his granddaughter 'ad gone to visit relatives, the others followed her. He stay'd. No one knows what 'appened to 'im. Who did 'im in – the Muslims or the troops… Could be that they wanted to get into the 'ouse and 'e wouldn' let 'em, an' then they did 'im in, an' later the Muslims told us that all they 'ad found was his hat and coat… That pigs 'ad eaten his corpse…

One mornin', it was foggy, I didn' tell no one where I was goin' an' why… After I'd fed the stock, I went to the cemetery, wail'd there long an' hard an' then set out to go back… I almost reach'd the 'ouse when I saw their police comin' my way. I went toward 'em. They started askin' me questions: "Where're ya goin', ol' woman?" "'ome," said I. "An' where would that be?" "O'er there. Only it used to be an 'ouse, but now it's not." "How's that? Isn't it that big beautiful building o'er there?" they enquired. "It's beautiful all right, from where you can see it, but from behind – it's all in shambles, a hotch-potch, really," I said. "Then why d'ya wanna go there?" "To see if there're any cows there." "So how many cows have ya got?" "I had five," said I. "Have ya got any papers?" "I'm waitin' for the papers, I am; but I've got this permit - I can go where I want with it!" I handed 'im the permit an' he folded it without lookin' at it an' said: "You can go, granny." Then I went up to the 'ouse of my closest neighbour. There're two squaddies sawin' planks which were all worthless, really: breakin' in two, crumblin'… I went past 'em to the place where I'd seen two cows grazin' every day. I see four women choppin' up a porker. A fifth was mindin' a tied cow. I greeted her: "Hey hun, 'ave you seen those two cows that graze here every day?" "One's o'er 'ere –

tied, but the other one you can' tie." "How come?" "She's got all chafed round the horns from chains, but she'd brake off any chain. She goes about the fields an' grazes an' comes back in the evenin'." I started to cry. "Why are ya cryin', granny?" "That's my cow." "How d'ya know?" "I saw 'er here the other day. I'll go an' find 'er." "I'll go with ya," said that Muslim woman. "Where's your 'ouse?" "O'er 'ere. Was an 'ouse but it's no more – all in shambles." said I. When I got a bit further, I saw me cow in me cornfield. I called to her an' she got all playful, tossin' 'er 'ead an' all, puttin' it on me shoulder. I cried, the Muslim woman cried, the cow cried. All three of us cried… The woman said: "Granny, I can see it's your cow, take it home with ya." "I 'aven't got a rope," said I. I set off to go 'ome and then the woman said: "I'll go with ya, granny, to see your 'ouse." The two of us got to the 'ouse, an' the cow came on her own, without a leash. I'd lost interest in all those shambles, now I wanted to find a rope to tie to that cow an' take 'er with me. Out of the yard we went, the cow just stood there. Whatever I said, she mooed an' stretched. Then came four boys, Muslims, an' lured the cow to go with 'em. Then the woman said: "Hey boys, leave that cow alone, it's this grandma's." "If it's hers, why doesn' she herd it?" "I would, but I haven' got no rope," I said. "Here, take this rope," said one of 'em. I tied the cow an' went to fetch an ear o' corn to bribe her over a stream. I didn' know then that she would follow me anyways, she'd follow me onto a roof, if need be. So I brought her to kuma-Ranka's…

The fear was enormous: we 'ad no idea that the neighbours 'ad so much weaponry. Whene'er an army went by, they'd stop to harass us, to ask where the others were, where our sons were. They'd say: "Here, they deny having sons, an' they shoot at us. Bloody Serbs… Where're your sons, each of you has two, three. Who would be firin' at us if you 'ad none." When I carried on that I 'ad none, he left me alone. Then he ask'd me: "Where's that son of a bitch from up there (the neighbour above me) gone?" "I dunno – they follow'd the others," said I. Then one o' the women there ask'd: "How come you know him?" "I've been this way more times than I care to count." Oh, the things they did… But I'd be lyin' if I said they were all bad. There were all sorts, no two men are alike… I swear to God, I wouldn' bear it all now… I was like someone stunned, I had no fear, I only shuddered at the thought that they could cut off me fingers, take out me eyes, cut off me nose, ears – otherwise I wasn' afraid they could kill me… I carried a bomb wi' me to blow meself up if they caught me.

Then gettin' the papers. I got 200 Kunas directly from the Red Cross. One of me cousins instructed me: "Tsitsa, you should apply for the papers an' when you're ready, I'll give ya the money to go away, an' now take this for the papers." I only paid 128 Kunas for the passport; other things – photos, forms, other documents – it was all free. We went to Vojnić to have the photos taken – it was all free. I got the certificate of citizenship, the ID, I only had to wait for the passport. It took me two an' a half months to get the passport… All that time I was at Ranka's. The others stayed there after

me: her cousin with the bed-ridden husband an' some other relatives. There was nothin' else they could do – they couldn' go to Vojnić to get the papers. I went, to tell ya the truth, at least a hundred an' sixty-five times an' that's sixteen kilometres – eight to go there an' eight to come back. When ya got there all you could see on the list were their folks from Banjaluka (the refugees) – not one Serb. Once when we were queuin' to enquire about it an' the woman standin' with me said: "Tsitsa, look what's written on Mustafa's 'ouse." I turn'd to look an' it said – 'Death to Serbs'. Then I said: "We'll die all right, we don't need no citizenship paper or passport."

When me Ljubitsa sent in a complaint, then they came for me. In the complaint, she didn't dare state that Ljuban 'ad got killed in 1995, she wrote 1991. That Monday, when the man came to take me away, it was snowin' so hard that you couldn' get out o' the 'ouse. I opened the door. Then he said: "Good morning, granny. I'm lookin' for 'such an' such' lady." "That'd be me," I said. "I'd like a word with you." "Please come in." I said. We sat down. Then he asked: "D'ya hear well, granny?" "I'd hear ya even if I didn't see ya." "You have a daughter there in Yugoslavia, right?" he went on. "Yep, she's been there for o'er twenty years. She's like a native there." "Good… I got a letter from her yesterday askin' that you go there to Yugoslavia, to join her. I need your papers," and he added, "I'll be back round Catholic Christmas, an' you be ready." And he really came on St. Nicolas Day, on Tuesday, at six o'clock in the mornin'. I wasn' ready yet but there was no time for delay. They came for me in a car an' waited till I pack'd. "C'mon, c'mon," he insisted, "ev'rything's ready, we've come for ya an' sent a message to Belgrade to expect ya round eleven." An' in that car they took me as far as the Hungarian border. There were two of 'em – a boy an' a girl – young people from the Refugee Office. They shared with me what they'd brought for food. Coffee, bananas, tangerines, sandwiches… Their boss grumbled that they 'adn't made a photocopy of the passport page with the picture. Then they agreed it wasn't necessary, that I was an ol' woman with no papers about suspicious propaganda or weaponry, who was going to her daughter to be taken care of. His boss'd said to 'im: "This is silly, really. Will you be the one to tell me what this woman looks like? Is she young or old? You've seen her three times already an' I have no idea what she looks like!" The two of 'em laugh'd at it in the car. An' he ask'd me a couple o' times in the car whether I'd recognise the person who'd meet me in Hungary. He said: "Your daughter an' your son-in-law haven' got passports, so they've found someone to come an' meet ya." We came to the border at ten an' waited 'til two. We wouldn' got o'er even then – there were ten, twelve cars before us. But they recognised the car, an' two of 'em came to us, check'd passports quickly, an' in less than half an hour we were on the other side. There (in Hungary), they couldn' find the bus station, an' that was the meetin' point. They took in a Hungarian to take us directly to the station. This one who drove us park'd on the left side an' the man who was supposed to meet me 'ad park'd on the right side – our car right across from theirs. His son called

some relatives in Zagreb to find out if I'd got to Belgrade yet. They 'ad no news of me an' the time they'd agreed on 'ad pass'd. The man 'ad started worryin'… So, we got out o' the car an' into the station. The boy said: "C'mon, let's walk around. This is where we arranged to meet." Then we headed again for the waitin' room an' this fella who was there to meet me, let the two of 'em go in, but spread 'is arms an' wouldn' let me pass. They all got so 'appy. Those two – more than me; they couldn' take me back to Croatia, an' they would've wasted time in Belgrade. I will stay here with my daughter an' grandchildren. No way I could stay there all alone. There's no people there, only a few elderly ones. When I go to Vojnić, it's harder to come back than to go there. I dunno no one no more. During the war, I was so hardy, so plucky – I didn' care if it was day or night. I only wish'd that the war would stop - that it would all be o'er, that I could get back any o' my lot (*weeping*)… He used to say: "Mom, what do we need five cows for?" "Don'cha see, son, how costly funerals are?" "Is that what'cha live an' work for?" "Well, don' I deserve roast veal for the wake?" But fate turn'd it the other way round…

What hurt me most are these human wrongs. When they were to flee, my neighbour come three times to ask for the trailer but didn' have the nerve to ask me. Then another neighbour came to ask me in his name. He said; "Tsitsa, will ya give us your trailer? If we survive an' keep it, we'll give it back to ya. If we survive an' lose it, we'll pay for it." "Just take it, Loja." I said. "An' one more thing," he went on, "if you wanna come an' take things with ya, you go an' pack an' we'll take ya along." "I'm not goin' nowhere, Loja," said I. "Would ya go if you was me: you buried your son yesterday, and you set out to flee today. You wouldn' do that, would ya?" He walked away an' didn' say nothin'. Later I met 'em on the way to my 'ouse. The granny 'ad already gone. They'd taken both the trailer an' the coverin'. Now he wants me to pay for the things he'd taken away. If 'e hadn' had that trailer o' mine, he wouldn'ave been able to take 'is things away an' 'is bed-ridden mother. Now he wants me to pay. You won' see that nowhere. I've got nothin' left, not one thing…

Miroslava

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I come from a village near Dvor-on-Una. That's near the Bosnia and Herzegovinian and Croatian border. Its name is Zakopa. During the war I was frequently alone with the children when my husband went to the front line. That's an awfully nerve-wracking situation. For instance, in that unfortunate district of ours, you could hear blasts from all sides. All the fronts were not more than fifty kilometres in the straight line and we could hear blasts from Knin, Petrinja and Kostajnica war zones and on the Bosnian side – from Bihać and Krupa. When you knew your husband was somewhere out there and you heard such dreadful explosions, you couldn't help fearing only the worst news – that he was either dead or wounded. You simply had no other thought; it was really terrible. You became a bundle of nerves; you lived in constant fear. You're always afraid that terrorist groups would break in – not that I had ever survived a massacre or anything, but I was scared of Muslims. For instance, my nephew, who was killed at the Kladuša front, was mutilated. They caught him alive, fettered him, tied weights to the shackles and made him walk like that. That was so horrid. Then they murdered him, kept the corpse for two and a half months and delivered him in that condition. It was scorching hot that May and they'd sealed his coffin with a fly in it. So we sat by the coffin and could hear the fly buzzing inside. He was twenty-five years old. It is so terrible when you know that inside that box lay a person who had loved you, whom you had helped bring up. His family and mine lived next-door – only a fence between us. I still remember the day when he was born. I remember changing him, taking him for walks. And now that child was gone. And we were very close. I didn't have a brother, and his father – my cousin, was like a brother to me. I loved his child like my own.

I feared for the children when they were at school since UNPROFOR was quartered at the school playground, right next to the school. I was afraid of air-raids, and in the morning when they went to school. They would leave at seven, and in the winter time, it was still dark. It was about a kilometer from the house to the bus stop. That was when I feared the break-ins of the Muslim terrorists. I was afraid that when they were at the bus stop someone might get them into a car or mutilate them, kidnap them, that they wouldn't come back home and so on. There were things that bothered me. It bothered me that the politicians who had caused all that havoc, that mayhem, took very little care of ordinary people, especially women. It was different for men – they had to go and fight, and so they went. Hardly anyone took any care of women and children. Every woman had to look after the children,

herself, the house, her husband; to wash and iron his clothes. Could you possibly imagine what a man lying in a trench for eight days and then coming home looks like? No one ever wondered what it was like for that woman, if it was hard for her…

We set off on 6 August. They'd told us that it was only for a few days; they told us to take only the necessities, to stay at a safe place while the troops were fighting so that civilians wouldn't get killed and so that the Croatians wouldn't bombard towns and villages. Yet there were no official announcements that we should leave. At that time, we had a totally wretched radio station called *Radio Banija*. On Saturday, we listened to that radio all day. Then there was a lot of hearsay – that Petrinja had fallen, Glina, Knin and Benkovac, too; that people were fleeing, withdrawing. And indeed, you could hear the rumble. But we thought Arkan was coming, Šešelj was coming, the Yugoslav Army, too – to defend us. Night after night, we could hear that rumble. We all thought the troops were coming to our aid. Not many of those who were fleeing came by way of our village. You could only hear tractors and cars at night. But then – who could tell? It was summer and Bosanski Novi was close by. Young people went out to discos, theatres, cafés and such places. No one thought it could be people fleeing. I think it was a Saturday when one of my husband's relatives came round and told us to pack only the necessities, some clothes and food for three days. We had to withdraw so that the Croatians wouldn't bombard Dvor and the villages, and to avoid civilian casualties. He said a raid on Knin was on, and that many women, children and elderly people were trapped, and that there were dead bodies lying in the streets. To avoid the same destiny, we were to retreat some 20 kilometres towards Banja Luka to a village called Svodno. That's where we would go, he said, for no longer than three days and then we would return home. On the radio, they said that the Dvor District was to receive about 50,000 – 60,000 refugees. The logistics base of UNPROFOR was quartered there, too. They said that the whole area would be catered to, that the refugees were to be accommodated in the school gymnasium, the cinema, in the secondary school building, in the Town Hall… They wouldn't be left without a shelter. But, no one stayed – they all went on heading for Yugoslavia. On Sunday, the whole village decided to leave. We all went together. I think it was about half past three in the afternoon. We all formed one column. It was the hardest when I left our courtyard (*weeping*). That was really terrible. The rest was so-so. I mean, it was the hardest to set out. And our troops, who held the position against the Muslims, they neither withdrew nor came home. We had no news. We thought, since they weren't withdrawing, that it wasn't that bad. But when we crossed the bridge and saw that we were walking with people from Petrinja, Kostajnica, Glina and all other parts of Kninska Krajina, and that the troops were fleeing too, we realised that it was the road of no return. When the troops start fleeing, there's no going back – you will never return. That was terrible, a true soul killer. We went all together to Banja Luka. Then some stayed there, some

went on. About five to six families from my village and myself went together all the way to Bjeljina. There, we parted ways. We'd taken some clothes, a pillow, a blanket with us. We hadn't taken any valuables. We'd been packing in panic: we'd put in less important things and had left behind the really important ones. Before the war, my husband was a reserve officer. When the war started, he was drafted and charged with a battalion. Then, when we were to leave, he hadn't come home. If only he'd come home and said: "We're leaving for good, we aren't coming back." I had also left behind his uniform and all those silly army trinkets in his military bag. I reckoned we'd be coming back and I'd have carried them needlessly and risked losing something. It was only in Svodno that we met again. I'd had no idea whether he was alive or not, whether he'd been captured. And people would spread rumours, just as they always do. There was a rumour being circulated in the column that the Muslims had reached a village, Trgovik, and that they'd stopped the troops there and that the Croats had over-run them with tanks. That was a totally nerve-wracking rumour.

During the flight, we never separated. We went together on a tractor. And you know why some people separated and got lost? Well, the old folks had stayed behind. They didn't want to flee. Then, when that massacre in Dvor occurred, when they bombed civilians, over-ran tractors and cars with tanks, the people there scattered into the fields and woods. This is how they got separated. Or, take the troops, for instance – some families didn't wait for them. I waited for my husband in Svodno. And all other women from my village waited for their husbands there, too. We had agreed to wait until they caught up with us or until we got some news about them, about their whereabouts. That's what we agreed – we needed to know. I couldn't just set off with two children and an elderly woman without any news of my husband. Then, when he got there, we really set off. And so did the troops. There were a lot of women from Dvor. People from Dvor had moved out two days before, although we weren't aware of that at the time. When that pogrom, that slaughter at Žirovac-by-Dvor occurred, people, running for dear life, fled in all directions and hid wherever they could. Those who hadn't managed to hide were probably killed, crushed with tanks. It was the Croats who carried out that massacre. Many got separated then. I think that Croats from Petrinja headed off people from Lika at Žirovac. There used to be a huge military base there with underground aircraft hangars. That's where they intercepted them and headed them off. Then they did the same thing from the direction of Kostajnica. Then they carried out that terrible massacre outside Dvor towards Bosanski Novi and also between Žirovac and Dvor. The Niš Black Legion was withdrawing at the time and when they reached Dvor they had already been waiting – that's when the massacre occurred.

We travelled on a tractor. The journey was a sheer horror. God forbid that we ever have to embark on a journey like that one again, to go through all that again. When we were still in Svodno, all of the military equipment was there. They had stored everything there that they had managed

to save from Kninska Krajina. There were tanks, radars, cannons, trucks and buses there – all the military machinery. We stayed only one night and I feared we would be bombed. They had a pretty good idea where the Serbs would move all that, where they would hide it. Five or six days later they really bombed the place. Lots of people were killed then.

Between Prijedor and Banja Luka, we travelled through places where Croats lived. One night we stopped by an empty motel. In the morning, when we woke up, we saw that there were houses there. So I went to ask the lady of one of the houses if the children and I could wash up. My children had been used to having a shower every evening. And, indeed, the lady was kind and let us in. So as we talked, she asked who we were and where we were from and I told her everything. Then she said: "You know, ma'am, they're suggesting to me that I exchange this for a place in Pakrac." "Why," I said, "would they do that, ma'am?" "You know," she said, "I am a Croat." And she was really good to us. Then I asked her: "Has anyone harassed you, threatened you? Have they banged on the door at night?" "No, they haven't." She replied. "Then why would you move to Pakrac?" I asked. "You know," she explained, "my husband is old and yet, they want to draft him." Then I told her I was a Serb, that my husband was also a Serb and that we'd lived in a Serbian district. I told her that everyone between 18 and 45 was at the front and those between 46 and 70 had a labour obligation. On Saturdays and Sundays, they dug trenches and during the week, they worked in factories, drove trucks and buses… "Do you really think that if you move to Pakrac," I went on, "that Tuđman won't make you work just as much? Every army forces the civilians to work." At that, she started crying! "You know, ma'am," she said, "no one has ever explained this to me."

I am a down-to-earth person. That war should never have happened. If things were to return to what they had been, I would go back without thinking twice. I used to have Muslim and Croat colleagues. I am a shop assistant by profession; I finished secondary commercial school. I worked in a department store in Bosanski Novi for twenty years. We were all mixed and truly friendly – like sisters. When those officials went to Brioni, we never argued who was in the right and who – in the wrong; we all agreed they didn't deserve to live! We agreed they were six power-hungry people and just didn't deserve to live! In the Bosanski Novi District alone, there were about a thousand mixed marriages between Serbs and Muslims. Those people lived happily together; their marriages were harmonious and didn't fall apart.

That night I had a queen-worthy bath at that Croatian lady's house. She didn't even allow me to use my own towel that I'd brought with me. She said we would need it clean during the flight. She gave us a towel, soap – everything. We all had a bath – me, my husband, the children. That lady had two cows and kept giving us milk all that day. There were many babies with the people from Petrinja. Those women were very worried about them because no one would give them milk. That lady, God bless her, gave them milk. I can't imagine how those mothers endured all that. It was sweltering

hot. We would start early in the morning – as early as 4 – 4.30 a.m. to avoid travelling during the greatest heat. Women died giving birth, babies died. Women really had no choice. If they started going into labour somewhere outside the settlements, what were they to do? They had to deliver then and there – deliver or die. The same held for new-borns.

We had no police escort, no ambulance. It was really horrid. We were more like a herd of cattle, really. Like a flock of sheep moving slowly together. For some, their tractor would break down, some had a flat tyre. Then you would get out of the line and pass them by. It hit me hard that no one would come up to those women to ask if they needed anything, if they were sick, if they needed any toiletries. There were people who had set off without anything. Can you imagine how it was for a woman who had a period and had no toiletries with her? It made no sense to let pregnant women, elderly people, and new mothers go first. Only one yellow and one green taxi went by in the opposite direction of the line and then stopped at every cart and every tractor and asked whether they had anyone old or sick they could pick up. If anyone came forth, they would take them in. Only them, no one else. Near us, a woman died while giving birth to twins. Both she and the babies died. That was hard. People died along the way. They were buried by the road without a marker – just like that. They would only spread a sheet or something over the body to cover the eyes from dirt. Horrible. We also saw scores of crosses on tombs by the road along the way. Just next to the asphalt – they were tombs all right, since they had crosses.

People were distraught and exhausted. You should have seen those old folks. Poor buggers, they'd shrunk somehow – all you could see were their eyes. And that silence. And an occasional baby's cry. As we were drawing nearer Brčko (that was a walkway some ten to fifteen kilometres from the Sava River) people started wondering: "If only we can pass Brčko quickly, because they could easily bomb us here. The border line is near – they could set planes on us." Then my children started to panic. They went on: "Mom, what're we going to do if they bomb us?" As if I knew what we were going to do! There were a lot of people from Lika and Kordun who had fled by way of Petrovac and they said they had been bombed. The children panicked when they heard that.

In Republika Srpska, no reception regarding food and a distribution of other necessities had been organised. We got a little something in Banja Luka, but nothing else. When we arrived in Kuzmin, we were given food: soup-kitchens were organised, but, again, not by the state. The local people organised that. At the pay-toll outside Belgrade, a refugee hold had been set up by the Red Cross. We were given a loaf of bread and some canned food, but nothing to drink. Along the way when we stopped to rest, people would give us money, soft drinks and clothes but nothing was organised. As we had very close relatives (once-removed – as the phrase goes) in Belgrade, we had no problem entering the city. Our relative met us at the pay-toll and made all the arrangements. He signed something and was given a paper by the Red

Cross. Then the police directed us in which way to go. We arrived in Belgrade on 15 August.

If my relative hadn't managed to find me work in his company, I would be unemployed like thousands of other women. That means a lot to me. That eases my mind. If it weren't for that job, I think I would have ended up in an asylum. This way, I go out, work for eight hours, relax mentally, escape my worries. Then, when I come home, there's always something to do – one chore or another. You don't think much about all that. My present job has nothing to do with my profession. I pack seeds. It's not a hard job, only a little mundane, that's all.

In the beginning, when we came here, I was very apprehensive. I felt terrible. You couldn't turn back time or do anything else. Out of nowhere, you just found yourself in totally new surroundings. As if you'd been dropped into the sea and there was water everywhere and you couldn't escape. That's how I felt. I had a headache for days. Maybe it was because of the anxiety. With time, you start to accommodate. Yet in the back of my mind, I still think I will return. I would return right away if Tuđman offered amnesty for Serbian troops. I wouldn't go without my husband. What would I do there without him, and him staying here? If it weren't for that, I'd return right away. If we were able to return without men being pardoned, I wouldn't go. I'd rather go to Africa than have my husband murdered or tried and convicted. What would I do there with two children and this elderly woman?

Vedrana

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Life was hard during the war. My husband was constantly at the front and my daughter and me were alone. I went to work and practically looked after her all alone. He would be at the front for a fortnight, come home to wash and change for a day or two and go back again. When my husband first went to war, I didn't know where he was. I went to work and came back home again and kept crying all the time. When he came home, all his clothes were black with dirt. They couldn't be washed in the machine just like that; I had to soak them in boiling suds a couple of times before washing them in the machine. He looked pretty much like his clothes – all black, dirty, unshaven and skinny. It was damp and cold where they slept. He was at the front line. He kept a bullet and a bomb close at hand for himself in case he got caught. Later, he somehow got a position behind the front line. It was easier there. When he was at home, he was restless and his thoughts were there, on the front, all the time. I would go to work. In the morning, I would take the little one to kindergarten and in the afternoon, I would go and get her. When I worked the afternoon shift, I would pay a babysitter. I went to work only to keep my job because the pay was miserable – once, we didn't get any pay for six months. When I did get it, it couldn't even pay the kindergarten fee. My mum would bring us some meat and eggs and thus we somehow made ends meet. If I got a day or two off, we would go to the countryside either to visit his folks or mine. But that was rare – once in a month, sometimes in two. We listened to the news all the time; we were desperate to hear what'd happened – who got captured and who – killed. I constantly worried for my lot. My two brothers and all my cousins were at the front. So I kept listening to the news, fearing the worst. I took it very hard when my brother-in-law's son got killed. He had constantly been in battles, but got killed when he was going to town on a motorbike. I saw what was happening and wondered what was on the cards for me and my family.

The men went to fight in the war and we, the women – we fought internal battles. My sister-in-law invited me to stay with them, but I couldn't. How could I have left my husband? He would come home every ten to fifteen days and there would have been no one to meet him. Last year I decided to go on holiday and get some proper rest. Yet my mind was back there constantly, and I felt remorseful all the time.

And just as I was hoping that things would improve, that they'd manage to make some sort of agreement, I got pregnant with my younger daughter. Then things turned worse. Two months before the exodus, my father died of a heart-attack. After that, I spent most of my time with my mum in the

country – I had taken a sick-leave. We managed to hold the forty-day memorial service for my dad. I was pregnant and I took it all very hard. The day before we fled, I got up feeling lousy. I couldn't say a word and I kept wondering why I felt like that. I thought I had a premonition that something bad was going to happen. That same day my husband was to come home from the front. He had asked me not to go anywhere that day as he would come there, to the village. I was worried about whether he would manage to come safely. We didn't listen to the news either on the radio or on television. A neighbour came over saying that she had heard the news and that the situation was very bad. Two young men from the village had gone missing. Some had been wounded, some – killed. Rumour had it that Grahovo had been seized. If Grahovo had fallen, I was thinking, then we simply had to leave.

The next morning my sister came and said: "C'mon, start packing – we're leaving."... My mum stayed behind, crying. We left in my sister's car which didn't have a radio, so we couldn't hear the news. We arrived at my place and I went over to the neighbour's immediately. She asked me why I was still there when so many people had fled. At that moment almost everyone had already gone – especially children and pregnant women. I said to her: "Where can I go this pregnant; I'm in the seventh month. Where else can I go except home?" She repeated that me and the child should flee. My husband was at the front and the child and I were alone. I didn't feel like going alone. When he came home, there would be no one to meet him there, no one to make him lunch, no one to wash and press his clothes. That wouldn't be his home. It would be so strange to him to come back and not find us there. He might go to his mum's first – to visit them, but then he would come straight to us. So I decided to stay. From the balcony, I watched women preparing reserve tanks for petrol, but was still adamant not to go. I reckoned there were a lot of people staying. I'd share their fate. I wasn't thinking about my safety. We left seven days after the fall of Grahovo. It was only when Grahovo was seized that people started fleeing in larger numbers. But many stayed even then. They said that they just wouldn't leave, that they had nowhere to go. Somehow we were still hopeful because we had been told that our town would stay safe. On television we were frequently encouraged to stay, too. They told us that we had sufficient supplies of food and weaponry. The Patriarch came for a visit. They told us that our town had always been Serbian and that it would remain Serbian.

My husband came home the day before we fled. He and another man had been given a day's leave – only to stay overnight, to have a bath, change clothes and return in the morning. The town was chaotic in those days. During those war years, many people had fallen victim to various psychological disorders and many had killed themselves. A neighbour had seriously wounded her daughter and then killed herself. No one found them for one whole day and night. That was a terrible shock for me. Her husband was at the front and her son – in the Army. She had promised she would kill both her daughter and herself to save them from rape and capture. And there were many similar cases when people thought there was no way out. But

they were misleading us, too. They told us to hold, told us help was coming. When my husband came home, he went to change and I started preparing supper. Then we went to visit some neighbours and some relatives. Later that evening, I only put the dishes in the sink – I thought I'd wash up in the morning. But, at five o'clock in the morning, we were awoken by – so appropriately called – *The Storm* [2]. My husband grabbed our daughter from the bed and we stood in the hall where we thought it was safer. When he put her down to go get a blanket, I took her in my arms. I was seven months pregnant – I shouldn't have done that. But I lifted her up and started wondering whether that had hurt the other one. My husband came back and told me off me for lifting her. But she seemed safer if I held her. I had a feeling something would just take her away. At that moment I heard all the others coming down (we were on the ground floor), some of them in their pyjamas. At 5:05, the air-raid alarm sounded. At 5:30, they cut off the power and water supply and telephone lines. We had no news and all we could hear were blasts from everywhere. And we didn't have any news about anyone. My sister, aunt, cousins – they were all nearby, but I couldn't reach them. We couldn't as much as peep outside – either through the door, or through the window. We all got into the bomb shelter. We somehow managed to bring in some sugar and coffee, and I had some cooking gas, so we could make coffee and warm some milk for the children. Some people brought bread and some brought the leftovers from their supper of the night before, so we all had something to eat. Yet, between 5 a.m. and 1 p.m., they never stopped bombing us. Some time around one o'clock, they stopped for ten to fifteen minutes and then continued. They probably thought we would come out. And when we did and set off, they would bomb in that direction. They knew where we were heading. We were completely visible to them. That day whoever ventured into the street – never came back. It was the heaviest crossfire – from all sides. And we all thought that our troops would come at any moment to defend us. That never happened. We were trapped with no electricity and no news. *Our* radio and TV stations were dead; we managed to pick up *their* news. They said: "Don't flee, we won't hurt you. Wait for us to come." Like hell we would wait! I knew what I could expect if I stayed at home, in the bomb shelter – a knife, that's what. I could vividly imagine the scene: me with my girl in my arms and them with knives. That was the worst nightmare. My only wish was to get out to safety. I wasn't thinking about what to take with me and what to leave behind. I couldn't make decisions about such things. I only wanted us to get to a safe place. Let them find an empty bomb shelter, a vacant house. We went out during a short ceasefire. We found a lantern, a flashlight, and some candles because it was dark outside. We filled the lantern with petroleum, lit it and hung it somewhere out-

[2] (Oluja): A large-scale military operation carried out by Croatian Armed Forces, with the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to retake the Krajina region into Croatia, which had been controlled by separatist ethnic Serbs since early 1991. The operation, which lasted only 36 hours, was documented as the largest European land offensive since World War II. It began on August 4, 1995 and ended with a complete victory for the Croatian forces four days later.

side in the hall to light the way for everyone. I went out to see how the neighbours were doing. Car after car was leaving. My husband had warned me not to go out, but I only said that they wouldn't aim at me. Yet you never knew what could happen. I saw a neighbour crying. Some others were filling car tanks. We had thought we would stay, and now we were getting ready to flee although I had no idea where to or how. Our car had broken down and we had no petrol supplies. A neighbour from across the street had come over to see how I was doing and then stayed – she couldn't get back home because of the blasts. Then an elderly neighbour said he had a car and some petrol and asked my husband to drive. My husband put on his uniform and we all got in to go to my aunt's in the nearby village. My husband's idea was to take us there and then return. It was sheer luck that there were no buses that day and that we couldn't get out that way. He would have gone back to his duty had there been the slightest chance.

Everywhere in the neighbourhood, people were packing. They'd fill the cars to the utmost. A neighbour had two babies and didn't have any means of transport – nothing was organised. In the streets, there was blood everywhere. Wherever people went, they were bombed. Whoever got killed in the street was left lying there because there was no time to move them. There was a female corpse hanging on a balcony all day. They bombed literally everything. But they knew where UNPROFOR was seated and they didn't bomb that area, of course. They (UNPROFOR) could even move freely: not a single building or a vehicle was hit. But our military barracks and the police station were hit – there was a lot of smoke there.

As we got into the car to leave, I decided to go back and check whether I had turned off the gas, switched off the TV, removed the curtains in case of fire, pulled down the blinds and opened the windows. Our plan was to go to my aunt's because she had a dug-out cellar. When we got there, we saw that her car was running. She was getting ready to leave. We had had no idea that people were fleeing from the towns in masses and also, from all the villages. My aunt had already packed and was about to leave as we got there - thinking we would stay with her. When we got there, she said: "Good that you've come by. Grandma won't come out." So we went in to ask Grandma why she wouldn't come out, to which she said: "I don't want to leave my home. Where would I go? You go along, and I'll stay to guard the house." We went to great pains to make her understand that there was nothing left to guard and that we should all go. So we set out, in the evening, on the 4th of August. The lanes of cars went in rows of four – the throng was enormous and we moved slowly, stopping often. We were moving forward not really knowing where or what lay ahead of us. I sat there, cowering in apprehension. I wouldn't 'ave worried, had I not been pregnant. I had left the bomb shelter wearing some old clothes. I felt cold with fear. I had only put on a thick but old dressing-gown and an old sweater that belonged to my husband. I was shivering with cold. I had asked my aunt to give me something to wrap myself in, and she had given us two blankets and some sweaters and jackets for my husband. For my daughter, I had only taken a

track-suit to put on over that light T-shirt. All of the clothes were very old – I had left behind all the newer ones. I had only put some underwear into a bag and had some photographs which I had collected a day earlier. That's all I had managed to bring with me in a suitcase. I had left behind all personal documents – my husband's and my school certificates, IDs, medical-care cards – everything. I only had my pregnancy-care card in the bag. As for food, I had only taken some frozen meals (I reckoned there would be many of us and it would be good if we had something properly cooked to eat). Being out in the countryside, my aunt had prepared a lot: she had baked bread, brought some smoke-dried sausages and had picked tomatoes and cucumbers from her garden. We had enough to eat, but unfortunately, not much to drink. I didn't feel hungry, but was thirsty all the time. My aunt had also brought some ham which was salty and made us even more thirsty.

We moved slowly – one would think it would be faster to go on foot. The night had fallen. Some ran out of petrol; some cars broke down. That stalled us all. You cannot imagine what it looked like, and the fear was almost palpable. We stayed overnight in Petrovac. At that point we had only enough petrol for a few more kilometers. When we set out, we had all been worried sick about each other. I had had no news of my sister or brother. I had no means to find out whether they would manage to pull through. It would have meant the world to me if I could have called her or if she could have called me. But our phone had been cut off and the risk of getting killed on the way to her house and back had been too great.

While we were on the road, there was no free distribution of petrol. When we got to Petrovac, my husband took a can and went to get some petrol. He came back, all down in the dumps, carrying only five liters. He would have got none at all had he not said that his wife was pregnant and about to deliver. They had said that that would suffice to get us to the nearest hospital. Otherwise, the price of petrol was 4.5 to 5 DM (Deutsch Marks) in that area. There we had some refreshments: the men, some beer and we had some soft drinks. We got to a garage and asked the mechanic to sell us some petrol. He said he didn't have any, but that the petrol station was about five kilometers down the road. My husband went there (either on foot or he was given a lift; I wouldn't know), and he came back on foot carrying five liters. We moved on and came to a roadside inn. We stopped there and asked for something to drink. They said beer was 5 DM, juice and coffee were 3 DM each. We all had something – it cost us 21 DM. The more we drank, the thirstier we were. We did have some water, but it had got warm in the car. We begged the person at the petrol station to give us some fuel, but he kept saying he had none. Finally, he agreed to sell us some, but said he charged 5 DM per liter. It was all on account of me. All we got was on account of me being pregnant. I was heavily pregnant, and it was sweltering heat. I felt sick. I had a small child with me. I worried that if anything happened to me there would be no way I could get help. I would have given all the money I had, just to get somewhere safe. All in all, we managed to buy around 15 – 20 liters. We spent 100 DM on fuel just to get to Banjaluka.

While going through Bosnia, we frequently got stern looks. Some, mainly men, would shout at us: "Where are you off to? Why are you fleeing? Haven't you got any shame? How could you leave your home? Why didn't you stay and fight? You call yourselves men!" We would ask for some water, and they would say: "Do you have any idea how expensive water is?!" Then they would charge us in Deutsch Marks for tiny bars of soap and for bread, too. Later we heard that after a while they started giving that away for free. But I saw some women crying, saying: "Whatever happened to you people, we will be next." But that was rare. We were made to go hither and thither throughout Bosnia. We had travelled around 50 kilometers when we were told to go back and take another route. I felt very humiliated – they were Serbs, too. Little did they know at that time that they would share our fate. We travelled all day and all night to get to Banjaluka. I think the worst moment for me was when I got inside my sister's flat. I lay on the bed and I realised I was never going to return home. My daughter would say: "Mum, why couldn't I have brought one doll only – that biggest one?" I would reply: "Honey, please don't mention that again. We left behind everything we had." Other girls would call her to go out and play and she would say to me: "I would go out, but I can't leave you. Mum, please don't cry. We left everything – I won't mention it again." And, there – at home, moments before we left, she had said: "Hey mum, let's take the video (player) with us, let's take this doll." "You don't need that doll, dear – you won't have the time to play. We'll be back home soon." It seems she was smarter than me. I had prepared a stash of washing powder – I hadn't wanted to wait for the last moment. Knowing the baby was coming, I had prepared everything: washed it and ironed it. She told me to take everything and leave, and I left as if I would return in a couple of days. The only underwear I had taken was what I had in the bomb shelter. I had only taken some photos along and a radio/cassette player so that we could listen to the news in the car – nothing else.

Later, my husband, my daughter, my aunt and I left with a neighbour for Belgrade, where I had a cousin. That's where I had the first news of the others. They all knew my cousin's number and they called us. My husband had been detained at the Pavlovića Ćuprija[3]. When we got to that border, we were told that only one man per car could be let in – and we had two: my husband and the man who was driving. They said that one of them had to go to the front and so my husband stayed. I didn't know where they would send him; I feared I would never see him again. I kept wondering where he was fighting, where he was staying – he didn't have a home, he didn't have anything.

Now I am preoccupied with my younger daughter because she isn't healthy. I only think of her and pray to God all ends well. I don't have time to think about either myself or my home.

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3. a bridge on the Drina (a bordering river between Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) at Badovinci, Serbia

Zora

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I was born in Luška Palanka, a small place at the foot of Grmeč, between Sanski Most and Bosansaka Krupa. In 1977, I got married and went to live in Petrinja. I gave birth to two daughters. In 1980, I started working. First I worked as an assistant and later, as a dental technician. I worked until 1991, that is, until the conflicts between the Serbs and the Croats broke out. When the CDU came to power, they didn't harass people openly – it was more like a psychological war. In the evening, starting at half past eight, you could never tell near whose house they would plant a bomb. At that time, fearing explosions, I used to spend nights going from one window to another watching.

As always, when the school-year ended, the girls went to spend the holiday with their grandma in Bosnia and I took a vacation, too. My husband had been fired the year before in 1990. This may have been due to him being a Serb since there were no other real reasons. Since he wasn't working, we all went to Bosnia together and stayed there until I had to go back to work. At that time, we still didn't know that soon the men would be drafted, that is, that the conflict would break out. I stayed there to the end of my holiday and then returned to work fearing that I too might lose my job. My husband and the children stayed in Bosnia. The atmosphere was tense; the CDU members patrolled the streets armed with *Kalashnikovs*. On the way to work I could see a machine-gun nozzle peeping out of a window on the church tower. On the way back, I saw the window closed. That made me very scared. We had a cellar, a basement, bellow the ground floor of the house and our neighbours didn't, so they would come over and stay the night at our place.

I had no problem with my colleagues at work. The atmosphere was normal. They might have talked behind my back when I left, but I'm not sure. As chance would have it, among those present at work, I was the only Serb. All of the other Serbs were on holiday. Everybody said that nothing would happen although we all had a hunch that something was looming. Then, on the night of August 27th, there was a skirmish between the *Zenge*[4] and the Army troops. The *Zenge* had launched an attack on the military barracks and the troops struck back and attacked the local police station. In the meantime, my husband had returned to Petrinja. In the morning, I got up and went to

[4] The Croatian National Guard popularly called *zenge* from the Croatian abbreviation ZNG = Zbor Nacionalne Garde

work. They had been arresting Serbs those days, so I told him not to go out while I was away. Our neighbour's son was only five, and could blurt he'd seen him. The night before, we had seen a tanker truck parked outside a supermarket. That morning, when I reached that spot, I noticed that a part of the road was closed off by a semi-truck trailer and also, that another trailer truck was placed across the road blocking the traffic. I then noticed that a sand-bag bulwark had been built overnight. I was in two minds whether to go on or to return home. I decided to go to work and say goodbye to my colleagues and then return home and go to my children in Bosnia. I met a friend, a Serb, along the way and told her I'd decided to leave. She told me to stay and that nothing was going to happen. My Croatian colleagues at work told me the same. It was different for them because their families were there and I was separated from my children. If anything happened, I would be cut off from them. In the meantime, Jadranka, who had been on holiday and who (so I had heard) had been asked by the director to monitor other people's movements, had returned to work. I said goodbye to her, too. So off I went and halfway to my house, I realised what I had done. It occurred to me that, knowing I had left, they would come to arrest my husband during the night. I didn't feel like going back to work but I didn't want to go back home either. Finally, I decided to go back home. When I got there, my husband asked me what had happened and I made something up. It was only in 1993 that I told him the truth about that day. So I went back to work. There I told them my husband had said that this was nothing and that the law and order had to be obeyed. It was only then that I fully realised how careless I had been and how I had endangered both his life and mine. That night, we decided that I would go to Bosnia and join our children and that he would go to stay in the military barracks.

In the morning, my husband said: "Don't cry, red eyes will give you away." We left home and came to the railroad. There he was to go straight forward and I – to turn left towards the bus station. We didn't dare say goodbye and when I said I wanted to stay, my husband replied: "No, you can't. If it comes to being killed, one of us is enough. We have two daughters and they need you more than they need me. Go and join them, so that they have at least one parent." That was such a dramatic moment – my husband was going to the barracks through an area full of the *Zenge* without knowing whether he would be sent back home (as many others had been) under the pretext that nothing was happening yet. People were very much disoriented by such a response.

The night before our departure, I packed a big suitcase and two travel bags. But they were too heavy to carry, so I started taking out things. Then I remembered that the children had taken only summer clothes with them. So, I started packing their jackets, sweaters, boots – all winter clothes. I reckoned that as long as they had what they needed, I would be all right. They could always give me something to wear. When I arrived in Zagreb, I didn't know what to do with all that luggage. I didn't dare call my sister as I

feared I would draw her and her family into something. I had a feeling I had been followed. I decided to leave the luggage in the cloakroom. There, the cloakroom attendant saw on my ID that I was from Petrinja and said: "So you are from Petrinja, Ma'am. How are things there?" I replied that it was alright and he then asked about some nearby villages. I said that it was alright in the places where 'our folks' lived, but that it was somewhat troubled in the areas with mixed population - leaving him to figure out on his own who exactly 'our folks' were. My bus was at 2:30, so I went for a walk. I went to the Republic Square and further; I walked around most of the town, but I still had plenty of time left. I was concerned that if he had a peek into that bag and saw all the winter clothes, he would figure out I was a Serb on the run. That made me really worried. I returned to the bus station some time after one o'clock and went to collect the luggage. In the meantime, the afternoon shift had started and there was another attendant at the luggage claim. So I took my bags and carefully looked around – nobody in particular seemed to be looking at me and I stayed there waiting for the coach.

I managed to get to Bosnia despite some occasional harassment by the *Zenge*. I had a seat in the coach and I didn't have to stand. But there was a woman with a child standing next to me, so I gave her my seat. The driver had let in twice as many passengers as he was supposed to, and it was packed full of mostly women with children and elderly people. Halfway between Zagreb and Novska, three members of the *Zenge* got on. They said that the coach was overcrowded and that all who were standing had to get off. But it was near a forest and there were no houses there. The driver said that he had had to let so many people on because the other coach had broken down. The woman with the child to whom I had given my seat offered it back to me, but I refused. I couldn't let her stand there with a child. They kept us there for an hour. They said we were chetniks and that we should go and join the chetniks. Another patrol of the *Zenge* came from the opposite direction. One of them, obviously a good man, asked what the problem was. He also said that although we were all chetniks, we were only women and children and that we should be let go. He finally managed to talk the other one into letting us go and we got on our way again. It was five days before the bridge at Novska was destroyed. If I hadn't left Croatia then, I would have been stuck there. At one point I realised I could have never seen my children again, but chance would have it that I managed to get to Bosnia.

I stayed with the children there until the end of May 1992. Petrinja came into Serbian hands in September 1991, but all the connections were so severed that I had no news of my husband until November that year. In November my husband came to visit us. After that, I went back to Petrinja on several occasions to do things in and around the house. This was so that it looked as if someone was living there because there was a lot of pillage going on in the area at that time. Once, the girls said they wanted to come along because they were homesick. Many people who had come back were disappointed since much of the town had been demolished, but they were

delighted. My husband met us at home but had to go to the front immediately. The three of us unpacked and went to bed. But suddenly, blasts from shell-fire could be heard. My daughters ran to me and I tried to calm them down by saying that it wasn't near at all although I was afraid, too. Later, they fell asleep again but I stayed awake all night.

I returned from Bosnia to Petrinja on May 23rd 1992 thinking we were going to live there. I stayed in Petrinja until the 4th of August 1995 when they launched a massive attack which included shell-fire and air-raids. There had been some occasional clashes but nothing on such a large scale. When I got up that morning, I was all alone. I got dressed and went downstairs. I turned the radio on trying to decide what to do. At half past seven, I started getting ready to go to work. My neighbour told me that I shouldn't. If I had known what was going to happen, I would have stayed in to pack. Then we heard that a neighbour had gotten killed, and I went over to their house to help. There were four or five families staying there in their cellar that day (it was a large cellar). About six o'clock in the evening, the news got around that we had to flee. I only had a few minutes to pack. I had my neighbour, her three children and her mother in the car with me. It had been eighteen years since I had last driven a car. That was my first time at the wheel after so many years. The fact that I had this neighbour and her children in the car made it even worse. I was afraid. It was specially bad at night.

When we reached Dodjoš, a village outside Petrinja, I saw multitudes on the move and boys in army uniforms, and I realised we wouldn't be going back. I believe that the Army and other top officials had known what was going to happen since the local officials from Petrinja had started sending off their stuff as early as the beginning of May, and towards the end of the same month, when they had moved out all of their things they put a ban on that. Just two days before Krajina fell, an Army General had been in our dental office and told us that no such thing would ever happen. The next day he sent his own son to Serbia – meaning that he had already known what was going to happen. My husband was at the very front-line, which they held steadily, and they were more than a little surprised when they were told to retreat. No one had ever told them why they were to retreat or where they were to go next.

I arrived at Prijedor at half past nine on the 4th of August and called the girls. My immediate concern was to find somewhere to put my neighbour and her children up for the night. She made a call to some relatives in Belgrade who told her to take the first bus and come to them. She stayed with a very good friend of mine and I left for the place where my children were staying so that they could stop worrying. I had no news of my husband until Sunday evening. Then he rang us up saying that he had managed to get to Prijedor, so the girls and I went there to meet him. That was on the 5th of August and it was horrendous. I was going from Prijedor to Sanski Most and rows of people with their cattle were going in the opposite direction towards me from Grahovo and Drvar. On the road, they went in three

lanes. There were plenty of children who drove their families. Someone found that little boy and made video footage and took some photos of him so he became known, but there were many others, too, who at that time became heads of their families.

I was the only one going in the opposite direction. Then and there, it became clear to me that we had been betrayed and sold out, that the same destiny was awaiting that part of Bosnia, and that we should be going to Serbia. We collected some things that we had in Prijedor and those that my friend Vesna and some relatives had given me and we set off for Banja Luka. We then got stuck with people waiting to get some petrol. Unfortunately, we weren't aware of that, nor did we know that there was an old road via Laktaš. There were six lanes and it took us two and a half days to move only eight kilometers. I hadn't wanted to take much bread with us, thinking it would take us only a day to get to Serbia. So my daughter and I had to walk eight kilometers to Laktaš to buy bread. It was teeming with people there – they waited in line for several hours to buy bread. We also managed to buy bread and get some water, and when we returned to the car I realised we had moved only a few centimeters in two hours. When it became clear that it would take us longer than two days to travel like that to Serbia, we somehow turned the car around and went to that old road and rather quickly got to Pavlovića Ćuprija. We got there at 6 p.m. only to cross over at midnight. There, my husband asked a police officer for directions to Apatin, where he had a sister. The officer told us not to leave the lane until Šimanovci where there was a Refugee hold for all the refugees, and where we were to get papers with which we could travel anywhere in Serbia. We did as we were told. We travelled in the lane escorted by the police. It started to dawn. The whole scene looked eerie - as if we were being taken to a concentration camp. When I mentioned that to my husband, he said I wasn't right in my mind. Yet, somehow, it reminded me of the deportations from that other war. Around 4:30 a.m. we saw a man and a woman at a gate. We stopped the car and asked where the road was going. They said it was going to Bogatič. That meant nothing to me as I had never heard of the place before but when I asked them for some further directions, they said the roads from there went to Ruma and Šabac, which was fine since we knew how to get from those two towns to Apatin. We had an idea to leave most of the things we had brought with us and those we had got in Bosnia at my sister-in-law's in Apatin and to go and look for jobs, a school for the girls and a place to stay – as it was pretty much the same to us regarding where we would settle down. The police patrols were placed at every crossroads we came to and you couldn't stray out of the line you were in as they would direct you right back to the same line without exception. When we got to the pay-toll at Šimanovci, the girls noticed there was some juice being given and they asked their father to get them some. He went there and returned soon – completely pale. "Go and make some phone-calls; find anyone to help – they want to send us all to Kosovo." So we had been brought to Šimanovci under false pretences. With

a lot of difficulty, I managed to find a cousin of mine who came there and took us with him to Banovci. We stayed with him for two days and then we found a place in Ruma and moved there. My husband found a job in nearby Hrtkovci, but he didn't like it there. After a short while, it so happened that he read a job notice about working with carpentry machinery and made contact with the man in Vrnjačka Banja. So that's how we decided to move to Vrnjačka Banja to settle for good. Here, we were given a house to stay in.

While we were in Vojvodina, we were often blamed for having fled, for not having put up a fight. Had we been commanded to fight, all of us would have fought. No one would have ever left their hearth and home. This war has brought about what couldn't have been done either in the Second, or in the First World War, or in the wars with the Turks. It was hard for me to leave Petrinja – the house we were building and which we hadn't finished yet. My husband had a carpentry shop there and we had lived there for nineteen years – it was hard to leave it all. Yet, it was harder for me when Western Bosnia fell – the region I originally came from, the place I spent my childhood and my youth in and where my grandfathers and great-grandfathers had lived. All those who came from Republika Srpska Krajina shared the same fate. My 80-year-old mother had to flee the home she had refused to leave in 1947 when she had been offered a house in Vojvodina as a part of a relocation programme.

One day, while we were in Ruma, I went to a bakery – all miserable and wretched as I was – and asked for *hljeb*[5]. A person standing behind me in the line corrected me and said I should have pronounced it *lebac*[6]. Never had I been corrected for my pronunciation before – not even in Croatia[7]. Being a grown-up, it is difficult for me to change my ways. I have always spoken like this, but, in time, I will accept this new pronunciation. I know that it will take a long time – about five to ten years, but I also know that my accent will never change.

People here help us as much as they can. It is difficult because many companies have closed down. They cannot give us what they haven't got themselves. We're friendly with two families here – a family from Petrinja and a local one. It's not like I can go from one neighbour's house to another and say: "Hello, I am your new neighbour. Please invite me to your house sometime." They're native people here - they should come over and invite me. I come from Bosnia where the mentality is different – people always have time to sit and have a word.

Up there, in Vojvodina, the friends who found us a place to stay helped us as much as they could. But they were both out of their jobs and

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5. hljeb = a local dialect transcription and pronunciation of the word *hleb* = bread, something that would give away her origin

6. lebac = another example of informal, local jargon; a social dialect transcription and pronunciation of the word *hleb* = bread

7. a Croatian word for *hleb* is *kruh*

could hardly make ends meet. They shared when they could; they brought things to the girls. I blame the sanctions for all that. Some people say it's because of us that they have been suffering for the past four years. But it's not because of us; who are we to be blamed for our own sufferings? It's all some higher politics which we don't understand.

During the escape, the hardest time for me was when I realised we weren't going to go back, and while I had no news of my husband. The families who lost their leader and mothers who lost their sons were hit the worst. They couldn't care less who the people in power are.

All stories in this chapter were translated by **Dubravka Radanov**

srebrenica

I.P. (b. 1963)

In February 1993, we experienced the most massive chetnik offensives against Cerska, which forced us to head towards the free territory of Srebrenica. First we arrived at Konjević Polje, where we spent the night. The next day, French general Philippe Morrion arrived with his staff. The chetniks shelled a location where many people were staying. One man had his head severed by a mortar shell; that was Avdo Husenović. My children were almost killed there. Rešid Ćelebić's daughter was killed by a shell fragment. Parts of her body were thrown over the crowd. I think that one of Morrion's soldiers got hit there. We found a shelter until nightfall, and by 10:30 p.m. we had already left for Srebrenica. We arrived there early in the morning and we couldn't move away from the street, because the place was packed with people. Heavy fighting was going on around the town.

I spent three weeks in Srebrenica with my husband, our two children, my mother-in-law and my brothers-in-law. Convoys were bringing us food and they'd started driving people away to Tuzla. I managed to get on one of those trucks with my two children only two days later. There was an immense crowd and people were swarming around the trucks. We nearly choked. It was like a thousand people had boarded that truck. My husband managed to get me in there and he said: "Good luck to you!"

At the first barricade I saw twelve chetniks and they started yelling at us, cursing our Muslim mothers and threatening us by promising that they were going to find us in Tuzla. I did not know anyone on the truck because they were mainly women from the village of Osmača. The truck braked and jerked from time to time, making them fall over one another. I lost my elder son in this commotion. He fell under the women's feet, but I managed to pull him out. But then I lost my younger son. I had no one to help me rescue him from that multitude. All this was happening in the vicinity of Bratunac. My six-year-old son suffocated as I tried to pull him from under their feet. He died in my arms, letting out his last breath. I lost my wits after that. They splashed me with some water.

In Bratunac, Serbian women blocked the way. Some of them were holding knives in their hands and were yelling at us, threatening to stab our children. When we left Bratunac, my sister-in-law, who was in another truck, managed to reach me and take my elder son with her.

It was market day in Zvornik that day, and there they threatened to throw our children into the Drina River. Twelve chetniks climbed into the truck seeking money and gold. I was still holding my dead child in my arms. A

twenty-year old pregnant woman from Osmača also choked in that truck, and also an elderly woman, and Senaid Šiljković's seven-year-old daughter. Altogether, four people suffocated in the truck I was on.

We had no food or water during that journey. We were stopped and insulted several times before we reached free territory. It was in the afternoon that we arrived in Tuzla. They brought us fruit juice, oranges, bread and all sorts of things, but I did not care about any of that. If I'd had a knife, I am sure I would have killed myself in those moments. I saw my elder son Edin being taken off the truck and two men put my younger son's body on a stretcher and took him away. I never saw my child again. Two men carried me to Mejdan, where I was given four shots. I came-to around seven o'clock in the morning the next day and I found my elder son, who was with my sister-in-law.

My husband Rahman and other numerous relatives never arrived from Srebrenica.

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

S.S. (b. 1970)

I got out of Srebrenica on 19 July at 2:30 p.m. The next day around noon, I came across my relatives, Kema and Edin Hajdarević. Just like most of the people from Srebrenica, I thought that nothing bad was going to happen to us on that journey. Naively, I believed that a line of 15,000 people would be let through. Furthermore, I'd expected the journey to last no more than 24 hours. That afternoon we were dead tired already, because we hadn't slept or eaten properly for seven days. While we were resting, I asked a man who was familiar with the terrain how much longer it was until we were supposed to reach Tuzla, (hoping that he was going to tell me it would be the next day) – he looked at me, smiled and said:

"Sanela, we have only just started!"

Fifteen-year-old Edin was wearing a cap and he was cheerful and smiling. I had the feeling then that he was happy to be taking part for the first time in a great event, like something he had only seen on television before. It was about three hours before he was killed. The first mortar shells that struck the convoy killed people from Srebrenica. Nino Avdić from Petriča and Edo Hajdarević were killed there. Many were wounded. When that shelling began during a break in our journey, I had the impression that the chetniks were firing at random from a great distance. But then they began shooting from the Bratunac road – Konjević Polje – Nova Kasaba. We were encircled. People started panicking.

I ran into Kema who had been hit in both legs. He told me that Edin had been killed by a shell. At one moment in that commotion, it was as if a line had been formed again behind Kema, who was being carried, wrapped in a blanket and wounded. It crossed my mind – my God, it's as if we're going to a funeral.

I asked him: "Kema, where is Edo?" Tears were rolling down my cheeks, but I wasn't simply crying. We were just there; all that was happening around us did not allow us any time to express our emotions, to scream or to shout. Practically, all the abnormal things had become normal. There are no words to express what was happening.

"Come, come, my child," that's what he called me, "don't cry. He is no longer with us, but everything will be all right," he repeated several times.

He looked at me once more and then bit his lower lip so hard that he broke it and it was bleeding. Then he looked upwards toward the sky and at that moment I had the feeling that he was no longer there with us, in that forest. I thought that he must be on a mind journey through all the important scenes of his life, since the birth of his son, Edo's first toys and his first

steps, all the joys and sorrows that followed, till he last parted with his son, who was lying dead in his arms.

Around seven o'clock, some fifteen minutes after this encounter, the chetniks attacked us from all sides. Later I heard that Kemo was trampled in the terrible rush that followed.

I saw my brother at the beginning of the journey, in Šušnjari. We did not travel together. The next time I saw him was during a rest time; he was lying asleep. He looked utterly exhausted. Besides which, he had seen Edin's body and he had been very near a place where many people had been swept by shell fire. I begged him to be by my side during the journey. Later I heard that he had tacitly decided that we should separate, so that at least one of us would make it alive.

After I saw him there, I did not hear anything about Braco during the journey, although I tried to enquire among those who had been encircled and managed to break out. Not long before we crossed to free territory, the night before, I'd lost my handbag in that forest.

(...)

The forest where I'd lost my handbag was very dark. Some twenty days later, Braco was going that way and he walked by a spot where there were four or five dead bodies. It was like someone had told him: "Go back and look!" He went back and found my pictures there. They were torn in pieces. That instilled him with fresh hope and he knew that I was alive. Anyway, he said he'd been having this strange feeling all along until he reached Tuzla, that someone was leading him by the hand and showing him the way. He managed to find a way out of all of the critical situations and ambushes, although he did not know the way.

One month after I arrived in Tuzla, I went to the market for the first time. I stood transfixed next to a fat Roma woman who was telling a blond girl her fortune from cards.

"She guessed everything," said the blond girl.

"How much is it?" I asked.

"Five marks," answered the woman.

I looked into my purse and found three marks. "Can I have it for three?"

"Yes," said the Roma woman, spreading around the cards. Then she said: "Your father is imprisoned and he won't be back for a long time, but your brother is on his way. Two dark-haired men have helped him and he is in Tuzla already."

"Come woman, don't lie to me, I am sick and tired of everything," I said.

"But I am not lying. When you get home, there will be word about your brother," she said and I went away. At home, I began telling my mother and my aunt what had happened at the market. Before I finished talking, the telephone rang.

It was a friend who said: "Sanela, your brother has arrived in Tuzla!"

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

S.H. (b. 1974)

When the war began, I was living in my native village. We rejoiced at the beginning of spring and the upcoming Bairam holiday. We had no idea that it was going to be the most mournful Bairam of our lives.

The mine of Sase was quickly occupied. My house was in the vicinity of its entrance and we were ordered to move out of the house immediately. With my family, I moved in the direction of the village of Poloznik. Several Muslims stayed behind in my village. All of them were killed. They were locked together in one house, which was then burnt down.

Having arrived in Poloznik, we thought that we were saved and that there would be no more war. However, on 16 May 1992, my brother M. H. was wounded by mortar shell fragments. His recovery lasted throughout the war, as it were. We experienced hunger and poverty. We looked for food in deserted and demolished Muslim villages. On 5 June, we arrived in Srebrenica. Food was even more scarce in Srebrenica than in the surrounding villages. Srebrenica managed to hold on, owing to our fighters. When UNPROFOR were deployed, all warfare, killings and shelling stopped. I married S.H. in Srebrenica and I was very happy.

In June 1995 our son was born, barely one month before the chetnik occupation of Srebrenica. On July 11, I parted with my husband and I headed toward Potočare. I will never forget his tearful eyes as he kissed his month-old son goodbye. Later I heard from some fellow citizens that my husband was among the prisoners in Kravica.

I spent two days and two nights at Potočare. During that time, I did not eat anything, and I was breast-feeding. The screaming of the women and children went on and on, every time the chetniks entered the crowds, leading out the men. It was horrible to listen to the cries and wails of my neighbors and fellow-citizens. I wondered about the fate of my husband, brother and father who had made their way through the forest.

On the second night at Potočare, I had a fit of madness and hysteria. I left the baby and attempted suicide. The people around me stopped me and gave me first aid. I came-to and took my baby. In tears and exasperation, I made my way to the truck that was supposed to take us to Tuzla.

During that journey, I saw thousands of prisoners and hundreds of dead bodies along the way. I recognized some helpless familiar faces, but I did not see any of my family members among the prisoners. Again, I contemplated suicide in case I spotted some of my folks among them. When they stopped the bus, the chetniks sought marks. They threatened to kill us

if we did not give them the money. Those who had money gave it away.

When we arrived in Tišća, we had to continue our way to free territory on foot. That was very hard for me because I was completely drained of strength. I recovered physically within a few days, but the pain and sorrow are still here. My husband, father and brother never showed up. I now live in Vogošća with my mother and my two-year-old son. I take care of my nearest and dearest, and my son keeps talking about his daddy although he did not have a chance to know him. I hope that fortune may bring back at least some of them.

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

H.H. (b. 1966)

In Srebrenica, I used to live near the hospital. We spent most of the time in basements, hiding away from the chetnik bombs and shells. We managed to survive for days on end with very little food, until they began dropping relief packages from airplanes. Our food supplies improved, but misfortune struck from another side: my elder sister was killed while she was trying to find food packages. She was killed by a food pallet.

In July 1995, having shelled us for several days, the chetniks launched an attack on Srebrenica. The people were very scared and many were heading towards the UN camp in Potočare. We were near the embroidery manufacturing plant when I was separated from my folks, after a shelling. We had all dispersed in the panic that followed. One child was killed and many wounded people were trampled underfoot. Amid that commotion, I ran into a friend of mine. She had also been separated from her family and she was scared. We clung to a truck that was transporting the wounded and managed to get to Potočare that way. The wounded were taken to the battery factory. We went in there too, thinking that we would be safe there. Later we realized that we would've been safer if we had stayed outside, in the crowd, because we would've reached Tuzla sooner and wouldn't have seen some horrible things.

We spent three days and three nights in the factory. On the second day, Ratko Mladić came and gave a child a bar of chocolate. Some fifteen minutes later, that child was trying to get away from his mother, telling her that she wasn't his mother. On the same day, they collected the wounded and drove them away, and we remained at the factory with many men. At night, some of the men were taken out and they never returned. I was not able to sleep at all. A man hanged himself at about 3 a.m. It was a horrendous scene. People were panic-stricken. A woman began screaming and attempted to stab herself with a knife. Then everyone got carried away by hysteria; people simply didn't know what to do.

At daybreak, I told my friend I was going to fetch some water. I made my way through the door where they'd been taking the men out the night before. I passed by a truck on which I saw five or six male bodies whose heads had been severed. I turned around and saw four chetniks sitting and drinking. Two women went by; one of them was pregnant. One of the chetniks asked them angrily where they had come from, and they just showed them a bottle of water. Then another man got up, grabbed the pregnant woman by the hair and cut her belly open, taking out two babies. I

heard her say: "Mother, save me." That was all she managed to utter.

I ran back to the factory without water. My friend told me that the evacuation had stopped and that we had been taken prisoners. I decided we had to leave from there. There were ropes on the door and a soldier was guarding the exit. But still, we jumped over the ropes and started running towards the bus. While I was running, I tripped over a stabbed man's hand. Not far from the bus, someone pulled me from behind and called my name. In terror, I turned around and saw my neighbor, a Serb. He asked me where the rest of my family were, and I shrugged my shoulders, because I had no idea where they'd gone.

He told me to board the bus, and not the truck. One chetnik who was standing nearby kept saying that we had to be taken back to the factory but my neighbor did not pay attention to him and led us to the bus. He told me to take off my green sweater, so that they wouldn't harass us because of the color. We got on the bus and were soon on our way.

My friend was terribly scared, so that I had to comfort her and encourage her to hold on all the way. When we'd passed Kravice, some chetniks got on the bus and began questioning some people from Potočare seeking gold, money and documents. Whoever had anything to give them did so. Then two chetniks led in a girl I did not know. She was all wet and distraught. She fell on the floor of the bus. When the bus drove off, I came up to her and offered her my seat. In tears, she said: "Kill me! I've been raped!" I cried along with her because she looked so pitiful. Another woman, who apparently knew her, took care of her the rest of the way.

The bus took us to Kladanj, and then to Tuzla airport. Two days later we were reunited with our families.

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

S.M. (b. 1966)

I began working with MSF (*Médecins sans Frontières*) in 1993. When the chetniks launched their attack on Srebrenica, on 8 July 1995, I was at home. I couldn't go to work and I spent the whole day in a shelter. I got out at sunset. People began withdrawing toward Baratova and my husband and I joined the crowd. He went to the post office, because he was working in communications, and I went to my friend's apartment. We spent the whole morning there. My husband looked us up several times, reassuring us that the NATO planes were going to attack the chetniks and protect us. However, nothing happened until the next morning. We waited until noon. So, I went to the post office to see my husband and decide what we were going to do. He said: "You should go along with everyone else, and I'll make my way across the forest." That's how we parted. I did not remember to give him the rucksack with food. It remained with me, and he went away with merely some tobacco in his pockets.

I arrived at Potočare in the evening and spent the night in a house near the battery factory. Although I was near my workplace, I did not manage to go to work. In the morning, I went out into the street and I came across my boss Kristina and our translator Emira. Kristina managed to bring me into the factory. When I went in, I nearly fainted. People were lying in the mud and the wounded were moaning. I couldn't understand what was happening. I stayed there for two days and one night. We were helpless. Since I was working as a cook at MSF, I'd expected we would be very busy preparing large quantities of food for the wounded. However, unfortunately, they'd completely given up on us, including the wounded and the sick. It is true that our superiors and UN officers offered some food, water and fruit juice to those of us who were part of their staff, but we were not interested in eating or drinking. I realized that in the situation we were in, the fact that we worked for MSF or the UN could not be of any help. I was devastated when I saw my paralyzed brother was also there, with his wife and child. All I wanted was to run away from there as soon as possible. I had a strange feeling that we were being held there as hostages. At one point I came across my boss again and told her that I could not bear that any longer and that I was going out. She just gave me a "No, no!" sign with her finger. The screaming of hungry children and the moans and painful cries of the wounded will resound in my mind forever, and we were helpless and unable to help them in any way. Dulo the cook called me and said that he had managed to make some soup. What a horrible scene that was! Thousands of extended

arms begging for a spoon of soup, and we did not even have enough for the children and the wounded. We somehow got organized and our medical staff managed to get some painkillers and some intravenous drips and bandages to take care of the most serious cases.

That day, on 12 July, the first group of the wounded and medical staff were "evacuated", and I managed to get my paralyzed brother on board. No sooner had they taken them away, than Dulo called me and said: "Senada, get the stretchers and the pallets ready, they are bringing them back. They didn't let them through at the Yellow Bridge!"

We prepared to help them disembark, and then waited and waited. The next day at dawn, the wounded were not back yet. The medical staff had arrived, except for the medical assistant Kadir Abdurahmanović (who used to live in Nova Kasaba). No one knew where the wounded had disappeared. I kept thinking of my brother: what if the chetniks seize him? Of course I was concerned about everyone else, but a brother is a brother.

At daybreak on 13 July, my boss and Emira, the translator, suddenly appeared carrying a 10-month-old baby. My boss gave me the baby and Emira said: "Senada, you have no children, you have to take care of this one. The Mother has been killed, and the chetniks snatched her from her father before they led him away!" Distraught as I was, I said I didn't know the first thing about babies, but I took her anyway. She was wet, dirty and hungry. She wouldn't stop screaming. I walked through the crowd carrying the baby in my arms, asking people to spare some clothes for her. Fortunately, this woman, Magbula Mašić, gave me her child's trousers and T-shirt. The UN soldiers provided some milk and tea so I was able to feed her. She swallowed everything I gave her, but she wouldn't stop crying. I guess she was shocked by the heat and the crowd. I found a tranquilizer and gave her a pill and after some time she gradually calmed down. I left her in the MSF car together with Magbula and her child.

I got out with a group of women and boarded a bus transporting civilians. As we drove by a meadow opposite the factory, I spotted a large group of old men sitting there, their bags piled up in a heap. We drove through Bratunac and arrived in Kravice without trouble. At Kravice, they stopped us for a short while and there, on a hill, I spotted a large group of prisoners. They were sitting in the scorching sun naked to their waists. Not far from Kravice, somewhere around Sandići, the chetniks were taking our imprisoned men out of a creek. They were holding up their hands at the back of their necks. I recognized Sakib Salkić among them – whose nickname was "Slatki", Sabahudin Dervišević, Saka (he used to operate a vehicle in the mine) and another man from Fojhare. We were stopped not far from that bridge to make way for the chetnik transport vehicles. They were moving in the direction of Bratunac, shooting and putting their flags out, followed by three or four transport trucks packed full with drunken chetniks. The driver told us to keep silent and not to attract their attention, because most of them were drunk. The driver behaved kindly to us. He offered water as a refresh-

ment and some bread if we were hungry. Between Milići and Kasaba, two chetniks stopped us. A young man with glasses was with them. The young man entered with a packet of *Marlboro* and enquired if any of us smoked. The driver told him: "All of them smoke, leave the cigarettes and I'll distribute them." He did so, got off the bus and went away with those two chetniks. When we drove off, the woman behind me broke into tears. She said that had been her sister's son. Eventually we arrived at Tišća.

There the chetniks ordered the bus driver to head towards the forest along a cobblestone road. I suspected the worst. Why else would they be taking us into a forest, if not for some evil doing? Lines of women and children were moving in the direction of Kladanj, and our group remained in the woods next to the road. I could feel that I was sweating all over, especially my palms. Sweat dripped down my fingers like a tap. A chetnik came up to us and told us to follow the rest of the people, but to move slowly and not to drink the water, because it was poisoned, and there were landmines alongside the road. When we walked past the chetnik observation post, a powerful flashlight glared into the forest. I spotted our medical aid Kadil Abdurahmanović, who had been taken away from Potočare with the wounded. Two chetniks were guarding him, and his head was bandaged. Raza Fazlić and I found Rabija Hadžimujagić on the road. She was lying on a blanket. The two of us carried her in that blanket toward Kladanj.

(...)

The aggressor used all possible means to destroy us, and one of the most dangerous was hunger. White death had seized Srebrenica. Food stocks were scarce because we had to help the thousands of people who had arrived in Srebrenica looking for salvation. At one point, no one was able to help anybody else. That was the most difficult period of war. I'd stopped worrying about mortar shells and whether they were going to kill me. My only thought was what I was going to feed everyone on in an empty house the next day. One day, my husband decided to go looking for food, and the only option he had was to go into the occupied territory where he could have been killed by the enemy. All that for a sack of flour. He made his way towards the village of Voljavica the chetniks had occupied. I had given him one half of a loaf of corn bread to carry along, and was keeping the other half to feed him when he returned, in case he did not manage to obtain any food. He was away for two days and two nights. I was worried sick for his life. Fortunately, he managed to get out and bring back a sack of wheat. When he returned, his clothes were torn and he was bruised and cut all over. He had been walking barefoot, and his feet were raw and bleeding. We tried to make that wheat last as long as we could. Every time I baked bread, I thought – "What shall I do when this is gone?" Then a gift from heaven arrived.

We were informed that food parcels with parachutes were going to be dropped over Srebrenica. However, after everything we'd been through, I did not dare to hope for that, nor did I believe it. But, on 8 March, right after midnight, my husband called me: "Senada, wake up, the planes are coming."

I was wide awake in no time. We tried to follow the sound of the planes and the signaling lights on the parachutes. I couldn't tell how long we'd been walking. I know that we had gone far away from the city, up Petriča and Učini Bašća, all the way to Orlovina. I lost my husband. I managed to find four parcels, but I could no longer find my way home. The parcels were heavy, but I wouldn't think of leaving them behind, because it was the only way for us to survive. Then I heard a woman's voice from behind me: "You have found four parcels and I haven't found a single one. I have two hungry children at home." I turned around and saw my neighbor Raza. I told her: "Don't worry, take two of them; we'll split them, only lead me out of here please - I don't know my way home." Whether it was out of infinite joy or exhaustion, I just did not know where I was any more. But still, I remembered it was March 8 – Women's Day – and I said to myself: "What a wonderful 8 March gift." And that's how Raza and I went back home.

Several days later, my husband made me get out of bed once more. This time we had to go to Bojna, because they were throwing packages in that area. It was snowing. We looked for parcels for a long time and we froze down to our bones. It was already daylight when we returned home. We were happy and content because we were not going to be hungry any more. Can you imagine opening a parcel after such a long time and finding some salt, coffee and toast in there? It was a small quantity, but that meant so much to us. It was only when I started shaking with cold that I realized that I had been looking for food in short-sleeved pajamas and practically barefoot in my old leather shoes. I had spent the whole night in the snow like that, unaware. Afterwards, I was overwhelmed by sorrow and desperation and I thought: "My goodness, what is this? Who did we offend so much? What are they doing to us and why are they doing it? What have they done to our beautiful lives?" And I felt terribly humiliated.

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

Dj.O. (b. 1977)

The end of eighth grade was approaching, and this "mini graduation" was supposed to be something special for us. Before the school year ended, people began leaving Srebrenica massively. I saw Dragana, my best friend at the time, off with tears in my eyes, hoping that she would soon be back. Later I realized that she had run away from the war and all the misery it brings along with it. She rescued herself, but I remained in Srebrenica and experienced great suffering. Until then, my notion of war was what I'd seen in movies.

After the enemy army entered our city, a group of about seventy of us hid in the forest. At first, I did not take that too seriously. The first mortar attack scared me, but I plucked up courage and tried to comfort my mother, who was shaking with fear. We spent two weeks hiding away in the forest and then we returned home. Groups of refugees – muhajirs[1] started pouring in. The first person I heard using this term was my grandmother, who often used to say: "God forbid war and ever living to be a muhajir!" The population of Srebrenica soon exceeded the figures we had before the war.

After the first air raid, I fainted. Our food supplies were running out. My mother began warning my brother and me to cut down on our meals out of fear that we would not have anything to eat the next day. We baked corn and oat bread, which we ate two or three days later, when it turned stale. Every morning, Dadža used to bring a slice of corn bread and marmalade to my brother and me. He would break it in two, saying that it was a cake. We waited for him at the gate every day to come and bring us our sweet. One morning, he didn't appear. We waited for him the next two or three days, but he did not come. Mother's tears were a sure enough sign why.

When the UNHCR convoy arrived, the situation with food improved a little. The school was closed for two years. The third year it reopened, but that was too late for me, because I had gotten married. I had a good life with my husband and we had a son. Then came that fatal July of 1995. My parents and my brother came to us, because we lived near the UN base. Around noon, we were on our way to Potočare. At one point on the road, the men separated from the others and headed towards the forest. I followed the other women with a four-month-old baby in my arms. I tried to suppress tears, but they were rolling down my cheeks. My mother and twelve-year-old brother were with me.

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1. A Turkish word for refugee, used in Bosnia

In Potočare we were crammed into four factories. I spent three nights on the test range. At night, we could hear the wailing of women whose underage children were being taken away. When everyone had fallen asleep with exhaustion just before daybreak, the chetniks would barge in, disguised in UN uniforms, and abduct men and children. Then hell broke loose. When the women screamed, masses of people instinctively jumped to their feet and rushed around randomly. They treaded over others who were lying down and over sleeping children. They would run for 100 or 200 meters, but there was no way out, because we were surrounded by the chetniks. Then everyone would return to their places until the next wave of screaming and running away. Three nights of fear and madness went by.

On the third day, seven or eight trucks of women and children left Potočare, and we heard over a small radio that they had crossed into free territory. On the fourth day, a dozen evacuation trucks arrived. My mother was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and she said that she could not bear to spend another night in that hell. We moved towards an improvised gate, which was marked by two large square stones. At that point, they separated all males older than twelve from the women. As we were approaching, my knees were buckling out of fear for my brother. Fortunately, they didn't take him away. There were a dozen trucks and buses in front of us, and the chetniks pushed the people in with their rifle butts. We went by two busses that were packed full, and came up to a truck when I heard a chetnik say: "The three of you, come here!"

I was terrified. I pressed my baby against me and regained my senses only when he started crying because I was squeezing him. I walked up to the chetnik, and he collected a handful of gold jewelry from the slab of stone and told me to hold out my hands. I gave the baby to my mother and did what he said. The chetnik poured a handful of gold into my hands and then he took a medallion and told my mother: "You will show this in Bratunac!" My mother began screaming and calling for help. For a couple of seconds I was bewildered, and then I returned the gold to the chetnik and started screaming. Three chetniks ran up to us immediately and started pushing us onto the truck with their rifle butts. It was as if my mother had lost her wits. She clutched the side of the truck and began screaming. When my brother and I tried to get her off the truck, she threatened to jump off. I handed the baby to a woman in the truck and we managed to get her down. She promised she would stop making trouble. I climbed back onto the truck and took my crying baby, but I could not see my mother any more. I got up and saw my mother lying motionless on the road. The chetniks were shouting to the driver to leave. I stood there watching as we moved away, until I lost sight of my mother. Then I sat down and looked at my twelve-year-old brother who was holding my baby and crying. It was my duty now to see that my baby and my brother made it alive to free territory.

The winding road was a sign that we were approaching Bratunac. The truck turned left toward Kravica, and then stones began falling on us. I

glanced out and saw people lining the streets and hurling stones at us. One of them hit me in the head and I fell over the woman sitting next to me.

My brother took a little blanket and spread it out as a shield over the baby. The stones hit me in the back and on my head, but I didn't feel anything. All I wanted was to protect my brother and my baby.

My brother enquired about Mother several times, but I did not reply. One and a half hours later, the truck stopped. I looked at the bus in front of us and saw that people were disembarking. Two chetniks put a ladder against our truck and ordered us to get off. We were near the cabin and were waiting for some women in front of us to get off. I spotted four men and a boy surrounded by the chetniks on the road and I thought: "Oh, God, isn't it over yet? What am I going to do about my brother?" I looked at him and I could tell by the way he looked that he understood what was happening. We were the last ones on the truck and we had to get off. He looked at me and said: "Don't worry about me." I started going down the ladder. One step, and another, and then I stretched out my arms to take the baby from him. At that moment, the chetnik who was standing next to the ladder said: "Give me the baby, I'll hold it!"

I stopped, my mind swarming with thoughts. If I gave him the baby, he could take it away from me or throw it on the ground, in case he realized it was a boy. My brother was still standing on the truck. I climbed back up and told my brother to get off. When he was on the third step, I handed him the baby. The chetnik just watched. Then I climbed down. I grabbed my brother by the hand and told him to hurry after the others. The road was full of chetniks and I heard them calling us names, cursing and trying to provoke us, but I just looked down and hurried. My brother was carrying the baby and two rucksacks. I was so frightened that I didn't even think that it was very heavy for him; the only thing that mattered was to leave that place and run away from those horrible people.

The chetniks lined the road for about one and a half kilometers. All the people hurried. At one point, while we were passing through a wood, I thought that they were taking us away for execution, because the chetniks were no longer there. Then some soldiers reappeared and I heard rumors that they were our men, but I couldn't believe it. Perhaps the chetniks had disguised themselves? I heard someone call my name and my legs started shaking. Someone must have recognized me! We were done for! I stopped and embraced my son and my brother because I thought it was the end of us.

Someone was shaking me, and I stared at that person, numbed. It was my husband. Then I realized that we were among our own people. I sat on the road and burst into tears, holding the baby in my arms. I cried like a child, and actually, I was still a child.

(The Deathly Summer of Srebrenica '95, 1998)

Kada Hotić

I am really glad to be in Belgrade, that I had this opportunity… I was here before in '88, when I took my mother to the hospital.

You must be tired of listening to all these accounts, but please bear with me for a while; what I am going to tell you is a true story and I am a living witness of the Srebrenica tragedy. I experienced this war and genuinely felt it. In the beginning of the conflict, in '92, we were under all kinds of fire – planes, mortar shells, bombs, machine guns, anti-aircraft missiles and anti-aircraft machine guns… all of those and what-not, it resounded all over. Srebrenica is in a small hollow. From the surrounding hills, the enemy targeted us. We were surprised; I don't know, I can't tell why the war started. If I'd thought there would be war, I'd have persuaded my family to get out of Srebrenica. We wouldn't have stayed there and lived through all that. However, in '92 and '93, we experienced horrible things and hunger, we had completely run out of salt and our food supplies had perished. We had taken in many people who had fled gunfire, who were fleeing to that so-called 'free territory', whereas, actually, that free territory had been turned into a concentration camp because we were surrounded and completely helpless. We were completely stuck and had nowhere to go. We had no television, no electricity, no water, no food; we were literally starving. That is why I was forced (me and the other women) – up to three hundred of us – to go into the territory controlled by the Serbs. That was, actually, land that belonged to the Muslims, where they had sown corn that year: in some places it had been tended and in others it hadn't. We would sneak in at night and pick the corn. It was already late fall, it was snowing and winter came. The corncobs were small and there wasn't much to pick. I walked the fields all night long. And it often happened that some of those women who were fighting famine in those fields stepped on landmines while they were searching for food. They remained in those corn fields along the Drina River. My journey used to take two days, or two nights and a day, and I would carry up to twenty-five kilos of corn. I did that nineteen times, in order to feed my family. I wouldn't let my son go because I was afraid he could be captured somewhere or that he might step on a mine. I would never have forgiven myself if he'd been killed while he was looking for food. I preferred to risk my life, which is worth less than his. It's only natural to love one's children above all.

However, when Philippe Morrion came to Srebrenica in '93, we women stopped him; we blocked his way with our bodies and would not let him out, because our bare survival was at stake. At that time, all of us were

targeted incessantly. We ploughed shells and what-not out of our land. We did not have any shelters to hide in, except for our houses. There were no real shelters. The forests and creeks were our best hiding places. People were shooting at us from the top of the wooded hills, while we were hiding down there in the creeks… And then they made us move. They were so close that we could hear their commands. We lived in such terror that ever since that time I haven't slept in my pajamas. I used to go to bed in a tracksuit and jeans and with sneakers on. And the struggle for water, carrying water, the struggle for that, went on and on. I wonder where I found all the strength and courage for all that, and how I managed to make my way through those forests and over those hills – because our beautiful Bosnia and our Srebrenica is like that. My Srebrenica. Those were superhuman efforts that I and all those women engaged in. The women bore that war on their shoulders, in order to feed their families, keep them clean and endure all that.

However, the biggest tragedy that struck me and my family and thousands of women like me was in '95 – on 11 July – when Srebrenica was occupied again and we stayed behind without our men. One thousand and forty-two children under legal age were taken away in Potočare, no one knows where. Five hundred and sixty young women were taken away. UNPROFOR and the Dutch battalion were there – it all happened before their eyes. They were all there. The place was full of troops, there were also some regular units from Serbia. General Mladić was there. When he arrived, during his brief visit… before TV cameras, he threw some bread and chocolate to the children and then it was all over, it was just for the sake of a TV picture. And then he issued an order to his troops, he said, "You will never have that chance again". I lived through that night and believe me – that was infernal.

Next to me there was this woman with five children, and suddenly the 13-year-old choked. The woman started screaming, "The UNPROFOR troops are killing our children!" But it was not them, but Serbian troops wearing their uniforms that they had got hold of. I thought that they were supposed to protect the people; that they were the UN protective forces deployed there to watch over the people and that something was going to happen, that they were going to evacuate us to some place. I did not think at any time of my nicely furnished flat, the flat my husband and I had worked for and invested in for thirty years in order to make it a cozy place to live. That I did not think of, not did I think of Srebrenica or our territory. My only thought was whether we would manage to pull out alive. My son tried to make an escape through the forest, my second brother did the same and so did my brother-in-law, and none of them came back alive.

And believe me – uncertainty is terribly difficult to bear. To have survived not knowing where they are. I allow myself the benefit of the doubt that they might be captured somewhere, that they might be suffering, exhausted and hungry, eating stale bread and eating… perhaps once a day, unaware of daylight or night, unable to see either the sun or the moon,

somewhere in some underground pits mining for ores and who knows what else. I dare to think along these lines now because of those high figures – 10,700 people disappeared within three days. Had they been birds, it would have been too many. But those were people. Only my husband was found somewhere near Zvornik when a tomb was dug up, when the remains were transported. He has been identified. He will have his grave.

After everything I lived through, along with my women who have experienced the same fate, or even worse… some women have lost up to four sons, some have lost all their men and some have been bereaved of all their relatives. There are such cases – we have a host of such cases here. Now we are in Sarajevo, Tuzla, and so on. We still cannot… no one has returned there yet, as it is; very few people, old people mostly, have returned to Srebrenica. It is still very tough there, those who fought for that territory, who wanted it all for themselves… but it used to be a territory we all shared and it was no bother. All of a sudden, it was supposed to belong to one people and the other would be exterminated. For God's sake, how can that possibly be right? It can't be. I now run the organization *The Movement of the Mothers of Srebrenica and Žepa*, a citizens' association fighting for our right to find the disappeared, to give them a decent burial and to erect a memorial. We have succeeded in obtaining a plot; we actually had to fight for that, for our own land – for the right to bury our people in our birthplace, in our Srebrenica. It took us two years to achieve this. I now believe that there will be a mass burial in the spring and then we'll have some respite. Six thousand bodies have been exhumed so far. A large number of them have been identified, but we'll have people buried as unknown, and when the time comes, they will be given their names. Because all faiths tell us that the bones have to be laid to rest so that the souls can be appeased. We all know that… it's only human.

However, I am not vindictive. I say this sincerely and openly, not because I am here in Belgrade, in front of people of a different nation, but bearing in mind those children. We need to build a future for them, to reconcile, because we cannot bring back the past. Those atrocities that took place – I am not going to say who provoked them, although someone had been at the root of that evil, but not the entire people, the masses… so that what happened to me and my women in Bosnia would never happen again. We have to build up love, to create a nice place for our children to live in, that's what I wish. Because of my grandchildren who are growing up and not because of me; I might live for five or six more years, maybe longer, maybe less, but my life is drawing to an end, anyway. There is no joy for me. When I think that my son Samir has perished, that I don't know why he has perished, why he is no longer with us, that I haven't even found his bones, I am not at ease and I do not feel good. But I want my grandchildren to have a good life, at least. I want them to stand on firm soil, to be politically represented… I say, I am a believer, and when I lift up my arms in prayer to Alah, I beseech him to give us clever leaders, loving people who will know how to

cater for the well-being of all. Because if some have a good life at the expense of all the others who suffer, we cannot be fine, it does not work that way. Not unless we can have a comfortable coexistence. I was happy before the war. I had a good life. I won't go into detail, whether some mistakes were made at some point. I was fine. As I said in this book, at the time when we were not recognized as a nation, when we were nationally undecided, I did not feel degraded. I had my rights just like those who had declared their national affiliation. This was simply because we lived in peace; we used to work and build and life was good for us.

I don't want to take any more of your time, but there's one more thing I'd like to say. My message is that we have to sober up, to bury our old animosities and to build a future, to create a nice world for our young generations to live in, for our children and grandchildren, and all those who used to live in this area. This is our fate and we have no other. We could go on fighting forever. Everyone is poor now where there was war, there were no winners in this war. Even those who have obtained a clean territory, it has also been marred, nothing is good there. The industry has been destroyed. The landscape, agriculture and the industry: everything that had been developed in fifty years has been destroyed, is no longer there. Everyone is down-and-out now. Believe me, they all live in penury. You should come to Srebrenica and see those people – I go there. You invariably hear them say, "I don't know what this was all about, someone threw a bone of contention among us" – like it had been done from outside; or they say "I wasn't here, I was in Belgrade, in Šabac or somewhere else in the country or abroad." We were, and they were here and there was war and the shells were whizzing past our heads. People got killed. They were impoverished. But this has to stop. Thank you.

(From the promotion of Swanee Hunt's book:
This Was Not Our War: Bosnian Women Restore Peace,
23 January 2002, Belgrade Cultural Center)

Sabaheta Fejzić

I arrived in Potočare with my son on the afternoon of 11 July, and the place was packed with refugees. In scorching heat, my son and I spent the night lying on the floor of a destroyed factory. On 12 July 1995, we were left to the mercy of the chetniks, the Yugoslav National Army, some diverse military formations and the local Serbs, our neighbors. As soon as they arrived, they began separating boys and men from the rest of us and taking them away. When some of their close family members enquired where they were taking them, they replied that they were going to be questioned and returned. However, they took them away and never brought them back. To this day, their whereabouts are unknown.

Fear crept in under my skin; I was worried about my child's safety and I left that enclosed space and went outside because I thought that I would protect my child if I mingled with the masses. However, the situation was deteriorating, and the uniformed chetniks were growing in numbers. They were equipped with knives, rifles, cartridge belts...They were armed to the teeth. At once, I spotted my neighbors Sreten Petrović and Milisav Gavrić a hundred meters away. I left my child with my mother, who was with us, in order to make my way towards them and ask them to save my child because I was already aware of the situation in Potočare. I pushed through the crowd, but people were standing close to one another and I had a hard time pushing through. But at one moment, it flashed through my mind that I had to return to the place where I had left my child. It was an overpowering urge. I turned back immediately and found my mother in tears. I asked her, "Mother, where's Rijad?" and she answered through tears: "They've taken him away; they can't be far." Good heavens, they'd taken away my child! I rushed to the place where they were standing and I spotted my child in a group of Muslim men, surrounded by armed chetniks. "Why have you taken away my child?" I asked. "It's none of your business why we have taken him, we want to question him and we'll bring him back." I replied, "You have nothing to ask him. If you have any questions to ask, ask me. Let my child go and take me away for questioning. What can a child know? He can't tell you anything." They started cursing me and wouldn't give him back to me. Then I threatened them: "You know what? I am going to tell the people from UNPROFOR what you are doing", and that helped. They returned my child. I took him by the hand and went back to my mother. We were terrified. I felt that the situation had aggravated even more and that no man or boy would get away from the chetniks.

We spent the whole day on that spot, but the night between 12 and 13 July was the worst. On 13 July, I moved in the direction of the busses and trucks that were deporting people from Potočare, with my son. First, I had to walk through a human barrier made up of Dutch troops and then of lined up chetniks all the way to the road, until we reached the trucks and buses that were supposed to deport us. We walked by the Dutch troops, but when we arrived at the line of chetniks, they came up to me and told my child to turn left and me to turn right. I told them: "If my child goes right, I will go that way, too." They wouldn't let me go with him. We started fighting for him. They pulled him to their side and I pulled him to mine. I begged them: "Please, don't take away my child! He is my only child. I have no more children. If you have to take somebody, then take me, but let the child go…" But it was of no avail. My child was crying. I will never forget his big tears that rolled down his white cheeks, from his dark olive eyes. When I realized that there was nothing else I could do, I went down on my knees, pressed my palms together and said: "Please, kill me." One of them pulled the safety back on his rifle. I thought: "Thank goodness, they're about to kill me, that's good…" However, one of them said: "Why bother to kill a Balija woman?!" He came up to me, grabbed me by the chest and threw me into the truck. It drove off immediately. I was lying on the bottom of that truck and I have no memory of the journey between Potočare and Tišća... It has been ten years since I've been trying to find out what happened to my husband and my son. Indeed, ten years have passed and I still wonder what fate befell my child. I don't know whether I will ever retrieve a remnant of his body.

(Srebrenica: Beyond Reasonable Doubt,
Belgrade Conference, 11 June 2005;
organized by the Humanitarian Law Center)

Šuhra Malić

I have lost two sons, three brothers-in-law, five nephews, and two sisters-in-law; my sister was burned in the municipality of Bratunac - in her house with a lot of other women. I don't know their names, but my sister Vlasija Šećir knows them. And we survived this catastrophe that we can never forget. That picture of our towns: our Srebrenica and our Potočari, our camps, we can't ever forget that in our lives. We encourage each other; it is hard for me. We keep encouraging each other, and we talk to those journalists and then we are so upset… but we will - we are spiteful people. In spite, we stayed alive. We want to encourage each other and to walk with our heads up, confidently. Our sons, husbands, brothers, fathers, fathers-in-law and brothers-in-law were never criminals. No, they were not, were not. That's why I am telling this proudly and I encourage myself proudly. I am having a very hard time, but I want to speak out for myself and stand firm.

(from the exhibition *Voices of the Missing* - Sarajevo, 2002)

The Most Painful Video Footage in the World

I am Nura Alispahić, Mother of a young boy from Srebrenica whose execution was showed on a video published on the 10th anniversary of the massacre in Srebrenica.

I saw the video in my home, on television around 11 pm. The reporter announced: "Now a mother will recognize a son, a sister her brother..."

My heart was racing because I realized that it would be about the Srebrenica tragedy. I saw the truck... tied up, there were young boys forced by uniformed members of the special forces to leave the truck. The forth was my son, Admir. They first killed four. My son with another boy carried the executed persons. Then they took them, tied up their hands… chewing gum.

The both of them got killed, too.

He was only a child, with many fears. He didn't know how to shoot, didn't like the rifle. I left him in Srebrenica where he was hungry and thirsty.

In the beginning, I hoped that he would return and then I bemoaned him for years and my heart kept breaking, but when I saw that video... I started to weep feeling very powerless.

I disturbed the whole neighborhood.

The next day, my daughter came from work and said: "Mother, I need to say something to you but I don't know how."

"I know, my daughter, ..." I said… "I saw the video last night..."

The next day, Hajra and Nura from the *Association* and one reporter visited me. Many others came as well after them. It was especially difficult for me when reporters from Australia arrived, eight of them, with the video. They asked me: "Mother, which one is your son?"

I don't know how I've survived through all of this. I regularly take medication.

I know that the government of the Republic of Srpska had to respect the decision of the House for Human Rights from BiH and that they made a report by which it admitted responsibility for the genocide in Srebrenica. However, the government has neither arrested nor prosecuted war criminals.

During the war, Srebrenica was crowded with refugees because it

was declared a protected zone. It was difficult to live there without food and water. Death was everywhere around us. We were deeply affected by the war.

Nura Alispahić

(Women, Victims of the War, 2006)

All stories in this chapter were translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**,
except the story *Šuhra Malić* and
The Most Painful Video Footage in the World

voices
of the missing

Alma Rikalo Turulja

Good morning, everyone. My name is Alma Rikalo. I don't know how to start and I appreciate your support. To have lived with one parent for twelve years and to have lost him is very hard. I had a father who lived with me for twelve years. In the beginning of April, actually on 8 April 1992, we decided as a family to go to a village near Foča where our ancestors had come from. However, there were rumors that there was going to be war and literally, just a few days later, the war started. We all got out of there and sought refuge in Montenegro. We arrived in Montenegro, but a week or ten days later, the Montenegrin police came and led away my three brothers, who left their wives and children behind. The youngest children were seven months old. We have been trying to find my brothers for thirteen years now. They were taken to the Correctional Institution in Foča. They'd been battered even before they got there, but that's something Montenegro ought to be ashamed of. Secondly, after they'd arrived in the Correctional Institution of Foča, (and I know they'd been there because some other prisoners saw them), Mr. – if I may call him Mr. – Dragan Zelenović, who is wanted by the Hague Tribunal, and who was my father's best man at his wedding, worked with him (my father) and argued his case. He should know best how he did it. I beg the Hague prosecutors to ask him about them when he gets there, so that thirteen years later, the truth may come out regarding the whereabouts of the three brothers Rikalo. Because these people did not commit any offence whatsoever. For God's sake, they have a 65-year-old mother who might never live to see that they've been found and given a decent funeral. You owe her that much at least. You have destroyed everything for her; you have taken away everything she had. She has no place to go back to. The least you can do is return her children to her in their coffins and be ashamed of what you have done. And we will never stop fighting for them to be brought to justice, no matter what that justice might be like. The sentences that have been pronounced are relatively lenient compared to the atrocities they committed. Very lenient. They provided comfort for their families and were given a free hand to do with ours whatever they wanted to. To cut off our ears and stab our children. They are not humans, they are monsters. Now that I've been given the opportunity to say what I want to say about Foča, my personal opinion, I have the right and I want to tell you this: as someone who was born and who grew up in that city, I say that I will never go back there. It's not because I don't like the city, but I don't like its people. I do not hate them, but I simply don't like them. Those people have no heart and soul, no feelings and no remorse. I believe this reason is good enough.

(Foča: Beyond Reasonable Doubt – public testimony conference dedicated to judicial truth and the victims; Belgrade, 28 January 2006 organized by the Humanitarian Law Center)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Smilja Mitrović*

That was our only child, as our people say: the first joy; he was going to the army and later, getting married. That is our tradition.

But on that morning… I did everything in this apartment; we were working on it for two or three days. On that morning, the three of us remained, after the guests and relatives left. They would come back to wish him farewell on his way to the army barracks.

We sat down and I saw a tear in his eye. He realized he was leaving his home and… I don't know… I stood up and told him that I did not want him to see my tears and then he stood up and said: "Mama, it's not like that," he said, "this is for all of us, my friends will be there." Afterwards, he tried to reassure himself.

After I came back home, I realized how I was, and automatically felt emptiness inside the house. He had not even left Bijeljina yet, had not even gotten on the bus yet, and I cried. Then, I could cry. My husband approached me and said: "Why are you crying now? He won't be alone; he is going to Banja Luka. It's nothing."

I don't know what to tell you. You might think I am exaggerating as mothers do, but he was everything to me in my life. When I got married I told myself I wanted a child and that was my priority. I never thought much about having a house and money; everything came later: an apartment, a job, money, and everything else.

He called us on September 5th - or it was the 7th - (1995). I can't remember exactly what he said, but I think it was that he was coming back on Monday, and it was Friday that day. We were happy when he said that he would come and I bought him a jacket. I said that he would go to college; I still have his student ID card and his books.

When I got to work on Monday, my colleagues said: "Smilja, have you heard that Srbobran fell?" I replied: "No... Why do you have the radio on at 5 a.m. anyway?" They were just looking at each other because they had heard and I hadn't. They thought of my child.

My husband called me and he said, "Smilja, we have to go up to Srbobran," he said, "Dragan is missing."

And that's how it has been, from then, up through today. You can never sleep in peace. My husband Milo died because of this, people say. He couldn't stand it. He was 47. When we would go to bed at night, he would

* The original text was altered and extended according to the author's wish.

turn to his side and I would turn to my side of the bed. Then he would get up to smoke cigarettes and drink coffee, while I kept silent and stayed lying down… Not even the worst offender would deserve to go through the ordeal I have experienced over the past twelve years.

Day after day… The most difficult moments for me are on his birthday, and when I watch TV reports about the end of the school year… Those days are so heartbreaking for me that I often wonder what I am made of when I am still here instead of being reunited with my Dragan and Milo on their endless journey.

(from the exhibition *Voices of the Missing* - Sarajevo, 2002)

Andjelka Arnautalić

I stayed behind in Brčko with my sick husband Fikret and my two sons, Jasmin and Damir. My son Jasmin was led away in the first days of the war and I did not know anything about his fate. I learned about it later, quite accidentally. This is how it happened:

I was on my way to see the doctor at the Health Center on 22 May 1992, when this huge man, weighing around 150 kilos, stopped me near the Post Office. He was carrying all sorts of arms: knives, a gun, bombs and a rifle. He asked me where I was going, and I told him. He wanted to see my ID, which I did not have on me. He walked back home with me, to check it. He took away my key, unlocked the front door and fired a gun into the hall. He asked me where I kept my papers. He took my wallet and took three party membership ID's: my husband's, my son Jasmin's and mine. He tore them up, cursing. He said: "Tito fucked your mother!" I had five thousand marks in that wallet, and he took the money and put it in his pocket. He saw Jasmin's photo and asked who that was. I told him it was my son. He said: "I stabbed him." I fainted. And he left behind that knife; actually, I found it on the doorstep. I still have it.

Later on, I found out how my son was killed. They led him away to the docks, and then they took him out to repair their car. At one moment, while he was busy doing that, they told him to run, to get away. He didn't know why, but he obeyed. Miloš Milošević from Vršani near Bijeljina shot him in one leg, and Kosta Kostić from Modrane in the other. Then Kosta Kostić walked up to him and stabbed him. I recognized my son later in the mass grave near the *Farm*. His body was headless.

Miloš Milošević, Kosta Kostić and Rato Stanić from the village of Medjaši near Bijeljina, killed not only my son, but hundreds of Bosnians in the community of Kolobara. They used to go on rampages there. They would enter houses, pillage and kill whomever they wanted. No one held them accountable. I know that they killed the barber Muhamed Zelenjaković, his brother and his nephew. They also killed the three brothers Terzić: Muhamed, Ekrem and Enes. I heard with my own ears Miloš Milošević bragging that he had raped every female in Kolobara, aged between thirteen and sixty.

We were not allowed to lock our houses. Everyone who wished to was free to enter whenever they wanted to. They called themselves the intervention squad. There was a man among them they called Tulija. My mother told me that he and I are relatives. I cursed such relatives. I said that Tulija had robbed me personally, that he had threatened me with a gun. I do not

consider those cousins as relatives. For me, they do not exist. The Serbs have committed a terrible crime in Brčko. They must have killed five thousand people. So many people are missing in Kolobara only, let alone the whole city. Goran Jelisić was not the only one to kill them. Ranko Češić was in it shoulder to shoulder with him. He killed hundreds of people. Then Monika Simonović. I heard that she was killing people by tearing their stomachs open with a broken bottle. She particularly enjoyed killing women. But the Serbs of Brčko do not see them as murderers, but as heroes. I say this although I live among them, because I am not afraid of them. I have no wish to go on living. A few nights ago, I dreamed of my son Jasmin. He was calling me: "Mother, why don't you take me out of here?" I know that he has been buried in a mass grave, but I don't know whether he is still there. I heard that they'd dug up the grave and poured in caustic soda in order to destroy the remains. If only I could find his bones because he is no longer alive since I was unable to save him.

(Brčko: Genocide and Testimonies, 1998)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Jasminka Kadrić*

We had to fly white flags on the houses (so that they would know who was Muslim) because whoever had a white flag on their house, it would mean that there was a Muslim. Even though they knew how many of us there were; they knew how many males and females, regardless of age; they had everything, very well coordinated lists.

I was here with a child - I have a father-in-law who was paralyzed in a wheelchair. I was sitting next to the wheelchair, with my child, my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law (the youngest one). They took my brother-in-law out - obviously to kill him; actually, we were convinced then that they were taking him to a prison camp. But at that moment, a Serb came by who knows my whole family (and my father-in-law), and he brought my brother-in-law back. He brought him back, but ten minutes later another group came and took him outside again. At that moment, the same man came by again and brought him back again. Then we asked for some kind of paper from him on which would be written that my brother-in-law should stay with my father-in-law, that he could stay here. He gave us such a paper, but as soon as he left, a third group came. And one of them cursed and asked who had given my brother-in-law that paper. And he said that he would talk, that he would talk personally with that Serb man (who had given them the paper). And that's how my brother-in-law stayed alive, and all of us stayed in the house. My husband, another two brothers-in-law, and some neighbors were hidden there under our house; they had been in cornfields, forests. They were there for three days. For those three days, the bodies of all of the killed Bosniaks were lying there, around. After three days trucks came and picked up those bodies, and then they went from house to house and told us to go. Where? We didn't know where, we didn't know.

I saw my husband on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday - the last day. Thursday evening he came and my brother-in-law was there. And here, in this room (although the kitchen was different; it wasn't like it is now), we were standing there. My son was sleeping. They put food in their bags. He didn't say anything to me, only when he was at the door he said: "Take care of the child."

That means on the 20th, 23rd I saw him for the last time in 1992: July. My brother-in-law was with him in the same group. Thirteen of them are still missing from that group, which was captured and taken to the camp at

* The original text was altered and extended according to the author's wish.

Keraterm[1]. In *Keraterm* they only stayed overnight and then, by trucks, they were taken to do some work. (I'd worked at *Keraterm* for nine years and my husband for two.)

After the massacre of the Muslim population in my village, the women, children and old people were driven out of their houses and marched to the camp of *Trnopolje*[2]. We stayed there for a week and then they crammed us into freight trucks. Those trucks were covered with tarpaulin sheets, so that we could not see anything that was going on outside or see where they were taking us or in which direction we moved. There were around 500 people in each truck: we were on top of one another, without food or water. We even lacked oxygen to sigh with despair and many people suffocated.

Those trucks took us to Travnik.

(from the exhibition *Voices of the Missing* - Sarajevo, 2002)

[1.] ceramics factory; Keraterm camp was a concentration camp (also referred to as prison and detention camp) near the town of Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995. The camp was founded by the authorities of Republika Srpska (RS) and was used to collect and confine civilians of Bosniak and Bosnian Croat nationality. According to ICTY indictment more than 3,000 detainees were held at Keraterm and some 300 of them were killed.

[2.] village near city Prijedor; Trnopolje camp was a detention camp (also referred to as ghetto, prison and concentration camp) established in the village of Trnopolje near the city of Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first months of the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Nominally "a transit camp" for members of the non-Serb (mainly Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak) population of the Prijedor region it was described by a United Nations Security Council report as "a concentration camp".

Mother Mejra
In Search of the Truth

Mejra: What can I say… for eight long years, I was searching for my children. When I finally found them, I was the happiest mother. Although I found only their bones, I felt like I was the happiest mother, and my husband – the happiest father. Now, at least, we could bury our children. Now we know where their graves are, sometimes we go visit them, bring flowers, say a prayer… I feel better.

(...)

I lived in Prijedor, but I am a native of Brčko. I was born in Brčko, where we lived until the '70s, when we moved to Prijedor. When the aggression started in 1992, my Edna, who was at the time a sophomore at the University, in the Department of Pedagogy (Education), came back to Prijedor. At the same time, Edvin walked to Prijedor all the way from Sarajevo. Both of them enlisted in the Patriotic League.[3] I couldn't stop them. I pleaded with Edna not to go there, but to leave for Germany instead. But she wouldn't hear of it.

(Excerpts from the book "On the Way to Truth" by Mejra Dautović)

It's April 1992. On the 30th in the evening, Edna was getting ready to go out with her friends. She was following politics closely. She came back shortly after she left. As we always talked openly, she said to me: "Mom, something is happening! While we were sitting in the café, Helena and Bilja told me that I should go home early tonight." And, indeed, that very night, Serb Army and police forces took over the town of Prijedor.

The following morning, Serb flags were already flying at the municipality and other buildings in the town. Snipers took positions in the *Prijedor Hotel* and other high-rises. It was at that moment that Muslims began to face serious problems. At the time, our Muslims neighbors and members of our family began organizing regular night watches. We were no longer able to move freely, or sleep in peace. At that time, many busloads of people were leaving for Croatia. Those who could leave, did so with a great deal of fuss.

It was then that I saw my son for the last time. I pleaded with him to go to Croatia, but he said: "No, mom! I will defend Prijedor and my Bosnia. I am not a coward that runs away."

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[3] The Patriotic League was the first organized armed group mostly made of citizen-volunteers who wanted to defend their hometowns attacked by Serb and Yugoslav National Army forces.

When he left, it was raining. At the doorstep, he turned around and said: "Here you go, Mom. Take this wallet and keep it for me until I return."

Edvin left.

A few days later, Edna took off for the Hurovo Mount. It was difficult to survive in Prijedor those days.

My dear God, when I saw my children off… I still have this painful and vivid memory of their last looks directed at me. And… I knew that we would never see each other again.

Mejra: On the 30th of May, they (the Patriotic League) tried to take over Prijedor. There were 132 of them… all boys and my Edna. They entered Prijedor and a brutal fight took place. Edvin was captured. Edna had been hiding for four or five days. She was with all the wounded soldiers… they also withdrew, because they didn't get the additional support they had been hoping for. They withdrew deep towards the Sana River. Edna had been hiding for a few days in various houses' cellars because she was not able to cross to the liberated territory. Then she returned home. On the tenth day, they came for her. They had an arrest warrant… the police from Prijedor. They came to take her away. They said that they had orders to take her to the police station to get a statement from her.

She put on black sandals and a thin blouse. She was not dressed warmly, but I couldn't say anything to her. I just discreetly nodded my head as if giving her a sign that she should not betray any of her friends. Edna knew too much.

Then they took her out. Edna went with them. Uzeir and I could not move a muscle in our bodies. Nor could she. She simply walked out and sat in the car. One policeman was just standing next to the car. Then they all got in the car and drove away.

Later, Uzeir went to the police station to see what was happening. However Edna was already in Omarska.

(Excerpts from the book)

Days and months were passing away, but they felt like years. No news about Edna. I was devastated, depressed. I couldn't eat, nor sleep. I didn't even want to live any more. I was praying to God to die.

Then, on the sixteenth day, the telephone rang. A female voice on the other end told me that Edna was alive. I immediately began my search. I wanted to send Edna some warm clothes. I begged my Serb neighbors to help me, but I met only silence on the other side. They were either afraid or did not want to tell me anything.

I tried to reach the Omarska camp several times, all in vain. I tried to bribe the guards with everything I had, just to allow me to see my daughter.

Seventeen days after Edna was arrested, one of my neighbors told me that she knew one of the guards who helped some of the Muslims who were imprisoned. I was shocked. The name of that guard was Kvočka. At that time almost everyone already knew that he tortured and killed Muslims.

I had a package ready for Edna. I knew that for twenty days she had had nothing new to wear. Then… one day, I heard a knock on the door. I peeked through the window and saw a daughter of one of my neighbors. She told me to quickly prepare the package I wanted to send and she slipped a note with Edna's handwriting in my hand. That was a list of things she needed. At the end, she sent us her love.

Mejra: For eighteen days we did not know if she was alive or not. I tried to go to Omarska, but they would not let me in. I asked for help from Edna's former boyfriend. He was a Serb; his name was Nebojša Babić. They had just broken up five, six months before the war. I asked Nebojša to see what he could do, to help because he was an inspector in Omarska. Unfortunately, he didn't want to help us. Later I would find out that it was he who questioned and tortured her the most. He sent her to her death.

For a month and a half, they questioned and terrorized her… here, take a look. These are some excerpts from newspapers and testimonies of survivors. Here, it says that she was tortured constantly. In the evening, they would take her away from her cell and bring her back the following morning. When she was returned in the morning, she could only gasp for water. "Water! I need some water!"

Here, just read this…

They tortured her because she belonged to the Patriotic League. Practically, all Muslims who were captured, thousands of them, were seen by Serbs as members of the Patriotic League.

(Excerpts from Mejra's book)

It's August 3, 1992. Three o'clock in the afternoon. A neighbor tells us that women have been transferred to the camp at Trnopolje. They used to return some people to this camp. They were in classes: A, B, C… These last ones were always killed. That night, Uzeir and I could not sleep. We were hoping that Edna was among those that were returned to Trnopolje. But our hope was short-lived.

I got up early in the morning and went towards the railway station. The train heading to Banja Luka was not for Muslims, but for the Serb Army. Dozen of us started walking along the rail tracks some ten kilometers. We were surrounded by Serb soldiers. But we had no fear. We had an enormous will.

We ran into the first set of guards in front of Tronopolje. We left our identification cards with them. We were completely numb and did not think for a minute about what could happen to us. We just wanted to see our children.

We who came for a visit were told to move towards the gate. Then hundreds of prisoners pushed their way towards the wire fence. We were standing on the street when international armored personal carriers drove in with cameras. Those images went around the world.

I returned home in a state of shock.

Mejra: Some month and a half later, around August 5th, we were told that women were returned to Trnopolje. I went to look for my Edna. That day, they brought in prisoners from the Omarska and Keraterm camps. You could not even recognize your own child. Female prisoners surrounded and began embracing me. They were with my Edna. I asked them where my child was. They said Edna had been exchanged. I though she was alive. I did not expect the worst to happen.

That is when my search and my suffering really began.

(Excerpts from Mejra's book)

"Shortly before midnight on July 20, 1992," remembers Nuska (Nusreta Sivac, a woman who survived the prison and being raped, and who, later, publicly spoke about it), "the prison commander, Željko Makić, came into our room and said 'Edna Dautović, get ready!'

"They also called out Sadeta Medunjanin who was in the cell next to ours. In the course of the night, they called forty men as well. They were all told that they would be transferred to another prison camp in Ličko Petrovo village. We saw them off with envy. 'Lucky them,' we thought. 'They will be saved… who knows what will happen with us?'

"Edna got ready quickly. Jadranka Cigelj gave her a pack of cigarettes. She kissed us. She asked me, if I survived the prison, to go to her parents and tell them not to worry… that she would call them when she managed to.

"From the bathroom window, Magbula Beširević, Esma Elezović and Zlata Cikota watched Edna, Sadeta and forty other prisoners entering the bus with Bihać license plates and a large sign that said AUTO SCHOOL ŠEŠELJ[4]. They were to be exchanged in Ličko Petrovo village. This POW exchange was never confirmed, nor has anyone after this seen or heard of Edna, Sadeta or any of the other prisoners who were driven away that night in the *Auto-school Šešelj* bus."

(testimony of Nusreta - Nuska Sivac)

(Excerpts from Mejra's book)

Days are passing by. Our sorrow is growing stronger. No news about our children. I went to the Prijedor Red Cross, where they formed a service team to search for the missing ones. There I met a girl, Ceca. I showed Edna's photo to her and I told her the story I had heard from the women who survived Omarska. She sent a message to Bihać and Ličko Petrovo village. A few days later, we received a reply. No POW exchange in that town had ever taken place.

I don't know what is keeping me hopeful, but I still have a glimmer of hope that Edna is alive.

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[4]. Vojislav Šešelj is one of the most infamous indicted Serb war criminals currently in *The Hague* prison – ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia).

Mejra: We, my husband and I, lived in Prijedor until October 1995. In fact, we did not leave voluntarily. We were expelled when the Bosnian Army liberated Bosanski Petrovac and Drvar. We were forced to leave, as Serbs at that time fled from Drvar and Petrovac. That meant that we had to get out of Prijedor. Until then, we had not been able to leave. Unless you had a letter guaranteeing your stay with someone else abroad, you could not leave. Since my husband was a small shop owner – what bad luck – we were especially not allowed to leave. Plus, our children were involved in… (the Patriotic League). There was no hope. You were just awaiting death and you feared the knife like sheep waiting for the slaughter.

In 1992, we had to wear white ribbons and place white flags on our houses, so they would know which houses belonged to Muslims or to Croats.

I must say that there were very few decent people of the Serb nationality. The few that were decent were afraid to help, because of their fear for their own lives.

For example, that boy Nebojša, the first and the last boyfriend of my Edna… I never thought that that boy could become a member of the SDS (Serb nationalist party formed by the indicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić) and become so inhumane. Before the war, he worked with Muslims, he lost a brother only a few years before the war… and he became one of those to torture and interrogate my Edna?! He, personally!? He watched them torture her. What kind of love was that? She did not even have a gun in her hand. She never killed anyone. She would never hurt anyone.

(Excerpts from Mejra's book)

Days are passing by. I am going to the Red Cross again. Ceca tells me that Edna is in jail in Stara Gradiška. She gives me a phone number to call her. I run to the telephone and call. A female voice on the other side tells me that there is no prison there. She gives me a different number. There, they give me a third number and so on... Finally, I get the number of a captain in Banja Luka who is supposedly in charge of POW exchanges. After numerous unsuccessful attempts, I manage to reach him. I hear the captain… yes, he was present that day, but he doesn't have the name of my daughter recorded. He also tells me that there was no exchange of POWs from Omarska. He tells me that some guards were organizing exchanges on their own. That captain gives me the number of the International Red Cross in Banja Luka.

So, I go on… through hell…

I am still hoping that my children are alive. I expect to hear from them…

Mejra: When we left Prijedor in 1995, I intensively started searching for my children. As soon as I arrived in Bosanski Petrovac, I joined *the Association of Bosniak Women* and the Red Cross. And I continued searching. I immediately went to Bihać, since we kept receiving information that my children were alive, that they had been exchanged, that they were in the Fifth Corps of the Bosnian Army, and so on… I went to Bihać, to the com-

mand center of the Army, the Fifth Corps. I was told that the exchange had never taken place.

It was then that I started visiting sites of mass graves.

The first mass grave was discovered in Hrgar. I was there when it was opened. Ms. Fadila Hodžić was with me. She helped me a great deal. And just like that, from Hrgar to Lanište, to Hrastova Glavica… I visited every single mass grave. I looked at every single bone… I was looking for my Edna.

In 1996, I went to Sarajevo for a conference of women from all over the world. It was then that I spoke for the first time about the genocide against Bosniaks in Prijedor and about my children. I talked about Omarska and the other camps. That is when I began to search most intensively.

In fact, (sighs)… I received an army notification about my Edvin… that he was killed on May 30, 1992 and that he was buried in Sredice. That is a small place near Prijedor. This was determined on the basis of some witness accounts. True, five young men were killed that day, but my Edvin was not among them. Edvin was seriously wounded, captured and taken to Omarska, where he was tortured. He was killed in the infamous *White house*. I found this out, however, much later, in 1999, when Mr. Bajramović told us to go to Lušci Palanka, where the remains of the persons exhumed from the mass grave in Kevljani near Kozarac had been transferred. As soon as I heard that the remains had been transported, I went and put my name in the book of those who are searching for their missing… I saw all the discovered clothes that were placed in proper queues and I saw a pair of boots. Those boots attracted my attention, as my Edvin took off in a similar pair of army boots. Sport clothes and a piece of overcoat were next to the boots. Later, I would find out that these were the clothes that my Edvin was wearing… but, they weren't his.

I returned and I gave my statement to the inspector Šljivar about the entire history – from the day my children were born to the day I saw them for the last time. I was at the time very surprised and shocked, so to speak. Dr. Sarajlić brought two skulls and some hair in a plastic bag. I first took one jaw in my hand and took a good look at it… Then I took the other one and, as if Allah willed this, I said: "Doctor, this is my child. These are my baby's teeth." They looked at each other. Only a year later, I discovered that they thought that I was not "all there."

I asked the doctor to take me to the other room, where they kept the bodies, in fact, the bones. He told me: "Mother, don't. You won't be able to handle this." I told him: "No. This is none of your concern. This is my problem. I want you to take me there so I can see for myself."

That was like a movie. When I entered the room, I said a prayer, of course. Then we were shown a bag with remains which was marked 014 KV 004. The doctor opened the bag, took out the upper part of the skull… and the forehead and the jaw… he put the skull in place where the eyes and nose should be… In that moment, I could almost see my Uzeir and my Edvin. They looked as similar as two eggs do. I said: "Doctor, this is my child." Perhaps it

was Allah's will that my child's face appeared before me at that moment.

Then the doctor took one part of the thigh, a bone and the lower part of the leg out of the bag. Then he took out the arms and the back… so, it all fit together. The age and the height. Edvin was 194 cm tall.

This is how I found Edvin's remains.

From then on, I went to Lušci Palanka every Thursday for four full months. Every Thursday, I would discover a new piece of the puzzle… that this is indeed my Edvin. Then some time in April, on the insistence of Ms. Eva Klonovski (a DNA expert), we gave our blood samples for a DNA analysis. They were sent to Madrid for further analysis. At the same time, I had a visit from Ms. Brenda Holls, a prosecutor from The Hague. She came to my home in Bosanski Petrovac with some other men. That is when I also asked Ms. Brenda to arrange that The Hague give us a green light for the opening of the mass grave near Bosanska Krupa. I had some information about this grave, but we needed approval from The Hague in order to uncover it. They gave me their word that this would be done.

After less than a month, the grave site was already being prepared and I was informed that I should come to Sanski Most, where Mr. Amor Mašović (the president of the Bosnian Commission for Missing Persons) and others would also be present. I talked to them, and after only two days, I was at the site when the bodies were exhumed. That was the mass grave in the pit of Lisac in Mali Dubovik, near Bosanska Krupa.

Eighteen bodies were exhumed that day.

I came back home and I got ill. I ended up in the hospital. The following day, my husband went to the site and took a lunch for everyone. That was the day when Edna was exhumed.

After seven days in the hospital, I asked the doctor to allow me to go home for the weekend. At the same time, Ms. Eva Klonovski told me that the bones had been transferred to the Šekovača hall in Sanski Most. Also, that was the day when the book about 3,200 missing Prijedor residents was promoted.

That day, I held my Edna in my arms.

Edvin was exhumed on the 1st of October. On the 7th, I organized his funeral. That was in the year 2000. Everything happened in that year. I found and recognized Edvin in February 2000.

I found Edna on June 26th. That is when she was taken out of the Lisac pit and she was in my arms on July 1st.

This was all very strange. I guess Allah wanted it to be this way… to let me exhume and recognize both of them… They were killed together… almost at the same time. Edvin was killed on July 16, 1992 and Edna on July 24, 1992. They were captured only a few days apart, killed only a few days apart, and found in a few months… and buried as well.

Although I organized the funeral very quickly, all in seven days, there were over 500 people there… Those were all friends. We started the funeral at the Šekovača hall… it was raining. We came to Petrovac… the rain

stopped. During the noon prayers… it was not raining. The funeral stretched towards Bihać. When we arrived there, the rain stopped once again. The sky was sealed shut. It did not rain during the funeral service… It started softly again as we were putting the last shovels of dirt and flowers on the grave. When we entered the busses… the sky opened up again.

Mejra: We are approaching the Humke cemetery. We are going to see the graves of my Edvin and Edna. Our children… so you can see where I buried my kids. Here now, we are getting closer… here, this is a civilian cemetery, that there is a Catholic one, and that is the *shehid* cemetary, that is where veterans are buried… that is where my children are. *Rahmetli* (late, tur.) Edvin and *Rahmetli* Edna. We buried them here on the 7th of October last year, and we put up the gravestones and inscribed them last year. Here are our children, for whom we were searching and whom we finally found and buried with Allah's help. Now our souls are at peace. With Allah's help, we come here and visit our children, their graves, say a prayer… and, what can I say? We feel relieved. Much, much more relieved. Now that they are found, identified, and buried… our souls are at peace.

(...)

Mejra: I don't hate anyone. The ones who did this to my kids… I can't forgive them. I cannot do this, for that would be sin. The truth cannot be forgotten. We cannot forget it if we want to live side by side and reconciled. The truth cannot be buried. The truth must be known.

(...)

(Mother Mejra - In Search of the Truth
from the documentary radio-reportage
by **Radmila Sesar**, *2001)*

Nusreta Sivac

Before I start talking about things I experienced in Prijedor in 1992, in the detention center of Omarska, actually, I would like to greet all of you. It is good to be able to talk about those difficult and painful experiences. On the other hand, I am sorry I can't share my testimony today with our Serb fellow citizens, who have not come here, unfortunately, to hear the survivors. As Nataša (Kandić) said already, my name is Nusreta Sivac and I was born in Prijedor, lived in Prijedor and was working as a judge in civil cases until 1992, when the Serbs took over power forcefully in the night between 29 and 30 April. Therefore, they overthrew the legally elected government bodies and assumed all positions in this city. In Prijedor, the war was felt much earlier than in other parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the fact that we are only 24 km away from Croatia. Many people from Prijedor were being summoned and drafted to the western Slavonija front line, and tensions had started rising with the onset of the war in Croatia. However, trouble began when the Serbian Democratic Party backed by the Army, who still called themselves the Yugoslav National Army, and the police, assumed power. It was then that dismissals from work began.

I will focus predominantly on my own experience. On the first weekday after that coup, as we call it, I was going to work as usual, when I spotted a huge group of armed men in front of the building. They had established some kind of checkpoint there and they asked me where I was going. I said I was going to work, but they took out a list and told me I no longer worked there. I returned home (what else could I do?) and then I was only able to listen to the Serbian radio, controlled by the newly-formed authorities, which was broadcasting some proclamations from the crisis headquarters. That was the first time I had heard of a crisis headquarters in Prijedor. Let me answer Mr. Hadžović at this point – he asked about bands and flags. Well, that crisis headquarters issued an announcement that all citizens of non-Serbian origin were to wear white bands around their arms when they moved through town and that they had to hang white flags on their windows. Curfew was also introduced, only for the non-Serbian population, of course. At that moment I thought that it was the most tragic thing that could happen to me: to be fired for no other reason but because of the fact that I was Bosnian.

However, that was not a calamity. That was still to come.

Rumors began circulating around town that there were some detention centers, in Omarska, Keraterm and Trnopolje. I thought that only men

were being taken there and I wouldn't have thought in my wildest dreams that I would end up in one of the most notorious detention centers in the area of former Yugoslavia.

First, they launched attacks on the villages: on 22 May the village of Hambarine was attacked, and then Kozarac on 24 May. Endless lines of refugees poured into the city from those villages, but in the part of town I was living in, we were forbidden to take in any of those people, or else we would bear the consequences.

I was not arrested in a typical way, like many other citizens of Prijedor. On 8 November 1992, my sister-in-law informed me that my brother had been taken to the police station for questioning. Of course, I was worried because he had young children at that time, but my brother returned the same evening and invited me to come over – we live very near each other – to tell me that there had been a terrible mix-up, that he had been at Omarska and that they said I was to report to the police station in the morning. I asked him what it was all about and what I had to do with it. He said that he had been told that, personally, by Miroslav Kvočka (the man, who having served two thirds of his sentence in the Hague, has been released; who is my neighbor; and whom I come across every day). So I did as I was told, naturally. I reported to the police station, but before I went there, I stopped in at the Courthouse because I wanted to ask my colleagues if they had any information on why I was being summoned to the police station. They ignored me and told me it was a police matter. And that is how I ended up in a bus with a multitude of armed men, most of whom I did not know at that time, and I was taken to the road used for Prijedor – Banjaluka. Of course, I had no idea where we were going; no one said anything, and I arrived in Omarska on 9 June 1992.

They told me to sit down and that I would be questioned. I saw a terrible sight that was shocking: at that moment, I saw thousands of people, mostly unfamiliar to me, and also three women from Kozarac that I knew. That day, two investigators from Prijedor, whom I used to know before the war, questioned me in the main building. They asked me some general questions about the referendum for an independent and sovereign Bosnia, if I had voted in that referendum and about some people I did not even know. Therefore, at one moment I thought that it might be a prelude for some big charges they were going to site against me or make me read out, for example. That questioning lasted for about an hour, although it seemed endless to me, and all that time there was a sniper gun or a rifle – I don't know much about arms and I couldn't tell what it was – pointed at me. When they'd finished questioning me, they told me to sit in the restaurant downstairs and to tell the guards if I remembered some details, and they would question me again. They also said they could not take me back to Prijedor because they had problems with fuel and did not have a vehicle, and I naively believed that they might take me back when the fuel arrived. Three women whom I spoke

to, who had already been there for quite some time, told me that no one had gotten out of there during the time they'd spent there. So I spent that first night in Omarska and the next morning at nine o'clock, prisoners began arriving in groups of about thirty into that restaurant where I had spent the night together with those three women. They were distributing some food and I still did not understand anything. Two months later, of course, I'd solved the puzzle in my head. I can still visualize all those people. Most of them were intellectuals, because there are hardly any Prijedor intellectuals who were not detained in one of those detention centers. I have memories of my fellow judges, the President of the Court, doctors, engineers, reputed people in Prijedor, authorities and well-off people who had worked hard to earn their possessions, members of political parties, of the Party of Democratic Action and of the Croatian Democratic Party. I have memories of some boys – I wondered what they were doing there, and of old, decrepit people. During my detention there, I realized that those people had been brought there as part of an ethnic cleansing operation and that they had been brought there according to a plan, because their names had been listed.

The detention center worked in three shifts, the guards changed accordingly, and there was one person in charge of each shift. Those guards shifted and there were also investigators in the center that questioned the prisoners daily with no written charges, in the rooms where women spent the nights. Therefore, all the areas were full of men, whereas the women, 36 of us altogether, stayed in two rooms above the restaurant, completely isolated from the men. The women had been assigned the duty of distributing to the prisoners one single daily meal. It usually consisted of a small piece of bread and some cooked beans or two leaves of cabbage. Since it was summer and the temperatures were high, the food had usually gone off. Disease soon spread through the Center, stomach diseases and fleas, because of those squalid conditions with no running water. It was even worse where they kept the men, because they also used that area as a toilet. And my day, together with those women, usually started with counting the dead on the lawn in front of the *white house*, when we came downstairs from the rooms on the first floor. And we always whispered the details to one another, so as to know how many we had counted. Sometimes it was 30, sometimes 25; that figure varied.

Judging by their clothes, we figured out who some of them might be – because if you knew someone well, they would always wear the same clothes. We wore the clothes we had had on when we arrived, we had no spare clothes. The guards used to drink heavily. They would beat people. I often found torture devices in the rooms where I spent the nights with the other women – there were 18 women in each of them. When we went up there from the restaurant in the evening to spend the night, the rooms were blood-stained: there was blood on the floor, the walls were smeared with blood and shreds of torn clothes lay on the floor. On two occasions we submitted those torture devices to the authorities in the Center – those were iron

objects, wooden objects, sticks and some iron balls. Also, during the day, when we went down to the restaurant to distribute that meal, we heard the horrible cries of those men who were being questioned up there: begging for help, crying, screaming and also crashing sounds. Then the guards would turn up the volume of the music in the restaurant to do away with the prisoners' cries. In those groups that came to eat in the restaurant, I often saw a father and a son, or a woman who was in one room, and her husband in another part of the Center, and their child somewhere else, so that they could not have any contact.

Whenever I talk about my experience, I am haunted by a scene that happened when a drunken guard with a cocked hat arrived and carved a cross on the face of one of my colleagues. She was an elderly woman of high repute, and she just sat stock-still... She survived then, but they led her away later and she hasn't been found to this day. I also remember another scene, yes – once we had to rehearse singing a song about Draža Mihajlović[5], about Serbia, and we did not know why they were rehearsing it, it was as if some choir was going to perform. Of course, we did not know then that a high delegation from Republika Srpska were coming to visit the place: Radislav Brdjanin and Stojan Župljanin were among them. Radislav was tried in the Hague, but Stojan is still on the run. Anyway, the prisoners were forced to sing those songs and greet the high delegation with three uplifted fingers and slogans like "Long live Serbia", and so on. Because of those terrible conditions and the starvation, various diseases raged among the worn out people. However, there was no one to turn to and ask for help. One time, the guards had a really good time when they made the prisoners strip naked and wash themselves under a powerful gush of water from the hose used for washing trucks and mine vehicles and heavy machinery. They lined them up on the platform and directed the jet at them, which knocked them down, and some of them fainted because they were so weak. There was a woman among them, who was never allowed to be with the rest of us, but was isolated in the *white house* – that was Hajra Hadžić. They stripped her naked and so they had an orgy in that detention camp. Unfortunately, Hajra has never been found either; she must have been executed somewhere and her body is probably in one of those mass graves.

I really hate to be using figures when I talk about what went on in Omarska, because no final numbers have been established yet. Thousands of people went through that detention center. They had to pass between ranks of guards who beat them all along the way. Those who could not finish up their lunch because of sickness, old age or exhaustion were beaten up in the restaurant in front of the women, sometimes to death. I saw my fellow citizens, persons I held dear, and my relatives perish. At one moment I

[5]. Commander-in-chief of the chetnik movement in Serbia during WWII

realized there was no one left from the judiciary, that I was the only one left in the detention center. There were no doctors from Prijedor left, either, except for Doctor Sadiković, who had stopped taking his lunch, the only meal they received. So I was also on that death row, praying to God to be executed, to get it over with, because that helplessness was killing me. I could not change a thing and it was too risky to say anything or react in any way. The worst part was when one of the guards got word that some relative of his had been killed on the front line – then they retaliated against the prisoners and a massacre ensued.

When they brought us to the detention center (as I said) I was only questioned once, and they never questioned me again because they kept bringing in new prisoners and I suppose they didn't have time. All in all, out of 36 of my women friends, 5 did not survive Omarska: 3 of them have been exhumed and the remains of the other 2 have not been found yet. Two of them were exhumed in the area of the community of Bosanska Krupa, which is now part of the federal part of BH. They were found in a limekiln; one of them was a student, she was only 22 years old. The women who were there were aged between 18 and 70. There were intellectuals, there were housewives; most of us were reputable women. There were also a few odd ones who were living alone, so they wanted to take away their apartments or something else, and they brought them to the Center. The sight of my friend Sedima Menković was heart-breaking: both of her sons were in the Center, but she couldn't manage to smuggle out a slice of bread to either of them. Or Fikreta Pervanić, whose four sons were imprisoned in Omarska, and her husband knew nothing of their whereabouts. Sadita Medunjanin was allegedly taken somewhere to be exchanged, but, later, her body was found in one of the mass graves along with her only son who had survived Omarska, while her husband was mutilated in front of the *white house*. I will not go into any more details now. Although Nataša told you that I can cope with this, I still get overwhelmed with emotions every time I talk about these things.

The guards used to tell us that we were completely safe there and protected; that we were better off there than in town because the Muslim forces were attacking, and the Croatians – that the HOS[6] units, and the ZNG units and what-not were there in town and that we were sheltered there in the detention center, so we ought to be grateful for being in there, really. The guards kept telling us that we were being treated decently, compared to the situation in Zenica where the women were exposed to horrendous sexual abuse. They also said that in Tuzla, they had given birth to janissaries[7], that

[6.] CDP/HOS:The Croatian Defence Forces (Croatian: Hrvatske obrambene snage, HOS) was the military arm of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP). The last HOS unit was dissolved in 1993 in central Bosnia. The guiding idea of CDF was to return the east border of the Croatian state to the one existing in the period of the Independent State of Croatia during the WWII

[7.] derived from Turkish, meaning "new soldier", infantry or foot soldier

Serbs were being massacred in Sarajevo, that they were being thrown into the Zoo park in Pionirska dolina, etc. We only listened and kept silent, of course. But when word spread about Omarska and when the arrival of an ITN[8] crew was announced, we could feel that something was happening in Omarska, because the prisoners had to clean the Center, tidy it, etc. On 3 August, the Commander – that is, the Chief Željko Medić, who has now been transferred to Sarajevo from the Hague to be processesd by the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina along with his deputy – called up all us women and told us to get ready because we were going somewhere. When we asked him where, he said Trnopolje. That's how it was: a group of women, which I was in, were transferred to the detention center in Trnopolje. I spent five days there and was then released home, against some guarantees. However, I no longer had a home, or my apartment, because while I was in detention a colleague of mine, a very good colleague of mine of Serbian nationality, had moved in and I basically had no place to live. I stayed with some friends, acquaintances and relatives, and my only wish was to leave that city. With great complications, with certificates I had to obtain from the local authorities which I eventually managed to get in October, I went into exile with a lot of difficulties, and with the help of the UNPROFOR who were stationed in the occupied parts of Croatia: in Dvor na Uni and I went to Croatia, where I lived for four years. I returned to Bosnia in 1996, in late 1996. I went to Sanski Most, because I couldn't even think of going to Prijedor – no one was able to go there even for a visit. I returned to Prijedor in the summer of 2002, to my apartment. However, my neighbors gave me a cold welcome and in the beginning nobody wanted to greet me. When they saw that I had come to live there in my apartment, I was "welcomed" with a large sign next to my front door, which read: "Omarska". Of course, I came across all those numerous investigators, all those people who used to question us in the detention center, who tortured the prisoners, but, thank God, I endured it and I am now there to stay.

Unfortunately, Prijedor has not confronted the past yet. This has been the third time I have given my testimony in Belgrade, but never in Prijedor so far. In spite of the numerous rulings of the Tribunal, in spite of the fact that over fifty mass graves have been detected, in spite of the book published by the non-governmental organization *Izvor* where the names and personal identification numbers of 3,227 citizens of Prijedor who were killed are cited, (among whom there were 128 children and women), Prijedor does not wish to tackle that matter and acknowledge the truth. We tried to erect a memorial monument to the detention center of Omarska, but came up against violent friction although the city is full of monuments to Serb fighters and if you came to Prijedor for the first time, you'd think that only Serbs

[8] Independent Television News

had been victimized. Of course, not everyone has been found yet, and the exhumed bodies from the mass graves cannot be stored in Prijedor. Instead, they are transferred to Sanski Most, to the federal territory, for identification. I have testified twice before the Tribunal about what I saw and experienced in the detention center. I testified in the case *Kvočka et al* and in the case *Brdjanin – Talić*, actually *Brdjanin*, because Talić had already been transferred to a hospital in Belgrade due to serious illness. And of course I will go back and testify every time the Court calls upon me.

(Prijedor 1992: Beyond Reasonable Doubt – public testimony conference dedicated to judicial truth and the victims; Belgrade, 24 June 2006 organized by the Humanitarian Law Center)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

lights
in the tunnel

Djulka

I'll tell you how it all happened – I'll tell you everything. And I'll try not to forget anyone or skip anything. That would not be good. When the war started in Rogatica, my folks took me out of the house and drove me to the center of the city. There they put me up in a flat. You see, people stayed together in flats in groups because it was safer that way. One morning, I can't tell you for sure what date it was, but it was in June '92, some people came to the door and ordered us to go to the school building. To the Rogatica High School, that is. A lot of people had already gathered there. There was food in that place. They gave us groceries and we cooked some soup to eat. We prepared food on the stoves. I guess someone had brought in those stoves and we used them for cooking. I stayed at that school for about a fortnight, until one day we were told to get ready. They said: "You are leaving this place." But they didn't tell us where we were going. The truth is, no one asked. No one dared to ask. Women, children and older folks were separated from the men who had to stand on the other side. They stayed back in Rogatica and I dunno what became of them later. Two big trucks rolled in and I reckoned that was it – I was gonna leave Rogatica.

Those people from the school had to carry me to the truck, 'cause I've been very sick since I was thirty-two. It's my bad bones. And my joints. I used crutches until just about before the war, but I've been unable to move ever since. So they carried me to the truck. It would've been easier if it had been a bus, but that's how it was. Then I recognized my first neighbor's son – Mirko was his name. So I reckoned I should call out to him. I wanted to, because I figured he might help me somehow. Even if he didn't, I thought he would at least say hello. But, he didn't want to. He turned away from me. And, believe me, when I sat in that truck, I had this feeling that I would be left behind somewhere on the road, once they kicked us out. Like someone had come and told me how it was going to happen. And it happened that way.

One of them said:
"Give them each a bomb to sit on."

So, they drove us to Hreša around noon. All those people got out; there must've been almost two hundred of us. Those guys carried me again. The soldiers who were escorting the busses and trucks told us we were going down to Sarajevo. Nobody paid attention to me. It didn't make any difference

that it was my people - no one wondered where they were taking me in that state. But, you see, I can understand all that. There was a war going on. Everybody minded their own business. Those busses and trucks also went away. And the troops, too. They left me on that road and everything happened as I had felt it would. Another woman had also been left on the road with me. Her name was Mira Ćurevac. She, too, was paralyzed. She was almost twice as old as me – nearly eighty. When they left us on that road, you could see two houses on one side, just like that. They were identical. While we were sittin' on the road, a woman from that house walked up to us, uninvited, and brought us coffee. She did, for sure! We took a few sips of coffee: we could not drink too much, because we couldn't move. We woudn't've been able to move if we had to go to the toilet. Anyway, that woman came back with a piece of pie for us a short while later. She'd brought out all that on the road because she'd hoped, (she said) that someone might pick us up. Later I found out that her name was Nedeljka Čvoro. She used to live there before the war, but she had found shelter at Pale, along with her husband and two sons. They only visited on weekends.

We were still sittin' there on the road and it was gettin' dark, when some Serb soldiers came by, a few of 'em, it musta been the end of their shift. I'd be cursed if I said they bothered us. They even offered us cigarettes. I don't smoke so I didn't take any, but Mina did. They said: "What are you doin' here, you can't just lie here on the road." There was this dark-haired older man, he musta been even older than me – over sixty. I don' know his name or his last name. All I know is that his house is over there, by the road, only on the other side. Then he said to the soldiers: "Give them each a bomb to sit on." We did not utter a word. My word, we thought he was gonna kill us. Trust me, he would've killed us for all I know, had it been his decision.

And then, luckily, Nedeljka's brother come home. His name is Milan Simović. He come out of nowhere. Perhaps he'd been workin' in the field. His was the other house, next to Nedeljka's. One of the two identical ones. He lived there with his mother, wife and two children. His wife was a nurse, their daughter was fifth grade and their son hadn't even started school. We found out later how this came about. When she left for Pale with her husband and sons, Nedeljka told her mother: "Here's the key to the house and, if no one collects these women, bring them in, please." Milan's mother – her name was Stana Simović – must've told him and he came up to us right away. He asked those soldiers: "Would you give me a hand in carrying them inside on some blankets?" They said yes. And they really carried us in. They put us on the couch, where we spent four days and five nights.

They took such good care of us! That old woman, Milan Simović's mother, although she was really flyin' off her feet with work – she had sheep and cows to look after because Milan's wife went out to work. But still, she came to us every morning and unlocked the house. She would open the door, and the weather was fine, like midsummer. She brought us coffee every

morning and then she brought us breakfast, and she would also bring us things during the day. She gave us all sorts of food, especially milk and dairy produce. I told her: "Don't bother feedin' us so much, just water will do." My mouth was gettin' so dry; I was feelin' bad 'cause of my joints. And she said: "Never mind, I'll get you some milk instead of water." I said: "Ok, if you have some to spare, but you don't have to." Then she brought us low fat and whole milk cheese, and cream, yogurt and milk. You can't imagine how well they cared for us, and they were really busy at that time. They worked in the field and collected hay at that time. But Milan would return from the field and come to see us, to check if there was anything we needed. Then he brought whatever was necessary. I can never forget that, 'til my last day. I have told everyone about it. The UNPROFOR people also came by, and I asked them to take us down to Sarajevo, but they wouldn't hear of it. So the two of us stayed there for four days. And all that time, the Simović family was so good to us.

Then on a Friday, I think, Nedeljka came back with her husband and children and came to check on us immediately. And I tell her that I'm embarrassed by all the work old Stana was doin' for us, in addition to her work, and everyone else from Milan's household, for that matter. And we asked her to find a place for us somewhere if that was possible. Then her husband appeared and went away by car. He came back with news in a short while. He said he'd arranged for us to be admitted to the hospital at Pale from where they'd evacuate us to Sarajevo, when it was possible. So he took us to Pale, to the *Koran Hospital*. But they wouldn' admit us. They put us in another ambulance an' told 'em: "Drive to Sokolac." I reckon'd we were goin' further away from Sarajevo all the time, an' that unnerved me. Anyway, this other ambulance took us to Sokolac, to the Military Hospital. And, yes, I was forgettin': when we left Hreša, except for me an' Marija Ćurevac, there was one more, old woman in that ambulance. Mulija Ajanović, her name was. She was nearly eighty. She'd left with the others, 'cause she was able to walk, but the poor soul must've sat under a tree to get some rest an' then she fell asleep. Just like old folks do. An' she did not have anyone to drag her, like I didn't, neither. So while she was asleep, that bullet or shrapnel came from somewhere an' wounded her in the leg. That leg had, God forbid, worsened, an' the Serbs must've found her there an' put her in our ambulance. The doctors in the Military Hospital 'ad dressed her wound, but the wounded Serbs wouldn't 'ave us there, so they took us to the mental hospital. There was this woman – Mahira Tokić – working there an' they ask'd her if she'd admit three old women. She said yes an' that's how the three of us came to Sokolac. I stayed in Sokolac for two years an' those two other old women, Mina an' Mulija, died there. They lived there for more'n a year after we arrived in Sokolac. They buried 'em right next to the hospital, under a pear tree. All of 'em who died in that hospital were buried there - no matter what side they belonged to. That was their fate, I guess.

Every time Nurse Slava was on shift, she would bring me out in the sun

The hospital wasn't a very nice place to stay in, but I figured it was better than being shelled in Sarajevo. There, in Sokolac, the lady doctors an' the nurses took very good care of me. I guess they understood how very ill I was an' on top of that, I'd been driven out of my house an' was all alone in the world. Sometimes they brought me their own medication from home. I have to tell you their names, to do them justice. The doctors were: Mira Djerić, then Branka Kovačević – a beautiful young woman. Later on came Mira Ćajić, she had a lot of understanding for me an' talked to me a lot. She was the one who told me that I was goin' to be discharged from the hospital. And those three nurses – Nera Zoranović, Jasenka Vuković an' Slava Radović – they were the best. They were kind an' caring an' that meant so much to me. That Slava would have other patients help her to carry me downstairs an' she would place me outside in the sun, so I would get some sunshine. An' I would tell her: "Don't you bother so much about me, love!" But it was no use. She would take me out anyway. She would say: "You have to get out in the sun, it's good for you." Every time she was on shift, she would bring me out in the sun. And also the other patients, my roommates, were good to me and took care of me.

My neighbors from Sokolac also came to the hospital to visit me; I'll tell you how it was. One patient from the mental hospital told me one day that he had seen Cica in a shop in Sokolac, that she was workin' there. He was walkin' around the town, like he wasn't very sick. And Cica, that was in fact Nada Radovanović, but everybody used to call her Cica. She used to work in a shop next to my house before the war and we were close. When things got bad in Rogatica, she went to her sister in Sokolac.

When I heard that, I took a piece of paper an' wrote her this note: *Cica, come to me, I'm in the mental hospital in Sokolac, ward eight, room five.* Now, listen to this - I want to tell you straight how it was. I wrote all that an' signed the name "Milena". I was afraid that if I wrote Djulka, she might not come to me. How could I know what she would think? There was a war going on. And I wanted so badly to see her. We had such good times together back in Rogatica. That patient who told me about Cica said that she was stayin' with her sister and that her house was over there, in Sokolac, near the carpet workshop. So I gave that note to another patient (Memedalija his name was), and I told him to look for that house and give the note to Cica. He found the house alright, but he didn't find Cica, he found her sister's mother-in-law, and he gave her the note. When Cica's brother-in-law came home, his mother gave him the note to read. It was already gettin' dark and there was no electricity at that time, but he came to the hospital right away to check on that woman "Milena". A nurse took him to ward eight, room five, and he asked which one of 'em was Milena. That nurse told him there was no Milena on that ward, but there was a woman called Mila.

She was in room five, next to mine. So they went to see her, but she told them she knew nothin' of that note and had no idea who Cica was. And they went on lookin' through all the rooms, and finally ran into that man Memedalija who had taken the note in the first place, and he brought 'em to me and said: "She gave me the note to take to you."

That man walked up to me – the nurse stayed by the door – and then I told him who I actually was. He smiled and turned to that nurse, winked at her and said: "Look at her, how canny she was to think of that." And we spoke a bit and he told me that Cica had gone to Serbia, but would be back that night and that he would tell her about me when she got back. And, my word, as soon as it had dawned, my Cica came to me. It was so good to see someone from Rogatica. You know, we used to have such a good life there, and then suddenly… We started kissin' and cryin'. Both of us. Cica had brought me all sorts of goodies to eat. And she came back and brought me some pajamas, and a pullover… She brought me all sorts of things. And after she'd gone back to Rogatica, she came to me from time to time, and brought me things. Her father came to me once and brought me a transistor radio. A new one. He said: "There, Djulka, now you can listen to *the Red Cross* messages, you might find out somethin' about your folks." That's what he said.

One evening, he came to me and asked: "Djulka, would you like to go home?"

I didn't tell you, the manager of that hospital in Sokolac was Doctor Momir Janković and he would always check on me when he came. He asked me many times: "Djulka, would you like to go home?" He never said *do you want*, but *would you like*. I notice such things right away. And I told him: "My dear Doctor, I would if I could." And he said: "You will, a telegram arrived." He just said that and left. Ever since that moment, I'd hoped I would be able to leave that place. A month went by and nothin' happened. Then one day – Slavka had just carried me outside – the manager came by and asked me: "What are you doing outside, Djulka?" And then I told him: "Doctor, you told me back then there was a telegram for me, but I haven' seen you nor the telegram ever since." He replied: "You see, Djulka, you'll have to wait a while." And he entered the building. The next mornin', that doctor Mila Čajić came into our room and asked me how I was doin'. I told her I'd got a bit too much sun the day before, 'cause I'd been outside. And she asked me: "And would you like to go home?" And I said: "Stop kiddin' me all the time." But she was dead serious. She said: "Don't you get upset, but you're goin' home." That moment I felt like I'd been plugged into a current. One minute I was cold and then hot again. She asked me if I'd had breakfast. I said I hadn't, breakfast had not been served yet. The she said: "You must have

breakfast, and then wait for the car; it'll be here by some time this evening. And if it doesn't come today, it'll pick you up tomorrow."

That breakfast arrived, but I couldn't swallow a bite. The window was wide open – the weather was beautiful – and I was lookin'… then, (it was almost noon) a car popped up! And I heard Doctor Mila shouting: "Go and help Djulka!" So, you see, I'd been right thinkin' that car had come to fetch me. They carried me out to that *Red Cross* vehicle. Many people had gathered to see us off. This woman Zora – she was from Grbavica – got into the car with me and started kissin' me and cryin': "My Djulka, what am I gonna do without you?" That's when we all started cryin'. I don't know how far that vehicle took us, but I remember being carried into another car and arriving in Sarajevo in that car. And, trust me, if it hadn't been for the Simović family from Hreša and for Nedeljka, I would've never seen my son again. They saved my life.

Djulka Džaferović

(Lights in the Tunnel, 1999)

I remember
Taiba

... I remember my neighbor Taiba Hodžić. We used to sit for hours in front of the house, talking endlessly... I wonder what we were talking about. And we laughed. I still wear that blue scarf that was a present from Taiba. She gave it to me before she fled to Munich with her daughter. Her eyes were the same blue as that scarf. "As soon as I come back, we'll go to Asim's to have grilled meat and chicken liver. And save all the stories for us, to have something to laugh about. Take care." Taiba, my best neighbor. She was like a sister to me. Even more than that. For the time being, I keep all the beautiful stories to myself that I want to share with her. So that we have something to laugh about when she returns.

Šaja Atić, *47, housewife*
from the town of Olovo near Sarajevo

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The two of us had always been together. Referring to me without referring to her, being with her and not being with me – that was impossible! We were the paragon of friendship and sincerity. If it hadn't been for you, I would've had no one to listen to my complaints, to laugh madly with, no one whose secrets I would keep and whose problems I would listen to. If it hadn't been for you, my dearest. And tonight, if you are sleepless, don't be sad! You and I will be together again, complaining to each other about our teachers and our parents who never seem to understand us. We will take offerings together for the *Bairam*[1] holiday and paint eggs for Easter. We will get ready together to go downtown and go for walks on long summer evenings. We won't be afraid of anyone then and no one will be able to tear us apart just because you are a Muslim and I am a Serb. Don't be sad tonight and please don't cry for me! For I will surly be back. I will come to give you a hug, to have a good talk and laugh our hearts out as only the two of us can.

Remember all the good times we had together and they will be projected into our future!

Do not cry tonight! I will come and bring back your smile and I will devote the most beautiful song to you.

Sanja Ristić

1. A Muslim holiday

My Dear Sanja,

I could never have thought that you and I would ever be writing to each other like this or that we would be away from each other for such a long time. I'm longing to see your mum and your brother, but it is you I miss the most. I feel so terribly aimless. Now that you've gone, I sit around the house all day long. I often see Aida, Alma, Azelma and Larisa. We often speak of you when we get together: when you'll be back, what you look like now and whether you think of us at all. Sanja, if you could only visit for an hour and see this forlorn place. And if you could see how many people are missing! My goodness, Sanja, the things I could write to you, or better still, tell you… but that will have to wait. This is all we can do now, and until our scum come back to their senses we'll just have to bear it and wait. I was in your room yesterday; I needed some notebooks from the first grade. I couldn't help crying, to get some relief, because everywhere I looked, I saw you. It was even harder for me when I saw your dad. This is so terribly painful. When he told us he was leaving, my spirits flagged, for how are we ever going to see each other now? We are all so embittered and I am completely losing hope. I can't go on about this now – I am literally choking!

I am sorry about your grandfather. We can barely hope with all the losses, and now this on top of everything. My closest relatives are all here, but many of our classmates are missing, and also some of those we dated. Samir (Sanela's boyfriend) got killed, and many others…

I have to say goodbye now and wish you luck on behalf of everyone here: Mum and Dad, Dženeta, Ajdin and Redža. And Begzade! She will never find another one like you, even if she wants to. Take care.

Aida, *who loves you very, very much.*
P.S. If you can't read this, it's not my fault, it's because of the candlelight.

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The telephone rang. Oh, that telephone! Who knows how many times a day it rings! I am beginning to fear it! But this time, it wasn't the Crisis Relief Headquarters. It's my neighbor Zada, inviting me to come over for a cup of coffee.

My neighbor Zada used to visit me quite often. She is somewhat younger than me, a cheerful woman who radiated generosity and a great sense of humor. She would always see the funny side of ordinary things. Chatting over a cup of coffee with her was a real pleasure. She always cheered me up. But in those days, those gloomy days, everything changed and so did Zada. We drank coffee and talked about the war. We couldn't believe it was true. We were sad and tearful. We would be drinking coffee, while tears poured down our cheeks. I had never seen Zada sad before. And I had never seen her crying, because she was a cheerful and optimistic person. But that day, tears just rolled down. We cried and sipped our coffee that

had turned cold, while her two little sons played around us. I never thought it would be the last coffee that we would have together. But that was the last day I spent in my old country and the last coffee I drank with Zada.

I don't think I'll have such a friend ever again.

Nada Ristić, *42 years old*
Mikulja – Tešanj

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I remember being happy, it was a long time ago when I was able to rejoice at every sunrise, every rosebud and each new life. All that is long gone, all those beautiful memories withered inside me and everything that used to be nice has disappeared. I seldom remember my childhood – although I would like to: playing with Vinko, Rosa, Goran, Taib, Hajra and Mujo. We were so happy every time we got together – for birthday parties, farewell parties and weddings, when we looked after our sheep together, did our homework together, collected hay, and built bridges and roads to connect people, when we had fun together. We were very young then, but our parents took us along when they joined a voluntary road building action that lasted a few months. We could barely imagine what it would be like when cars started rolling along our road. When we were actually taken for a ride, no one could have been happier than us.

The life we had together was ruined by some other wretched people, but not for long. There is a common future before us. And we will rebuild it together with our children.

Dobrinka Marić
Mikulja

(I remember, 1995)

We Live Together*

For every one of us in Bosnia, the most difficult thing is having to tell someone how we feel. Writing letters to friends and relatives are the saddest moments for me. This is probably because then we begin to analyze our feelings. And the next day we are invariably drained, out of strength. Also, we often avoid writing to people and telling them how we feel because we love them and we don't want to make them feel sad.

The situation is much better now than a year ago. One year ago, there was much more hunger, much more cold, and no heating or electricity. This sounds like reading down a list, you know, but it is very hard when you experience it in real life. Instead of coffee, we used to roast wheat, rye or chickpeas – but that is over now. We have coffee and other goods, but very little money, because we don't get our salaries. Humanitarian aid is being distributed, but that's for the refugees. The citizens of Tuzla have received relief in very limited amounts and very seldom because the quantities that would be necessary to meet the needs of Tuzla never actually reach the city.

Before the war started in Tuzla, large numbers of refugees had already poured into the city and we had therefore encountered that problem a long time before it was engulfed by the war. Those people were refugees from areas of the Drina valley, from Zvornik, Bratunac and Vlasenica – I am mentioning them in the order in which people were forced to leave those regions and find shelter somewhere else – then from Bijeljina and Srebrenica. That was an exclusively Muslim population; and then from Bratunac, Cerska and Konjević Polje – those were the places they came from. In addition to being driven out of their houses and arriving in the city, all those people had experienced personal tragedies and persecution. Their dearest had been killed and they had undergone torture and harassment, and it took the local authorities a lot of effort and skill, so to say – and this also goes for the political parties that worked with them – to keep things under control.

The last refugees from Bijeljina and Janja say that before crossing the river, in Bijeljina, where they had been moved to the area controlled by the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they had been told to demand that the Serbs be expelled from Tuzla, so that they could move into their apartments. I am not saying that they sought such things, but that the representatives of the Serbian authorities told them to do so.

There might have been some sporadic demands of this kind in Tuzla, but they never came from the authorities, nor did the authorities support such things. The Serbs in Tuzla feel one percent more threatened than the rest of the population. That is exactly because of such messages that are being sent

* Title - Ed.

out, or messages that say: we want you to release the Serbs from Tuzla. But let's say that no one can say such things on behalf of all Serbs, because at that very moment there could be at least five persons who do not want to leave.

We live together. There are no problems whatsoever in that respect. I haven't noticed any changes in the atmosphere. The motto of out intensive care team, of which I am in charge, is that if someone wants to "cook up" something, it can only be coffee – and after that we go back to work.

Far more important than that, is to be able to stick together in hard times. We help one another mutually. A year ago, on the Ramadan Bairam, Tuzla was shelled. Early in the morning, my apartment was also hit. My neighbors came to help me clear up the mess, after they'd made sure we were ok, because we were really scared. That was perhaps the worst moment for me – not because my apartment had been struck, but because of that scene in the stairwell, where we had all gathered, frightened out of bed, our hair in a mess, and, while the shelling was still going on, my neighbor Zineta came out of her apartment, stared at us and said: "My goodness, what is this? Are we going to eat that baklava I prepared and drink the Bairam coffee together? Nada, please come in." And we had also prepared some sweets although we are not Muslims, but everyone had prepared something because it was Bairam – I mean, we could have had some visitors. That was the most difficult moment for me. I was choking with fury because I could not, with all my heart, rejoice with my neighbors on their holiday as we should have done because those are really good people. That feeling of uneasiness is far worse among the Serbs in such situations.

The journey from Tuzla to Sarajevo lasted for thirty hours. I cannot tell you exactly how many kilometers we covered, because we traveled along some roads we had never taken before. We traveled on a truck, and then that truck stopped sometime during the night, together with a line of other vehicles, because they said there was shooting going on. We could not go any further and had to wait 'til late in the night when that crew of the anti-aircraft guns, or machine-guns or mortars would be taking a nap, and then the trucks, buses and other vehicles would roll unnoticed down the Mount of Igman with no headlights and without braking. But that night nobody drove down that way because one truck had been hit and the driver was killed, so it had blocked the way.

The next morning at daybreak, I had no other option but to walk down the mountainside, carrying my things, all the way to Hrasnica, and then to ask to be let through that fabled tunnel before it opened in the afternoon, to avoid spending another day in front of the entrance into the tunnel. And the tunnel was completely inadequate for my height, and of course the height of many other people. It is rather low, narrow, humid and damp, but it was the only way into and out of Sarajevo.

(March 1995)
Nada Mladina

(The Age of Reason 2, 1998)

Esma

Tell us something about yourself briefly.

I come from Prijepolje, Sandžak, but I have been living in Sarajevo for thirty years already. I have two sons, my husband has passed away… I am a pensioner.

Looking back at the early nineties and the years that preceded the war, what do you remember?

One usually remembers those war times, the shelling, so to say. Being told to run for shelter, when we used to find refuge in basements and in the neighborhood. I had the children with me. Most of the time, we spent the night in the garage or at our late neighbor, Branko's. The whole neighborhood, all of us together.

And who did you see as the aggressive sides in this war?

To tell you the truth, I haven't been able to figure that out. I come from Prijepolje, my neighbors there are also Serbs. Here – I can show you some pictures – they came to visit me last year. They were sitting right here. And what difference can then possibly be between us, how am I to feel that difference? It all depends on individual character. I don't know, I really don't understand why all this happened…

And you still don't have an answer to that?

I really do not have an answer.

As for the current situation, how do you see things now?

Let me tell you, everything is the same here as it used to be. Some were here all the time, some have come back, others have escaped, like that neighbor M. You see, all my neighbors are Serbs.

I remember having *the Bairam baklava* in '92 with late Branko – God have mercy on his soul. He came to see me; I had no idea what was brewing. People say that many had been storing weapons in their houses back then, but I didn't have a decent dull knife. That's how it was. So he came to see me just before Bairam. I asked: "Is it true what people say?" And he replied: "My devotion, dear Esma, things look bad." But I brushed aside his dark forebodings. I would've thought there could be trouble inland, but not in Sarajevo. My husband and I had no idea that war would break out in Sarajevo, and that it would be the worst in the Old City. Tanks were rolling uphill, along the main road, and we watched them from our terrace unsus-

pectingly. Branko told us then that his son was being summoned by the Army all the time, and the war had already started in Croatia. His wife told me then: "I am not going to have my son killed or killing others. We're in for trouble." Then the two of them went away to Switzerland, and late Branko stayed behind to watch over the house. Once he tried to leave and stay with his relatives in downtown Sarajevo, and he left me the key to his house when he was leaving. He said: "Take this key to my house and if someone wants to go in, don't let them break in, just unlock it and they can take away whatever they want." That's how it was. He wanted me to look after his house. Now that he has gone to his Maker, who is to believe me when I say that? Anyway, he couldn't stay put for more than two days there, and on the third day, he returned.

And every year, when they celebrated their patron Saint's Day, Uncle Branko – that's what they called him – used to give our children some goodies: candies and chocolates. They invited us, and I always went to their *slava*[2]. I can never forget that, and they also came to us for Bairam. That's the truth.

They used to visit us and they still do. And when my husband died, they all came to pay their respects, and we also went over to see them when Uncle Branko was killed…

And during the first year of war, his wife J. had prepared a lot of winter preserves and marmalade and Branko gave away all that food to all of us. Later she sent us parcels from Switzerland!

To tell you the truth, people are different. Our own five fingers are not the same. God forbid they should ever be…

And then when Branko was killed during the war… My, my, my… one morning, when we got up, I realized something was wrong. When we went down to check on him, one of the neighbors told me, "What can I say, Djula, they killed him…" I replied: "Who in the world could have killed him, damn it?!" I just went berserk and I thought I would fall apart. That's how I felt. When such a thing actually happens before your eyes, it is quite a different thing from hearing grenades and being in the middle of shell fire. This was different… and it was "us" who killed him…

Let me tell you another thing – I was working in the factory there and this man, S., came there from Vukovar. He used to be a technologist in the factory in Borovo. He came up to us screaming: "They have razed Vukovar to the ground! You people should brace yourselves for trouble; it's not going to be any better here!" And he was really poor, so we got together and made some shoes for him and his family… What he said was so hard for us, and we didn't know that it was soon going to be like that for us, too! But when that began in Sarajevo, he left…

[2] the Orthodox Christian custom of honouring a family patron saint. It is celebrated by the Serbs, but also in parts of the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria as well as among some Croats and the Gorani people.

And how did you feel about those who were shooting from the surrounding hills?

How? Oh, come on… for God's sake… That was horrible. I have no words to describe those people. When I went to Prijepolje in 1996, for the first time after the war, I set off with the children. We'd left from Grbavica, and were supposed to go down to Lukavica and to take a bus to Serbia from there. I was only hoping they would say that the bus had broken down, sigh with relief and go back home. I was so scared. But at the same time, I wanted to go and see my mother and brother…

And now this situation… You know, it gives me the creeps when I hear people say that they live in Bosnia but don't support Bosnia. I mean, let's be real. How could I not support you, when you are here and we live here together? Isn't a neighbor closer to you than a distant relative?

That same neighbor, J., had taken me to the doctor when I was unwell. Am I supposed to tell her off now? That's nonsense…

When you hear nowadays that there is to be reconciliation here, how do you feel about it?

Well, I don't know really… they ought to be reconciled over there, the politicians, that shit - pardon my language! Who do I have to be reconciled with? I did not quarrel with anyone, for that matter. There was this case of our Serb neighbor, who was quite ill-tempered, but I did not quarrel with him either. And the other one who'd left without telling anyone, whenever I see him nowadays I ask him – how are you, how're things? And he calls us all on Bairam Day.

Who do I have to make peace with? I did not quarrel with anyone, my neighbor didn't quarrel with me or I with him.

And on a bit higher level, on the state level?

I don't think this is only about politics, but it is the politicians who embroiled us in this. They entrapped us, and the people were involved and killed unwillingly. There was a good comment the other night - "I prefer to keep my head on my shoulders rather than to fight for the state." After all, that man was right. We have no state. And still, look what's happening!

So what is Bosnia and Herzegovina - if not a state?

What is it? A country that fell apart, that's what it is. And now I really can't tell what is supposed to happen, trust me. What they have cooked up and what they have gained this way, I really don't know… I only feel sorry for this young generation. What is going to become of them? Even those who complete school and everything, what are they going to do? Whereas those who have secured their children and grandchildren… And what have we got to leave our children and grandchildren? In an honest way… We lived honestly, did everything straight, but thank God, we're safe and sound. There must be some justice in this world…

And what would you like this society to look like, I mean Bosnia and Herzegovina?

As it used to be, naturally. Unified, one state so to speak, one president, all the people living together, Serbs, Croats and Muslims… And those who don't like it should be expelled. Only, there is no *Goli otok*[3] nowadays, and even that would be too good for them. I have in mind the politicians who mess things up; it's them I have in mind… not the people…

And do you hold these "ordinary" people accountable in any way?

And what can I do about it? How should I know whether you fired mortars or not? I don't know, I simply don't know and can't be the judge… Anyway, I was saying, when I traveled to Prijepolje via Mt. Trebević. That place was strewn with bunkers, and someone must have known this. They were able to keep tabs on us from up there all the time... That's a bad feeling... The worst thing is that the Serbs, who started all this, remain unbending; they just want to keep a grip on their entity, no matter what. What is there to hold on to, aren't we all made of flesh and blood?! As if we weren't all going to be judged by the same Maker one day. And what are the poor people to do? Bend down and take the blows as long as you can...

Do you think that what happened during the war should be talked about nowadays?

Well, that should not be hushed up, we have to be real. We have to speak up and make it known! Let me say this – my children have started school… this is not fair: if, in my time, I studied history, and World War I and II, why is the recent history being stifled? They are not allowed to talk about many things that happened. But why? It wasn't me or you who did those things. Why not let the truth come out? If God knows this, why shouldn't people know? That's an old proverb. How could I hide away from you if some of your dear ones were killed or stabbed somewhere? That cannot be done. Or, as I often say, how can I ever forget someone being good to me? Whether it was the neighbors, or somewhere else – not even the children will forget the good that was done to them. But they also remember bad things. Just like I can't forget the things I told you about: the goodness of late Branko for instance, and perhaps they cannot forget what happened to them, and the killings and persecutions and all…

How can this silencing be discouraged?

The young should not settle for this! A child cannot forget the shelling and explosions, and going to school in a shelter. No way a child can forget that! Of course, my child will have normal contacts with your child, but

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[3] The infamous islet in the Adriatic Sea where political prisoners were sent after Tito broke away from Stalin in 1948, ill-famed for the extremely harsh and humiliating treatment of renegades.

it was not your child who did those things, but some hot-headed jerk out there. That will never be forgotten, for sure, but it will gradually fade away in time. And the fastest way to do that is to get production going, to employ young people and give them a little freedom. My Tamara, we no longer enjoy the freedom we once had.

Do you believe that economy can be developed without tackling the issue of guilt and who started it all?

Well, things would be clear if the main culprits were put behind bars. Everything would gradually get moving then. These entities would be scrapped and young people would mingle and integrate, and so on. And the industry must be revived. Otherwise, you can't go on with an empty stomach and all that pain, I am afraid… For example, my son is working with some Serbs – so what?! You also are a Serb, aren't you? And if you cut yourself and I let out my own blood – they will be the same!

Interview conducted by **T.Š.**

(Things Cannot Be Good for Me if They Are Bad for My Neighbor, 2005)

Jadranka

Tell me something about yourself, please…

Well, my name is Jadranka and I'm twenty-nine and a half years old, going on thirty. I work as a math teacher in the Secondary Technical School in Loznica. That's all, except that I continually struggle with myself and others…

How did the '90s and the war affect you? Can you tell me something about it, because I know that you experienced a lot…

As time goes by, the pain diminishes, for one thing and also, as time passes I realize that all that used to matter is still there. As I've already told you (before the interview) I have stayed in touch with our neighbors from Croatia, who remained decent people during the war and who practically protected us from those who were not so good…They have maintained their human qualities, they haven't changed and that's why I think that all that used to be good is still there. And what stinks comes to the surface, isn't it so? I find solace in that, the fact that the good people haven't changed a bit, that's the moving force that maintains the belief in me that there is good in people… and I also hope that those who aren't good will improve (*laughing*). I believe that everyone has the right to err and to make amends.

What went on during those war-troubled '90s? You used to live in Croatia, and then, when the war started, you moved…

Oh, yes, we moved from Šibenik to Knin and we stayed there for about a year and a half, and then, before *Operation Storm*, we moved from Knin to Kosovo, and then from Kosovo… But also in Kosovo, the Albanians there – and I was the only one who had contact with them – were very nice and cultivated people. After everything that happened, in those troubled times, these people remained unchanged, and said that, speaking for themselves, they did not want us to leave, but that they could not be of any help because they would be putting themselves in jeopardy. In those difficult moments, they remained humane. Afterwards, we met occasionally. They would come to that shop in the isolated Serbian building, and would enquire discreetly and say hello or wave as they were passing by, inconspicuously, so that others would not see them. But there was no change of heart towards us, and we felt the same way. That is human, something you feel that doesn't have to be described or emphasized, you just sense it and feel it. With no words said, their behavior conveys that message.

How much imprint has this left on you through all these years?

I believe that I've been empowered, and also that, because I was lucky enough to come across good people in those difficult moments, I don't have prejudices nor do I hate anyone, because they (the good people) wiped out all the bad things that happened. One or two such persons will eclipse all this evil. Yes, there was bitterness in the beginning, but there is no hatred. I simply felt helpless because I hadn't done anything wrong, and I wondered why all that had to happen. But it happened, and empowered me and helped me realize what the real values are in life...

So, in the light of all these experiences, how do you understand reconciliation? What does it mean to you?

Well, I did not have any personal conflicts and I haven't quarreled with anyone, but it is a big burden on a broader scale, I think...

Why?

Well, I don't know, but I feel it is weighing upon people, especially among those who haven't been through anything and who don't know much about those conflicts. There is quite a lot of ignorance and prejudice and then you hear them say preposterous things – they have no idea what happened, but they hate someone they do not even know. That's why I think that first we must work to disperse prejudices, because you cannot hate someone you don't know, let alone an entire nation. Do you know every single individual in that nation, which leads you to the conclusion that they are all bad? And that you are the best? And, what's worse, the good people will never make a big deal out of it, people just perceive them as such, whereas the bad people brag and boast (although they sound hollow and they actually make trouble)... Unfortunately, there are such people on all sides, as far as I can see: among the Serbs and the Croats and in Bosnia...

Can we say that you see reconciliation as dispersing prejudices?

I believe this is a priority. If, for example, young people from Serbia could get to know the people from Croatia and Bosnia... Many of them were born after the war and they did not have the opportunity to see how it used to be. So that now they base their notions on some stories they hear at home or in their social environment, but actually, they have no idea. Unfortunately, their notions are distorted. If only there could be friendship among the young, for the sake of the future that is ahead of them. What worries me most is that young people are leaving, and the elders who stay behind are not very tolerant.

You said that overcoming prejudice is a priority, and what is next?

Prejudices are the biggest problem, I guess. And then there's self-development. For example, as a member of the Serbian nation, I dislike some national characteristics such as "we are the best and unrivaled, a God-given people" and what not, but in effect, things are different...

Many people don't believe in what they are doing, and they should really find something that suits them and be engaged in that, instead of beating about the bush without getting to the core of the problem; then they label things and cry out loud, whereas, in fact, it's all hollow and ungrounded… This is a bit unnerving: people not working on themselves, but engaging in empty talk. That's like in busily cleaning your own house, you don't have time to look over the fence; and here, everybody seems to be looking at their neighbors and scrutinizing everyone else except themselves – and their souls become full of weeds, just like their gardens.

Therefore, people ought to sober up a bit and realize that things are not so perfect, especially not among the Serbs. They speak of victims, but – wait a minute – it's not as if there weren't any other victims…

Who should be working on reconciliation, dispersing prejudices and on all these other things that you mentioned? Who is to do that? Even when it is said that it should be done, no one says who should do it…

In my opinion, this is a problem of mentality in general: our park ought to be clean, with no litter, which means we have to take care of it. I mean, if I throw my garbage in the container and not next to it, there won't be garbage lying around. We must take ourselves as a starting point and make peace with ourselves first of all, because there are many people with conflicting personalities (this is obvious, considering the crime rates), people are quarrelsome and aggressive… How can you build peace if you are not at peace with yourself?

Therefore, every individual should work on this?

There are some fundamental human values that have to be respected: if everybody observed the Ten Commandments, there wouldn't be any problems in the world. If we could take, as a starting point, perhaps not ideology or theory, but a proven standard… but how can you do it when no one will listen to you? For example, when I see two people fighting, I try to separate them. When I hear "we are the victims" I tell them that our side also did that, especially in Kosovo, which I can confirm… For example, when I was talking to my colleague and telling her that the Serbs had also been looting and stealing and that I'd watched them doing that, she said: "I would never have thought of anything like that, you see." If you manage to open one person's eyes so they can start thinking for themselves, instead of blindly accepting what others are saying time and again… if only they insisted on different things, they might try to tell things apart. People generally do not think about reconciliation because they are immersed in their daily grind. It would be good to live in peace with our new neighboring states, our former republics, like we do with Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary, for instance. To have close relations, but to remain at a distance, to avoid new amalgams that could lead to new eruptions. I am saying this because I have the impression that our former country was formed against the will of its citizens.

You said that you could take yourself as a starting point and provide information. Is there anything else that you could do, as an "ordinary person"?

That's the first step. I constantly have these prejudices in mind. If only I could disperse them, and I am really trying hard… Not only prejudices against other nations, but also against some social groups.

What are the existing fears, what are the obstacles to reconciliation?

I believe that there are fears among the people that history could be repeated. That is why I think it would be better to start reconciliation from a distance, rather than being best friends who quarreled and reconciled only to blow up again. Those mutual relations ought to be founded on a much more solid basis. But this is very difficult now because people do not mix enough. For example, I watch Serbian and Croatian television and I see that they are heavily biased against each other… If people could travel and mingle more… but because of economic problems, you can't travel; perhaps some cheaper youth camp sites could help: they could get to know one another better and see that there are normal people on the other side, that they don't have horns, and that the stereotypes such as "all the Croats are like this" or "all the Albanians are like that" simply don't work. A friend of mine from our choir has just been to a youth camp in Germany and met some young Croats there. She says she had the best time with the Croats, although she has never had the opportunity to mingle with them before, because she was born after 1980. She says that the language brought them together and that they were best friends there and they have kept in touch, even though she had never seen any Croats before.

You just told me that you were afraid that something like that (war) could happen again. How are we to reconsider this past so that history will not repeat itself? Some say we should forget it, others believe we should confront it and forgive – how do you see this? What are we to do with the past?

As a mathematician, I'd say that everything happens periodically, so I'm afraid that war is a periodic function – it occurs every twenty, thirty or fifty years… It is better to confront the facts than to forget them… there are things that can't be forgotten. And it is bad to forget because you can compare it to an infected wound: if it isn't cleaned right away, it festers. And how are we to clean it? I don't know, but the first thing must be to make the perpetrators face justice – all those who have killed people, raped women and pillaged. I wonder whether there could be any justice at all when the entire judiciary is corrupted. Who are we to believe, if the judges get bribed? If those criminals could be made to repent and redeem themselves… but how can you lead them to repentance?

And what should "ordinary people" do? How are they to cope with their past?

Everyone carries the burden they've been given to bear. I have processed my past and digested it, in order to draw some sound conclusions out of everything that happened. And those people who have blood on their hands should gradually become aware of their guilt. Some of them have

turned themselves in, they have started talking about those things because they have a bad conscience. They, too, are made of flesh and blood.

My sister used to work in a café here in Loznica. One day, a young man came in there crying. He was drunk and he said that he hadn't wanted to do what he did and she began enquiring. He said that he had been ordered, as a simple soldier, to shoot several civilians. And he kept repeating through tears: "I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do it." This means that he has a bad conscience. Although he cannot apologize to the people he killed, it dawned on him all the same that he shouldn't have done it… The worst thing is when people do things and go on living with the belief that they were right (although they were terribly wrong), such as in: "kill a Shiptar, kill a Serb or kill a Croat". But why? They were also born of their mothers and they cry for them, too. And it seems to me that ordinary people who have not gone through that experience are not so concerned with this. I wonder whether they are considering reconciliation at all, and whether they have the need to be reconciled with someone they have never quarreled with.

Do you have the need to think about reconciliation?

I am not sure, really, especially because I wasn't involved in any direct conflict and there's nothing I can complain about, nor have I done anyone any harm. I know that our Albanian neighbors had their house ransacked while they were away during the bombing, and I used to go in and tidy up because I felt sorry for those people… For example, he was an anatomy professor and I could not bear to see his books thrown around, so I arranged them back in place after the house had been ransacked. What else could I do?

When our Albanian neighbor returned from Macedonia, her flat had been trashed. They do not eat pork; a roasted pig's head had been left inside. It had spoiled and the woman vomited in her house. My mother sent me to her with a few mint and chamomile teabags. The woman started crying and wanted to give me some money, but I told her: "It's ok, we're neighbors!" She couldn't believe those things were happening, and my sister went over to help her wash the carpet. That was right in the period between June 10th and 20th, when everything was being "reversed". My sister had an Albanian friend and during the bombing he and his family were locked up in their flat. And she went over a few times - although it was risky because of the police and everything - to knock on that door. Later, when we ran out of food, they brought us some flour and milk from the other end of the city. You actually risked your life to go there and come back. But that's only human and what's left for us to remember are those things – the sparks that are still here in the ashes. That human goodness still radiates. I have no bitterness because I don't want to be intoxicated. Luckily, God has given me the ability to see that good side. There is good everywhere, and who wants to see it will, and who doesn't want to see it will not. I want to see it.

What does confronting the past mean to you? Does it mean confronting accountability?

It means confronting oneself, what you have done, repentance, analyzing oneself and realizing the bad things.

What does a group have to do regarding the reconciliation issue? For example, what do your people have to do?

First of all, stop playing the victim role. Not to be playing the role, I mean, this is so deeply rooted – but to genuinely see themselves as victims. They would be able to respect the other victims. There are reports about the missing: when the victims on the Serbian side are counted, let us mention the victims on all other sides. I am not in favor of mathematical statistics about the percentage of the population that was proportionally destroyed, because every victim has the same weight: that was somebody's child, father or husband. It's like when they say – so many people were killed, five people – that means five families and their relatives – that must not be. And there are some tendencies towards that, like saying "that's a small, dark number". Well, it is not a number! For those affected, that is the whole world, so… I don't know; we should talk more. It's not as if there were no such discussions, but they always incur outrage. There have been programs on B92, and I watched them and I was tormented, but I watched them all the same. I'd rather be distressed than shun the truth. It is also nerve-racking to watch what was happening on the other side. For example, I was terribly affected when I heard about Srebrenica for the first time. That was in 2001; I hadn't heard about it before… We didn't have money for a satellite dish antenna and I had no possibility to listen to foreign radio-stations or read foreign press. I simply did not know. A colleague at work mentioned it, and when he realized I didn't know, he said that I was a good actress. But I really had no idea. This is also about wanting to find out… but when you have no possibility to see the other side and you only have that RTS 1[4] and a weak signal for RTS 2, you either watch that or nothing. I had no knowledge of it.

How did you feel when you found out about it?

I immediately thought of Kragujevac[5]. Here we have been talking about it for fifty years, and that is really horrible, but you talk for fifty years about it, but haven't mentioned Srebrenica once in five years… The point is not to treat someone worse than they have treated you, but to remain what you are and keep your standards. This frightens me. It was not an act committed by an individual, but many…

When you say that it wasn't one man, but many, how do you understand accountability – is it individual or collective? And what about guilt?

I don't see how it could be collective when I didn't even know about it. That was horrible, I watched it on B92 and was shocked. Collective? I am

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[4.] Radio–Television Serbia, the official, state-controlled television channel

[5.] Mass executions of secondary school students and their teachers were conducted in the city of Kragujevac by the Nazis during World War II in a massive retribution for each killed German soldier.

not sure. Those are difficult things; I don't know what I could have done about it even if I had known.

And now?

When they start with "that many people were killed", I can say "there were forty thousand victims on the other side, too". It's dumb to say this, because every man is a human being… Just think what it must be like to be in the dark for ten years about someone dear, to wonder what happened to them. What can I do, but speak up?! I sometimes wonder what it is that tears people asunder, if it is some ingredient in our blood that defines us, what we are and what we are not.

How do you see the future with this kind of past?

Ooh…what worries me most is the amount of decay this state rests on. All the respectable people are leaving the country. That worries me, and it is not only the people from Serbia, but also from Croatia and Bosnia – and those who remain are so embittered. Of course, I am generalizing now; there are some people with a conscience. The ruling figures in all these countries are the reflection of their respective electoral bodies, of those who voted for them. Now we can say that bad people produce bad authorities. This worries me.

Can we speak of the accountability of the electorate?

Well, there are many resigned people with the "what-can-I-do-about-it?" attitude who have become disinterested and increasingly fail to turn out at the polls. Perhaps they don't have time for that because of their personal concerns and problems; people simply don't have time to think, and then the next thing is that some new lunatic rises to power and starts a new war. And he will also be elected by a majority vote, although that won't actually be a real majority. Because of those that abstain. For example, the majority of the British are against sending troops to Iraq, but they have been sent there because those who turned out in the elections opted for that, and the others, who are against, don't care to vote. So what you could have prevented is made possible by someone else. This is not rosy…

Before we started the interview you said something that immediately made you think of reconciliation…about writing to your neighbors in Croatia.

Ever since '91, when we left, these people have been fair and completely decent. They'd come out of their houses to say goodbye to us, in spite of being threatened and insulted by the passers-by who did not know us. We remained in touch until the telephone numbers were changed. Then, gradually, we lost touch, for nearly fourteen years. Then I decided to write to them and give them some news about us, and they called. Nothing has changed. A decent person will always be that… there were tears… our neighbor was clearly moved and we were all moved, too. You wonder why? It's very sad to be suddenly separated from someone you grew up with and used to see every day, for half of your life, I can say. Later in life you meet very few peo-

ple like them, and that's probably how she felt about us as well. They invited us to come over, and we invited them. Part of your soul nags at you, because they are part of you and you are part of them. Only some parts are missing because of some other people… When you talk about something, it's like diminishing its value. But it is important to talk. If you keep things to yourself, then no one will ever find out.

Have you got anything to add to sum up?

Everyone should take themselves as a starting point. Some people don't want to and some don't know… How can we help them? I do what I can. Unfortunately, that's not much, but if I manage to shake up one person and stop him pretending to be a hero, barking and not biting, to bring him down to earth a little… This little will do, and little by little… If everyone did their bit, the results would probably be remarkable. So within my limits, I believe that I am doing a good job. If someone tells me, "I wouldn't have thought of that", it means that they are thinking now. Perhaps they'll tell someone else from their social environment and that will create a ripple effect.

Interview conducted by **H.R.**

(Things Cannot Be Good for Me if They Are Bad for My Neighbor, 2005)

All stories in this chapter were translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

women look back

Gacko

I am over forty. Before the war, I lived in the region which is now Republika Srpska, in a town called Gacko in Eastern Herzegovina. I am an engineer with a university degree and I had a very good life. I worked for a large industrial company and lived quite well off that. I had gotten the job there by simply being in the right place at the right time – they needed an expert of my specialisation and they took me on. I had an excellent salary, lived well and wasn't much interested in the market and business and the like. I thought that if it was OK for me, it had to be OK for everyone else, too.

I had a family – a husband and three children. My husband worked for the same company as I did and we had a two-bedroom flat in the city centre.

I had always been active in various organisations – from the youth organisation when I was young, to the trade union in the company. I was received into the Communist League in a rather unusual way. My colleague, who was also my boss at the time, met with some problems in his political work and told me that if he needed to recommend someone to be received into the party, he would recommend me. He was a person of a different faith, a Serb, and we got on really well. He was my boss then and I still haven't changed my mind about him. I believe he has managed to stay the same person as he has always been and that he hasn't been changed by the war and all these divisions.

The population of the town was of mixed ethnicity. Predominantly, there were Muslims – who now call themselves Bosniaks, and Serbs. Muslims prevailed in the town, but Serbs prevailed in the district. Croats were in the minority – perhaps only about one percent.

Mixed marriages were infrequent, but people of different religions were often friends and best-men and bridesmaids at weddings, god-fathers and god-mothers to each other's children and so on. Ethnic brushes were practically non-existent or very rare. Several people, mainly Serbs, were declared nationalists, but they proved more benign to other nationalities than some others who had never admitted to being nationalists.

As far as I am concerned, there weren't any problems back then. People were friendly – even cordial, we could travel wherever we wanted: go to the sea-side, travel abroad, make friends, choose our professions freely, and study what we wanted because we were well off and could afford it. We mainly went to Mostar and Sarajevo for further education. Actually, mainly Muslims went there and Serbs tended to go to Belgrade – that is, the ones who could afford it, since studying in Belgrade was more expensive. Those

who weren't that well-off chose Mostar or Sarajevo. It can be said that the district of Gacko had the largest number of people of both nationalities with a university degree.

It was unthinkable that an ethnic war could affect Gacko since we had always got along exceptionally well.

While newcomers had an occasional tendency to demonstrate some ethnic peculiarities, the native folk never showed any. But all in all, no one was threatened by anyone else. That's how I used to perceive it, but now I see it differently because I can't believe that the war managed to change people so utterly – some must have had different attitudes in the old days, too.

For me, war had been an abstract concept – I could have never imagined that I would stop working and that Yugoslavia would cease to exist – to me, she was an ideal country. That was how I was brought up.

But from the year 1991, a different feeling started creeping in – people began to change, and members of different ethnicities stopped communicating except when they had to – mainly for professional reasons. They became distant and cold and nothing was the same.

In 1991, I too felt the war coming when groups of reserve troops started going to Mostar. They were armoured reserve troops who fired guns on the way and, in that way, let us know something was about to happen in Herzegovina. Then, in 1992, groups of refugees started pouring in from Foča. Once, when a coach full of women and children from Foča arrived, I went out too – I was curious to see who the people who came in it were. The next sign of the war coming was the formation of the *White Eagles*[1] – a paramilitary organisation which was made up of all the Serbian scum. They were mainly school drop-outs, young men who had previously caused trouble, but among whom there were also the children of some respectable parents: officers from World War II, heroes with medals whom we had all looked up to. Even the children of such people joined this organisation which spread fear and later death among the Muslims.

Next, they started setting fire to cafés in the town itself. This first happened in Gacko round May 1 – they burned down the Muslim cafés.

Everything around us was in flames – cafés and shops alike. They used mortars and threw grenades.

That evening, they simply staged a war-like situation. Those guys from the White Eagles attacked others and defended themselves. There were many of them and they went as far as the Muslim cemetery – it really looked like a war. Probably, at least it seems to me, they wanted to show us what it would be like for us in the town and what we should expect.

[1.] The White Eagles or Beli Orlovi (1991-1995) were a Serbian paramilitary group. Testimony at the International War Crimes Tribunal indicates that the White Eagles were responsible for a number of atrocities during the Croatian and Bosnian wars, including: the Voćin massacre, Višegrad massacre, crimes at Foča, Gacko and others. Various members of the White Eagles were indicted by the Tribunal.

That night was an eye-opener for me and it was then that I decided to leave Gacko. The ones who stayed behind had a terrible time. Even though there was a lull which lasted for about a month and during which people even went to work, that ethnic cleansing was taking shape. Those who stayed were either taken to concentration camps, or got killed, or were banished to Macedonia.

Feeling our lives were threatened, my children and I fled from our house on 4 May.

The flight was a relief – I hadn't slept properly in days, fearing a break-in as various rumours had been circulated. Families had stuck closer together and had stayed in one flat with friends or relatives finding safety in larger numbers. I hadn't done that since my father had kept saying it was all nonsense and that nothing was going to happen, that they talked gibberish and that nothing could ever happen in Gacko where people got on so well together. I have resented my father ever since for having lulled me into feeling safe and for having painted such an unrealistic picture for me whilst all the time I had expected him to tell me that a war was about to start and that I should go and take the children somewhere safe. I would have probably left Gacko sooner had I not held his opinion in such high regard.

I went to a nearby village – only a few kilometres away from Gacko – where a relative lived. That place is now abandoned as it was completely ethnically cleansed and then razed to the ground. It used to be a Muslim village where there were almost no Serbs – the villages in the area were mainly mono-ethnic, each with either a Muslim or a Serbian population.

First, they arrested a group of Muslims. They picked out several elderly men with their sons – I remember two brothers with their children – and took them away to a concentration camp in Bileća and then to Montenegro – I don't know where exactly. Their fate was terrible – they were severely tortured but survived and many of them are now invalids.

Then came the gun-fire. The Muslims could not return it as they were unarmed. Some of them did have some light weapons but it was very sporadic – an occasional hunting gun or some other smaller piece which they tried to use but they were no match for the heavily-armed Serbs, who included reserve troops, too.

Then I left for Trebinje. I couldn't take anything substantial with me – only some personal belongings – mainly for the children. My husband could not leave Gacko since men were not allowed to go from Gacko to Trebinje at that time. For a couple of months, he stayed in the mountains with his mother in a camp with women, children and other men. The bus journey to Trebinje was fine – I mean, some sang ethnic songs, those chetnick songs – if you know what I mean, but no one harassed us. In Trebinje, I stayed the night with a friendly family and in the morning, I went to get the travelling permit to go to Dubrovnik. We were given some military passes at the bus

station to go to Dubrovnik and I went there on a coach. The journey was fine and we didn't have any problems.

We were received very well by the civil defence in Dubrovnik. They had organised accommodation for refugees in the Hotel *Libertas*. This was only a transit destination as all the refuge holds on Korčula and Pelješac were full. We stayed in Dubrovnik only overnight and in the morning we embarked on a ship to go to Rijeka – but our final destination was Slovenia.

I stayed in Slovenia for ten months in a refugee centre for people from Bosnia. Besides me and the children, there were some ten more women – about fifty of us altogether. We had left a normal, everyday life to live there in somewhat prison-like conditions. Our movement was very restricted; I can't say why Slovenia undertook such measures – maybe it was with a reason but I had a hard time accepting such restrictions especially towards women and children. It's true that some refugees behaved inappropriately, having misunderstood the situation, and some – downright recklessly, which altogether may have lead to such restrictions.

We received no other aid except for what we were given by the Slovenian government. We received food from the soup kitchen – something that we could never get used to since that food was almost inedible. Then we received some aid from Italy – that really helped us a lot, the children especially; they had that charity – Caritas and some wealthy people helped individually, too.

After ten months, I managed to get in contact with my husband. He had already heard in Gacko that we had left. Via a radio line, we somehow found out that he and some other people were in the mountains, that they ate berries and generally lived in a primitive, backward way. He didn't dare go home as those who stayed were captured – some of them killed and some taken to the concentration camp in Bileća.

Then he managed to get away over the mountains. He and some other men were helped by a group of armed men who belonged to a CCD unit at the time. They were Muslims from Gacko who had joined the CCD. The CCD had equipped them with much better weapons for the operation of pulling the civilians out of Gacko. There were about ten of them and they managed to save some 300 people from that camp in the mountains. They travelled over the mountains for four or five days and came to Igman and, from there, to Mostar.

We spoke on the phone – he used to call frequently – and I knew what it was like there: I was aware of the fact that the economic situation was bad and that the war was still on, but I wanted to go back anyway. I just couldn't get used to those conditions in Slovenia and it was all very hard for me.

After ten months, by way of Rijeka and Split, my children and I arrived in Mostar on a Croatian bus. It was in 1993 just before the Muslim/Croatian conflict. It was then that I saw my husband again.

There, in Mostar, I had a place to stay at my relatives' who had invited me. They had told me they had a studio flat where they could accommodate me with the children and so I came. Everything was all right for two months – only an occasional grenade would hit from the hills above – from where the Serbs lived below the peak of Veležje. And then on 9 May 1993, the conflict started. A thousand grenades hit Mostar on that day and I was convinced no one would survive.

We all lived a terrible life during that time as the food was scarce and we often didn't have anything to eat. All the food coming to Mostar was intercepted and we had none for nine months. We picked grass at night, we rationed the rice we had, we used the leftovers from old stocks – it was really a miracle that we survived. We had nothing and our life was terrible.

They shelled us every day. I lived in a cellar for at least seven months. It was literally underground – no windows, no sunlight, like an atomic-bomb shelter. I had to move out of the shelter and find a new one three times during the shell-fire.

The relatives' house I had moved into was destroyed. First, they set it on fire and then a VBR – that vehicle that fires a lot of missiles at once – wiped it out completely. We were lucky that they set fire to it first so that we were forced to get out. The second shelter was also a cellar from which I had to flee because of the shell-fire. The rest of the war days I spent in a third one: a cellar on the main street. We had lived a normal life for only two months, and then we were underground for the next seven.

I cannot say for sure when exactly that war ended – I don't remember and I would like to forget everything about it. At first, we didn't believe that it was over. Neither I nor anyone else could walk the streets in a normal way – we sneaked under the eaves of houses and probably looked odd to everyone who hadn't been through that with us. We looked odd because our living conditions had been odd and we couldn't adapt to a peace-time situation. Instead, while on the street, I would eye the houses I passed by and would think "... this one is a good shelter in case they start shelling again..."

The war ended then and only an occasional grenade would hit, injuring someone, but the war was over.

Since everything had been demolished, the European Union organisations came to Mostar to start reconstruction. The food situation also improved a little and we had some more. Looking back now, it wasn't much at all and it was rationed. We were given milk, cooking oil, flour, rice, pasta - only the basic foods, really. Humanitarian aid came, too. I know the flour was American, other things came from the European Union – I don't know all the charities – but I know that the food was distributed by the local council in cardboard boxes.

In the beginning, such quantities of food sufficed, but with time, they grew smaller and smaller and in the past two years most of the people have stopped receiving aid. As soon as people started getting employment, since

then, the aid hasn't remained there to this day. My husband is unemployed and the children go to school. My worst problem with this job is insecurity since I am only temporarily employed and have been given temporary accommodation, too. My whole life feels temporary and that is what troubles every exile the most – temporariness. With us, it has lasted for seven years now.

Everybody was banished from our town. No one knows what will happen with all the property left there – the flats, houses and the farm land.

I saw my home again last year. The flat I used to live in had not been destroyed, but I didn't dare go in, fearing the reaction of the new tenants – I just didn't want to find myself rudely offended by someone I had never met before. Some people tried to make such a visit but only a few were invited in; most of them were unwelcome, the door often locked in front of their faces.

However, I did visit my father's house occupied by Serbs. My father and I went together and we were well received. The people there were some folks from Mostar who had quite a decent reaction to us coming for a visit and to our wish to see the house. Yet, I couldn't feel good about it – in fact, I felt miserable.

I think that too much time has passed. If only this had been done a couple of years after the Dayton Agreement while the wish to return was still strong. But now it's much harder since there have been too many changes in all of the segments of life. It is not the same place as where we once lived. We would have to get used to this new way of life and to our town all over again. I know it would be very hard for me to return, but I can't speak for other people. I know that my parents would be more than glad to return regardless of the circumstances.

In Mostar, the Bosniaks live mainly in the eastern part of the town and the Croats – mainly in the western. I don't have as strong of feelings about it as the local people. It is understandable that they have stronger feelings since many of them have flats in the other part where they can't return. There are many such cases but I don't have as strong of feelings about it as about my own town.

I will never completely grasp why all that had to happen. We insisted that we belonged in Europe; that we were a European nation but it's very unlikely that a civilised nation could have done something like this. The way I see it, no one in their right mind could have seen any gain from the war – only savage, uncivilised people could have done things like these. Indeed, some people profited from the war, some became rich, but exiles got the worst end of it as they lost everything that they had been acquiring for years. They lost their tradition and their names – they will never return to some places and their names will never be there again.

Someone wanted to take a piece of a country and proclaim it their own – it's as simple as that, and now we have these ethnically clean products. There are these three parts in Bosnia and Herzegovina – a total pre-

domination of Serbs in one part and that Federation – a wobbly state, if you ask me, because the two ethnicities which comprise it haven't settled their accounts yet.

I don't think we need another war, but I can't know what will happen. If they waged another war, I certainly wouldn't stay put. I take special care to have my passport valid and ready at all times so that I can get out. That's what I would want to do so that I would never have to spend even one more day in a war – I'd rather die, believe me.

I'd love Bosnia and Herzegovina to get back on its feet again. I'd love it that people should stop considering themselves and others as members of ethnic groups first and start thinking in a rational, economic way. The economic situation is grave and it's difficult to act politically in a country as war-ridden as ours, but I really believe that people should cast aside their ethnic differences. They'd better start thinking who they should trade with, who their partners could be and such things. People who understand economy properly, they behave properly and succeed. They are the ones who live well today.

The economic situation is globally bad – we need more basic industries, more jobs and better opportunities for women because, in my opinion, they are the force which can pull this country out of the crisis. Women spread democracy and basically have a better sense of democracy than men. I think that the pre-war socialism somehow lulled people since it never mirrored a true economic situation. Everything was sugar-coated and that was the reason why the crisis snowballed. But in my opinion, both models: the pre-war one and the existing one are wrong for us. We need to adopt a model similar to what they have in the West based on inviolability of private property. I am in favour of these principles of respect for human rights and inviolability of private property and I find them applicable in our situation and comprehensible for people here. We cannot copy directly the Western model or the American model – we don't have the necessary infrastructure; our history is different, our development is different and our people are different – and that's that.

That socialism we lived in was far from perfect too; it looked much more idyllic than it really was since its economy fell apart like a house of cards. And the present political situation is not much better either. We have national parties in power, politicians with strong ethnic orientations and I have no sympathy towards any party including the Bosniaks' PDA - I don't like any of them.

In a way, it all stared with different perceptions of religion or even an abuse of religion.

Those of different religious beliefs, namely Serbs and Croats, believed that their religion is on some higher level than Islam and wanted to destroy it – not all of them – only certain groups among them. In my opinion, every religion should be respected since they all promote goodwill. This

diversity is a bonus and I really don't mind other religions – it's more interesting this way. I have always held this opinion. Personally, it hurts most that the people I used to live with thought differently and I didn't know that.

Everyone thinks their (ethnic) identity is important and so do I. This is now especially important for Bosniaks – the majority of whom never felt they had any identity or an identity of which they had vague ideas about. These Bosnian Muslims never knew what they were: some thought they were Serbs since they lived in the areas with predominantly Serbian populations and others, in Croatian parts, thought they were Croats – while all the time, they were neither. Then both the nationalities claimed them as their own; but decent persons should be aware of their own identity, they should know what they are. The Bosniaks didn't have a state of their own or anyone to rely on and neither of the other two ethnicities accepted them.

Some people considered adopting either ethnicity but I simply wanted to be myself because it's something you can't choose. I am a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a Bosniak from Bosnia: that's my identity. I was born to a Bosniak mother and father and that's something I couldn't choose.

Yet people manipulate that a lot, too, and some have suddenly become very religious, almost pious. I haven't changed my religious attitudes. You need to understand religion correctly so that you don't hate others. I offer a hand in peace to everyone, but I'm not sure whether it is always welcome.

As for my future, I would like to have a steady job and a home of my own. For my children, I would like them to have an opportunity to finish their schools. I will probably stay here in Mostar since I'm not really a newcomer. I wouldn't like to move; I'd like to build a future for myself and my children here.

I would like to warn everyone never to trust people completely, regardless of who they are dealing with, since all this has taught us that blind trust doesn't pay off. No one should be trusted absolutely, since such complete trust cost many people their own lives.

(*Voices of the Dawn – Testimonies of Displaced People, 2005; testimonies collected 1997 – 1999)*

Zenica

I am 35 years old and before the war I lived in Zenica with my parents. We had a house on the outskirts of this town. I worked in Zenica and had a superb job. We all had jobs – my brother, my father, my mother and I. It wasn't easy to find a good job before the war and the unemployment was high. We lived well and I think that everyone lived well too – we could all meet basic needs and life was good.

The area where I lived was populated only by Muslims and Croats, and they were equal in numbers, while Serbs lived in another part of the town. Before the war, the whole Zenica district was said to have about 50 percent Muslim inhabitants, 25 percent Serbs and 25 percent Croats.

Different people lived and worked together in peace. We were never too close – we never socialized or visited each other but would greet neighbours and acquaintances in a friendly way. My father didn't have friends who would come and visit us at home. It had always been like that – we'd say 'good morning' and 'good evening' but that would be that and there had never been a problem; and my mates at work were of different faiths, father's colleagues, too, but that was OK and we worked well together.

I think it was fine back then and things should have stayed like that – it didn't matter whether your manager or your neighbour was of a different faith – we all lived next to each other.

I didn't believe that war would break out until I had to leave my house. I used to say that Serbs had started the conflict and that it wouldn't spread to Zenica where we and the Muslims were so mixed. I would've never thought it possible that a neighbour would fly at my dad, or Dad – at a Muslim neighbour. It all started in Zenica after the incident in Ahmići on 16 April 1993. Before that, there had never been any real problems in Ahmići – only, perhaps a sporadic quarrel between some families.

When Ahmići was attacked, the majority of Muslims moved from Vitez to Zenica and that's how the Croats became a minority. Then the Muslims attacked the local Croats. They were banished from that area and I was also told I should join my folks.

It was the BiH Army that attacked Ahmići, but in Zenica, it was a conflict between the Army and the much weaker CCD. They were constantly attacked and they had to retreat through the area where my house was. The CCD Headquarters had to back out of Zenica and they went through my part of the town and past my house and the house of my relatives. They

stopped there and put up some fight but the Army's response was harsh – they set fire to the houses in the whole neighbourhood – on 18 April, my whole area was on fire. The Army was much stronger and the CCD surrendered. The prisoners were taken to the Detention Centre.

We had to flee home, too. It was terrible: my mom, my grandma and I wanted to leave as we saw our relatives leaving and the CCD members were also telling us to leave – my brother was at the frontline with the CCD firing a howitzer – but my father didn't want to leave. He would say: "I'm not leaving, I haven't done anything wrong." I agreed with him – if he didn't want to leave, I wouldn't leave either. Then mom said: "If you two are staying, then all of us are staying, too." However, we all left when they started shooting and firing shells. When the Army was close to the house, we all fled. There wasn't time to take anything with us. I went out and saw a friend of mine, a member of the CCD, and I said to him: "Goran, where are you going?" "Are you still at home?" he asked. "We all are," I said. "Then leave immediately." It took us only half an hour to leave. As the CCD had surrendered, they scattered, taking off their uniforms.

I felt horrible when we had to flee; it was like a nightmare or as if I had fainted. I kept thinking that I would return the next day and that life would go on – same as it had always been.

We stayed in the town with my uncle for seven days. Now, this will be interesting for this story of yours: my dad returned home two hours later; he had only seen us to my uncle's place and said he was going back home. So he and a couple of relatives returned home. My dad sat outside the house while an Army troop carried out our things. A neighbour of ours, a Muslim in plain clothes, told him to keep quiet as they had all gotten mixed there – the Muslim neighbours, our folks in plain clothes and the Army troops. They all blended together and the troops couldn't tell whether my dad was a Muslim neighbour or the Croat who owned the house. During that evening and night, from around 5 p.m. until daybreak, they burnt five and emptied six houses. Ours was among the emptied ones. Sometime during the night he called us on the phone – the lines to Zenica were working – and told us that he was all right; he told us not to worry and that he would return in the morning because he didn't want to walk two and a half kilometres in the dark. In the morning, a relative came and asked if anyone wanted to go back home with him – he had a van and would give us a lift. So I was the first female to return there at 6 o'clock in the morning although we had been advised that only men should go back and not women as there were still many troops up there. When we got there – the sight was terrible: our house was completely empty – everything had been taken out. The bigger pieces of furniture such as wardrobes or bedroom furniture were upturned and broken, windows – shattered. It had all happened during the night. As my dad had been sitting on the bench outside watching it all, he recognised one of them – a young man from another part of the town.

We stayed with those relatives for several days but I went back home every day. However, we didn't let mom and granny go along as they were in a bad way. My mom was ill, I mean really ill, and we wouldn't let her go back to see it all and get upset – that could worsen her condition. Same went for granny – she was an elderly woman.

My brother, being a CCD member, didn't dare come home. He hid for about two months but was captured then and taken to the Detention Centre.

The atmosphere in Zenica was tense – a real misery. It wasn't so bad for my family – our house hadn't been burnt down; but our relatives' house – it had been burnt to the ground.

Seven days later, mom and dad returned home. People from SFOR[2] came then and distributed re-enforced nylon sheets, food and other basics. We had the windows mended and things settled down a bit. We all came back then and until the cease-fire was signed with Vitez one year later, Zenica was under a blockade. Life was terrible until that cease-fire between the Muslims and the Croats was signed. I stayed in Zenica, in the house. My dad didn't sleep inside the house for about a year as they would frequently come, and bang on the door looking for something or somebody. So, fearing for our safety, dad and some relatives organised themselves to guard the houses. They simply feared that the rest of us might be attacked during the night so they sat and watched to see who would come and why. They didn't want us to be caught by surprise. When all that happened, I didn't go to work for seven days. I phoned them and said I wouldn't be coming for such and such reasons. My manager and his assistant both agreed that it was alright and said they would count it as either a leave or a holiday – leaving it to me to come back when I felt safe. It all lasted for seven days and then I went back to work. My dad did the same: he stayed away three, maybe four days and then returned to work.

Then, for a while, we were stopped and checked by those troops that we call "mujahedins" with turbans and swords. They stood guard at the crossroads around Zenica and I live near a crossroads on the road to Vitez. They would stand there and wouldn't let us pass to go to work. We all had to have a written proof of Civil Obligation stating where we were going, when we were coming back, when we left work – and all that because we were Croats.

All that year I went to work continually. The salary was miserable – 5 DM for the whole month, but I went and worked. They didn't fire me because I was a Croat – no, they didn't do that. But life was hard then: we didn't have flour, bread – the basics. It was hard for everyone – Muslims, Croats and Serbs alike. The roads were blocked and food delivery was stopped – we lived on the stocked supplies.

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2. The Stabilization Force (SFOR) was a NATO-led multinational force in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was given the task of upholding the Dayton Agreement

After they signed the truce in 1994, my brother was released from the Detention Centre for a large sum of money. We paid the Detention Centre to let him out because he didn't want to sign up to join the Army. Those who agreed to join the Army were released, enlisted and sent off to a unit. My brother didn't do that. When the cease-fire was signed, my brother and I moved to Vitez. It was fear and poverty that made me decide to leave my job and Zenica – as we literally had nothing. As for my brother, he could either choose to be drafted or flee. I can't say I was mistreated by Muslims, nor was I harassed at work; sometimes we would squabble – but that would be that.

My parents stayed at home then and they have been living in Zenica all this time and they are still there. My brother joined the Zenica Brigade of the CCD and stayed in Vitez.

I stayed in Vitez for a couple of days until some colleagues sent me some money to go from Vitez to Čapljina. Down there in Čapljina, I had many friends and relatives who had fled Zenica and gotten there. I lived in a caravan on a site. It was horrible and I felt miserable.

We were given food at that caravan site in Čapljina. Yes, we had a soup kitchen and were given breakfast, lunch and dinner – we would take our own pot, go to the caravan which served as the kitchen and get a ration.

There are many people there now – those returnees from Germany and other countries. In 1996, there weren't many people at all at that caravan site – they had already moved out – but now it's full again.

Then I volunteered for the military service in the CCD. For a year I worked for the CCD and got a salary. I did go to the front line, but only with the HQ and I wasn't in the trenches – I went to the field, the HQ, the Command Centre.

I was happy because my salary was good – it was really big and I had to send some money to my folks back there, too. I was glad that I had made that decision; many of my friends were there, too. Everything was good.

I left the Army because I had enough of it – the conditions, the fieldwork – they went to do some actions every week back in 1995. Frequent actions, field work, the place where I was – I won't go into details now – I'd had enough of it, I mean as a woman.

I left the Army and went to work in Mostar in the HQ of the company I had worked for before the war. I applied there, stating where I had worked and that I had worked for the Army and left. I asked if they needed a person with ten years of experience on "such-and-such" tasks since I had been doing that before the war. Since they had been ethnically divided in Mostar too, the company needed skilled workers; that is – they needed people who had already worked on such tasks, who were skilled and had experience. In Mostar, the people from the company told me that they had vacancies in the towns they had taken in *The Storm*: in Jajce, Drvar, Glamoč and Grahovo. Being from central Bosnia – a Bosnian if you want – not from

Herzegovina, they said it would be best if I accepted either Drvar or Jajce and went to work in the branch office of our company there. But I was kinda apprehensive – how would it be there? Would I manage all right on my own, being single and all that? Then the people from the company explained that they had already established connections with those towns and that they would call the colleagues there and explain everything before I arrived.

Before the ware, here in Jajce, in this company where I work, there wasn't a single Croat employed. Well, as the town was seized and held by the CCD, they wanted to employ a Croat and so they sent me there since this place is closer to my town (Zenica) than Drvar. I had never been to Drvar or that part of Bosnia before the war and so they decided to send me here. Now I have been here for three years.

This is how I came to Jajce, and I really don't feel like a refugee in this town. It's true that I wouldn't be here, had it not been for the war, but to be a refugee means that you are somehow underprivileged or deprived in a way, and I don't feel like that. They gave me a flat and now I live here – I have a home, work, I receive a salary and I feel good. So, that's how it is – I have been happy here since day one. Maybe it's me – maybe it's the way I am that makes me feel content. Not for one single moment did I feel like an outsider here, nor have I had any unpleasant experiences with the local people – I would be lying if I said I had. Everyone has been helpful since the beginning when it was really hard – no one was hostile.

I'm not thinking of going back to Zenica for the time being because I haven't got a job there. I haven't asked whether they would take me back in my company there because there were some hard words between us after I left and I wouldn't like to go back to that. Also, many Muslims have come to Zenica from other towns and have filled in the vacancies; it has all been a rotation really. My greatest worry is my parents. They are elderly now and not entirely healthy, and that's what worries me. Of course I would love them to be in good health, who wouldn't? Luckily, I'm still healthy – knock on wood – and I visit them in Zenica and talk to them on the phone regularly. I visited them last weekend. I passed by my Muslim neighbours who know where I am now, and they say 'good morning' and that's all – same as it was before.

I have no idea why this war happened – I only know it shouldn't have. I blame it on the Serbs – they planned it all – but I won't go into that now. Serbs were usually followed by the troops and Serbs started it first. The way I see it, they planned it all and then started it. There weren't any such problems before the war, honestly. I can't figure out what turned people against each other.

In my opinion, after so many casualties on all these here sides, things should have a different ending – all three sides should go their separate ways; like Republika Srpska, the other two should split, too. A line should be drawn between Muslims and Croats as well, and if anyone wants to live

in the territory of the other ethnicity – let them, like the Serbs have done. The way things are now, after so many casualties, I don't see how Muslims and Croats can go on living together. Now it shows we can be neighbours, but I don't think we can live together any more.

When I look back at it, it wasn't good at all. The famine in Zenica was terrible; it was really bad – we had to cut a slice of bread into four and if you had another one, you saved it for the next day. Also, I would offer my mom half of whatever I had to eat, and she would give it back to me saying: "No, hun, you eat it – you are younger and need more food than I do." You don't forget such things. At that time, my mom lost about thirty kilos and in February 1994 she was admitted to a hospital in Zenica due to malnutrition and exhaustion, both physical and mental.

I don't know what I would do if the war started all over again. I would like to go away with my nearest and dearest and not watch all that. Some of my relatives emigrated because of the war – to Australia, the US, Germany and Holland. Some of those in Australia don't want to come back at all.

My ethnicity didn't use to mean much to me but now it does. I was a Croat and a Catholic who honoured Christmas, Easter and other holidays, and it wasn't really a big deal. Now it means a lot to me. I am a Catholic, a Croat by nationality and a citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina – a Bosnian. It is important to me to have an identity, to know who I am – it is more important now than before, but I can't say why.

I practice my religion the way I used to: I didn't go to church often, then, and I don't go to church often, now. My parents don't go to church every Sunday either. I think that my people go to church more often now than they used to. I can't say why because it's a personal thing.

And my view of other religions has remained the same: live and let others live, too. If someone is a good person and behaves kindly – then it doesn't matter.

If I could choose, it would be the old Yugoslavia. I never had any bad experiences in the old Yugoslavia and as far as I know, neither did my father – he lived, worked, received a salary and wasn't threatened or harassed in any way because of what he was – we lived an ordinary life. No one paid attention to such things and we could live well on what we had. Now friends and neighbours have parted ways, my parents have stayed there alone and their life isn't good. My dad refused to leave his home, saying that it's his property, he wasn't guilty, he'd rather die than leave and so on. Now they're still in that house, and they do have the basics, they aren't starving. A lot of Croats left Zenica and not many came back – friends are gone, neighbours are gone, no one knocks at your door, many houses are burnt or abandoned and that is hard to bear.

The economic situation in BiH is difficult. When you travel through it, you see it's all burnt and razed. A lot of money, resources and other things

are needed. And the political situation is hard, too – as if we're constantly going in circles; the politicians change and the people just stay put.

The refugees will return, but I can't say in what percentages and where. As for my friends, neighbours, relatives and the like – they won't return. Even out of those who stayed, many are leaving now – some because they are jobless, some because they are fed up with everything; the elderly ones follow their children. Those who left for Croatia are making plans to settle down there and some already have – they are buying houses there. In my opinion, it will all be ethnically cleansed in a couple of years without a war.

My true wish is that it is peaceful, that we can live on, improve, build and make it a better place. That we are healthy – that's really the most important thing. As for BiH – I wish that all of this calms down: that people try to forget although I know it's hard.

I'd like to say to the readers that I wish they never have to experience what some people have been through. I didn't have to go through the hardest things; it wasn't that bad for me compared to some others. May they never have to go through that. Let it only remain as "something that happened in the Balkans a while ago".

(Voices of the Dawn – Testimonies of Displaced People, 2005; testimonies collected 1997 – 1999)

Bosanska Krupa

I was born in 1967. Before the war I lived in Bosanska Krupa, in the town. I lived with my husband, my child – he was a baby then – actually, a three-year old little boy, my mother-in-law, father-in-law, sister-in-law and her husband and two children – it was like a bee-hive, really. We all worked. My husband worked in a state company but had a private business, too. My father-in-law also had a private business and he retired just before the war. My mother in law was employed, too; my sister-in-law was a school teacher and her husband worked in the textile industry. I don't think there was another country in the world where a common worker could live well on their salary, have a house, buy a car and spend a holiday at the seaside every year. At that time, I used to think that my son would probably end up having a plane, and now his childhood is much worse than mine was.

Now when I look back, there was nothing wrong with that life – not one thing. We didn't know how to appreciate it or how to enjoy what we had. Those communist times were all about brotherhood and unity – you never thought of people as Croats, Muslims or Serbs: such things didn't matter.

We lived on the other bank of the Una where Muslims prevailed. Muslim houses were all around us, but no one ever said as much as a bad word to us. Croatian families were few – only a couple, really, but everyone got on well until the disintegration of Yugoslavia began and political parties started to spring up – until that time, we never new about ethnic differences. I went to school then, and it was only later when I looked back at those times that I realised there were only five of us, Serbian children, in the class – all the others were Muslims.

I think we were all taken in by the politicians – they conjured up evil where there was none and all those animosities were fake. Whatever people say now, the fact remains that those were the good times.

The first sign of the upcoming war for me was when that incident with Slovenia happened in 1991. It quickly calmed down and we reckoned that was the end of it. Then things got bad in Croatia. Now, that was something else because it was nearer. Yet, everything calmed down both in Croatia and in SAO Krajina[3], but when it came down to the clashes in Sarajevo, we really

[3] SAO Krajina or Serbian Autonomous Oblast of Krajina was a self proclaimed Serbian autonomous region (oblast) in Croatia. It existed between 1990 and 1991 and was subsequently included into Republika Srpska Krajina. SAO Krajina was the main section of the Republika Srpska Krajina, also known as *Krajina proper.*

started worrying – we feared we were the next. I think it was in Bosanska Krupa that the clashes started right after they had started in Sarajevo.

The Muslims arrested Martić in the little town of Otoci. He had been a policeman and had then taken over power in SAO Krajina. In my opinion, he was arrested unlawfully because he was a citizen of Croatia and was only passing through this area. They kept him for several days and then had to yield to the protests coming from SAO Krajina, but I can't remember how it ended.

Here, the war started on 21 April 1992. After Martić was released, the police divided into Serbian and Muslim forces. At that time, on weekends, we would all go to the countryside – just to get away from the town. They didn't shoot exactly, but the atmosphere was tense and a strange feeling loomed over the town. For instance, when you walked into the town, people did everything in a hurried, non-leisurely way: no one would stop for a chat as they used to, no one would go for a stroll. This situation lasted for about two months. Then people started organising the night watch in all villages. In one of them, they found two soldiers and shot them. Their ethnicity has not been determined to this day. They were driven to the hospital. That was the very first shooting. Since my brother-in-law was working in that hospital, he told us what had happened and said that some guards and troops were being organised and that something was happening. Then my sister-in-law and I took all three children and went to stay in a weekend cottage in a village nearby. That cottage was given to us by a Muslim neighbour who reckoned that, should a war break out, he wouldn't be needing it anyway – as it was in a Serbian village. We spent about four or five days up there and then started preparing to go back, since nothing was happening. However, at about 5 o'clock in the evening on 21 April, the gun-fire started. My husband had stayed at home and so had my uncles and their families. My husband worked in a Muslim village and had never had a problem because he was a Serb, nor had he ever been verbally abused. He would go to work on week days and then come to visit us on weekends (I was temporarily out of work at that time, on a kind of waiting list). My sister-in-law commuted to her school in the town every day – the buses were still running – and came back in the evening. My mother- and father-in-law, seeing that we'd moved out, came and joined us up there so that only my husband and his brother-in-law slept at home. On the day the war broke out, my husband was at home and his brother-in-law was in this (Serbian) part. The shooting started and shell-fire started. They cleared out a territory of the size of a town. But then the Serbs took over the town centre and the Una river became the borderline. Our house remained in the Muslim part. We had moved out earlier, but remained there, in that same village, until 1995. In September, our house burned down. No one knows who set it on fire.

Since the town centre became Serbian, my parents remained in their flat. My uncle (my father's brother) who lives in Germany had a house in a suburb, some three kilometres from the centre, and I moved in there in 1992 and stayed until 1995.

Well, the first grenade blasts and the first sniper-fire were terrible. Later, we stopped counting and got used to living with it. While my son was playing outside the house, we could hear bullets swishing, grenades blasting – and there was a sniper shooting from undercover – but we somehow got used to it all. I took it much harder when that Dayton Agreement was signed and when we moved here. I had found it easier to live there with those grenades, than here. We had shelling and shooting every day from 1992 to 1995. It was worse when there was a cease-fire – while we could hear them, we knew something was going on – it was a certainty. That sniper, for instance – we knew where he could aim, when it was visible enough for him to shoot and where it was dangerous for us to go. At first, casualties were numerous, but only until we got used to it. The last year was the easiest and we thought it a normal life: we could sleep and do things. We were completely adapted. We had no water or electricity, but it was a normal life for us. It's incredible how people can adapt to such conditions, and God knows what the limits to our adaptability are.

My husband was at the front-line. All men were drafted – including my dad who was about to retire. They didn't have a choice – they had to carry a gun. Some managed to avoid it by fleeing across the border to Serbia, but after two or three years, they had to come back, too. They were even arrested there and deported. We didn't have a choice – it was as simple as that.

We had enough food – nobody starved at that time. We also had money and we brought it with us. It was hard during the first few months before the passageway that linked us to Serbia was established. But once it was set up, we started getting regular supplies of food and other goods. We also received humanitarian aid, mainly from the Red Cross. We regularly got flour, cooking oil and clothes.

All our things had remained in the house which burnt down. When we were leaving that weekend cottage we had less with us than we had brought in. The rule was that if there was an offensive, the civilians withdrew to safer places. During those three to four years, we fled and returned a number of times, so when it came to the final mass departure, we simply thought it was yet another one of those temporary ones and we took only the basics with us. We left carrying only plastic bags with something for the children to change into and that was all. Nobody ever thought about some things – like furniture, for instance. It was as long ago as 1992 that I stopped regretting having to flee from home. While the house was still standing, I had hope that, someday, we might return. But when it burnt down – all hope was gone; and that neighbour's weekend cottage – how could I have been homesick about somebody else's weekend cottage?

At the beginning of September 1995, when SAO Krajina fell, when Dvor and Petrovac fell, the Muslims came from the North and the Croats via Dvor and Petrovac, so they really came from behind. There weren't enough troops to stop them. Yet I think that it was all politics and that our positions would have been defendable if they had had the will to do it. We saw the

troops pulling out, the artillery pulling out and then we set off with the children, too. Everybody was on the move – very few civilians stayed behind. Of the troops – some got captured, some killed: almost none were left.

Everybody set off for Prijedor and Banja Luka since this was the only way we could go. We had a car. My father-in-law drove, because both my husband and his brother-in-law were at the front-line. While we were going through the Bosanska Krupa area, we were shell-bombed all the time. Having realised what was going on, we were one of the first families to set out. Some troops had also warned us, telling us to take the children away. Near Novi, about fifteen civilians got killed in the shell-fire.

We first went to Prijedor. We had some old family friends there whom we had never seen before, but such was the situation. When things get very bad, people tend to remember old bonds, and thus, we stayed there for two months.

I have no idea why we came here – I'd say it was somebody's political decision, that's what. They made various promises – that, here, there would be all sorts of things: houses, accommodation – everything we needed. At that time, my husband had already been released. He had gotten a car and had driven us all here. My sister-in-law stayed in Prijedor because she was given a flat there. We set out on 1 December and it took us about a day or two to come here – the roads were overcrowded with people on the move at that time and it took a long time to get anywhere. We have been here in the (refugee) camps since then. No one had heard of this camp before. The people of the local council had already been informed about our arrival and had prepared schedules for relocating us. Women with children and elderly people were given better accommodation – like this one, and the others were put in schools.

This is not a normal life. I mean, when people lead a normal life, they work and make a living and somehow get a place of their own. But we neither have a place of our own, nor jobs. The economy here, in Republika Srpska, is bad and not improving. If we get a job, it's usually in summer and then it's either in a private business in Serbia or somewhere around here – in Bijeljina. They get digging jobs or jobs at pepper plantations – those sorts of jobs. In winter we just all sit and wait for the spring jobs to start.

Until 1998 – until this year, my whole income was what my relatives sent me. I have a brother in Serbia and two uncles in Denmark who sent us some aid every month. We also managed to earn something ourselves. My in-laws have been receiving their pensions and doing these digging and picking jobs like everyone else from here. I haven't been doing any work since I've been bringing up the child.

We receive some aid here, too. We get regular supplies of flour and fresh fruit and vegetables. It's all from some foreign organisations – I've stopped remembering their names – it's always a different one. As for the domestic Red Cross – I don't think we're getting anything from them here. I

think only those in houses are getting something from them. I doubt these local organisations have anything to give us.

I have a certain security now. My husband got a steady job and we're not in such dire straits as we used to be. It's not that we have to stand in line to get tinned food like before. I wish I had enough money to go and buy everything I need and not wait to be given charity. Now I hope we shall get some accommodation. We would look for some private accommodation, but Banja Luka is overpopulated and there are many foreign organisations positioned here, so accommodation is more expensive than in Belgrade. We cannot afford that with this salary and make ends meet.

We never saw our house again. When it burnt down in 1995, we left and have never been back. I have no wish to go there. I would only feel disappointed. What is there to see? Those whose houses haven't been destroyed have gone for a visit. The other day, people went back on a bus: some were received in their houses, some weren't; some were allowed to have a look around and some were even offered coffee and had a chat. But it all amounts to one and the same thing: this doesn't belong to you any more and that's definite.

I somehow feel secure staying in Banja Luka. He has a job and I might find one, too. Or, perhaps not – I don't know.

I don't know what this war was all about and whose purpose it served. In my opinion, it all started with the splitting up of Yugoslavia – when all the upheaval began, with ethnic divisions and political parties, and when Muslims, Croats and Serbs first had their (own) national leaders. To put it simply: those nationalistic feelings were awakened in people. I blame the war on all of them equally. Yet in those chaotic times, you just couldn't choose. Suddenly, no one was good – Serbs didn't like Muslims, Muslims didn't like Serbs, Croats didn't like either. That nationalism turned people against each other. For instance, a Muslim would dislike a Serb for being better educated, or the other way round. Everything was someone else's fault and all sides had war profiteers. Some kept swimming and some drowned, so to say, and some were pushed under. Common people could be nothing but losers – the war brought us no good. The other day, there was a power cut and I started wondering whether there is any other nation in the world where people fought for worse. I haven't got a telly – couldn't take it along; my child hasn't got a telly and I had one as a child. And with each generation, instead of going from good to better, we're doing the opposite. We're now buying off some second-hand cookers which people dumped; we repair old fridges and black-and-white tellies – that's our life now, and we used to have it all.

I don't think we need another war. As far as I'm concerned, we could have gone without this one either. I think we've all gotten weary and have realised that this could have been settled in some other way.

I don't think we can turn back time and live and work together

again. People have lost too much. It is perhaps different for families who haven't lost a member, but those who have – they can't forget. It was all different back in 1941: then we had the German aggressors and when they got defeated and fled, it was a different feeling for us. That communism was all about brotherhood and unity and everything was somehow evened out. But this is different; this was an ethnic war and has brought about many more problems. We don't see it as possible to lead some kind of normal life like before. Maybe, with time, those living in the Federation – and us here, in Republika Srpska – maybe we'll change one day to a common economy; maybe in a couple of years, maybe in ten or fifty; but they should allow the people to decide about that. If they try to make us do it – it can turn to hell for all of us.

If the war started over, I would run away as far as I could, if I had a chance. No one would be able to keep up with me – that's how far and fast I would run. In 1992 we didn't have a chance to flee: they simply closed the border. There was nowhere to go, nothing to do with your family.

First and foremost, I am a human being. Some of us were born Serbs, some Muslims or, indeed, any other ethnicity. I think that those human qualities should prevail in all of us, but we seem to have forgotten them. We forgot them back in 1991 and started thinking that it was important to be a Serb. The bigger the cross we wore, the bigger the Serb we were; the bigger the Crescent with a star – the better the Muslim. If I am a Serb and go to church and worship God – that's something very personal and we shouldn't be blowing our own horn about it. That's a matter of personal choice. Those who haven't got their own faith cannot be good persons, friends or neighbours. We all need some identity, some roots. With this war, all bad things cropped up and all good has been forgotten. We constantly fear that someone will do something wrong to us, that someone will cheat us – we've stopped seeing good in people. If someone reaches out to help us because they like us or want to help, we always think that they will somehow profit from that. Yet I've noticed that such thoughts are fading and that things are coming back into balance again.

We were under communist rule for fifty years. All religion was forbidden and you couldn't be a member of the Party and go to church. You couldn't be a believer – that just didn't work. Students with excellent marks were recommended for admittance into the Communist Party. If it happened that you didn't want to become a member, then you had to go to their meeting and explain why. At that time, it was a commonplace thing. Being a communist, you couldn't go to church, have your *slava* or celebrate Christmas. We celebrated the New Year, The First of May (Labour Day) and such holidays. When the war broke out and all that went down the drain, and when it turned out that those fifty years were a mistake, then we started exaggerating in the other direction. From one extreme situation (when we didn't

believe in anything), we have now turned into devout believers. Now we are such good Serbs or such good Muslims or – Croats. And now we do things we would have never done before, only to prove that we belong – that we can and know how. I believe that not many people today know the true meaning of faith because it is not something that can be learnt in a year. That's something you need to grow up with.

My parents have never been religious or church-goers. There wasn't an Orthodox church in Bosanska Krupa – it was burnt down in 1941 and they never built it again. We had a Catholic one and a mosque. Just before this war, when they started organising those political parties, a church was built – actually, they had just managed to put on the roof when the war broke out. And so I have no religion and neither have my parents – because they are from a war generation. Now my son has something like Sunday school (only together with the regular classes and on the week days). I study along at home with him about Genesis, religion and *Slavas*. It's all very interesting, but it shouldn't be forced on anyone. Those who are interested will accept it on their own.

Some politicians, knowing the weakest trait in people, claimed that the war started because we had different religions. Well, all families were mixed – there wasn't a family without Muslims and Croats in it. I think all families in ex-Yugoslavia were like that. We all had people of different faiths in our families. The war hasn't changed my view on other religions – I look upon people as human beings first and foremost. We have all lost similar things and there's no winner. I haven't suffered a personal loss and therefore I don't hate anyone; I only feel sad. I feel sorry for all of us.

For me, all our future lies in the economy. Unless the economy improves, we're lost. The aid will eventually stop coming. It's been four years since the war ended – I'm surprised that these organisations are still sending any; the war ended here, and some other people need help, too. People are still emotional when they speak at the Assembly sessions – we're still angry and hold our own against them, we quarrel and argue. And the truth is that common people have no job and no future. I say – they don't have to find me a house: if they gave me a job I would create my own future. If I had a steady job, I would rent a flat or build a house. If they turned it all into a children's game and let the children decide while playing it, I'm sure they would find better solutions than these in power. Those market sellers speak more wisely than politicians and I'm sick of it all. Although I voted in the last elections, I don't think I will vote ever again – it's a sheer waste of time.

That life we had in former Yugoslavia – that was a real thing. Now, nothing has been completed yet – Republika Srpska is not Republika Srpska yet, the Federation – is not the Federation – it's still considered Bosnia and Herzegovina and we all have some rights there. The truth is – we have no rights. They call it democracy… what's in it for us? We've got nothing – noth-

ing has changed. In the past four years, since the war ended, not a single thing has changed for us.

In my opinion – and I'm neither that clever nor a politician, we should stay separated: Republika Srpska and The Federation. We need some kind of border between us so that we know what's ours and what's theirs. Whether we will manage to make peace between us – so to say – and go on with some normal life – that should be left to people to decide. Our houses stayed on the Muslim side and theirs – on the Serbian: we should be allowed to decide what to do. If I want to return, I should be allowed to return; if I want to sell, they should allow me to sell or exchange it somehow. Things should end somewhere, and we shouldn't be forced to do anything any more. Forcing people has never brought any good. I believe that if we sat and talked, like people do, that we would be able to solve it all without hitting the roof and without putting pressure on anyone.

As for my personal wishes, all I hope for is to lead a normal life. They don't have to feel obligated to find me accommodation – I know that will never happen. No one will ever build a place and come to us with the key and say: 'Here, this is yours'. Such things don't happen; you have to fend for yourself. Miracles don't happen.

My message and my wish here would be that no war should ever happen again anywhere in the world. Let us be human first and religious and other things – second, and may we never wish for others what we wouldn't like to happen to us.

(Voices of the Dawn – Testimonies of Displaced People, 2005; testimonies collected: 1997 – 1999)

Goga M.'s Second Story

This conversation between Goga M. and Vesna K. took place on several occasions, at the end of 2002 and the beginning of 2003, by e-mail and phone from Zagreb to Verona, where Goga M. and her son live today after leaving Sarajevo in 1996.

Goga M.:

Ciao, cara,

After a long period of silence I am finally trying to answer your questions. Of course, the silence was only exterior. For the last few days, that is, from the moment I read your questions (as I told you last night, your "kalashnikov" questions) I have been distressed. Something stirred in me, something from which we try to protect ourselves by burying and waiting to address it until there is a time in the future when we will be able to face it without feeling pain, or when we will be ready to embrace that pain. Because losses are exactly that, losses, maybe we just learn to live with them over time.

Vesna: *What are your memories of the time you left Zagreb and the Center in July 1993 when, on your way to Sarajevo, you and your eleven year-old son, Luka, traveled by bus via Hungary and Belgrade...?*

Goga M: I remember my friends coming to say goodbye. Biba, with eyes full of sadness, gave me a gift, a golden cross with a letter that I still carry with me: "Let God be with you!" I am boarding the bus with my four bags full of medicine, food, soap and shampoo, mostly things that I can't get in Sarajevo or that are too expensive there. Almost all the passengers in the bus are women. Mothers, sisters, wives, whose loved ones are by choice or by chance (who knows?) in Serbia. Oh, WOMEN, WOMEN. Silence. Each with her own thoughts, her own fears. We are at the border. Before entering Hungary, the Croatian customs officials. They search our bags and tell us to empty their contents into a neat new garbage container. I can still remember how shiny it looked on the inside; I had never seen such a clean container. Every damn time I throw the garbage out, I remember this container at the Croatian border. I try to explain that I am going to Sarajevo and not to Belgrade, which they hate, and that the medicine is for my mother: "Can I at least have one box..." Nothing. It ALL ends up in the shiny clean container. Even pads. One woman cries as she slowly puts a ham in, the ham she had saved for two years for her son. What can a bus full of women traveling in the wrong direction do to counter two or three customs officers full of

patriotism! Come on, tell me, who is brave here, who is strong? When we had gotten rid of our "burdens," the bus continued on. Hungary. Now I am the only problem, because they are worried that I will stay in Hungary. They want to deport me to Macedonia. I don't want to get off the train. For God's sake, Macedonia is the only thing I need right now. I would have to learn the language again (just kidding). One woman whispers to me, "Offer them some money." It's not an easy decision for me, but after two hours of negotiations, we solve the problem with 200 Deutsch Marks. We move on. To Belgrade. Chaos, crowds, shouting. I manage to buy a ticket to Sarajevo. After a ten-hour journey on a public transportation bus with hard chairs, my son and I arrive in Pale. It's already late. We can't find transportation to Sarajevo. In the morning, yes. I panic; I don't know anyone in Pale, soldiers are everywhere, it's chilly even though it's still summer. Time passes, my son and I are standing by the road without any bags (a little lighter), a hundred thoughts are in my mind, the dark looks threatening. I see a car and literally throw myself at it. In the car, there is a soldier who's shocked by my behavior. In short, I manage to persuade him to drive me to Sarajevo. He babbles on like crazy the entire time, but we arrive in Sarajevo. It's so dark I don't even know when we are there. I start to recognize buildings, no light anywhere, complete silence. Sarajevo, my love.

You know, every time I went on summer vacation I liked to come home at sunset. I was always impatient to see the lights of Sarajevo and my heart would pound with anticipation. I liked to travel but I was even more eager to return, always wondering what might have changed, what might have happened while I was gone. Of course, everything always stayed the same and it would be peaceful again.

V: *How did your mother greet you?*

G: My mother and my neighbors couldn't believe their eyes. You know, someone suddenly returns to a city that everyone is leaving. It seemed like things were improving, but they weren't of course. Three more long years of conflict were ahead. War and goodbyes. My return hadn't brought peace back into my life. When I went to the Sarajevo suburb of Grbavica the next morning, what I saw brought me eternal sadness. They could and they did repair and rebuild, but everything is different. Forever.

(...)

V: (...) *What did life look like in Grbavica during those war years?*

G: A lot of refugees from the opposite side of Sarajevo went there. They crossed the river at night; they were either going there or passing through on their way to Belgrade or more distant towns. New friendships were formed and we gathered every evening, full of joy because we had survived another day. We celebrated every possible event: birthdays, departures, letters. New relationships began, new children were born. When each morning is uncertain, people try to get as much as possible out of the present.

V: *Why did you finally decide to leave Sarajevo and why in 1996, when the war ended?*

G: When the war ended and when Grbavica was "liberated," there were only a few of us left. In my building, only 5 out of 36 apartments were inhabited. I was in someone else's Serbian apartment, whose owner had left, because my apartment was destroyed. Before the Bosnian army came we were all registered with the UNHCR, I think, or some other foreign organization, to be protected from possible outbursts of hate on the part of the liberators. Everyone who remained in Grbavica during the war was considered to be equal to paramilitary Serbian troops, "chetniks". During the day, foreign troops were marching to "protect" us but at night there was no one around. Banging on doors, threats, beatings... The flat we lived in was immediately given to a "highly respected officer" who, of course, insisted we move out RIGHT AWAY. Various unpleasant encounters, threats... But when I was actually spit on in the middle of the market because I was wearing a cross around my neck—I have been wearing one for my whole life and even during times of the most extreme communism no one said anything to me—it was the last straw that made me decide to leave. My son, with the maturity of a fourteen year-old boy who became a man too early (and not only him, since that is the destiny of all children who in some way feel the consequences of war on their own skin; these childhoods were cut as if with a knife), also influenced my decision.

We began to pack. To leave and to know that you are leaving is always a strange feeling. You have to decide what to take and what to leave, when every stupid thing reminds you of something because you bought it precisely on the day you... And that is how you end up making selections that define your life, you weigh your memories and you try to be realistic and take only the useful stuff. And you must admit, thank God we are alive, and you are not exactly sure if you are winning.

As I already told you, there is no wrong decision—to stay or to leave. We're all unhappy, those who stayed and those who left. But my son goes to school, he plays with his friends, he lives peacefully. And that was my goal.

V: *You are leaving for Italy. How, why?*

G: This time there were three of us traveling. My mother, my son and me. My mom's health had gotten worse; she is 86 years old, with impaired vision and hearing. You always talked about how mother-daughter relationships are difficult and complicated. You see, I no longer think that my relationship with my mother is complicated, no way. I see only the love we gave to each other, interchanged, and I see that we gave the other everything when she needed it. We both did what we had to. But not as a required task or job. We did it because WE WANTED TO.

When a woman makes a difficult decision that demands sacrifice, and might even be illogical, then the decision is analyzed and you conclude that there was some kind of complex involved, some conditioned behavior, etc. But when a MAN makes a decision, he does it because he is BRAVE. Don't you think we are mistaken? My dear Vesna, I saw our women in camps, hugging each other, frightened; they were, for the first time, alone and

unprotected (peacefully admitting that they were afraid) but they found the strength to move on. Don't forget that they were all nearly illiterate!

(...)

January 19, 2003. (e-mail)

(...)

So you asked me what first comes to mind when I think about all the events after the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. My first thought is: God, what they did to us! The second, almost at the same time: God, what we allowed them to do to us! It's easy to accuse them of doing something to us. What did we do to stop them? We gave in, or we couldn't do anything, or we didn't know how or we didn't want to, we, ordinary people, who paid the full price for it all (we are still paying it—the debt is life-long). Who knows?

Why did it all happen? There are many answers to this question and no one knows the right one, or maybe someone does but is unwilling to admit it. Each of us has his or her own different theory, and every discussion on the subject turns into empty babble.

I think all wars are equally cruel and that this one is no exception. We felt this one in our souls, of course, that's why it seems the cruelest.

You know, Vesna, when I think about it, I remember in *Hadrian's Memoirs*, he says something like: all changes, all advances, technology, science, medicine, every day new discoveries; only MAN, his nature and character remain the same, the eternal hunger for power never changes! May my adored Hadrian forgive me for the incomplete quote, but I think you get the meaning.

About the Hague? We have witnessed various trials. Nuremberg's was one of them. We watched Simon Wiesenthal in the endless fight to uncover war crimes and we were so grateful when another criminal was convicted. I hope this will happen now.

I occasionally follow what's happening in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. I don't have the opportunity to read our newspapers, and the newspapers here haven't mentioned anything about the region for years. WE ARE ABSOLUTELY FORGOTTEN. No more "exciting" news from the Balkans.

My plans for the future? I plan a week in advance at the most. What will be, will be. I don't have a future; I only have my past and my present. (...)

Interview conducted by **Vesna Kesić**

(Women Recollecting Memories, 2003)

Translated by **Tamara Slišković**

When I Met You for the First Time

An interview with ***Habiba (Biba, Biserka) Metikoš****, a refugee from Sarajevo and activist for the Center for Women War Victims who has since relocated to Canada, and will possibly return to Bosnia.*

(**Rada's e-mail**):

(...) *you often say that you remember the times you spent in zagreb, and all that was happening at the center. you should have written it all down. we didn't have time to do it while we were visiting the women in the shacks in kruge and črnomerec, but we should have done it immediately after. you in your canadian winter nights, me in my finnish ones. i regret it, because every day i am more aware that what we did was valuable, but if we don't put it down on paper, it will fall into oblivion. i believe that we learned so much about war, war violence, women, support... for perhaps the first time in croatia, we put feminist models into practice and managed a feminist process. in times when someone would say that it is enough just to survive, we learned... but we should have written it down. many wrote stories out of fragments about us, produced films.... in times when we were trying to patch up our lives, when we were the voice of difference in an atmosphere of political one-mindedness, this was legitimate, and we supported those writers as they passed through the center. but, it is time for us to write something down. i think it is good to write. as we told women when we were noting down our memories, "writing is therapy." many believe that it helps even great writers...*

(...)

Rada: (...) *What was going through your mind as you were leaving Sarajevo?*

Biba: It was April 11, 1992. Everything happened so suddenly that you didn't even have time to think. Everyone panicked. All the roads were blocked. Barricades all over Sarajevo. My mother was on one side of town, my sister and her family across the city from her, and my family and I on yet another side of town. All means of communication gradually broke down. No TV broadcasts. Grenades from all directions flying over our building (luckily, since they were trying to hit the Hum, the hill where all the transmitter towers were).

We watch the grenades, sometimes as if watching fireworks, and sometimes seeing them as a horrible threat. It looks as if something terrible is happening, but we are unaware of it or don't know what it is.

I am 50 years old, my daughter is 12. Our long hoped for child could die. Why?

Vasko (my husband) tries to get my disabled mother to my sister's, to a safe place. He crosses Serbian barricades since my mother lives in the Serb occupied part of town. He manages to carry her out of the apartment (in her wheelchair) and pushes her to my sister's house. Poor old woman, she has been tied to her bed for years and hasn't gone out. She says, "My God, Vasko, how many new houses have been built."

Poor old her, she isn't aware that at this moment Sarajevo is being brought to the ground. Our homes, our lives and our worlds are being destroyed.

I think: "my mom is now at my sister's place and I have to hide my kid so she won't get killed." Sarajevo airport is the place where people are literally fighting for a ticket, which, instead of a seat number, has the word "LIFE" written on it.

It all reminds me of *Saigon* (the film about the evacuation of American citizens from Saigon).

When I was watching that film, I thought about how horrible it was, but it was just a movie, and it couldn't happen here, to us. Now it was no longer a movie, it was a cruel reality. People were stepping on each other trying to push their way onto the plane. After three days of waiting and struggling, my daughter and I succeeded in leaving on a military vehicle with a 600-person capacity, which transported the families of military men to Belgrade. "Good," I thought, "this won't take long. Fifteen days at the most, and then we'll go back home."

However, we still have not returned to Sarajevo, and today is November 22, 2002.

R: *When I first saw you at the Center (I think you opened the door), I didn't know you were a refugee. Maybe because I had already formed a "suitable" image of them when I was translating for a Finnish journalist. I saw refugees coming to Croatia, and being placed in high school halls in Sisak or Karlovac with the things they managed to take with them in a hurry. I can still remember the scenes: women and children at train stations in empty cars stopped at a side track, and a seven-year-old girl wiping the windows of the compartment clean trying to turn it into a new home for her mother, grandmother, sisters and herself. All the others seemed as if they didn't know the train would never move out of the station. You, on the other hand, had short blond hair, as if you had just been to the hairstylist's, and very elegant clothes. And you laughed loudly. You looked like a woman who accidentally wandered into a place in which a lot of both younger and older women, activists and refugees, spent their time. How did you come to the Center?*

B: It was October 1992 and I was in Zagreb. I was sitting in a tram going nowhere in particular. I could ride in trams as much as I wanted, since, in the beginning, we could use public transportation for free. Soon after, they

didn't allow it any more because refugees started arriving in large numbers. An acquaintance who came from Sarajevo, Goga Marković, got on at the tram stop at the main train station. We had met recently at a gathering of some former Sarajevo citizens. From that moment on, we spent all of our time together. We tried looking for a job together (she with an eleven year-o1d child, me with a twelve year-old) so we could feed our kids. She told me then that a woman from Sarajevo had said that some women in Zagreb were forming an NGO and that they needed a number of women to work there. The first meeting was scheduled for 5 p.m. on Wednesday at 38 Tkalčićeva Street.

Of course, we came.

(...) We began working in refugee camps in May 1993. I really wanted to help these women, but I also helped myself by learning new skills for surviving the horrors of war. I think—I know—they were very useful.

R: (...) *What did you gain for yourself by leading self-help groups?*

B: I helped myself by thinking that if I wanted to help the women in the group, I needed to be a positive "living example" to them. I was also a refugee from Bosnia, and I was always smiling and looking nice. I encouraged women by telling them that we all have to live for the present and the future, and not for the past. We have to take care of our appearances and ourselves, because everything depends on us and no one else. At the end of each session, every woman was given a homework assignment for the next meeting. They were supposed to get a haircut or color their hair. One woman had to take her head scarf off (which she wore all the time) and arrange her hair and so forth. I remember how funny it was when my first partner Maja (a beautiful girl) and I put our women into the so-called "alfa state of half-sleep", encouraging them to "go to" (think of) some place where they'd feel nice. When they 'returned' to the real world, we talked about the places they had been and how they felt. Some of them described their experiences vividly, and some only pretended they'd been somewhere, although their minds had remained in the camp. It was sad that women at first thought we were their teachers, not their fellow travelers, a shoulder to cry on, or support, so they lied to please us. It took a lot of time for us to become close to them, but after that, we gained their trust and we solved many problems together by laughing and crying. I couldn't allow myself to fall. Sure, there were a lot of situations when we cried together. We are only human.

(...)

(**Rada's e-mail, between the interviews**)

as i was reading, i remembered the images of your own and the other women's humiliation; you who were not so long ago our fellow citizens. there's also the personal sense of loss and insecurity. i sometimes think that no one will ever be able to describe the atmosphere in the city. on one hand, there was insecurity (and a real fear of possible bombings), but on the other, there was an artificially created atmosphere of hate towards everything and everyone different (in other words, non-croatian). i remember a scene in the

tram when one woman asked another, "do your people go to air raid shelters?" ('your people' meaning 'serbs'), and the other one said they did not. i wanted to ask them if they really think that "they" know when there's going to be an air raid, and when not. i wanted to tell them i have serbian neighbors from petrinja who came to live with their daughter in zagreb and how they sit in the corner of the shelter (they left everything they had in petrinja) and listen to people say they should force all serbs out of the shelter... i remember the story about your sister-in-law who rejected you when you managed to send your daughter, dunja, to the states... what happens to people in war? where does empathy go, that basic human feeling for other people? murderers and robbers, the people who make the war an excuse for the things they would do anyway - that I can understand, but the so-called ordinary people who all of a sudden turn into monsters... if i could just feel the atmosphere between 1994 and 1995 again and make it tangible. when you talk about the croats deliberately provoking the war with the muslims in bosnia, i remember how our muslim women felt. they didn't dare go out of the camp because sheks (then the vice-president of parliament) was exclaiming furiously that while we are feeding their wives and children, they are killing our croatian brothers... how can you then, as a woman, go out on the street, let alone in "dimije," the loose pants muslim women wear...

(...)

R: *How did you try to solve your "legal" status?*

B: Dunja, my daughter, was supposed to start school. We didn't have identification papers because what was written in Dunja's papers was not desirable for the newly formed independent Croatian state. Father Vasilije, mother Habiba. The worst combination for a child.

Radmila M. had a similar problem, maybe even worse, because her son's name is Lazar. We found a solution: "Let's christen our children. We'll become Croats and no one will exclude us."

In Bistra parish we found a wonderful priest who asked no questions and agreed to christen us. We stood side by side in front of the priest: Jovo (who was sixty years old), beside him his twenty-five year-old daugther-in-law Munevera holding her one year-old child Maja, then Lazar (eleven) and Radmila M. (in her forties), Dunja (twelve) and finally Habiba (fifty). We were all given generally desirable names: Vasilije – Vlatko, Lazar – Luka, Jovo – Joško, Habiba – Biserka (I used the name I had already been given by Martina). With the baptism certificates (which were very important documents in addition to proof of citizenship), we managed to sign our children up for school. But we certainly never got certificates of citizenship and the other papers that make life bearable, because in order to get those you have to be pure Croat and according to the opinion of (their) government officials, we were not. All our documents were new. We needed something "old." Life went on.

(...)

R: (...) *I remember women saying that it was harder to be a refugee*

in Croatia – part of a country they had only recently called their own, one they had visited during summer vacations or business trips, but that was now hostile toward them – than far away in the U.S. or Canada...

B: While Dunja was in Zagreb, we lived in my husband's sister's empty apartment. When Dunja left for the U.S., I was thrown out onto the street as undesirable. I was homeless. Where would I find a roof over my head? I was wandering the streets of Zagreb in despair, the most miserable of the miserable.

I remember the two of us (you and I) walking around Zagreb with free classifieds, trying to rent an apartment for me. We found some ads that we followed door to door, while I was "holding in my fear" that my accent would betray me. You were speaking and acting like a "true" Croatian woman, so you spoke on my behalf when needed. Do you remember why we finally were never able to rent an apartment? You were so angry. Often, after we had agreed on a price and my moving in, the owner in question would ask, "Mrs. Metikoš, you, of course, have a certificate of citizenship?" "Of course," I always replied. And we wouldn't return. After a month-long search, you lost your patience; you were so upset. You said, "You'll stay at our place. Right now you're coming to my apartment and you'll stay there until the war ends." So I spent three months in the Borić "community". Many friendships and family ties ended because they couldn't stand the test of time. But simultaneously, on the tiny foundation of some remnants of humanity, new friendships were born. That is how I made a lot of new friends during the most difficult period of my life. Happiness is what counts most in the game of life. I was lucky that fortune never turned its back on me. Apart from the "normal" troubles from war conditions, we refugees went through some painful experiences of families being separated and often destroyed. Quarrels, resentment, lack of understanding, envy and the whole lot was present in formerly well organized and stable families. Sisters were no longer sisters, brothers no longer brothers, and these losses are as terrible as death. They are irretrievable - things will never be the same. These wounds don't heal.

Judging from common political opinion on present and future developments in Bosnia, it became evident that mixed marriages would not be able to survive there (the BiH Minister of Culture at the time publicly stated that children from mixed marriages were "bastards"). So Vasko and I decided to apply for emigration to Canada. After overcoming great difficulty, Vasko managed to escape from Sarajevo. He left all that we had built for years. He joined me in Zagreb, where we waited for Canadian visas and for the journey to the unknown. We left Croatia on May 17, 1995.

R: *In Canada, you started "from scratch." How simple or hard is it for people your age, with your experience and education, to "start a new life?"*

B: We arrived in the promised land of Canada, the city of Winnipeg. Nice welcome, nice weather, kind people. We enrolled in a language course immediately (we didn't know the language yet). We started looking for jobs. And found none, none, none, none...

In July 1995, our sorely missed daughter finally joined us. We were as happy as small children. After three years we were finally together again. In July 1996, we moved to Toronto. It's a larger city, so we thought there would be more job opportunities. However, there are no job opportunities for people in their sixties, especially when they are starting from scratch. In the meantime, we were granted some family benefits, which helped us to survive. Today, Dunja has finished her education (world literature and psychology, with an additional year of training for a license to teach adult ESL) and lives in Canada, while the two of us are going back home finally.

(...)

I am a person who likes to be busy and active, even if I'm not doing something extremely important. It's in my nature. For the past few years, I've done nothing except housework. I have two roles: I am a mother and a wife. For a workaholic like me, it's too little, though very important, work. Nothing has been happening in my professional life; it's not yet possible. When I arrived, I wanted to use the knowledge and experience I gained at the Center. I wanted to work with other women refugees. But apart from individual people, I couldn't organize anything. Here, the administration has its rules; work with refugees is institutionalized, and in order to approach these institutions, you must, in addition to having all the official certifications, be fluent in English. Not knowing the language is a limiting factor, and age is an obstacle to learning a new language. All in its own time, as the saying goes. I am 60 years old and I have 35 years of work experience. I shouldn't be ungrateful. There is a time when people retire. To go back home is to be yourself on your own ground. In our circumstances, we won't be able to live without fear and anxiety for a long time. I want to return home, though life there will not be rosy and carefree, because I suffer from a sinister disease known as NOSTALGIA. Although the cause of it is known, the cure has not yet been found and you cannot buy that cure in the pharmacy. (...)

Rada Borić and **Habiba - Biba Metikoš**

(Women Recollecting Memories, 2003)

Translated by **Tamara Slišković**

kosovo

Didara

The Mounting Crisis

Having served a term in the Provincial Assembly, I was assigned to the Provincial Socialist Alliance, where I held the post of member of the Presidency and President of the Health and Social Policy Board. I remained in that position until 1986. As I mentioned before, as a political organization, the Socialist Alliance had no power of decision over financial matters; the Provincial Assembly deployed the funds and decided HOW and where they were going to be used. Therefore, our duty was to analyze the situation, submit reports to the Assembly, suggest priorities (such as the purchase of medication); that is, to spot the problems and propose solutions. However, with the funds constantly dwindling, our analyses and recommendations were to no avail. The era of prosperity, when the whole country had a decent standard of living, was coming to an end. The outstanding debts were unpaid and due. In Kosovo, the least developed region, the impending crisis was even more profound. The money that was being allocated from the fund for underdeveloped regions failed to meet the growing needs. The shortage of funding for hospitals and health care was being felt, coupled with a growing pressure on the Employment Agency: jobs were scarce against the population figures. The social crisis was becoming more acute, and along with it, the political situation continually deteriorated.

In the late 1970s, the unemployment rate in Kosovo was the highest in the country and that generated discontent among both the Serbian and Albanian populations. Inter-ethnic tensions were on the rise. Many Serbs resented the fact that Albanians, as the majority population, were given priority of employment; on the other hand, and in spite of that, the numbers of Albanians queuing in front of employment bureaus were constantly growing – although at that point, many of them possessed higher or high education diplomas – they were jobless and aimless. During those years, Albanian nationalism became more vociferous, nurtured by what I believe was massive social discontent. The eruption, as we know, came about in the demonstrations of 1981, which had started as student protests against unacceptable conditions in students' residence halls and escalated into the famous slogan: "Kosovo – Republic". I was dumbfounded. I had seen the crisis approaching, but had completely failed to understand the proportions of the discontent. Above all, I was taken aback by those massive, obviously well organized demonstrations and blatant nationalistic demands. At no time had I noticed that anything was being prepared, although I was in the eye of the storm.

The appeasement of the situation was an illusion. As the language

of nationalism grew louder, the issue of "the right of precedence" in Kosovo was put on the agenda: whether it rested with the descendants of the Illyrians, who presumably had been the ancestors of the contemporary Albanians, or whether it belonged to the Serbs from "time immemorial".

Private and public debates went on as to who was actually a minority in Kosovo, who exploited whom and on what occasions a certain government had been partial to one side or the other. While some were counting up the Serbs who had migrated to Kosovo from other regions in between the two World Wars in order to "prove" that genuine indigenous Serbs were scarce, others argued that Albanians were moving into the region by the tens of thousands in order to increase their numbers. At the same time, the concept of Kosovo as a common yard shared by all its inhabitants was losing ground. Everybody was banging their own drum and I was feeling more and more anxious, torn between the two sides. My Serbian friends would, for instance, intercept me with questions such as: "What more do your people want? Haven't we given them everything?" In the beginning, I engaged in such discussions and asked them who "my" people were and who their "we" were who had given "them" everything, and whether the Albanians actually had some rights or that, as second-rate citizens, they had just been given the opportunity to enjoy benefits that they were not entitled to. To my growing concern, I began hearing talk from the other camp, of Albania being a country of justice and equality (as completely opposed to our country), which many sincerely took to be true. I soon realized that such arguments were futile and embittering. How could one ever argue with someone who saw the Enver Hoxhes Albania as the promised land? Or with someone who thought that the Albanians "reproduced according to an agenda" in order to drive the Serbs away from Kosovo? The propaganda on both sides used semi-truths that, as a rule, the discontented people accepted more readily than they would accept the truth. The official policy was still calling upon patience and reason, but those were running short. Stambolić and the top political leadership insisted that the Kosovo crises be dealt with on the federal level, as a problem facing the whole country and not only the Republic of Serbia, which I thought was right. Therefore, the measures that were being undertaken by the authorities in order to prevent the growth of separatist tendencies among the Albanians were supported by practically all the party and republic leadership, including the Albanian leadership loyal to the Yugoslav federation.

However, while these efforts were being made, the Serbs' dissatisfaction was ever more present. Interethnic relations in Kosovo deteriorated constantly. In the aftermath of the demonstrations of 1981, rising numbers of Serb families departed from Kosovo: many could not bear being treated as a minority in Kosovo, because the Serbs constituted the majority throughout the entire Republic. Many fled, fearing Albanian separatism, and many could not come to terms with the situation created after the Fourth Party plenary session, whereas many others took advantage of that very same situation, when the entire country labeled the demonstrations as nationalist and condemned them in order to secure jobs or apartments in Belgrade. Of course,

there was pressure and of course, a lot of people moved out because the Albanian emigration workers (working on emigration to the West) offered huge sums of money for their houses and land. It is not customary to sell overpriced real estate under pressure, but it was not seen that way at the time. Every departure from Kosovo, regardless of the reasons or conditions that accompanied it, was labeled as "exodus under pressure". Appeals were launched for all official instances asking Serbs not to leave the region because it would aggravate a situation that was difficult already. Simultaneously, as it soon turned out, some other centers of political power were persistently trying to thwart all efforts to move towards appeasement; those centers kept inciting the Kosovo Serbs to rise up in defense of their national rights and to refuse to make any concessions, instilling them with fear and discontent. New political forces were emerging, who were soon to entrust the resolution of the Serbian national issue to Slobodan Milošević.

Personally, I felt less and less at home, no matter what my surroundings were. Until the mid '80s, I had been fully in favor of the policy pursued by the Republic overall and the regional leaders who were in power at that time, as far as the Kosovo situation was concerned. Besides, as a pro-Yugoslav Albanian, I believed that it was my duty to oppose Albanian nationalism wherever I could (in the first place, in the sphere of interpersonal relations because, professionally, my area was healthcare) and interethnic relations were the responsibility of party officials. However, when an unprecedented anti-Albanian media crackdown began in Serbia in the mid '80s, I was not able to join that chorus. Within a short time, Albanians were completely identified with the concepts of irredentism[1] and terrorism: both in the media and in the public opinion. They were all seen as enemies of the people. Bewildered by the proportions of hatred disseminated by the media, I decided to detach myself completely from everything. Inasmuch as I had never been inclined towards the Albanian nationalists, I now shunned the Serbian nationalists, too. Inasmuch as I could not accept the idea of national engagement with the Albanians, I was abhorred at the possibility of being awarded the epithet "honest Albanian" by the Serb nationalists. I would never have thought that hatred could escalate that far. The few brave people in Serbia who opposed that hatred, calling the public to regain their senses and start a serious debate on the situation in Kosovo, were defamed as traitors of the Serbian people.

The worst thing was the fact that the anti-Albanian climate was strongly encouraged – never before had any such thing been allowed in public speech, never before had such blatant chauvinism been condoned. Not only did hate talk now go unpunished, but it had as its main proponents reputed public figures, writers and intellectuals. This, in turn, generated rising Albanian discontent, "closing of ranks," nationalism and overall anti-Serb feelings. Instead of looking for ways to include this segment of the population in the Yugoslav society as much as possible, to appease tensions and quench nationalism on both sides, everything was, practically, done to prevent this

[1]. one who advocates the recovery of territory culturally or historically related to one's nation

from happening. It looked as if there was a deliberate intention to widen the gap between the two peoples and aggravate the situation beyond repair.

I knew many Albanians who used to be loyal citizens of Yugoslavia and Serbia, who were simply driven to "taking sides" by such anti-Albanian feelings that were being imposed by the Serbian media. For example, I knew some Albanian students who were looking in vain for some accommodation to rent in Belgrade – the landladies would refuse to let them premises as soon as they heard their names or recognized their accent, which was but one in a series of "accomplishments" of the general hysteria generated (orchestrated) by the media. I would read the articles in the daily *Politika* (especially those in the column "Echoes and Reactions" and I could not believe my eyes. For more than two years, news on rapes and attempted rapes on ethnic grounds, on the "Shiptar[2] mob" trafficking of drugs and hard currency and so on, bombarded us in the press and on television. Naturally, reports on rapes were the most embittering. Needless to say, I consider violence against women to be a horrendous crime that calls for a most severe punishment. And that even one raped woman is an alarming figure. However, this was about the fact that the topics of newspaper reports were only "ethnic" rapes, whereas the others, the "usual ones" would only be mentioned without any comment or reactions by the outraged readers. The names (or initials) of the perpetrators were always accompanied by their ethnicity, but exclusively when the perpetrator was Albanian and the victim Serbian. In reference to other cases, which by far outnumbered them, ethnicity was not pointed out, which created the impression that Albanians were the only rapists. I wondered whether anyone noticed these things: whether there were Serbs, Hungarians and Bosnians among the rapists, and also women of other nationalities among the raped. Indeed, how many readers stopped to think whether ethnicity mattered at all, when this type of crime was in question? How many people did actually react to the ethnicity of the perpetrators and victims, rather than to the violent acts, as if a raped woman would be less affected if her abuser belonged to her own people? How many people saw through that orchestrated campaign that was launched with the aim to induce fear, revolt and hate toward Albanians? Let alone the fact that such articles were being published before those cases were tried and before evidence was established. Obviously, evidence did not matter at that time, nor was it of anyone’s concern. The habit of publishing the ethnicity of the parties involved in rape cases was discontinued abruptly when the objective had been accomplished – when the Serbian population had been massively mobilized to lend their support to the scheme for the resolution of the Kosovo crisis masterminded by the political leadership in Belgrade, headed by the new President of the League of Communists of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević. And they were bracing up to change the constitutionally defined position of the regions whatever it took, even if it took brutal force (in order to do that, public opinion had to be homogenized first), because it was highly unlikely that the Kosovo Albanians would give up their autonomy and sub-

2. pejorative term for the Kosovo Albanians

ject themselves once more to Serbia's control.

I am no Constitutional Law expert and I accept that the 1974 Constitution might have been too vague regarding the intricate relations between the Republic and its regions. Namely, the Kosovo and Vojvodina representatives were part of the Assembly of Serbia and participated equally in decision making concerning the whole Republic, including Serbia Proper, whereas there were no representatives of Serbia Proper in the provincial assemblies. Such a constellation could not have been long-lived. In any case, it seems that the process of devolution of the s was inevitably leading to the creation of two more equally positioned federal units with, i.e. eight Yugoslav republics, and that was unacceptable for the political and national elite of Serbia. It is hard to tell how that asymmetry could have been rectified and whether the Constitution would have been amended in a regular, legal way and how the existing ethnic tensions would have been solved. After everything that happened, it is useless to speculate whether Kosovo, with the status of a republic in a democratic Yugoslav federation of equal peoples, would have still wanted to secede and join the (then) isolated and internally besieged Albania. Be that as it may, it was obvious that for some political (party) circles and the intellectual elite in Serbia, the issue had become so crucial that they pushed for a change of Constitution at all costs, including violence and cruelty that unfortunately became the means of "conflict resolution", which is unjustifiable. Absolutely everything had been counterproductive, noxious for both sides and the entire country. From today's point of view, the Kosovo Serbs seem to have been the most adversely affected.

On my behalf, I can say that my country had disappeared long before Yugoslavia disintegrated, long before the middle of the wars that followed. I lost my point of support: wherever I went, I felt as if I did not belong there. In the general hysteria, politics were the central issues of everybody's conversation and individual beliefs were passionately supported by the different camps. This was not the case only in Kosovo. The whole country had contracted the virus of nationalism. The communist option might have justifiably lost its historical battle, but what was being offered instead? Stark nationalism. "Half-breeds" were no longer desirable anywhere unless they rid their identity of the "wrong" component. What I had proudly cherished all those years, my "mixture" that was the very essence of my life, had become (in the eyes of the majority of people in such a short time) something to be ashamed of, a defect that ought to be concealed.

I Keep a Low Profile

Fortunately, I never got into serious trouble, in the sense of physical assault or intimidation. I have "merely" lost the ground under my feet.. I no longer feel at ease anywhere. I have continued to work with no particular zeal or motivation. Before I retired, I served a last term as an assistant to the Chamber of Republics in the National Assembly (during the former SFRY)

in the capacity of member of the Administrative Board, in the period 1987-1991. Under such circumstances, retirement came as a great relief. Over the same period, I was president of the editorial board of the magazine *Nada*, which was a very interesting and diverting occupation.

Over that period some very difficult events coincided in my private life. First, my brother Enver died in 1986. Only his wife, our younger brother and I knew that his cancer had spread and that he had only a few months left to live. We did not dare tell him the whole truth for fear that he would refuse treatment and stop fighting. That way, he believed that he would conquer the disease and we encouraged him to be brave during our daily visits, pretending to be convinced of a favorable outcome, just like he was. It was devastating to look him in the eye and lie, saying that everything was going to be alright, it was as difficult as the knowledge that there was no hope left. His illness and death affected me deeply. Afterwards, I became indifferent, lapsing from periods of grief into periods of depression and fits of unaccountable fear. I would spend most of my time at home. But when my granddaughter Luna – Goran and Maša's daughter – was born that year, I was overjoyed. Her birth gave a new impulse to my life. My business trips, endless meetings and the daily toil were made easier by the thought that I was going to spend some time playing with her during my stays in Belgrade. I was no longer attracted to my work – in that atmosphere, all I wanted was to be out of the way and as inconspicuous as possible.

I attended all the Assembly sessions, but I tried to keep a low profile. Frankly, all I wanted was to achieve retirement age. Then, in 1988, Toša had a heart attack. He has to undergo surgery and to have three bypass operations performed in a Belgrade hospital. It was as if I had a more difficult time than he did. Afterwards my health became fragile, my age was taking its toll: anemia, rheumatism, and eventually, in 1990 I think, I had my gallbladder taken out. I had strong enough health reasons to avoid appearing anywhere and taking part in anything. On the other hand, this self-inflicted isolation was hard for me to bear. For me, who could not have imagined a day going by without company and talking to people, solitude had become a refuge. In time, I had developed a peculiar tactic of running away: I managed to find two families who did not discuss politics and current events and I visited them alternately. Once I would visit my sister-in-law Jela, a widow who was looking after her grandchildren, and next time I would go to a distant relative who was confined to her home due to her disease. Those were isolated worlds untouched by the reality of the outside world, which suited me perfectly. I would bring them goodies, have my afternoon tea with them quietly, while we talked about health issues, the children and the weather and nothing else – it was a real salvation. Those were, practically, my only two destinations. Toša was angry because of that. He used to say: "What in the world are you running away from? You did not mess anything up, so why would you have anything to make up for?" I shunned political discussions, even with him, because those were not discussions any more.

The national polarization had gained such momentum that it was

practically impossible to find yourself in mixed company and to comment on the political situation without critical comments being exchanged with the other side. All such discussions wound up in arguments or quick interruptions in order to avoid them. Everybody had already taken sides politically (that was the case in Prishtine, anyway), so that people had united together along ethnic lines and political opinions. There was no place for me there. There must have been some exceptions (with all due respect for those I never met), but I cannot single out any of my Albanian friends for having raised their voices against Albanian nationalism, just like there were no Serbs or Montenegrins in Prishtine who did not support Milošević (I am referring to the late 1980s and early 1990s) – the one single issue on their political agenda was the menace facing their own nation. Of course, the Kosovo Serbs were backed by an entire state apparatus, including the Army and the police who were prepared to defend the threatened Serbs and their interests, unlike the Albanians who had no such support, and that was an enormous, substantial difference. It was precisely that difference that, in my opinion, decisively defined the course of events in Kosovo for the following decade.

Even my husband supported the Milošević policy for quite a few years. He had already retired and had no other way to express his views but in his private circle: among friends, if not actively, then as a supporter. Although he constantly objected and could not go along with some things, especially nationalism, he was definitely inclined to that option. The bottom line was that he cursed Milošević the most infrequently – until it came to the issue of the public loan from the economic recovery of Serbia, Dafina[3] and hyperinflation. Afterwards, he changed his tune. I think that what affected him most was the fear of change, the introduction of the multiparty system, which for him, a man of another time, was completely strange (he was particularly upset when, in that multiparty strife, the possibility of a restoration of the monarchy, or the scraping of World War II veterans' pensions or other privileges was put on the political agenda of some parties). Be that as it may, it took him a long time to admit that "he had been wrong about Milošević". We had several serious fights on that subject, but then I realized that such arguments not only spoiled our mood, but were harmful to his heart, and I renounced taking part in them completely. In Belgrade, I would collect the old issues of *Vreme*[4] and take them home to read them carefully and see what the "other Serbia" thought (and to reassure myself that it existed). I settled for that much.

The dramatic Kosovo events of the late '80s and early '90s – rallies, demonstrations, political purges, arrests, abolishment of autonomy followed by the self-proclamation of a republic, curfews, dismissals from work, etc, were followed by even more dramatic events in the rest of the country. For

[3] Dafina Milanović, owner of a bank that generated pyramidal profits on the citizens' savings and later collapsed in bankruptcy

[4] *Vreme (Time)*, an independent weekly magazine renowned for its sharp criticism of the ruling policies of the time

a while Kosovo was left on the side, because the wars in Croatia and Bosnia were the center of attention. Our children kept pressing us to move to Belgrade. We had no wish to leave Kosovo. Prishtine was the only home we had had and we did not know what we would do in Belgrade, because Goran and Suzana were already living abroad with their families. Our argument was: "There is no danger for us in Kosovo, who can possibly be bothered by two elderly people?" In fact, we did not want to hear what Goran had seen approaching with great concern ever since the Eighth Session. He had sensed the essence of the entire Milošević policy before many analysts had been able to do so, let alone us (although he had never been engaged in politics, and we were) and he kept warning us that the crisis was ultimately going to be resolved by force, during which time the whole country was likely to fall apart in war and he advised us to move out of there. We genuinely disbelieved his bleak predictions, not even when an all-out war escalated in Croatia. At that time, Todor could not bear to hear a word against the YNA without bursting out in rage. Every time Goran asked us whether we were planning to move to Belgrade, we avoided a direct answer and even tried to argue that, from abroad, they saw the situation in much worse a light than it really was.

Goran was exasperated because we did not understand anything. On one of our occasional encounters, he started beating around the bush about the police having conducted an armed mission "in an Albanian village with 7,000 inhabitants". We understood what he was getting at, and we quickly explained that those were sporadic incidents and that the situation would gradually return to normal, etc. It remained like that until the late '90s, when that relatively calm situation – left on hold "until later"– began to deteriorate. Although thousands of people had already been laid off, schools had been run in private houses and, in spite of sporadic clashes between the police and small armed groups, things were relatively normal – compared to the other wars and destruction that had already happened elsewhere. It was then that Goran asked us: "What do you think: how long can a regime last by means of force, enforced by the Army and the police? And how long do you think is it going to be before one of those villages rises up in arms, until everything turns into a popular rebellion?"

And he asked: "Can you find a village of 7,000 inhabitants anywhere anymore, and what does the future hold for such ghettos without schools, shops, roads and communication with the world? They merely grow in numbers, and the generations that are growing there have nothing to look forward to in the future and they will soon look for a way out by taking up arms. It is the only choice they have left."

He said that there would soon be a whole army of young people, who would know nothing other than to shoot and fight fanatically, because they would have nothing left to lose but their basic lives. They were going to arm and organize a real army that was going to clash with the Serbian Army and police and fight to the last.

"Do you see any reason why you should stay here and wait for this to happen? If you wait for complete chaos, I am afraid that you will wind up

fleeing with your belongings in a plastic carrier bag, before some army – no matter whose," he said. I remember those words perfectly. At that time, the KLA did not exist and the war Goran was warning us about seemed absolutely surreal, but still, his words made me think about the possible development of the situation. It was then that Toša and I seriously began considering moving out. We remembered Operation *The Storm* and the lines of refugees fleeing Krajina on tractors (with their belongings in plastic carrier bags!) that we had seen on television. Eventually, we had become aware of the fact that we could no longer wait, and that we had to leave our own house and join a line of refugees.

A Citizen of Belgrade

We moved to Belgrade in the spring of 1998. Previously, I had to change my personal documents, leaving out the family name Djordjević, because it was illegal for Serbs (i.e. non-Albanians) to sell real estate. Under the name Dukadjini I was able to sell our house in Prishtine. It was completely absurd – I had gotten rid of my Serbian last name exactly at the moment when it could have made a difference in Belgrade, and I moved to Belgrade as a "pure" Albanian exactly at the time when, from both aspects, it was the worst possible choice. And yet, it simply had to be that way, I had no options left, nothing to decide on because "my side" as it were, no longer existed.

My family and my closest women friends supported my decision to leave. None of them could have predicted in their wildest dreams how hideous living in Prishtine was going to become, but they sensed that worse things were to come and they thought that it was better for me to leave, since I had the possibility to do so. They could not do that. I have to say that I also heard some derisive comments from my fellow townspeople for having chosen to go nowhere else but to Belgrade at precisely that moment. Afterwards, I had to withstand a few derisive gazes in Belgrade (at counters and cash desks), when they heard my name and accent. I could not be indifferent to either, but I tried hard to ignore them. My old friends received me openheartedly, and fortunately, there were many of them in Belgrade.

Out of all the reasons for moving to Belgrade, one had definitely prevailed: Maša and Luna had come back, for good, so that we could visit more often. Then another beautiful and important reason came into this world: our grandson Noam, Suzana's and Stefan's son, another source of joy in our lives. So Belgrade became the center of family reunions: Goran visited his family regularly anyway, Suzana visited us with her family (by the way, we live in her apartment) and I am delighted to be able to see them more often than when we had lived in Prishtine, and of course, much more often than would have been the case if we had stayed down there.

I parted with my friends and relatives unaware that it was the last time we would be together. A short time after we had gotten used to living in a big city, clashes in Kosovo had escalated so much that it was wiser not

to travel there. I did not want to put myself in a situation where I would have to justify my decision "to desert" or to be questioned by someone on the bus (by then, those had become ethnically pure "tours") about who I was and where I came from. I used to indulge in similar small talk on the five-hour journey, but back then I was not one of "the others". Venturing to undertake such a trip had by then become totally out of the question. Also, I advised my brother not to come to Belgrade to visit us. Then the NATO bombing started and, after that, traveling down there was not only ill-advised, but literally impossible.

It is hard to describe how I felt during the bombing. I was in the same boat with all other citizens of Belgrade: I waited for the air-raid alert to go off, and I waited to hear what targets had been hit, then I waited for the power cut to be over, I queued for bread, cursed the Americans and walked the city streets with Toša – undeterred during the alert, because "we had something to attend to". I was doing my best to sift through the nightmare, and I found myself in the same horror story as the majority of other people around me. I shared the daily hardships with them. At the same time, deep down, I was worried sick about those who were on the other side. I had left behind my closest relatives and friends, and they were being exposed to NATO air-raids just like us, while on the ground, they were at the mercy of the military and paramilitary formations. Every day, I would spend hours on the phone trying to find out news of my brother, his family, my nephews and friends. And they were doing the same thing. We would get in touch through Suzana, who was in Paris, or through my nephew Leka in Berlin; we went out of our way just to let one another know that we were alive. For example, my niece Nora and her husband and children had been banished to Macedonia. Fortunately, they found shelter in Tetovo, with a family who put them up for four months. For days on end, nobody knew their whereabouts or if they were alive at all. Some armed men in uniform had broken into their apartment in Prishtine and ordered them to leave within five minutes. In front of their building, a crowd had already gathered. Someone tried to take away her husband, but gave up when Dea, their little daughter, burst into tears, clinging to her father. That probably saved him, because in the general commotion and chaos in front of the building, not everything unfolded according to plan. I found out about this later, when Nora returned to Prishtine with her family. And I had no one to share such things with in Belgrade – no one who, amid a state of war, would be interested in the fate of "the enemy" – even of people like Nora and her family.

And how could I talk when their children were also affected in different ways: some were taken away to war, some had fled abroad and some were spending their nights in air-raid shelters – no one was spared. We had already heard countless stories of similar fates in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. I believe that only people of a similarly unfortunate background, and similar family ties and identities can possibly fully understand how I felt. I feared that the war was only going to make things worse – no matter who cried victory. I was convinced that we would all emerge from it as losers, and

everything that has been going on in Kosovo for the past four years confirms that I was right. At least, in my concern of what I see as the essential and most precious thing – that Kosovo should be a place where all its citizens can live together in peace. This groundwork has been torn apart and I think that all the "tailors", especially the international forces who have a mandate to secure peace and order in that unfortunate corner of the world, will have a very hard time patching it up.

Over the past six years, I have not been to Prishtine at all. I can't say at this time whether I will ever go back there again. I keep in touch with my family and some women friends by telephone to make sure they are well. That is all that counts for me now and I am not capable of doing more. Sometimes I wish I could walk though Prizren again like I used to – even under cover, with a veil, so that no one would recognize me, but I quickly sober up and realize that this is no longer possible. I have replaced Kaljaja[5] with Kalemegdan[6] and it is not so bad – it is not quite the same thing, but then, nothing is the same way anymore. From where I now stand, I can say that what really matters to me now is the fact that our family ties and some year-long friendships have remained untouched. My children and my brothers' children and the friends they've had since early childhood have remained above the hatred that they had been instilled with for years. They probably don't know how grateful I am to them for having kept in touch regularly all that time. I firmly believe that they are not an exception, and I have heard of similar examples, which fills me with hope that not everything has been changed and disrupted beyond repair, that (even in Kosovo!) people can go back to living together, within a multi-ethnic and multicultural Europe, I guess. Only, that is not going to be my story any more, but a much nicer and happier story told by my – and all of our – grandchildren.

Didara Dukadjini

testimony recorded by: **Miroslava Malešević**

(*Didara: The Life Story of a Woman from Prizren,* 2004)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

5. Kaljaja is the ancient Byzantine citadel on the hills above Prizren

6. Kalemegdan is the ancient citadel and largest park of Belgrade which overlooks the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers

Testimony on Kosovo
"The Asylum Seekers"

In the fall of '97, checkpoints sprang up all over the place. Asylum seekers often arrived on special flights. The regular, civil aviation lines used to be on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and sometimes also on Sundays, whereas the planes bringing in asylum seekers usually flew in on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Two or even three planes would land successively. The sight of heavily armed policemen and men in plain clothes coming out of the building for hours, forming a line as it were, after they'd completed the checking and double checking of papers, was spine-chilling. On such occasions, their commander would inevitably be present and a vehicle or a patrol car would be sent out from Prishtine to collect the hand-cuffed asylum seekers who would then be driven off straight to the police headquarters in Prishtine or to jail. Once I saw a hand-cuffed man whose feet were also tied one of top of the other, so that he could barely walk, taking very short steps to the police car which had arrived to collect him, until the policemen pushed him in. Some of those asylum seekers were held in the police station for several hours, some of them emerged from there with visible, fresh bruises on their arms and legs. They would be crying. (...)

February '98

(...) I had left the airport and was heading to Mališevo. At the checkpoint near Glogovac I stopped "obediently" and then I witnessed a gruesome scene. I could not believe my eyes, but then, when I was signaled to move the car forward, I was also able to hear what was being said. I had to conceal my feelings of absolute shock at the scene. Two women and one man, in their fifties, were standing on the edge of the road, in their socks. The contents of their bags had been poured out, half of those things were scattered around on the road and the rest was further away, near a ditch by the road. Their shoes had also been thrown around. The women were shaking with fear and sobbing. The policeman slapped them several times, before my eyes, as if it amused him. He yelled at them and cursed them: "And there is no KLA, huh? Who do you think you can fool? Do you think that we are crazy? How much money did you bring them? To buy weapons and kill us?" (...)

May '98

(...) As I was driving up the road and approaching the highest point, a sight unraveled before my eyes that I thought was going to be the very last thing I would ever see. On the other side of that elevated area, on both sides

of the downhill road, the following scene presented itself: first, I could see appearing the heads of those people, then their shoulders, arms and weapons pointed at me, their trousers and casual, plain shoes on their feet. Even if I had wanted, or been in a position to do anything, I wouldn't have been able to move. Casting a look in the rearview mirror, I spotted similar figures who had probably emerged from the thin woods as soon as I passed by. And even if they had not been there, I would not have been able to escape because of the bad and narrow road. The man next to me also looked scared. Without moving his lips, he whispered to me: "Don't be afraid, we are here."

When we drove down to a flat stretch of the road, a tall, dark-haired young man came out of the bushes – as I recall, he had a neatly trimmed beard. He gave me a sign to stop, which I did, and I rolled down the window. At the same time, another man, whose face I could not see because I did not dare to turn around, approached from the other side and spoke to the passenger in my car in a low voice. The black-bearded man greeted me in Albanian. I felt like a robot, a machine, and not like a human being, at least not completely. Although I performed all the operations mechanically, a thought crossed my mind: "At least I know now how the Albanians must be feeling, or at least how most of them feel, at every checkpoint, at every few kilometers." (…)

End of June '98

(…) I did not feel very comfortable and at ease with the thought that I have to drive a sick woman past so many checkpoints and police patrols. I did not dare to undertake that journey by myself, since I'd been told that she was very ill. Radosav and Vera were away. Their son Dragoslav was the only one free and he agreed to come with me: "I'll go with you. If you are not scared, then I must not be intimidated either."

We found the address we had been given in Prishtine. It's hard for me to describe how I felt when I saw them carrying out Mrs. Karoči. She was on a real stretcher, almost completely covered in plaster casts. I pulled the seat down and moved it forward. We put down some blankets to make room for her to lie down. We took her papers and some water and drove off. Dragan sat next to her head on the back seat, wiping her face with a wet towel from time to time. She was in great pain and cried all the way, although she tried to refrain herself because of us. It was clear that she suffered a lot. Later, I found out that she had bone cancer – I don't know the exact medical term for it – she'd had hip surgery, on the right side I think, and that was why her leg was fully immobilized in a plaster cast; so was her spine, up to her neck. What monster could possibly disturb a woman in such a state – be it a policeman, a one-hundred-percent Serb or a thousand-percent "great Serb"? And who could have prevented me, or scared me off from trying, at least, to step to her side and try to help her? However, driving through the infamous Sredska is no easy task. It was under the direct administration of the worst dredge of humankind, a butcher named Šćekić. They stopped us in Sredska. Until then, we had not had any problems. At every checkpoint,

they had only looked at the papers and the woman in pain and let us go on our way. But, not Šćekić!

"Get out! And you, have you got any papers?" – He screamed at Dragan. Dragan was easily intimidated and it did not take him much to turn pale with fear. "I do," he said, handing him his ID.

"A Serb? Driving a Shiptar woman? Where are your gun and uniform?" He said, and Dragan began staggering.

"Get her out of there, let's see what weapons she's hiding underneath!" I was seething with rage. Although I was aware of the fact that he could do to us whatever he wanted and that I had to control myself and swallow my anger, I could no longer bear it. "No, sir, I cannot possibly move this woman. She is in terrible pain and I cannot torture her additionally, on top of that. There is nothing underneath her except blankets and the seat. It would be a sin to move her. She is just a woman, an elderly, sick woman who has had a serious operation and has just been discharged from hospital."

"And you feel sorry for her? I bet she has given birth to at least five terrorists. Do you want to cry along with her?" – He screamed at me. I believe that the woman in the car heard everything. I was ashamed of that man. "I am already crying," I answered. And I was crying indeed.

(...)

Soon after that ride, I took her son and two daughters to visit her for the weekend and returned them to the airport afterwards. Vera was with me on both occasions. I am not sure how many times I drove them, but in the next month or so I kept driving someone to their house and back. They took it in turns to come and stay with their mother for a few days. Then they called to tell me that she had died. I had to collect her two daughters and her son and daughter-in-law from the airport. There was no room for Vera in the car.

The plane was delayed and I drove as fast as I could so they would be there in time for the funeral, which was scheduled at two p.m. We passed all the checkpoints smoothly, but at Brezovica, we came up against Šćekić. When I saw him, my heart sank. He was wearing a uniform and as soon as he spotted us, he entered the booth and sent out a man in plain clothes to collect our papers – it must have been his assistant or deputy commander. Whenever that man was alone at any of the checkpoints, without Šćekić in his presence or in his vicinity, he would merely inspect the papers, peer into the interior of the car (which was a duty every policeman had to fulfill) and let us proceed on our way undisturbed, with no bad word, offence or threat being uttered. But when his "boss" was there, he only shrugged his shoulders. Either he could not confront him (fearing that he would turn his anger towards him) or else he himself aspired to "be promoted" in his service and could not afford to be reprimanded. So, once again, he collected our passports and took them to Šćekić.

"Do not leave the car, those are Šćekić's orders," he said in a low voice as if feeling uneasy.

"But, sir, do you remember that bedridden woman I transported a moth ago? She was their mother and she has died, the funeral is at two o'clock." His eyes revealed that he understood and that he was embarrassed,

but he still had to take our papers to the booth. Behind me, the three young women were crying. Karoči was also choking with grief, which must have been mixed with humiliation and anger. I was also having a hard time. We waited in the car for more than an hour, under the scorching sun. A lot of vehicles that arrived at the checkpoint later had been checked and let through. I could not tolerate that any longer. It was clear that an insane, armed man was simply torturing us. I hated him. I got out of the car and made my way to the booth. The man in plain clothes looked at me with his eyes wide open, and as soon as I got in, he ran away. Šćekić was drinking something in a can with his feet resting on a coffee table or a chair – I can't remember anymore – comfortably leaning back. The papers were on the table in front of him. I went in and stood before him, next to his boots.

"Sir, give us back our papers, these people have to be there for their mother's funeral."

"Then tell them to line up along the road, over there. And you, too. We'll shoot you all and throw you in the ravine." Another policeman was inside, sitting and roaring with laughter as if he'd heard a good joke. I turned around and headed for the door. (…)

"Where do you think you are going?" He yelled from behind. I stopped short. "Kneel down and beg me to spare their lives," he ordered. The other policeman went serious. Perhaps something had dawned on him, who knows? I stood there for a moment, and dropped to my knees.

(…)

June 15

(…) He got up, walked towards me in a semi-circle, as if he wanted to show me that he was in no hurry, menacingly, then stood before me and slapped me forcefully. Like my father when I was a little girl. It was like being down there in the cellar once again. But this time it was not only me who was locked up, but Kosovo as a whole, all the Kosovo citizens were locked in a cellar. The majority of civilians were shaking with fear, just as I was at that moment. (…)

He slapped me once more. "Who are you working for? Whose spy are you?" "If I knew what it is you'd like to hear, I would say it. I don't work for anyone except for myself and for the community in which I am a tax payer, which also provides you your salary. That is all. You are stronger, you can do what you please, but it is not fair. I want to go home," – that is what I remember saying in between the blows.

He went mad, pulled out his gun, grabbed my face with the other hand and clutched my jaw firmly. The pain was excruciating. He pushed the barrel of his gun into my mouth and I believe that it tasted greasy. I wanted to say: "Stop it, you are hurting me," but I could not utter a word because of his grip. Anyway, it would have been a stupid thing to say, because he wanted to inflict pain on me. I knew that he had no intention of killing me, he would not do it there and mess up the floor, I thought. He just wanted to

humiliate me, to crush me like a worm, to manifest his disdain and to intimidate me. Then he placed his gun in a metal cupboard above my head and slapped me once more. Once again, I could feel warm blood flowing out of my nose and I had another flashback of myself as a little girl with a bleeding nose. I staggered and stepped back toward the cupboard and the wall, but I did not fall. He grabbed my face with his hands and thrust my head angrily against the wall. That was strong, but not too strong, I remember reflecting at that moment. I was sure he could do more and better. And that was supposed to be one of the hero-worshipped Serbs: a Serb policeman of Montenegrin stock! The one who battered women and children on the road. Damn him! I felt weary, exhausted and drained, as if I'd been driving nonstop for thousands of kilometers and had just gotten into bed, my body consumed with fatigue, slipping into an unfamiliar but pleasant void. The taste of metal lingered on and I might have thought that it was the gun barrel, if I'd been able to think at all. He grabbed my arm and pushed me into the hall.

(...)

I recovered enough to be able to drive, although slowly and by concentrating on simple, mechanical actions. My speech, though, has never been the same as before that June 15. There are many names, faces and events stored somewhere at the back of my mind, but I cannot remember them, or my memories of them are blurred and confused so that it sometimes takes me a long time to retrieve and classify them, to realize where they belong. I find it much harder to organize my sentences than ever before. Occasionally, I "get lost" in mid-sentence and I have to concentrate, to make a concerted effort to recapture it and finish it off as I had intended, or at least to make sense. Only people who used to know me before June 15 can see clearly what is left of me after that fatal "encounter" with Šćekić. Every encounter with him erased a part of me; his every look or word, every offence, curse, threat and blow took away part of my health and my life. And all the things he did to my passengers – and not only to them. It was all those people I saw him stop at the checkpoints, those whom I never saw again on my way back, however thoroughly I searched every vehicle with my eyes and scrutinized every passer-by... I grieved for every single person and kept them in my thoughts for a long time.

(...)

March '99

A thorough "spring cleaning" of Kosovo was under way and I will try to describe it the way I saw it and experienced it, from my point of view, and from what others have told me. So it will never happen to anyone again! It was as if all the Serbs had taken to the streets at once, rushing frantically from one shop to another, trying to stock up on some more food and goods that they might need in the long war against the rest of the world that was ahead of them: "We will give them a worse time than Vietnam; we'll all die if that's what it takes, but they will not enslave Serbia. We are the most obstinate people in the world. "Democratic" powers are not prepared to suffer

human losses. How will they account for them to their public and justify the lost lives of their citizens?" – This was not only whispered among many, but threatened publicly. Everyone seemed to be in a peculiar state of feverish euphoria. "They cannot break in across our borders, we shall never let them step into our territory; we'll fight to the last if we have to. Serbia will be with us and if they seize Kosovo, they will also seize Belgrade."

(...)

The first bomb fell that evening. Jadranka jumped to her feet and began screaming. We did not know where exactly it had hit, but judging by the strength of the explosion, it must have been near. The electricity went off and the screaming of women could be heard from outside.

(...)

"My goodness, are they really bombing? They are going to kill us all!" she cried. "No, they won't, don't worry. You have to keep your wits. Who knows how long this war is going to last? You will need your strength to pull through and stay healthy. Let's make a good shelter for ourselves. Come on, pull yourself together, I have experience from being in Bosnia. I visited some people there for a week and during that time I heard so many things about war from those people, and how to protect yourself from the bombs that hit nearby. If it falls too near, it's not that bad, you don't even get to feel it. Have I encouraged you?"

"Now you have frightened me even more. How can you be so composed? I really can't understand you."

"Jadranka, you are forgetting that throughout last year I was fighting a fierce battle for survival. Do you know how much strength and courage it takes to set off to Gjakova and to know in advance that you are bound to drive past a hundred policemen, and that half of them would like to see you dead. Let alone Šćekić.That was real war for me. This is nothing. I don't need any sedatives, trust me."

We moved the bed next to the other wall, which was a more solid partition-wall and, thus, we moved it away from the outer wall. Even if our house was destroyed, that wall would stay there. And if it did crumble, it would mean that the bomb had hit too near and that we probably wouldn't have felt anything. In that case, it wouldn't matter in which corner the bed was.

(...)

Žuja stayed with us for two months and he regularly informed us about the events in the outside world: the movements of the Army and police forces, the targets and what had been hit, about the lines of Albanian refugees leaving the country in the direction of Albania and Macedonia, on taking advantage of those lines as a human shield relocating police and armed forces. He always had his radio with him, so we had the opportunity to hear many things, such as where the planes with their deadly loads had taken off from, what course they were taking and when they were expected to arrive. For several nights, we could hear and see the bombers in the sky above Kosovo and occasionally we also watched the attempts of the Army to hit some of those planes.

(...)

All the civilian facilities were occupied by the Army, the police and reserve troops; everything was packed with armament and ammunition. The technical college, which was fifty meters away, behind my little house, was also packed full of troops and ammunition, and throughout the bombing there was great danger that NATO, in their search for military targets, could locate this place, which for many civilians – Jadranka and myself included – would mean death. (…)

***

I think that what I saw happening around me was actually a small picture of Kosovo in general and I am sure that similar or even worse things happened elsewhere in Kosovo.

A few days after the beginning of the war, while looking through my window, I noticed Dragan, Vera's son, carrying some parcels of food and juice, and going back and forth through the same crossroads, returning with similar parcels more than once. I knew they were plundering some place and I went out on the narrow porch.

"Dragan, what are you doing?" "We are emptying the Shiptar shops before they set fire to them; it would be a pity to let all this stuff burn along with them," he answered, as if what he was doing was perfectly correct.

"Don't do that, Dragan, it is a criminal offence, someone will see you and press charges."

"Who can hold me accountable? The place is full of police and Army troops. They are also helping themselves and picking out the best goods. Everything is legal." (…)

"What are you plundering? Which shop?" "All the Shiptar shops. We have just dealt with the market, *Eni*," he answered. "Why on earth *Eni*? They are such good people there; they helped and respected everybody!" I was struggling to control my fury.

"All the others have already been plundered. The bakery has been set on fire and a couple of shops are going to be burnt. *Eni* is the last one."

"Don't take part in this, Dragan, you will be sorry one day. Don't do it, the security guard of that shop is in the basement. He might still be in there – perhaps he did not dare to come out. Let him go, if you set fire there, he will be burnt alive. Have you people lost your minds, to be burning someone alive? Come to your senses, man, you are no longer a kid. Don't be carried away by evil. Have you all gone mad? Look at you, you were never mean, what's with you?" "Even if he escapes, he will get killed – that is, if they let him go. Vladan is here to, and you know that he is crazy." "You mustn't allow this madness to seize you. Only a very sick person can kill another person with no reason. Who is setting fire? Who decides what is to be burnt?" I asked, exasperated and helpless. "Vladan is much better than me at that. He was in touch with the masked men, and I am only showing them the Shiptar houses and shops. Then, usually three masked policemen or soldiers come, we empty the shop and they set fire to it. As long as there are policemen and soldiers in uniform, they should know why they are setting fire and who is doing it."

It was getting dark. I went outside and climbed the fence. I could hear the fire crackling and see the flames rising up, high, from the exact direction of where *Eni* used to be. It seemed to me that I heard someone screaming, a man's voice, and I burst into tears. I prayed to God that it wasn't true, that the gray-haired man had not been down there – or anyone else. I did not dare cry before those furious, outraged men. I went inside. The next day, I asked Dragan: "What happened to the market?"

"It burnt to the ground. There must have been someone inside. We heard cries for help, but that didn't last long. He was probably choked by the smoke."

(...)

In the yard next to the gate which led onto the street, there were two houses. One was further inside the yard and the other had already been plundered. Everyone living on that street was taking hold of whatever they could grab. This included a regular officer of the Yugoslav Army who lived one street away, but had been informed that looting had started. Even Vera had taken a bathroom water boiler and dragged it home. The above mentioned officer kept running back and forth with a trolley cart in front of everybody, stacking a kitchen sink and kitchen cabinets onto it. He kept "losing them" and fetching them back because there were so many on top of eachother that he had to make several journeys to collect everything he wanted. That scene should have been filmed for posterity: a Serbian Army officer collecting stolen goods scattered in the street! Once emptied, the house was set on fire, but they did not bother to burn it down completely. The neighboring house, however, was burnt to the ground and even further than that, for that matter. It had a basement and everyone knew, as I did, that there were refugees living there. I had noticed that food was being taken in, in rather large quantities and I'd presumed that the members of its relatively small household had "guests" from the threatened villages of Drenica and some others – just like the owners of all Albanian houses that had basements and could offer shelter to their relatives in exile. That house did not get looted, but it was burnt down. I often used to see an elderly woman in that yard and I believe that it was her cries that I heard coming out of the house in flames.

(...)

On the first day after Miki's visit, I could not stop myself from walking down to the end of the street from where I could see the main street leading to the railway station. I wanted to see for myself the lines of those miserable people who were trying to get onto that "salvation train" which, as Miki had told me, was packed full only until it reached the border and then returned empty. I went out and watched. Yes, that was true. Large numbers of people filed from Prishtine in the direction of the railway station. There were women, children and old people among them. I still remember a moving scene I witnessed then: an old man was sitting on a wheelbarrow which was being pushed by a young woman – probably his daughter or daughter-in-law. She did not want to leave him behind and he could not walk. I watched for a few minutes and saw for myself the lines of refugees that

reportedly roamed the outskirts of Kosovo or patiently queued in front of the police headquarters to hand in their papers and leave the country with no proof whatsoever that they were coming out of that country and that it was their country at all. Unlike the majority of my people, I did not believe that those people would never return to their homes.

(...)

Troops, police and civilians kept streaming in. Kosovo Polje was divided into two opposing camps. They watched the lines being formed and their fellow citizens from the bordering area leaving Kosovo in haste. Those who were possessed with hatred and evil – and even worse than that – kept encouraging the others, the more moderate ones who had remained "clean-handed" (but not clean-faced), to depart from Kosovo Polje as fast as they could. As soon as the last plane had disappeared from the sky above the city, the profit-hunters immediately started packing up and pulling out: the stolen goods first, just in case. The officers of the Yugoslav Army were privileged. They easily moved out on trucks that had been put at their disposal; they went, along with their possessions and the possessions of others. Those civilians who had not been lucky enough to get hold of a planting wagon, like Vera, or a tractor, like some luckier ones, implored the truck drivers to move their things. The price was around one thousand Deutschmarks per "round": to the first town in Serbia, but it was increasing each day. That was, of course, for those who were lucky enough to find a truck.

(...)

Darko, Violeta, David and I moved out of Kosovo on June 19, with one of the last Army convoys. I did not want to leave, and yet I had no strength to stay behind. I wondered whether I would have the time to tell the Albanians who were streaming back in: "No, I did not hurt anyone." Would they listen to me at all? Who had listened to the pleas and cries of their civilians? That is why it was better to leave until the heat of the conflict was over, until people had come back to their senses and regained their normal frames of mind.

(...)

We joined the row of military vehicles, like everyone else. We were going in the direction of Kosovska Mitrovica, while, from the opposite direction, Albanians were returning to their country, probably from Montenegro. Ironically, we were leaving with our worthless papers, whereas they were pouring in without any papers at all and no one to seek any proof that they were citizens of Kosovo. It was raining all the way. Was it heaven crying over the loss of human lives and over human destiny? Did it want to wash away the blood from the land of Kosovo?

Svetlana Djordjević

(Testimony on Kosovo, 2003)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Bombs Again

Prishtine, February 5th 1999

Dear women,

Because I ask myself everyday if am going to live until tomorrow, I intend to write a letter to you and to the whole world in order to express my feelings and experiences. Even if it is just my personal experience or feeling, I am afraid that I won't make it until... (I don't even want to say it).

I will start with paranoia. I don't know if it is paranoia or reality. But people who know me well, and know where I go and what I do, know me as a strong, tough and brave girl. They think that I couldn't be afraid of anything or anyone, ever!!!

Well my dear women, I am very afraid now, and you can imagine - in the middle of Prishtine. I am afraid of every unknown man that is getting close to me on the street, I am afraid of cars passing close to me, afraid of unknown people that are coming to the office - I am afraid of many things. I am even afraid in my own house. Everyday that I go to work I think: "What is going to be the next place, the next coffee-shop, who is going to be next victim of a hand grenade?"

I remember distant times when I was a child; I watched the war in the Middle East. I remember the name Beirut, and later, during the eighties and in the beginning of the nineties the name Belfast. I was thinking about what was going on there and how bombs were falling, just like that. I knew nothing about their daily life. Of course, it never occurred to me that Prishtine would become such a place, as it never occurred to anyone from ex-Yugoslavia that a WAR would start in the region.

There was and is a WAR going on HERE.

February 6th, 1999

The night before the last, after working hours, I went out with a friend to talk and have a cup of coffee. Have you ever tried to go out to a cafe, and you keep on watching who was coming in and what he/she had in hand and who stood close to it? That is horrible. We stayed in the cafe from 5.30 to 8.00 p.m, constantly looking at the clock.

We returned home through the city center because that way was better lit. As we approached the crossroads near the student's cantina, close to my part of town, Sunny Hill, I heard a strong detonation. It was 8.20 p.m.

I was speechless. We looked at each other in silence. Looking at each other, we were asking: Could we be the next victims? It was only 100 meters away. My friend, as he works for the OSCE, called the OSCE people immediately. As we approached the place I prayed that it wasn't a child, a woman, a man...

Fortunately there were no casualties. We saw a damaged SERBIAN cafe and the police were already there. We stayed for a short while, until the OSCE people came, and then continued along our way. Our conversation topic changed slightly. Could someone think of something different to talk about?

How long is this going to last and how many more victims will there be?

Valjon told me not to go out the day after because it would be dangerous, an attack on an ALBANIAN cafe was expected.

I felt even worse when I came home. My stomach started hurting from nervousness.

I keep on asking myself HOW MUCH MORE time, suffering and force is needed so that we could survive. MORE, MORE and MORE?

I continuously feel sorry for my youth and energy that I keep spending on such things, and I keep on thinking about how my friends in the USA, Germany, England, and Australia live. I comfort myself with the fact that there are friends living worse than I do, in Kashmir, Rwanda, Palestine...

Another bomb, February 7th 1999

Imagine, yesterday - as I was listening to the news at Mimoza's (my sister's) place, an apple got stuck in my mouth. Another explosion. In the *Ulpiana* part of town, in a shop close to the city market. Three casualties of Albanian ethnicity, among which was a 17 year-old girl.

I am speechless. There won't be anyone going out, definitely. Is that a solution? No.

Every week in Prishtine brings several victims, several damaged cafes and many more people scared and not going out after 6 p.m.

We have to keep on living as if nothing is happening. We know that we have to get up every day, go to work, to school, work, study or sit at home, eat, buy, drink coffee in a rare cafe that works and that is mainly visited by foreigners (the safest up until now), talk to friends, wanting it or not, make plans for the future??? Is there going to be a future?

I know that I lived today, I don't know if am going to live tomorrow.

I keep on remembering Scarlet O'Hara, "I will think about it tomorrow when it comes."

Nora Ahmetaj

(Women for Peace, 1999)

I Am Alive!

People were happy because something was going on, and at the same time, they were scared. However, they were not afraid of NATO, but rather of the police. They all feared that the Serbs would take revenge on them, which turned out to be true. On the very first night of NATO air-strikes, there was a power cut that lasted from 7:30 p.m. until morning, and that was the most horrible thing that night. In the complete black-out, people refrained from lighting candles so that the police would not see that there was someone inside.

We have heard a lot of accounts about the police coming at night and looking for some people, such as the renowned lawyer Bajram Keljmendi, who was among the first ones to be led away. They'd seized the lawyer and his two sons, and the next day the three of them were found dead on the outskirts of Prishtine.

Because of similar stories and rumors about people having been abducted from their homes, mounting fear could be felt in all the households. That was also the case with my family. We got organized and formed night watches so that two or three of us would be on guard, watching the street until the next shift took over.

In the nights to come, the police forces became more and more oppressive toward the Albanian population: they would go into villages, throw people out of their houses, conduct executions, separate men from women and set fire to their houses… That exacerbated fears. We listened to such stories all the time: on one side, there were the Serbian police and paramilitaries engaging in ethnic cleansing hand in hand, and on the other side, Serbian civilians harassed and pillaged the city dwellers. Their main objectives were plunder and intimidation. Presumably, the ultimate objective of those actions was to make the Albanians leave. However, some of us like me and my family, had decided to stay and see what the next day had in stall for us. We were hoping that Milošević was going to accept the peace plan after, say, three days of bombing. That, and also the hope that the situation was going to change, reinforced our decision to stay. On the other hand, the majority of the people thought that Milošević would never surrender and that he would fight to the last.

A new wave of intimidation started in the cities – again with uniformed masked men who would drive cars along the streets, pull up in front of apartment buildings and run away from them before they exploded. That happened in Prishtine two or three times and the people who lived in those

buildings panicked, of course, and momentarily left their dwellings. We were not able to buy any food because the police had shut down the Albanian stores or (which was also frequently the case) their windows had been smashed and all the food had been taken. So the Albanians' shops had suddenly been emptied of food, while the state-owned Serbian shops had suddenly been turned into places where exclusively Serbian civilians were allowed to shop. I did not go shopping, but my sister did… On the first and second day, people went shopping, but then things began to change: discrimination started and she, being Albanian, could not even enter a shop… We started rationing food, eating less and organizing ourselves in different ways – planning our meals carefully, eating leftovers and of course, sharing food with our neighbors. And this went on and on. Thus, because of the shortages of food and other items, people started helping one another out and those who had bigger supply stocks shared them with the others who were not prepared for that kind of situation. We shared both flour and food, but mostly flour, because, all of a sudden, we could no longer buy bread since the bakeries, mostly run by Albanians, had been shut down. Their shops were not only getting closed, but also destroyed and smashed up. However, people were bound by a very strong feeling of solidarity.

When the NATO air strikes began, not only did the electricity go off, but the telephone lines got cut in Prishtine – or in some parts of Prishtine. It was very difficult to communicate with people living on the other side of the city. Then some rumors began spreading – rumors that everyone could hear but no one could check out for themselves because you did not dare to go to the source and find out the truth. On the first or second day of the bombing, people stayed out until midnight, but as the air strikes continued and the drive for revenge and resentment towards the Albanians increased, people decided to stay inside.

I did not go out. I went out a few times during the first, second or third day, but not after that. I was scared and I reckoned it was better for me to stay in. Some communication channels still remained: we were able to watch TV – BBC – when we had electricity and whoever had batteries listened to the radio because if you had batteries, then in the evenings… The strategy of the Serbian state TV was unbelievable: aimed to fuel the animosity of Serbian civilians toward Albanians, not by simply telling them: "Go on a rampage against Albanians", but by presenting various lies on TV, a lot of lies. For example, the story about the *American Informative Center*, whose headquarters were at one end of the city. The police cleared that area before shelling it. A strong explosion was heard and the whole building was then on fire, but the news said that NATO had set that building on fire.

The Serbian propaganda, the way they addressed their people, the messages they kept sending to them were: NATO is attacking civilians, NATO wants to kill the Serbs, NATO is hovering over Serbia because they want to kill civilians…

When did I realize that? My first neighbor was a very poor Serbian

woman who lived with her three sons, and we used to help them – we would give them some money or some food from time to time and we'd always maintained good neighborly relations. So I thought I would pay them a visit and check on them, as I always used to do, every month. I wanted to express my solidarity, even during wartime. However, she was terribly upset while we were talking and she kept saying: "NATO is attacking us and not you, they are against us. All they want is to kill us all!" She believed that story, like all Serbs did, of course, and went on saying: "NATO is attacking us." I tried to explain to her, but she was terribly tense, and when I told her to try to relax, she said: "I'll tell you why I'm upset. The Serbs have told me that I shouldn't be talking to any Albanians." I said: "All right, I am leaving; I have just brought you some money so that you can buy a few things for yourselves, and if you happen to find some cigarettes, I'll give you money to buy some for us, too."

So, all the journalists had been expelled and the telephone lines from Prishtine were partly disconnected. In spite of that, ever since the first night, my feminist friends from Belgrade regularly called me. They called the women in Prishtine as much as they could in order to find out what was going on. And every night that I had a call from Belgrade, we would talk and they would jot down everything I told them and e-mail it further. That network was very powerful, because it was the only independent source giving news of our reality. During those conversations I was also informed, but their support was far more important to me. Every night, Lepa used to tell me: "I love you. I care about you. You must be strong…" Through them, I knew what was happening in Belgrade and how panic-stricken the people were – especially the women – and that they worked round the clock trying to help them out. It must have been on the second or third evening when Lepa said: "I have to call the women's groups in Sarajevo and find out how they coped with that fear in war." This is how our network Sarajevo–Belgrade–Prishtine worked and it was very powerful. Speaking for myself, I can say that I could feel their support and love, and that made me happy but, also, sincerely speaking, worried: what if someone found out what they were doing – they would be in danger. Because anyone who was against the regime was treated as an enemy of the state. They were doing a great deal already just by calling me and asking me how I was. I remember Šešelj saying in his speeches: "Our enemies are America and *Women in Black*." He said that on television, and *Women in Black* is indeed anti-regime oriented, and he insisted on them being our enemy several times. That is why I was worried all the time about what would happen to them.

The situation remained unchanged every night: we would organize guards, continuously watch down the street – we put up curtains and peeped through them… Every night we heard bombs falling very near Prishtine because NATO targeted the places where the army was stationed. Military police began inspecting apartments and throwing people out by force in order to accommodate troops, so the apartment blocks in Prishtine were con-

verted into military shelters because the army troops were not sleeping in their barracks, but in Albanian civilian apartment buildings. They used that strategy in order to hide. They would position their tanks in the schoolyards or in the streets, and hide away their ammunition from NATO planes wherever they could.

Fear was mounting and people were saying: "This part of the city is empty now, because the army is here." Everyone was on the alert, and I cannot describe my feelings in the ten nights we spent waiting for them to come, fearing the moment when that would happen. I never slept longer than two hours, because I couldn’t. I thought that they would be there any minute and I could not calm down and go to sleep because I did not want them to come while I was sleeping, I wanted to be prepared.

It happened on the tenth day. Through a small hole in the curtain we saw three policemen at the end of the street throwing out a family and saying: "Tell all the neighbors that we’ll be back in thirty minutes."

Our neighbor left with his family, the frightened children were crying as they were leaving and saying: "They will be back in thirty minutes, you’d better leave too." We were standing at the window and did not go out, because we had decided to stay until they came. Perhaps they won’t come, we thought. Maybe we reacted that way out of fear, but the whole street had decided to get organized and to leave if they came to chase us away but, if they didn’t, we would stay. We’d agreed to do that.

Two or three hours went by… We thought they might not come after all… But then… Then, the police appeared on our street too, with automatic weapons and masks on their faces. I could see that those who were not wearing masks were terribly young. We waited. Then we heard banging at the door. We decided not to open the door and to let them think we had left. We stood still while one of us was watching them through the window. They could not see him from outside. The police went to the next door, and that was our Serbian neighbor’s apartment. She opened the door smiling, we watched everything – and that Serbian woman, to whom we had always been good neighbors, told the police: "There are people inside."

For me personally, that was the worst moment in the whole situation. Why? – I wondered. I say it was the worst moment because I was so sad that this was happening; we used to be neighbors. The policemen were very angry and shouted at us: "Why didn’t you open the door?" We tried to appease them and said that it had been out of fear and panic, and that we were not aware that they were knocking at our door. Anyway, we were composed and did not resist, and how could we have? If you resisted, they would tell you: "Go inside and we’ll talk later." I don’t know what that meant, whether they killed you or what… Anyway, we did not protest, but we decided to stick together with our neighbors and not to be separated.

As I was walking down the street, I turned back and looked at the house, and that site, which I will never forget, was like in the Second World War movies when the Nazis lead away masses of Jews to the railway station

– it was that picture. We walked together in a line while other lines of people streamed in all the time and the line became longer and longer as we approached the railway station. All the way, the police were watching us to see whether anyone was going to try to escape. While I was walking down the street, I kept looking back at my house to see if anyone was going to move in immediately or if it would happen later. Do you know who went straight into my house? My Serbian neighbors, they went in first. I was terribly grieved; I have no words to express my sorrow.

I felt as if I did not know where I was going, pretending that everything was o.k. and I was just taking a walk, although I had no idea where they were taking us. When some people tried to escape through side streets, we heard shots being fired and I don't know what happened to them. And if you barely turned around to see what had happened, the police would yell: "Don't look!" Or they would shout: "Faster, faster!!!" And fear weighed upon us all the time…

We were worried because of my mother, who could not walk. I saw other old people with blankets on their shoulders, disabled people in wheelchairs, children… It was horrible, all of them were moving in the direction of the railway station. When we arrived, although I'd thought we were many, the masses that we saw there were immense… I'd say there were thousands of people, ten or twenty thousand, I can't say…

It seemed to me that the whole city had gathered there, in that spot, but more and more people were pouring in. We were surrounded by police forces and could not leave. They were not standing near the masses, but they were deployed on top of the neighboring buildings with sniper guns. The area we had been directed to was an open-air space rather than a proper railway station; it was an area where goods are taken down, and we stood there waiting for a train.

It started raining, and we were out in the weather. Everybody was trying to shield themselves from the rain and to protect the women and children and the elderly. Once again, solidarity prevailed in that huge mass of people who were helping one another and saying: "here, take this, I have an umbrella."

The train came in and once again I had that picture of the Nazis and the Jews in front of my face, because the police were pushing the people into the cars – freight carriages that were already packed full, but they kept pushing them anyway. Many families had already been separated there, because of the tumult and the huge crowds.

I forgot to say… while we were waiting, night fell and it got dark in that unlit terrain. Three women gave birth right there! The newborn babies were also carried into those freight cars… Later, we heard stories about old people dying on the train. All that pressure was terrible…

The journey from Prishtine to the border took longer because we were first taken to a place where a Serbian military or paramilitary base was stationed and we were kept there for one hour. We could hear the voices of

drunken Serb policemen all the time, shouting and singing: "We have killed all the Shiptars!" Everybody on that train was terrified. They thought: "This is it… they have brought us here to be killed." People panicked…

Everyone was scared, but my greatest fear was that they were going to take away my brother. People were panic-stricken at the thought that they might separate the men and take them away. The police showed up, not during that stopover, but while we were moving toward the border and they behaved differently with different groups. We were ordered to hand over our money, on the train. We were tired and exhausted and we had no idea where they were taking us, and because of the rumors going around, the panic increased every time the train stopped. We thought they were going to take away the men and leave behind the women and the children.

When we arrived at the border, the train stopped and they made us cross the state border and enter the neutral zone two by two. "Two by two along the railroad tracks, otherwise you'll get killed since the whole area has been mined," the policemen said.

That was the next morning, at sunrise, but it was still dark when we arrived in the neutral zone between Yugoslavia and Macedonia… Thousands of people were sitting in that field.

While we were walking, I thought that it would be easy to enter Macedonia and I began to feel excited because I was finally able to breathe, after all the terror we had gone through. Those were mixed feelings and I was reluctant about whether to rejoice or… Shocked at the sight of those huge masses of people, I forgot about joy and wondered: what in the world is this? That scene frightened me. From the very moment I saw those people, I thought: they are going to leave us here, who knows for how long?
When we arrived in that zone, people were trying to find a place where they could sit down and rest in the open air. It had been raining all the time, not hard, but the grass was wet and we had light clothes on, so if you sat down, you felt even colder and I did not want to sit. We did everything we could to keep our mother warm; with our bodies we protected her against the cold...

I decided to walk around to see what was going on and warm up a bit. I saw weary, tired-out people. As the situation continued, I could see strong people being crushed, like it had all been well-planned – at least I thought so. Everything was clear-cut there, the strategy to break people down: physically, mentally and morally, and I could see that happening – I saw staunch people, both women and men, break down… It was hell… and raining all the time, we could never get dry, sheltering ourselves under plastic tarps all the time to get away from the rain…

I said to myself that I could not simply sit there, and that the least I could do was to talk to people, to show that we cared for one another and that our fellow citizens were capable of mutual support. I began visiting the people who were sitting in small groups, asking them how they were doing, and if they were scared, and then we would engage in a conversation. We greeted and supported one another. We would exchange sentences such as:

"Yes, we are tired and exhausted, but the truth is that we are alive and that they cannot kill all of us…" After all, this is only a temporary situation and we will all go back to our homes, where we were born and where we grew up. The best times for those conversations were the evenings, when people gathered by the warmth of the fire, surrounded by complete darkness and terrible cold. We would sit around the fire in silence. During the day, everyone was running around looking for something, either to find bread or plastic covers, because they had realized that this was going to last and decided to get organized in some way: to protect their children, and so on. That is why those exchanges in the evenings were so special. Then you could spend time with your children, and children…

On the fourth day the sun came out and the children finally emerged from their tents sad, frightened and hungry, and I went up to them and asked: "Which sports do you like?" They answered that they liked basketball, football, etc, but they couldn't play any of these games there, without a ball and a place to play, so I asked them: "And what about gymnastics?" They accepted readily and I also needed to get warm somehow. We did gymnastics, we jogged and engaged in activities that preserved our spirit. A lot of children joined us while their parents watched, smiling. It was so great to see that in spite of having spent four days in mayhem, people were not completely broken-spirited. Their spirit was preserved although they were mentally worn out, but they manifested their resilience. Because, until that day, no humanitarian organization was allowed access to us except for one that distributed bread and milk. However much they might have planned to crush our spirits, it did not work and that became crystal clear on the fourth day. People kept wondering: where is the international community? Why aren't we getting any help?

And the police… I couldn't bear the way they were treating us. We had been driven out forcefully and greeted in the same manner! There was violence everywhere and I asked: "What are you people doing here?" I meant that the Serbian police had expelled us and the Macedonian police did not want us there.

As of the first day, I realized what was happening: those people clearly had no way to get out of that place, because the whole strategy was that people were leaving at the rate of two per day, instead of fifty or a hundred. And when I saw that, I wondered how long it would take for the thousands of people stationed there to leave: two weeks, a month, were they ever going to get out of there? I called humanitarian organizations and told them that we needed help, but they were not allowed to come in. I saw people freezing, and hungry, and children crying, but not even journalists were granted access. It was clear to me right away and it made me terribly angry because they had resorted to air strikes to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, whereas the humanitarian catastrophe was taking place right before my eyes – it was exasperating.

I was so furious I wanted to scream and manifest my anger loudly.

Catching sight of a man with a camera, I ran up to him, shook him by his shoulders and said: "Are you a TV crew? Look what's happening! Where the fuck is NATO? We are having a humanitarian catastrophe here! Where is the international community now???" Of course it wasn't his fault, but I simply had to take it out on someone. He understood my revolt…

Feeling relieved, I went back to my mother and asked her if she was cold. She answered, with her ever-present sense of humor: "What do you think?" Then the TV crew appeared – I wonder how they managed to push through at all, because they had no permission for that but they wanted me to talk. I recounted how we had been expelled from our homes and forced to leave, and how we were confronted by force again when we arrived there…

At that time, I blamed both sides, but my growing concern was that if I was the only person giving a genuine account of what was going on, I could be persecuted. I was worried that I might be putting my life in jeopardy by telling the media the truth.

Then you two arrived, bringing us food, cigarettes, sleeping bags and umbrellas – it was so good just to see you there together. But when you'd left, I realized how tired, worn out and frightened I was – much more than before, and I thought about it: I had been freezing all the time and trying to convey my energy to the people around me… If I could somehow isolate myself somewhere, I might be able to recapture that energy from nature: from the mountains, the trees and the rivers, but I did not have that moment of solitude with so many people swarming around me. I had no privacy and could not regain that energy. On top of that, all the people who needed guidance kept coming up to me and asking me what to do next. On Saturday evening, on the fourth night, I had to admit to myself that I had no more energy to give out and that I was feeling empty and frightened. Since it had finally stopped raining and the night was clear, I was able to get more sleep. Not only had I had something to eat, but I also had a sleeping bag. It was like spending the night in the *Intercontinental* or *Mariot*, like a hotel suite, compared to the previous cold and rainy nights with only one blanket to freeze underneath. The next morning, I walked to the place where I'd been told to wait for the people from the organization who would get me out of there. Starting at five a.m., I walked around and waited until one or two p.m. – I can't remember exactly, and all that time I watched those worn out people.

And they were more and more numerous as the trains kept coming in, and every new group had a new story to tell. Practically all of the groups reported women giving birth and old people dying of exhaustion on the train. And, every time, the police harassed them all over again. In one convoy, for example, police officers walked through with plastic carrier bags, ordering them to throw their identity cards in. They were doing that in order to destroy evidence that those people had been expelled from those areas, in case they returned some day. And while I was waiting, on the fifth day, for some people who were going to help me get out, who were going to give me the badge of their organization, I watched the worn out faces and thought

that what I had suspected since the first day was true. All this had been preconceived: it was a plan to crush people morally and mentally, so that those who managed to get out would never ever think of going back.

Eventually, they arrived. I was given the badge of an aid organization and was supposed to move towards the gate that was controlled by the army and the police… I was nervous the whole time, and I was supposed to speak English and pretend to be a foreigner in front of them. And I kept saying out-loud: "Oh, shit… Look at this… My goodness…", so that the policemen would not realize I was Albanian. And I could not believe my ears when they told me: "It's over, let's get into the car." As soon as I entered the car I started crying, and I cried and cried, and poured out all that I had bottled up. But at the same time I was sad and overwhelmed by mixed feelings. Those were tears of joy because I had gotten out, but, at the same time, I was grieving because of the pain I had gone through and because of the people I had left behind. All of a sudden, in that car, it dawned on me: "I am alive!" That strange mixture of feelings was so powerful that I cried all the way to Skoplje.

Igballa Rogova, 1999, recorded by **Lepa Mladjenović**

(published here for the first time)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

You Will Give Birth to My Son!

On March 27, a few days after the NATO bombardment started, the police set off a car bomb in our neighborhood. The electrical and water services were shut off. These were very tense days. Then on the 30th of March the police surrounded our neighborhood and started evicting people, street by street. There were 20 officers in black uniforms. They took our identification documents, destroyed them, and told us, "Go to Albania!"

We had heard that they were separating men from women at the train station, so we didn't go to there. Instead we went in the other direction, towards the east. That night we slept in the street. We had prepared small packages of belongings and some blankets to carry, but the police did not allow us to carry the blankets. All we had was some bread.

There were nine of us in the family, including my parents and my brother-in-law. On the 1st of April, we passed through some woods and came to a village. We passed through this village at 6:00 a.m. We were lucky because the Serbs did not do anything to us. But 20 minutes later we heard shooting and the village was emptied.

We saw people leaving the village in two queues: one with cars and one on foot. There were only old people, women, and children – no men. We joined the queue, and tried to stay away from the end of it. There were snipers on a hill above us, and we were followed by helicopters. I saw a young woman giving birth. It was awful, because I did not have a chance to help her. There was a truck accident too, and a baby had been killed.

My father was very sick. I persuaded my mother and brother to go on ahead. I stayed behind with my father and we walked very slowly. He was having heart problems. We arrived at a village where we had some relatives. There were already five displaced families, or around 80 people, in this house of four rooms. Most of us couldn't enter the house.

The younger people and some women slept in the house, and the rest of us slept in the woods. We didn't even have plastic sheeting to protect us. For two weeks we slept that way, listening to bombing in the distance. We got very little sleep. There was also very little food. Sometimes we went for 48 hours without bread. What food we had, we gave to the pregnant women and children.

After two weeks, we decided to go back home. We started to head back on April 13. Near Prishtine we were coming down a hill, and we saw some Serbian deserters fighting with the army. This was a battle that went on for five hours. Then we were helped by some people from the KLA They took us, just my family, and brought us to a village. We stayed there until April 18.

On that day we started to go to Prishtine. There was a Serbian offensive taking place near Podujevo. Many people were leaving from that area. We walked with them all day and all night. We tried to leave the queue of people, but the soldiers and police were controlling the march. They were trying to direct us to the east, towards Leskovac. We stayed in the middle of the column. In the front they were checking people's identification documents and taking money from people. They were asking for Deutsch Marks and dollars. They were separating the men and women.

We waited for three hours at a checkpoint to the northeast of Prishtine. A NATO airplane came by at a low altitude. At that time they started beating us with guns to make us go faster. They took several young people and put them in a garage, and we heard shooting. I didn't see what happened, but no one saw those people after that. They do not exist anymore.

A soldier grabbed a young woman by the hair and said, "You will give birth to my son!" She started to scream, and he put his hand on her mouth. I couldn't help her. We were ordered to look down.

We approached a tunnel near Prishtine. I ordered my family to run away, across some railroad tracks. My sister and brother-in-law ran. We got across the tracks, and meanwhile, I heard the police shooting. I don't know whether they were shooting in the air or not. We were able to get away, and we went back to our house.

Different police came back to our house on different occasions. Sometimes they would tell us to leave, and then others would tell us to stay. This kept happening until the middle of May. Then we were all given "green cards", special identification cards for Albanians who had stayed in Prishtine. They were written in Cyrillic only. If we went out to buy bread, we were asked if we had permission to walk on the streets. We felt like we were in a concentration camp, like the Jews during World War II.

It was dangerous to speak Albanian on the streets. I saw a professor of mine, and he had the courage to talk to me. Prices for food were triple for Albanians. You could go outside between 10:00 and 12:00 – if you were out later, you were crazy, stupid. There were 10 checkpoints between our home and the market. The police checked our identification and asked us how much money we had, our profession.

At one point the police came to my house to look for me. I answered the door, and pretended to be my sister. I said, "She's not here." Another time I was stopped on the street, and the police asked me to "come make coffee" for them. I was with my sister, and she started shaking. I started to make jokes, to turn the situation in my favor. The policeman said that he would remember my address and come to my home. But he didn't come.

The worst time of all was when the Russians came into Prishtine just before KFOR[7] got here. It was on a Thursday night. On that Friday and Saturday, the paramilitary units came in and raped, burned, looted, and took

[7]. NATO troops in Kosovo

people's money. They came to my street on June 18 and started burning houses, but they didn't burn my house. They stabbed people and beat old people. One of them was speaking Russian, not Serbian. On Sunday it was quieter. After June 20th it was more normal.

This is a small part of the story. Thank God I was not raped or killed. Being killed is the end of everything, but I would choose that.

Now I am waiting for myself to start forgiving. But I am afraid I will not be able to forget what happened. Sometimes I have nightmares. Now when I wake up, I say to myself that I'm here in my bed, and that I need to go to work tomorrow.

It is hard to continue life here. But it would be harder to start a new life somewhere else.

July 1999

Mihane Nartile Salihu Bala

(On the Record Kosovo, vol. 9 No. 4, 1999)

Notes from the Trip to Macedonia

Feminists visit refugee camps

June 3, 1999

On the road to Skopje, people are standing before the border and waiting to cross. There are 15-20 of them, apparently from the nearby town, maybe from Gnjilane. I wonder when, if ever, Belgrade citizens have seen citizens from Gnjilane? Of Serbian or Albanian nationality? Anyway, I see them now for the first time in my life. They must be Albanians. They are standing in the darkness and waiting to cross the border. On foot. They are silent and I can only hear baby voices. They are silent as if they have never spoken before, and it looks like that suffering goes far beyond those faces waiting there, restlessly patient. Exiles on the border crossing Tabanovci have different status than the bus passengers who have arrived from Belgrade.

I came to see my friends from Prishtine who were driven out of their homes with machine guns and are (for the time being) in Macedonia. I am going to see them, their way of life now. Only a few days earlier, they became refugees. Now they go along strange streets, to rented flats, in another country. Some of their stories of how they managed to get here are already familiar to me.

After '92, the same story was repeated with my friends from ex-Yu (now divided by other front lines): that we long for each other, that wars separate us, that we are eager to reach each other and to embrace in the so-called "third stop countries". We are eager to travel for hours just to see each other. Is this the last war?

Čegrane

Everyone here has heard about the camp "Čegrane" because it is the biggest one. It is near Tetovo, and approximately 43,000 people are currently placed there. It is famous because it is settled in dust and stone, convenient for lizards and snakes. This is a hillside, just near a fertile valley where people live, with lots of trees, water, flowers. But the camp is not in the valley; it starts just on the spot where fertile valley ends and rocky ground starts. On the other side of the valley, on another foothill, a smaller camp, Stenkovec, is situated with 30,000 people. Today about 103,000 Albanians who were expelled from their homes in Kosovo have been placed in refugee camps in Macedonia, while more than 150,000 of them stay in the homes of their relatives or friends.

Čegrane is a small village in the valley, where mostly Albanians live. It's very active now: humanitarian organizations' jeeps, crowds, shops, restaurants crowded with people.

Čegrane camp means thousands and thousands of yellowish white tents. You have to always go uphill til the end. Many of them have already been here for two months. Humanitarian organizations set up water supplies, toilets, schools, a hospital, warehouses, a children's park, food distribution. They still don't have showers, but they have a promise of getting them in June.

When you enter the camp, you only see wires: around the camp and inside the camp. My friends tell me that the wires are here to prevent riots. All of the camps are wire fenced. In most of them, it is a rule that the refugees are not allowed to go out unless they have permission to do that. It is a rule within the territory of Macedonia that refugees are not allowed to travel to other parts of Macedonia more than two times; the third time can be only to leave the country. Besides this, they can't go out and return to Macedonia once they have left. From the Čegrane camp, refugees can go to the nearest village to have a bath, to go to the mosque, or to buy something.

Jeeps drive up and down, and the dust gets into everyone's eyes. There is no shade for shelter. There are lots of children. UNICEF has organized tents for school. Elementary schools have five shifts starting at 8 a.m. and going for two hours. In the tents they have boards and benches. A famous actor from the Prishtine children's theatre *DODONA* once gave a performance (on the rocky ground) in May and 4,500 children watched, applauding and jumping around.

In 1994, the Women's group from Prishtine *Motrat Qiriazi* started its work to support girls in the rural area of Has in Kosova. In May of 1999, they continued this work in Čegrane. Feminists from Prishtine and their friends from England, Sweden and other countries organized a big tent for women only. A group for girls, a group for women, daily meetings of local coordinators, trainings on using video cameras and for amateur photographers, English lessons are held here. Two times a week, here in this tent, hairdressers work. Ten feminists work here every day.

That Saturday when I arrived, I was introduced as "Maria from Italy." This was our joint decision because I was really so close to the trauma myself. We didn't want to expose any girl to unpleasant memories or pain. Last week, when Rada Borić, Neva Tolle and Slavica Kusić (feminists from Zagreb) were in the refugee camps in Albania, some girls had started shivering when they heard Croatian.

In the camp, the girls approached me with only a few Spanish words (since they belong to the post-*Cassandra* [telenovela] generation). In the women's tent, after half an hour, there wasn't any space left. Everything was full: the places around us, space on the floor - 120 girls from different parts of Kosovo. This tent full of girls, lots of them with recently cut hair, lots of them coming to these workshops for more than just a few weeks, some of them here for the first time, incredible energy, no space left. Igballa Rogova,

a feminist from Prishtine who coordinates the group activities, raised the energy even more: "Let's shout: *'Vajzat jan tforta!' – 'GIRLS ARE STRONG!'* once, twice, louder! What a joy in the hills! Are we empowered as girls together with our friends to express ourselves through our own voices?" Then: talks, exchanging information, debates on male violence and some unpleasant situations that could occur in the camp. Then the "role plays" begin: How to defend ourselves from an intrusive man? But this time the male role is performed by feminist Nazlie Bala from the Prishtine Women's group *Elena*. She is so convincing and so likable that, in fact, everything ends in laughter and screaming because everyone likes her way of intrusion. The girls are laughing. It is so hot in the tent. Then they start singing. A song of Drenica and Kosovo is the favorite one. At the end, there is a tape player (with batteries). Dancing begins as Albanian folk music is played. In the middle of the day, in the middle of this tent, with no space to move: these girls. Girls without addresses, whose parents were forced to throw their identity cards into plastic bags in May when they were deported to the border with Serbian police as escorts. Girls who are longing for their homes, girls who were hungry and threatened for days, girls exhausted from being displaced from their lives. Like many other girls from Croatia or Bosnia or Palestine; here they are: they survived and they are dancing.

Lepa Mladjenović

Skopje, June 15, 1999

Yesterday, while I was on my second trip from Belgrade to Skopje, there were many cars fleeing towards Belgrade. On the roofs and trailers: chairs, cabinets, mattresses, carpets from Gnjilane and Prizren. This time, Serbian people are the ones forced to displace their lives. Anti-war activists from ex-Yugoslavia remember a lot of these scenes from back in 1991 with sadness and anger.

(Women for Peace, 1999)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Waiting for Kosovare

With much effort and perseverance derived from genuine concern, the Paris magazine *Transeuropéen* organized a new meeting for women activists from the former Yugoslavia as a follow-up to the conference held in the vicinity of Paris. This time the meeting was in Mavrovo, Macedonia. First of all, if Macedonia succeeds in passing its "final graduation exam" regarding the Albanians, it could become a comfortably decent state and have a pleasant living environment. When we arrived at the *Transeuropéen* conference, we were informed that Valbona Petrovci and Kosovare Kellmendi were among those who could not come. Because the so-called "Kouchner" passport[8] is not valid, they were not allowed to leave Prishtine or Kosovo. That passport is not recognized in any country. However, Kosovare was still to come to the border crossing, to Blace, so that we could see one another. The view of the Šar-planina Mountains from the road matches the beauty of the Alps of Geneva. Except that we are in the Balkans, and we are advancing toward the border-line, toward yet another horrible, newly established frontier, yet another territory created by the savage acts of the Balkan butchers. We are approaching the border crossing of Blace. Blace a year ago: a wasteland; Blace now: the same barren wasteland. Blood, sweat and tears. Owing to our driver's incredible diplomatic skills, Žarana Papić; Gislenne Glasson, the editor-in-chief and manager of *Transeuropéen* and I manage to reach the border crossing without delay. Gislenne, bearer of a French passport, goes to Kosovo, and the two of us stay behind, in the buffer zone, to wait. All of our politicians (who pursue their policies in such a reckless, perpetually counterproductive manner that is so merciless to the population: to civilians, to citizens, to the people; those politicians who deal with politics as geo-strategy) ought to be brought to the border crossings and kept there until they understand. They ought to be made to cross the border on foot, not by car. At Blace, for example: to walk from one border to the other, from one majority group to the other – and they should be stopped there. Because there is no court whatsoever: no Hague Tribunal, no final judgment, like that of the border crossings created by the power hungry inventors of prison states. It is hot now, and we can only imagine the heat of last year. Women and children swarm around, women and children everywhere, so tiny among the exhaust pipes and men of different origins in different uniforms and plain clothes. On

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8. passports issued by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), so named after Bernard Kouchner, the first UN Special Representative and Head of the mission.

the asphalt, they are yearning, yet helpless, to cross the line between life and death. Suddenly, five skinheads in leather uniforms appear on large motorcycles. No movie can compare to what happened to us - the things we had to participate in, or the things we witnessed as spectators. White cars roll on, white cars as a particular chapter of our history and our reality. Cars bearing labels of UNMIK[9], OSCE, KFOR, humanitarian organizations, Danish and Norwegian vehicles, the Red Cross, "Save the Children"... Suddenly, a well-dressed woman passes through with luxurious luggage: large, black suitcases with metal rims and, finally, a big round box, resembling a hat case. God almighty, what a spectacle this is! Bareheaded women, side by side with veiled women, push the children in front of them or drag them behind. There is tumult and vibration everywhere; yes, we are at the end of the world and the world is coming to an end. Seen from here, it is obvious that it will all fall apart, that this long-tortured land will break open. Kosovare, where are you? I grasp the message of *Waiting for Godot* better than ever; this is the most horrific and most powerful performance, the closing scene. Afterwards, we see Kosovare and Gislenne. We talk, we cry, we smoke and we shake. We try to understand what is not to be understood, what *cannot* be understood, yet, what must be experienced, but must not be permitted, and must not be done. Because it is not for humans, when humans start doing these things - and Blace exists - (and not only Blace) then everything is possible. Then there is no God. Kosovare Kellmendi is both courageous and beautiful; she is strong and intelligent, she sustains her father and brother and her own self, bravely. In a few minutes, she will go back to her confinement. To the prison she is unable to leave. And wait for a new law, until doomsday. In Mavrovo, I talk about "how it was". Radojka Tomašević from Split says: "That is nothing. I was near Bihać, in a car, and human arms and legs were just falling over the roof." Is there an end to this outrageous spectacle? It is as if someone conceived a notion to torture all the people in these states that used to be our former country - not altogether, but gradually, by degrees - in the most atrocious manner.

Borka Pavićević

(Women for Peace, 2001)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

[9] United Nations Mission in Kosovo

He Has Diminished the Significance of All the Women in the World

After that, Flora Brovina gave her final word. She addressed the court in the following way: "Your Honor, it is not true that I have taken advantage of *the League of Albanian Women*. I stand before you as a doctor and ask to be judged in this capacity. Abiding by the Hippocratic Oath, I have dedicated my whole life to children, and children do not choose their nationality, nor are they aware of it until their parents tell them about it. I have never categorized my patients, nor divided them according to their parents' nationality, religion or ideological beliefs. I am proud of it and this is what I would also do today. Being a humanist, I am prepared to put my own health at risk in order to help children and women. If I were free, I would still be working and helping the under-privileged. Since nowadays the other side is being threatened, I would try to help them. As a poetess, I tried to be part of the emancipation of Albanian women, to strive for women's rights, to raise their consciousness, to help them fight for their freedom and to understand that there can be no freedom without economic independence. In *the League* I had managed to create the first bridges between women within the country and worldwide.

My closest associates were Serbian women. It was the Serbian women who lent us the strongest support. I may say that the Serbian women identified the problems of the Albanian women best of all. The Albanian women must never forget that. And we cooperated with women from the whole world. (Italy, Sweden, etc.)

I regret to say that the Prosecutor has diminished the role of women in the world, because it is of utmost importance to achieve equality between women and men. I will never give up fighting for women's rights – I will always pursue this idea. As for the accusations ascribed to me by the Prosecutor that I was conspiring to bring about the secession of Kosovo and its unification with Albania, I repeat – my country is where I have friends and where people read my poems. And they are being read here in Serbia as well as in Sweden and India, Brazil, Poland, etc. I could feel at home in any of those countries. My poems are printed in the Encyclopedia of Yugoslav Poets (SFRJ).

Sadly, instead of making strides forward, Kosovo has slipped into a retaliatory atmosphere. Albanians had never behaved like that towards their neighbors, women and children. I regret the fact that I am not free and that I cannot influence this situation in any way, nor extend a helping hand to the displaced persons, together with other women. I believe that they will do

that, as women who appreciate women. And as an intellectual, I think that it is time we did our best to reconcile the Serbs and the Albanians. Other peoples have also had disputes and waged larger scale wars than this one, and they have reconciled. If I had the power, I would do everything to bring about the reconciliation of the Serbian and Albanian peoples."

Flora Brovina

Recorded by **Staša Zajović**,
attending the trial in Niš, 9 Dec. 1999

(Women for Peace, 2001)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Please, Do Not Be Silent any Longer

It has been several days that I have been waiting to hear the Albanian intellectuals raise their voices and publicly condemn the tragic event near Podujevo, but they are still silent.

I wonder whether you have forgotten so quickly the Serbian humanists who were brave enough to publicly condemn the tragedy of your fellow countrymen? Have the names of Nataša Kandić, Sonja Biserko, Vojin Dimitrijević, Nataša Odalović, Ivan Torov, the late Burzan and many others (let those whose names have not been mentioned here forgive me) disappeared from your lives overnight?

Mrs. Brovina: have you forgotten the texts and public appearances of many Serbian intellectuals who wrote about you daily and finally helped you to be released from prison? Yet, you remain silent. Why?

Mr. Rugova: brief, disapproving announcements will not do. But rather a politician's influence which can (to a great extent) prevent what has been going on, condemn it and give it a real name. Do not forget: you came out of the war alive, and yet, you are silent. Why?

And all of you journalists, lawyers, sociologists, actors, humanists; all of you for whom your Serbian friends slid into an abyss on the night of March 24th 1999 in order to save your lives.

You are going to recognize yourselves. If you are still in possession of your souls, I believe that you should feel ashamed.

Do not condemn me, and do not say that the passengers from that bus are to blame. Those were innocent people who were longing for their homes and their hearths. Those were children who are not capable of hatred, who happened to be on the site of that tragic crime, in their parents' laps, and who have, unfortunately, become history.

Therefore, I beg you not to be silent any longer. Do not leave a shameful history behind to your following. Let us be humans...

Aferdita Jakubi

(Women for Peace, 2001)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

"humanitarian" intervention

La vitta e bella

March 26th, 1999, 5 p.m.

I hope we all survive this war and the bombs: the Serbs, the Albanians, the bad and the good guys, those who took up the arms, those who deserted, the Kosovo refugees traveling through the woods and the Belgrade refugees traveling through the streets with their children in their arms looking for non-existent shelters when the alarms go off. I hope that NATO pilots don't leave behind the wives and children whom I saw crying on CNN as their husbands were taking off for military targets in Serbia. I hope we all survive, but that the world as it is does not. I hope we manage to break it down: call it democracy, call it dictatorship. When NATO estimates 20,000 civilian deaths as a low price for peace in Kosovo, or President Clinton says he wants a Europe safe for American schoolgirls, or Serbian president Milutinović says that we will fight to the very last drop of our blood, I always have a feeling they are talking about my blood, not theirs. And they all become not only my enemies, but beasts, werewolves, switching from economic policy and democratic human rights to amounts of blood necessary for it (as fuel).

Today is the second day of aftermath. I went to the green and black markets in my neighborhood. They have livened up again, adapted to new conditions, new necessities: no bread from the state, but a lot of grain on the market, no information from the official TV, but small talk among frightened population about who is winning. Teenagers are betting on the corners: whose planes have been shot down, ours or theirs, who lies best, who hides the best victims, who exposes the best victories, or again victims. As if it were a football game of equals. The city is silent and paralyzed, but still working, rubbish is taken away, we have water, we have electricity... But where are the people? In houses, in beds, in shelters... I hear several personal stories of nervous breakdowns among my friends, male and female. Those who were in a nervous breakdown for the past year, since the war in Kosovo started, who were very few, now feel better: real danger is less frightening than fantasies of danger. I couldn't cope with the invisible war as I can cope with concrete needs: bread, water, medicine... And also, very important: I can see an end. Finally we in Belgrade got what all rest of Yugoslavia has had: war on our territory. I receive 10-20 emails per day from friends or people whom I only met once: they think of us, me and my family and want to give me moral support. I feel like giving them moral support, I need only material support at this moment, my moral is made out of my needs.

People are gathering at homes, to wait for the bombs together: people who hardly know each other, who pretended not to know or who truly didn't know what was going on in Kosovo or that NATO was serious all along. We sit together and share things we have. Solidarity and tenderness brings the best out of Serbian people. There it is: I knew I liked something about my people...

My German friend living in Belgrade phones me, she says, I didn't leave the country, I didn't take out my children, even my newborn grandchildren. I am fed up with everything, I want to lead my personal life. My feminist friend asks me to have a workshop with our group of consciousness raising, my other friend wants us to go to Pančevo, the bombed city at the outskirts of Belgrade, to give a reading of my novel. But there is no petrol, we must buy bicycles.

We phone each other all the time, seeking and giving information: I realized children are best at it, they prefer to be active rather than passive in emergency situations. We grown-ups harass them with our fears and they are too young to lie or construct as grownups do: they deal with facts and news. Mostly we are well informed, with children networks, some foreign satellite programs and local TV stations.

I think of the Albanians in Kosovo, of my friends and their fears, I think they must be worse off than us; fear springs up at that thought, it means that it is not the end yet.

I have no dreams, I sleep heavily afraid to wake up, but happy that there is no true tragedy yet, we are all still alive, looking every second at each other for proof.

And yes, the weather, it is beautiful, we all enjoy and fear it: the better the weather, the heavier the bombings, but the better the weather, probably more precise bombings. I wish I only knew do we need good or bad weather to stay alive?

And finally, I saw Benigni's film "La vita e' bella," the night before the first bombs fell. The next day, it started happening to us too. Maybe I shouldn't have seen it, but now it is too late: and I realize in every war game led by Big Men the safest place is that of a victim.

P.S. At this moment the alarm is interrupting my writing... the alarm is my censor and my timing. I switch on CNN to see why the alarm is in Belgrade, they say they do not know. Local TV will say it after it all is over.

April 6th, 1999

Today is the anniversary of the bombing of Belgrade in 1941 by Hitler. However the major damage to Belgrade happened at the end of the war from the Allied bombing, the so-called liberation or Britain bombs. I know everybody today here will use this parallel to feel better or worse, whatever... I remember an old librarian whose fiancée died in the first bombing of Belgrade; he never married but became a priest. That story impressed

me more than the personal stories of lost lives, furniture and goods I heard from my close family.

I was sitting on the terrace this morning, the sun was bathing me with great love, I was dreaming of the sea and the clear sky of which we spoke last night waiting for air raids on the terrace, while the planes were flying over our heads. And the planes came again. But they didn't bomb Belgrade last night: again other places, other victims. I feel so guilty, more than ever this morning for this Other. My friends and enemies from all over the world ask me, do you realize how terrible it is in Kosovo? I do, I really do, and I feel guilty that we feel bad here without having the horror they do. But our war, for the past 10-50 years has always been this kind of invisible horror, we have still a long way to run to catharsis, to be free from our bad conscience, wrong myths, inertia...

I feel we are being cut away from the rest of the world, more bridges down, more friends and enemies pointing out to us here how bad we are, more crazy people here making careers on screaming how we are heavenly people. And the people? They are in cellars or just in beds waiting for nothing.

I dreamed last night of bombs falling in my cellar, in my bed and afterwards feeling relieved and free. I should stop writing, I hate my dreams, thoughts and words. But it is a vice.

Jasmina Tešanović

(Diary of a Political Idiot, 1999)

Originally written in English

Ljiljana Odanić

My name is Ljiljana Odanić and I am from Novi Sad. I was born in 1968. Nine years ago I had an accident which has left me completely disabled. Both my arms and legs are paralyzed, which will prove to be very important in this story. This also means that I am completely dependent on my parents and on the people around me.

Like everyone else, I did not believe that there was going to be a war, even when on the day when the bombing started, I told my mother that CNN had announced that Novi Sad, Belgrade, Podgorica and Prishtine would be targeted.

At eight o'clock in the evening, the first bomb exploded. However absurd it might sound, I was numb with shock, that is, whatever was left of my senses went numb. Firstly, because I depend on my parents and I had spent all those nine years in my wheelchair together with them, they have always been by my side, sharing all my fears with me. This was a terrible fear and it was probably intensified by the fact that they were not with me. Then my parents, who were at my brother's, called me. I don't know how I survived those twenty minutes until they returned. When they arrived, they did not seem to be that scared although they were probably as scared as they had been all along, for years, but they did not show it: they were strong because of me. We began making a war plan. What did that mean for me? It meant gathering all my medications in one bag, collecting all the documents, money and jewelry – the few things we had in our house – that were the most important. Another big problem that my family had was two elderly grannies. One of them was ninety-two years old and the other was ninety, and it was really absurd to go anywhere with them, trying to find other shelter. The two of them and myself posed a problem. We spent that evening in our apartment waiting to see what would happen and, since I cannot sit for a long time, it must have been around two a.m. when we went to bed. The next evening, I decided to go down to the basement because everybody was talking of going to the air-raid shelter, or to the basement; they were very panicky. So I went down there and, together with the neighbors, I spent a nice evening. We managed to forget about the war for some of the time, but I realized that I could not spend all of the time down there, because of my state of health which was such that I would probably fall ill within a short time. Like most basements, ours is also a very old, dank and terribly cold place. As you know, it all started in March, and I probably wouldn't have endured it for more than a week. So we decided to stay where we were, in

our apartment and to wait. Like everyone else, we thought that the war would be over soon, in five or six days. I can say that the night we spent in the shelter had created a special bond with my neighbors, which was a widespread feeling among the Yugoslavs at that time. We began spending time together and this continued after the war was over. I used to visit my next-door neighbor every evening, where quite a lot of us got together. Luckily, they were all optimistic, their spirits were high and we had some good times together. We laughed and we also feared the sirens sounding the alarm, but we pulled through

The next terrible night was when the Varadin Bridge went down. It is only two hundred meters away from where I live and it was then that I realized how disabled I was. When that bomb slammed down at five o'clock in the morning, everybody jumped out of bed, but I couldn't even sit up in bed. Mum and Dad rushed in and covered me with their bodies. In the morning we talked. I was terrified, but they reassured me that they would never leave me, no matter what, and that I mustn't worry because they would always be there for me. Then the mobilizations started. I was obsessed with the fear that they would mobilize my brother. I'd say that was much worse than the fear of bombs. He is everything to me and he has a little child who means the whole world to me. Also, since I live in the center of the city, it was bad when the Žeželj Bridge got hit, and the oil refinery is quite near, too. There were also some funny moments. Everyone rejoiced when it rained, because we knew there wouldn't be any air strikes then. Absurd as it may sound, that's the way it was.

I know this will sound stupid to healthy people, but there was also something good about the war for me. I made many friends, we spent a lot of time together and we endured collective misery. My personal tragedy had been much greater than the tragedy we experienced as of the moment when we realized what their objectives were and then that there was a 90% chance the civilians would not be targeted. No one could be sure that another tragedy (like the one of Aleksinac) would not be repeated in Novi Sad, but the odds were that we would not be that unlucky, that we were not going to be hit. That is where I regained my optimism. I can say that I was the one who reassured my friends (who have always known me to be very optimistic), and I even spent the morning alerts in the yard with my neighbors, and not upstairs.

The next very important factor was the power cuts. For me, they meant… (As we sit here in my yard and I am giving you this interview, a comet has just crossed the sky. It does not really look like a bomb, but we were scared… it was yellow with a red-and-while tail). Anyway, I was talking about electricity. Electricity is important for everyone, but what does it mean to me? A power cut means I am completely cut off from the rest of the world, and since there is no elevator, I have to stay inside. The heating stops and I have bad circulation. Whenever I lie down, I have to plug in my electric cushion. If I want to have a bath, the bathroom and my room both have two be

heated two hours ahead of time. Therefore, with two old grannies and myself, there was more wartime planning to do…

And also medications… those had been a problem even before the war, but during the war, since we did not know how long it was going to last, obtaining medication from abroad that could not be found in Yugoslavia was a real enterprise.

In the meantime, both the Žeželj Bridge and the Bridge of Liberty were destroyed. A bomb hit the Executive Council building, which is some eighty meters away from here. That day, we had twenty-six phone calls from people enquiring about us. Everybody is very sorry because of the bridges. I cannot say that I am indifferent; having been born and bred in Novi Sad, I have crossed them so many times – especially the Varadin Bridge, which I was really attached to. However, although everybody was grieving for the bridges, what mattered to me most in that war were the young people's lives (for the simple reason that I had spent such a long time in hospital). Between 1990 and 1994, I'd been hospitalized and I'd seen so many young people who'd been wounded. Their numbers were so high. They left hospital not only physically impaired, but also with mental scars. I think that this is the greatest tragedy of this war. We will build new bridges, but these people will never recover. I do not think all this was worth a single human life.

I can say that I have emerged from this war much stronger but also much, much poorer. My "unjustified" optimism, as I call it, has slackened. The strength that I needed to invest in this wretched life has been drained by this damned war. I've been trying to recharge my batteries in this post-war period. I don't know how to do that, because our country is in a chaotic state. My friends are in a chaotic state. We don't know where to go and what to do. Young people are at a loss and pensioners are at a loss about what to do. And what am I to say?

Another interesting thing was… that my mother has a sister living in Switzerland; they used to call us every morning to ask for news. I can say that they had practically given up on us. But by reassuring them, we drew some special energy and strength. My mum spoke as if she was on a picnic. She always pretended that everything was alright with us, but I guess this is the way people react in such situations.

I did not think that I would be able to go over all these things again and talk about war again, after everything that happened.

The luckiest thing during the whole war was that I had this wonderful yard, which is like an oasis, really. It is a nice, quiet, green yard. We used to gather there and it was my own micro-world. Even my girlfriends, my friends and my acquaintances started to visit me there. I have to admit that I was really satisfied because I had discovered that yard, which I had never used before. In some way, that was my war profit. I got to know my neighbors, sunbathed there (which was also a new thing) and my blood count improved; all sorts of things happened there and sometimes we laughed 'til we cried. Anyway, like everybody else, I had my ups and downs. On some

days I thought we were not going to make it: then I was hysterical and bursting into tears, but there were also days when I believed that everything would be over soon and that it could not go on forever because we were stronger than destiny.

During those seventy-eight days, I had a lot of time on my hands to think about myself and what changes that war had brought about in me. I guess it was the fact that for the previous nine years I had been living my life as it was, not stopping to think about my troubles and accepting things as they were. I had never wondered why I was in that wheelchair, but I had accepted that, whereas those two and a half months had made me think about myself, reconsider my situation and understand that things were not as rosy as I'd thought. I have changed a lot. I can't laugh like I used to be able to: I cannot have a good laugh anymore. I am talking about what the war did to me, as a state that forced me to withdraw, to think about ugly things, to speculate about my future, which is not promising. The future of my fellow citizens is not promising.

(Recorded by Women at Work, Novi Sad, July/August 1999;
first time published here)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Agneš

My name is Agneš, I am forty-eight years old and I am an ethnic Hungarian from Vojvodina. There are some key words that are associated with every epoch. They used to be "self-management" and the "delegate system", after that came "transition" and "identity" and now, the trendy word is "multiculturalism". There are two multicultural elements in my story: one is the Chinese horoscope and the other is the Jews' World War II experience. According to the Chinese horoscope, this was supposed to be the best year of my life, after seven long, lean years that had only meant deprivation and had given me so little. So I was secretly and earnestly bracing myself for the grand finale. Firstly, I had received a job offer that I had been expecting for years; secondly, I was finally going to do my specialist studies, which was something I had been waiting for since '93; thirdly, I had managed to get in touch with the main surgeon who was going to operate on my child. All the tests had been completed and the operation was scheduled to be on my daughter's birthday, April 8. That is to say, life was finally moving on. It felt like I was balancing on a rail… the sun glimmered and it was really going to be the year of my life. That was on March 20. Then, all of a sudden, everything crumbled into pieces.

I remember, it was a Wednesday – the very day when the bombing started – my daughter was back from school and we were sitting at home, talking. I could feel something in the air and I knew… My mind was telling me that this was going to be it, but my heart rejected all possibility that it could really happen, and so the two of us went out for a walk. Around six o'clock in the evening, on our way back along Zmaj Jovina Street, in the shop-window of the department store *Progress*, I spotted a pair of shoes I had been dreaming about. I had been looking for elegant shoes for months; shoes are important because you walk through life in them and those shoes were going to play a crucial role in my survival of the war. The city was eerily quiet. The two of us were standing there in the twilight, on the eve of the war, when I caught sight of my dream shoes. Size thirty-six, brown Italian shoes that fit me like Cinderella's, as if they had been tailor-made for me. We went into the empty shop where a transistor radio was on, broadcasting instructions for citizens in case of an air-raid. While all the instructions about the different kinds of alert were being explained, I was trying out shoes in the empty shops, the best and most beautiful shoes I had ever tried on in my life! And I knew – once the war was over, if I survived and if they were still there, I was going to buy them. The salesgirls from the beauty products

department fiddled around idly and when it had become clear that the bombing was about to start any time, two young girls opened some perfume samples and started decking themselves out. The situation was preposterous: I was trying on the shoes, while those young girls…

That was a survival technique, actually. It meant turning hell into a celebration. Instead of going back home and being there alone, the two of us went to my friend's who has four children. Somehow, it was safer that way, being with somebody, when it had become obvious that it was going to happen. Since she was a refugee from Rijeka and speaks good Italian, she was watching an Italian channel and the news was already running on the coverage banner that the bombers had taken off from the Aviano airbase – while five children and the two of us, perched on the fourth floor at the top of the building, were waiting for the bombing to start, and it was clear that our future had ended at that moment. It was for real – we were there, expecting airplanes to arrive, and indeed, the first bomb exploded and we stared at each other, with tearful eyes, in front of the children and… what I felt was simply sadness that my life had ended, that I was in my late forties and my career had been interrupted, my future was uncertain and my life had actually stopped. I was not afraid during the air raids: I worked, sat and wrote and waited for the bombing to be over, I looked after my family and deplored the losses, but I did not fear death, or getting killed.

The second element of my multiculturalism is my Jewish connection. Specifically, for a long time, we used to be tenants in Jewish houses and we had Jewish landladies who had survived the Novi Sad raid[1]. Some had already been stripped to their underwear and lined up before the firing squad when the raid had ended and one of them had been in Auschwitz. Anyway, they were all survivors whose lives had been completely changed at an early age after such experiences. They told me that all the women who were pessimistic had ended up in a western country, in America, whereas the optimistic ones had been sent to Auschwitz, because they thought: now that The Great War is over, humanity can't be so foolish as to start another war. When I listened to those stories, I thought: how did they not have the impulse, how did they not see what was coming? Because from our perspective, their fates seemed so obvious.

The first bomb fell on a Wednesday, and the next Friday morning the Jewish Community had organized busses for the transport of children. All those who wanted to leave were taken to Budapest and, from there, they were transferred to Israel. Actually, the Jewish children were. The busses transported children of all nationalities, but those who proceeded to Israel were selected on religious grounds. Now, bearing in mind that the Jewish people have a genetic (as it were) or, rather, a historically acquired wisdom, and if they had moved out within three days, then it must have been a sig-

[1.] The 1942 raid included the mass murder of 3,808 Serb and Jewish civilians in and around Novi Sad. After being killed, many of the civilians were thrown into the frozen Danube River.

nal that things were serious and that it was time to act upon that impulse. In that way, the stories I had been listening to had now become my story. Secondly, the city was a spooky, deserted place, as if everyone had left. For days after, I simply did not come across a familiar face, and after forty days of bombing, when all the bridges had gone down and after I had witnessed all that, we packed two bags, collected our papers and made towards the border. I have some relatives in Hungary, I can speak the language – which, again, is not quite the same language, although we all speak Hungarian and the way I speak it does not betray me as a foreigner – but still, it is a completely different country and a different culture. The fact that I could speak the language might have made it even more difficult for me to fit in. Then the two of us began our life in exile. Our relatives could not accommodate us: they treated us decently, but had no means to help us. All we had was one room and nothing else, no meals, and when I realized how quickly our money was dwindling, I panicked. Our relatives let us have the room, but they did not say how long we would be able to use it – probably out of fear that we would become a burden to them. And I can really understand this, because no one needs that kind of obligation. However, those very same relatives used to come to Yugoslavia to spend their holidays or go shopping here, and they were genuinely treated as relatives. When the tables turned, it was a different story. We were invited to Sunday dinner once, on the day when we arrived. Being photographers by profession, they made a group portrait with the refugees and that's where the story ends. They did not even give us a phone call to check on how we had settled in. I did not need financial support; I needed a job. I am not afraid of work and I can do manual work and all sorts of jobs, but our daily existence was terribly difficult – we were in a strange place with no one to talk to and I often walked the streets crying. The city is beautiful, the city where I once enjoyed myself when I earned a salary, which I did not mind spending in three days there. But now I was scared, I was simply chilled to the bone. I had never felt so frightened, helpless and frustrated in my life. My daughter could not get used to the new school. Everybody was polite to her, but it wasn't her environment. She missed her friends and was terribly homesick. She was losing weight. We kept watching the news. She was terribly worried about everyone she had left behind in Novi Sad. What I have learned from experience is that families should not be separated in situations of crisis and that it would have been much better for both her and me and for my family if we had stayed there, because the separation only made things worse.

I had feared an overland invasion and that was the main driving force for me. There were speculations that the Kosovo scenario was going to be repeated in Vojvodina and I had simply gone on a reconnaissance mission to secure a retreat for us and the family so that we could survive if, God forbid, something happened there. After our Hungarian relatives treated us like they did, and since it was supposed to be my good year, the Chinese horoscope had to come into this story at some point. When I was in primary

school, I had a pen-pal. We had spent some time together in Pécs, and I still remembered the address where we had stayed. And from that bottomless, sunless pit that we were in, with nowhere to go, I found that number in the telephone directory and dialed it. Fortunately, they were alive and kicking, although they were in their eighties. My pen-friend was just then visiting them and she got on the first bus and came to see us. Then she remembered her life story and said: "When I was there in ’66, when Hungary was a poor country and we had never seen the sea, you invited us to spend the summer holidays with you."

My parents were teachers and they took schoolchildren to Kašteli in Dalmatia for holidays. "You took us along, free of charge," she said, "and that was my nicest childhood experience, one that I will never forget. My house is at your disposal and my parents would share their last bowl of soup with you." And she said: "You are more than welcome and don’t worry: I will take care of you and your child and your parents."

That was a great comfort to me. I began looking for a job, but unemployment is also very high there and it is very hard to find any work, especially without papers. The only wise piece of advice I got was to look for work where I would find it. What was that supposed to mean? Well, I had set out looking for work as a maid, or as a toilet cleaner, I could do some ironing or work for small businesses producing plastic carrier bags – but that was not going to work. Secondly, as my daughter’s health had quickly deteriorated, I called the doctor and he said that she needed to have an operation urgently. How could I organize that in a foreign country, in a strange city where I did not even know where the hospital was? I was completely broke because we had spent all my savings and what I earned was just for bare necessities. How was I going to cope? Once again, horoscopes enter the story: I walk down the street, tears rolling down my cheeks and I run into this woman who asks me why I am crying. In a deserted street! No one had come up to me since we emigrated. And I tell her briefly that I have a sick child and that I don’t know what to do next. She tells me: "No problem, my friend is an anesthesiologist at the Children’s Hospital." She gave me her telephone number and promised to put us in touch. The next day, her friend saw us – she has the same name as my daughter and it was love at first sight – and she said: "This requires an urgent operation, let’s have some x-rays."

So we had the x-rays taken and a doctor came in. A doctor who, being a surgeon, had dropped in by sheer chance and he asked: "What’s this?" Out of professional curiosity, he then asked: "Whose leg is that?" I said it was ours. And he answered that he would like to operate on it. He said that he could schedule the operation in August – and it was May. How could we possibly plan anything so far ahead, what would have become of us by then? I said I wouldn’t mind if it was tomorrow, but… And he says, "Great, someone has cancelled, we’ve got the operating room at ten."

She had her operation within a day and it was successful. We did not have to pay anything; everything was done free of charge and with the

utmost kindness and care. I was being fed and allowed to stay in the hospital all day long. They watched TV with us to see what targets had been hit. I told them my war experiences. They had no idea what it was like in real life… Actually, those Hungarians had guilty feelings because Tasar, where the airplanes took off from, is very near Pécs. The whole hospital expressed their solidarity with us and that was a beautiful humane story with so much warmth that we experienced the operation and the whole situation as a wonderful gift and a special occasion. We are still in touch with the patients who were there at the time… and we have become part of a family we had never belonged to before. So to speak, while one door was being shut on one side, on the other side… such unbelievable friendships were created… the lesson to be learnt is that one good deed deserves another. Ever since, whenever I have the chance to do something good, I do it. When I see a beggar, I give what I can, and with my soul and my words, I will try to pay off, for the rest of my life, the kindness of those people who did so much…

When we returned home, I decided we were never going to leave this place again. And when I went downtown, I walked straight to the shoe shop. Those shoes were still there and I bought them in three monthly installments. Now I look at them in my closet and, although I will probably never wear them, they are here and I hope that they will take me to the right destination.

(Recorded by Women at Work, Novi Sad, July /August 1999; first time published here)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

War Workshops

Bobana from Belgrade

When the war started we from the Autonomous Women Center managed to organize ourselves in order to back up women in the entire Yugoslavia, as much as we could. The first thing we did, and which also helped us to escape the general state of panic, was to continuously make phone calls throughout Serbia and support women who were afraid and to talk with them about the situation in their towns. I am glad we were able to telephone our friends in Prishtine every day as many times as telephone lines permitted. When I heard their voices, from somewhere down below, and when I talked to Igbala, when I heard her voice, at that moment, the war in Belgrade seemed to me to be somehow small. All that bombing made my fear disappear, in a way. I was aware, at every moment, how much more difficult it was down there. You see all that on TV, you watch CNN, BBC, you see the flow of refugees, they keep telling you about it, but it cannot compare with the feeling when you hear someone who is alive, someone you like very much, and who is talking to you out of some dark comer, telling you that the curtains are drawn, that she cannot speak aloud, and that she is afraid the police will barge in; it is something you have to experience personally. When I tried to put myself in the position, as hard as it was, of an Albanian woman, who was bombed, too, and who was waiting in the corner of her room for a gang of soldiers to break inside and do to her whatever they chose, this image caused my greatest fear. Another thing that hurt me in Belgrade was our inability to speak. At one point, when the police went to Nataša Kandić's place, we got scared that they would come to our office as well. Then we learned by heart all the telephone numbers; the name of Prishtine was not to be seen anywhere, for our sake as well as for theirs. The hardest thing for me was when I had to remove from our notice board at the Centre a large piece of paper entitled "Let's learn Albanian" where our Albanian friends, who came to see us, wrote different words in their language, like "feminist" or others. At that moment, I felt the whole world was crumbling before my eyes. I felt as if we would stay forever in this fascist regime. You were not allowed to say anything, you wrote encoded e-mails, you did everything in codes, and you spoke on the telephone in codes. It was terrible. Then, I suddenly flipped out and said to myself that I couldn't do it any longer; so I wrote to all my friends in Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia everything that was on my mind and the consequence was that I was disconnected from the Internet. The only thing that made me happy during that period, as far as I remember, was the news that some of those women had managed to get out of Kosovo. The fact that they were saved was the most important thing. Well, that's how I experienced the war.

Ada from Novi Pazar

There was an eerie silence at school. The children who could be terribly noisy were very silent and scared that day. I came into the class and told them that I would be talking about a cheerful thing, about love. They listened to me for about five minutes, because they respected me, because they were scared, and then a boy told me: "Teacher, I am only 16, and I haven't experienced anything." After that, a girl asked if she could sing. The class lasted incredibly long, it seemed, for hours. The duration of classes was not shortened, although the state of emergency was declared. While the girl was singing with a pleasant voice, I turned to the blackboard to hide my tears from them. The children asked me if they would bomb us, and if the school had a cellar. I insisted that there was a shelter, although I knew there was none and that there was no place for the children to hide if something happened that afternoon. I thought that I would not teach those children anymore and that we would never talk about love again. This agony had lasted for me since 1990, but the agony since March 24 has been going on. We watched the exodus of the Albanians, and it moved me deeply on personal level. I had to be on duty at school, we spent about six hours on duty; there was a total blackout in the town. There was a general feeling of distrust, because I lived in the ethnically mixed environment, and the majority of people feared of another Srebrenica, or another Peć, Goražde, or Foča... On May 31, a civilian building was bombed and there were many casualties. Some reports quoted the number of 13 and others 23 people killed. On that occasion, there were no Muslim casualties; all of them were orthodox Serbs. So the rumor spread that the Muslims had been forewarned, that there had been a locator on the roof of the destroyed building, that someone from the Muslim community had informed NATO through the Internet, and that it had been the reason why all the Muslims had moved out of that building and its neighborhood. That, of course, was not true. There was another rumor that the pilot of the plane who did the actual bombing was a Turk. As if they wanted me, by chance or on purpose, to feel guilty because I was hungry that day, because we had been moved out and we had to live at my aunt's place. When I went to see my flat, later, I found it totally destroyed. They asked me in town if it was true that a piece of my furniture had killed some woman.

Vera from Vrnjačka Banja

I have expressed my opinion at all times, and I did so when they killed Slavko Ćuruvija as well, only my opinon did not matter that much. I follow the footsteps of a young friend of mine, a literature professor form Niš, who says: I lock myself up in my room and I bellow: I AM AGAINST and I reckon that my voice will join a chorus that will make things change for the better eventually. So, I yell all the time. We are in great trouble. We don’t have to appear on television: they asked me on television why we did not appear on our good local television more often… that’s our advantage over Belgrade. I replied that I seized every opportunity, every family patron saint

celebration, every gathering or festive occasion and every funeral to express my opinion. I talked young men out of reporting to the Army upon summons and the fact is that 23,000 Serbian young men did not report – they can't arrest them all because they don't have that many prisons. And all the young reserve troopers I spoke to after they returned were horrified. These embittered people of ours have got hidden potential. I cherish that hope. Here is what I did: let each one of you be spared from being the mother of an only son who did his military service in Sarajevo when the war broke out, and who was under a constant threat of being summoned for a military drill, i.e. for Slobodan Milošević's private war. The first time he came, when the man delivering summons entered our yard, I threatened him with a rifle. I do not recommend this to anyone, but I said: "I've got an arsenal of arms in my house and you are the first I can kill. I cannot reach Slobodan Milošević, but don't you dare step into this yard ever again!" Whether it was accidental or not, he never showed up again.

Nada from Podgorica

During the NATO bombing, a military barrack was hit and one soldier was killed. The interesting thing was that all the barracks were empty. The death of this soldier hurt me very much. What was he doing there alone, anyway? That is what I said on Gorica radio-station, that the first casualty of war was a soldier, and I asked where their officers were. I talked on the radio at 2 p.m. that day, and the next morning at 5 a.m. military police arrived, the four of them, heavily armed. I had asked my son the other day to go and spend the night at the premises of the SOS Hot Line. He didn't follow my advice, and he remained in our flat. He had a medical certificate that released him from doing his military service, and he believed they would not come to look for him. However, they came at five in the morning. I didn't want to open the door but they kept on banging so hard that my son got angry and opened the door. They came in with their guns pointed at us. When I asked them to hang on a minute so that I could show them the medical certificate in question, they didn't even want to look at it. Instead, they told me: "Well, since you are a sectarian from a non-governmental organization, we will now arrest your kid." I showed them the soldier's identity card that belonged to my son as well as his medical certificate, but they were adamant, with their hands on their guns: either he went with them or he went to prison. My son went with them. After five or six hours had passed and he didn't come home, I went to see his father, my ex-husband, who is a member of the armed forces. His father told me that our son was "where he was supposed to be, in an anti-aircraft unit on the way to Sjenica". Then I went to the Government of Montenegro headquarters, since the state of emergency and not the state of war had been declared, asking them to give me a warrant that we were not in the state of war and to return my son to me. However, nobody would listen to me. All of my neighbors knew that I was against my son's going to the army and since some thought he was supposed to go, they shelled my

balcony with eggs and stones. While my son was in the army, half of my neighbors isolated themselves from me. I was passing through the worst of traumas. Even my brother severely criticized me, saying that I was damaging my son's reputation by begging for his return and that I should be proud of his being there.

Nora from Prishtine

I can say that, unlike all the Albanians who were faced with fear and threats by the police, I was against the bombing. Somehow, I am as angry with the international community as with Milošević.

Before the beginning of the bombing campaign, while the talks in Rambouillet went on, the situation in Prishtine got considerably worse. This fact we didn't feel until then, especially when we compared our situation in the capital with the one in other parts of Kosovo. The bombs started to fall down and people began to shut themselves inside. Every evening somebody got killed. The explosive devices were thrown at both Serbian and Albanian cafes and shops. I felt as if I was in Beirut or somewhere in Northern Ireland. Many had hoped, and now I speak as an Albanian, that some peaceful solution for Kosovo would be found in Rambouillet. However, it turned out that nothing was agreed on, that Milošević was again playing some dirty game of his. The Albanian people who were so disappointed, desperately asked NATO to start the bombing. The Albanian people did not see any other way for their salvation. However, nobody believed that the bombing would really take place. We thought that it would be the same as it was in October, that public opinion was getting ready, that pressure would be exerted on Milošević, and that everything would be postponed until some new negotiations. The main thing was to listen to the news and mostly international electronic media. Everything else was secondary. Only the news, nothing but the news was important. As the negotiations were not fruitful, on March 24, the bombing started. As soon as my colleagues in the office and I heard that the planes had taken off from Scotland, we felt that some kind of storm was on its way, and that something bad would happen. My colleagues went home. One of my co-workers Ariana and I stayed until 3 p.m. in the office. Our office was opposite the police station and we expected that we would be blocked or that someone would throw a bomb at us. I simply could not leave the office. Telephone lines were out of order. I served as the contact in the field. I felt powerless. Now it was not me who was supposed to help someone. I felt I needed support and help. I got scared and I called my best friend Hana, and we had a walk together. That was the last time I saw her before the war. We saw that people were buying what they could in the shops, because they knew they would have to lock themselves in their houses soon. We saw tanks at different crossroads in town. I got so nervous that I didn't know what to do in broad daylight. Should I lock myself in? In my opinion, it was abnormal. I couldn't lock myself in, and wait to see what would happen.

Then we heard the sirens announcing the attack from the air: we

locked ourselves in our houses. About six o' clock in the evening there was a power cut. It was incredible that the whole town was left without a single light, without a single voice; it seemed to me that even the animals disappeared, for nothing could be seen or heard. The only thing that made me happy in the general darkness was the fact that the telephone lines were reestablished. My only comfort was my friends in and out of Prishtine, and in Belgrade, with whom I kept in touch. It was only during the night, as the military targets were bombed, that the town was "lighted". We all wondered if it was possible that there were so many military targets and weaponry around Prishtine that we had no idea about. The police actions began during that first night of bombardment. In some other towns, there were paramilitary units, but in Prishtine, they were the police units; what kind of police they were, I don't know. They killed the best Albanian lawyer along with his two sons.

That's why I was against the bombing. I knew we wouldn't get away with it easily. I knew the way the police operated in the field, that the same police was in Prishtine, and that there was no reason for them to act differently towards the town dwellers. The freedom of movement did not exist. Between 10 and 12 a.m., people moved only in their neighborhood, so we did not know what was happening in other parts of Prishtine. Then other towns began to burn. Gjakova/Djakovica was first on the list. It was an almost entirely ethnically cleaned from Albanian citizens. Then there was the killing of civilians in the area of Drenica, in Mitrovica, in the part of Dukagjini/Metohija where the fighting between the UCK/KLA and the police was taking place. Communication was possible only in the area about 100, 200, or 300 meters around the house. The Albanians rarely dared to go to the town center, because nobody could be sure that he or she would come back unhurt or alive. The worst things happened during the nights. We horrified waited for the police or the paramilitary forces who committed the worst crimes in Kosovo to come and do the same to us. That night I was at home with my brother and our parents. There were moments when I, the antimilitarist, asked my father: "Why didn't you buy some kind of weapon? How are we going to defend ourselves?" What made that week in Prishtine easier for me were the frequent phone calls from different people not only from Prishtine, but most of all from Belgrade and from abroad. I cannot explain why, but the support I got from my friends in Belgrade was the most important for me. If nobody telephoned me during the day, I would be very angry. Those telephone calls meant so much not only to me but to my family as well.

Four or five days later I decided I could not stay in Prishtine any longer, because I was not able to do anything there and I didn't feel like dying. I said I wanted to work, to help people who were leaving the country, and not to be the refugee myself and ask other people to help me. Of course, I knew I wouldn't go anywhere else except to Belgrade. I didn't want to be humiliated on the border by the Macedonians, as was the case with some Albanian refugees who were kept in the mud for a week. I managed to go to Belgrade, because my director came and took me there with her. Otherwise, I don't think I would have been able to get out of Kosovo. I stayed in Belgrade

for two or three days, and then I went to Montenegro to work with the refugees there. I slept at different houses where I had to learn their rules, but I said that I would never feel as a victim myself, that I would work hard in order to get back to Kosovo, which in the end I did.

After the end of my research in Montenegro, I returned to Belgrade where I stayed ten days. It was there that I was faced with the consequences of the NATO bombing. It was there that I had completely forgotten that I was Albanian. I was with friends who needed my support. I saw that the NATO bombing destroyed civilian targets causing the suffering of civilians, women, children and innocent people. I didn't know what angered me more: the tragedy of my own people, the tragedy of the innocent people in Belgrade or the total destruction of one country, and so many of its bridges.

The situation in Belgrade was getting worse so I decided to leave. I had to go back to Albania and Macedonia to work with the refugees. I needed their information about the situation in Kosovo. I spent most of the time with refugees in the north of Albania, in Kukes. Quite accidentally, I got back to Kosovo with the KFOR forces after the peace agreement was signed. I felt so good coming back to Kosovo three months later. I was happy to return to the country I love, to the most beautiful town, but at the same time it made me angry that I had to come back with such a big army, the army I hate, and which is for me the occupational force. The worst thing was when I saw the lines of local Serbs getting ready to leave the town with the Yugoslav army. The Serbs were leaving Prizren, the most beautiful and a multi-ethnic town. I talked to those Serbs, telling them that I had been a refugee for three months. I knew how it was to be expelled from your country and how it felt to leave your house, but I told them they had to stay, like my parents had stayed at their own risk. Serbs, Montenegrins, and Romas told me they were afraid of Albanian revenge. Probably among them, some had committed crimes, and they were terribly afraid of the UCK. On my arrival in Prishtine, I was faced with another disappointment. I couldn't recognize my own town. There were some strange people there, absolutely unknown to me.

People from some other parts came to power, people who had allegedly fought in the war and brought the victory, although it was not so. Those people abused the name of the UCK/KLA, robbed other people, burned people's houses and made people leave their homes. They avenged badly by killing some Albanians as allegedly collaborators of Serbian regime and by expelling thousands of Serbs and Montenegrins from their homes in Kosovo. Since it's the duty of KFOR and the UN to keep the peace and stability in Kosovo, I wonder whether they do not want to do it or they cannot do it. Someone must bring peace to Kosovo, but I don't know who can do it. I wonder what will happen with the multi-ethnic Kosovo. Will it remain a dead letter?

1999/Ulcinj

(Women for Peace, 1999)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

crossing the lines

Crossing the Lines

Crossing the lines
    out of lines
Means different colours
    sounds
    ways
Crossing the days
    the thoughts
souls
Crossing every time
    every day
Crossing together
    the senseless war
Crossing history
So
They put the lines

Words of women's future
Remind us
Remembering life in peace
Crossing the south and the north
    the east and the west
Balkan
We walk across the earth
    out of lines
When we see each other
We know
We are together
When we think of each other
Miles far from
    together
Remembering our dreams and goals
The wholeness
Despite lines and sides
    senseless war
We are not alone
Imagine
    out of lines.

Biljana Kašić
(Women for Peace, 1994)

Originally written in English

(The poem was written during the watch in Anti-war campaign in Zagreb. Peace activists worldwide adopted the poem as a motto for the marking of March 8, 1994. Biljana was thinking of us while she was writing it. We are thinking of Biljana and our friends from Zagreb by publishing it. – *Feminist notebooks 1/1994*)

Iren Meier

The words enshrouded sheer horror.

It was a newspaper page like any other: a large headline, five columns, a picture, a caption, words, syllables, letters, punctuation. Nothing disturbing. Another article to skim, leafing through the papers. As I turned the page, four lines in the middle of the text suddenly stood out, growing in size as if under a magnifying glass, dragging the meaning back into my brain: "All the women and girls were being raped night and day by various men. On the bare ground, against the wall, vaginally, anally and orally. At times, by several men at the same time."

Look away, just look away! But, when I looked back, those sentences were still there, they had not disappeared or perished with shame, nor faded with horror. No, they were as direct as before. And thousands of others next to them. Those sentences were fraught with atrocities.

The atrocities experienced by seventeen-year-old Marijana, pregnant after being raped hundreds of times. Atrocities experienced by forty-year-old Besima, who was raped for nights on end by her former neighbors. And twelve-year-old Fatima, who was raped in front of her mother.

This is still going on. Why is there no reaction? Why is it that nothing is being done to stop it? Why doesn't the newspaper page turn blood-red like the blood of those women? – But no, the paper remains white and dry and the print color remains black. The unspeakable has been said, written down and printed. And it has been read. Pictures could appear out of fear, in defense. The blood-stained bodies of Marijana, Besima and Fatima could leave an imprint on the mind. This has already happened. To read something like that and to fail to see is simply not possible. It is also unbearable. Because they are no longer Fatima, Besima and Marijana, but MYSELF. What if I were in their place… that's the point where I stop thinking. For, if I continued, it would have repercussions: finishing that thought would mean screaming. And screaming out loud – screaming out of my deeply wounded soul, screaming because of my HUMAN dignity.

A gulf yawns blackly open. All gulfs open up in war. The act of love turns into an act of hatred. It turns into the betrayal of the woman and into the betrayal of humanity. Into all-out violence that destroys everything: bodies, souls and lives. Into the most profound humiliation conceivable – which is conceivable and possible only out of a most abominable hatred or the need for retribution and intoxication by violence and drugs. Or else losing touch with oneself. Only a person who no longer feels like a person can do such a thing to another human being. This is what happens in war. In any war.

In all wars, atrocities stifle the victims' scream for help. Therefore, those who are in a position to scream ought to do so as loudly as they can.

(text read by **Iren Meier**, reporter on DRS Radio in Prague, December 10, 1992)

(Anti-war SOS Bulletin, 1993)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Silence*

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All of those who investigated the war rapes in Bosnia have noted that the silence of the victims was the biggest, and often invisible, obstacle to discovering the truth. My own experience confirms this. The silence of the victims during my investigation was also my adversary. Very often I felt as if I were standing in front of a wall, yet it was human beings, not bricks, that were in front of me. Human beings who were unhappy, shamed, humiliated and lost. Many of the victims had experienced horrible torture in camps and prisons for months on end. Many of them had lost their children, husbands and parents. Behind the majority of them remained the burned out shells of their destroyed homes. I understood their silence.

My other adversary was my own emotions. I overrated myself, thinking that the immense suffering, helplessness and invisibility of the victims would not shake me. The hardest were my contacts with raped children. Some of them do not even today know the word for "it" and what happened to them. But a grey-haired 8-year-old girl or a suddenly stuttering child of the same age, were obvious proof of the trauma which had destroyed their childhoods. After many long months of listening to indelible experiences, which deeply imprinted themselves onto my consciousness, I felt on the verge of a breakdown myself. It took a long time to recover in order to begin to write.

Some who know me are surprised at my professional turn from political journalism to a topic which never interested me before. Perhaps it would not have happened if the first Bosnian refugee, whom I met at the end of April of 1992, had not been a raped woman from Bijeljina. When I realized that her experience was neither random nor isolated, I could not return to my routine reporting. The twelve stories, presented in this book with my minimal but needed interventions (shortened), and the almost 100 statements of victims and several hundred others given by witnesses used in my analysis of the Bosnian case, are the result of a ten–month trek through refugee camps, railway stations, and all other places to which the Bosnian exodus was dispersed. I would never have succeeded in it without the help of others… (...)

Seada Vranić

(Breaking the Wall of Silence, 1996)

Translated and edited by **Diane Conklin**

* Title - Ed.

A Uniform Scenario

The Incipient Delusions

The term "ethnic cleansing" was not yet a part of common media usage in mid–May 1992 when I decided to write a series of authentic stories about rape victims. At that time in Croatia, there existed extensive information available with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of Bosnian refugees. Croatian media generally used terms such as "the genocidal Serb policy" and "genocide against the non-Serbs in Bosnia" for descriptions of Serb criminal actions in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The first press reports about war rape classified these crimes under the same name — that of genocide. In June and particularly in July of 1992, when the European media had not yet mentioned this topic, the Croatian press published almost daily testimonies of rape victims. These report accounts served to influence the public opinion's conviction that there existed a specific and monstrous strategy which planned and practiced sexual violence as one of the efficacious means of war to further the extermination of the non–Serb inhabitants in neighboring Serbia.

My own opinion (at that time) about the war rapes in Bosnia did not fit into the realm of general popular thinking in Croatia about war rape, although I was well informed about the aims of the Serb aggression in Bosnia-Herzegovina. I did not doubt that the aggressor used all weapons and methods available and behaved in extreme ways towards the Bosniacs and the Bosnian Croats. Owing to the information I had gathered in my daily contacts with the rape victims and other refugees, by May and June of 1992, I knew that sexual violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina was not sporadic, but was a mass phenomenon.

Nevertheless, I rejected the possibility that these cases represented the result of a pre-planned strategy and that sexuality was consciously and deliberately used as a weapon of war. In my mind, there was no room for such a perverse idea, nor would my mental system accept the possibility of a remote-controlled male sexuality to attain the same effects as grenade and bombs - as suggested in a political cartoon that I had condemned as a faulty and vulgar idea.

The reason I insisted on my own opinion was not academic as some of my colleagues thought. Even less true was that I was the Serbophile that some accused me of being (due to the fact that I had long been a correspondent of a Belgrade newspaper). I also had no illusions that moral reasons would prevent the planned and systematic use of rape in war for political purposes. I recognized that Karadžić's forces and special death squads from Serbia could not be counted on to follow moral rules.

I believed that the main hindrance to a systematic use of sexual violence, and the mass practice of rape according to a previously formulated plan, was in the nature of the sexual act. I thought at the time, that even if it was violent, the sexual act implicitly included some impulses that could not be reproduced on command, particularly not on a mass scale, by any exterior or outside mechanism. I knew then what the term "crime of obedience" meant and I was also familiar with arguments used to explain this type of phenomenon, characteristic in war. However, I excluded rape from this category of war crimes because I was sure that the biological barrier would obstruct any attempt to use mass rape as a war project. I thought that human nature, the psycho-physical system of the human being, would prevent directed and controlled mass scale rape.

Of course, it was a mistake from which I was ultimately freed, but not before many conversations with victims during which the mystified picture of rape (essentially as crude violence, closer to Thanatos than Eros) became clear to me. Gradually I began to understand rape as an aggressive pseudo-sexual, even anti-sexual act. However, at the beginning of August 1992, other pieces of the puzzle began to fit into a mosaic representative of sexual violence in warring Bosnia. This new information dispelled my initial hope that it was a question of random sexual incidents and led me, rather, to the real possibility of strategic rape and its systematic and massive realization in the war against Bosniacs.

Underlying rape in both diverse geographic areas and in individual experiences of victims, I began to perceive some bizarre harmony which I had initially discounted. In time, recognized patterns began to crystallize and, finally, a complete mosaic emerged. No longer could I ignore the conclusion that sexual violence in Bosnia was a strategy of war.

How the Mosaic Emerged

Since I have recognized this mosaic, I can now understand my colleagues, particularly those who were well-meaning and who were irritated by my initial attitude about war rape in Bosnia. I do not, however, think that I lost the first four months of my investigation even though I did not recognize something which others recognized immediately.

During that time, I learned a great deal about the phenomenon of rape, which I had previously known little about. During these first four months, step by step, I came to the decision that I must change my goal if I wanted to express and explain what I heard in my daily talks with victims and refugees. I faced a big challenge which became even larger due to the fact that, at that time, everything became different for me. I also felt that I changed. I was not the same person that I was when I began my investigation.

(...)

In August 1992, when I realized that the women I tracked down daily were not the random victims of rape but the targets of a morbid policy

which put sexual violence at the disposal of war, I decided to write a book. My new goal to write a book required much more energy and knowledge than a newspaper series. I knew that my interviews with victims (although very important) could not provide all the answers to my questions. To answer them, I needed to review literature and the experts.

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By chance, an old car map of Bosnia-Herzegovina tipped the scales and after that, I finally resolved to write this book. I thought that I would locate a small place called Uskotlina on that car map more easily than on a map of Yugoslavia. That same day, the last day of July 1992, I had met a refugee family from Uskotlina and I found that place (located in eastern Bosnia between Foča and Goražde) on the map.

Without any particular aim, I decided to locate and circle on the old map some other places mentioned in my notes and about which I had heard for the first time through refugees and rape victims. I thought that this would be a good thing to do to protect myself from any surprises. This way I could be sure that places mentioned by the victims actually existed.

I marked about fifty red points on the car map and then drew a line from point to point on the outside margins of the area. What emerged was a shape that looked like a huge mushroom, which outlined and exceeded the territory enclosed by the Drina River on the southeast and east, the Sava River on the north and the Sana and Una Rivers on the northwest and west. In drawing this, I did not ask for any symbolic message except that it was obvious that the margin of the mushroom cap covered the directions of the Serb occupation. I remembered that the two very last points on the margin of the mushroom - Foča in the southeast and Bosanska Krupa located in the northwest - were the sites of horrible crimes committed by Serb soldiers. Across my mind it flashed that a plane would need about twenty minutes to fly from one place to the other, covering a distance of 270 kilometers, but suddenly these places became more distant than they had ever been in their histories. In spite of the actual distance, Foča and Bosanska Krupa are connected with the same fate. Each has experienced its own Golgotha (*path of suffering*).

Finally something suddenly clanged in my head. A mental tape started to play. I remembered facts which had not attracted my attention before. At that moment the bewildering similarities in the victims' descriptions of geographically separated experiences became all at once extremely important. Similar, often identical, details in many individual experiences and deeply-felt personal dramas (which sometimes resounded in my mind as a never-ending repetition) started to look, to me, like a scenario of uniformity. After re-reading my notes and listening again to my recorded interviews, I was absolutely sure of this uniformity. This point was incontestable: the same, repeated, tactics were practiced without exception during the Serb

occupation and devastation of the territories of non-Serb inhabitants. Mass rape, combined with massacres and other methods of violence and terror which caused the mass exodus of two million people, was a component of this strategy.

In my investigation in the following months I did not discover any facts which would change this conclusion. On the contrary, the only change was the emergence of an ever-larger cluster of evidence that rape was a component of Serb political and war strategy, systematically practiced in the armed aggression against Bosnia-Herzegovina. Of course, this strategy is adaptable and the war rape scenario included different "variants" or "models". Later, I came to know that some neutral reports had also recognized specific "patterns". Additionally I have decided to use "pattern", because this word more adequately reflects the systematic quality of rape typical in the Bosnian case. To me, it is not essential that the patterns emerging from my analysis do not correspond to those from other reports.

Seada Vranić

(Breaking the Wall of Silence, 1996)

Translated and edited by **Diane Conklin**

Rachel's Bed

"They took my 60-year-old mother and 68-year-old father outside. These chetniks, these boy soldiers who grew up with us, who went to primary school with us. They made my father stand in the center of our lawn, and they held guns to his head. Then they began to throw stones at him, pelting him in his head, his neck, his groin as he stood helpless and confused before me, my mother, our relatives. He was bruised and bleeding and exposed, and they wouldn't stop."

I am sitting in a metal chair in a circle of women, all of whom are smoking and drinking thick black coffee. We are in a makeshift doctor's office in a refugee camp outside Zagreb, Croatia, listening to a 30-year-old woman "doctress" (as my translator calls her) describe her recent experiences in Bosnia. It is the summer of 1993, and I have come here (and will later go to Pakistan) for two months to interview Bosnian refugees. Outraged by reports of atrocities committed toward women, I have come as a playwright and screenwriter to write a film script.

"Then they took my mother and poured gasoline around her feet. For three hours they lit matches and held them as close as they could. My mother turned white – it was very cold outside. Then she started screaming. She ripped her skirt open and screamed 'Go ahead, you chetniks! Kill me. I am not afraid of you, I'm not afraid to die. Kill me'."

The other Bosnian women seem to have stopped breathing as they listen. I hear myself asking questions, through my translator, in a strange reporter-like voice that implies I have seen all this before, that it is just another war story. I ask: "How do you explain your neighbors turning against you like that?" and "Did you ever worry about being a Muslim before the war?" I ask these questions from behind my professional persona, as if it were a secret shield, a place of safety.

"After I finally escaped and got here," the doctor continues, "I heard our village was safe again. The United Nations forces had raided the concentration camp, and my father had been released. I began to get a glimmer of hope. Then the chetniks invaded my village. They butchered every member of my family with machetes. My mother and father were found, their limbs spread over our lawn."

I listen to her words and feel something caving in. Logic. Safety. Order. Ground. I don't want to cry. Professionals don't cry. Playwrights see people as characters. She is a doctor character. She is a strong, resilient, traumatized woman character. I bear down on the parts of my body where shakes are escaping.

For my first ten days in Zagreb, I slept on a couch in the Center for Women War Victims. The Center was created three years ago to serve Serbian, Muslim, and Croatian women refugees who had been raped in the war. It now serves over 500 women who not only have been raped, but have been made homeless by the war. Most of the women who work there are refugees themselves. They run support groups and provide emergency aid: food, toiletries, medication, children's toys. They help women find employment, access to medical treatment, and schools for their children.

In those first days, I spent five to eight hours a day interviewing women in city centers, desolate refugee camps, and local cafes. I met a country of women dressed in black – black silk, black cotton, black lycra. In all the interviews, I was either filled with an overwhelming desire to rescue the women (which rendered me powerless and sometimes resentful) or tried to maintain my playwright position: I was hearing their stories as potential dramas, measuring their words in terms of beats and momentum. This approach made me feel cold, impervious, superior.

Thousands of journalists had already passed through these women's lives. The women felt invaded, robbed, ripped off. It was an honor and a privilege that the refugee workers had brought me into these camps, even at times had focused the groups around my being there. I realized I was not honoring my end of the contract. My ways of relationship were hierarchical, one-sided, based on a perception of myself as a healer, a problem solver – which in turn was based on a desperate, hidden need to control: control chaos and protect myself from too much loss, cruelty, and insanity. My need to analyze, interpret, even create art out of these war atrocities stemmed from my inability to be with people, to be with their suffering, to listen, to feel, to be lost in the mess.

On the 10th day in Zagreb, a woman named Rachel who worked in the center offered me her apartment for the weekend. I was terrified. It was the first time I'd been alone since my arrival in Croatia, the first time I'd been able to process the experience, to find out where I really was. It was nighttime when I got there, and the lights in the hallway kept going off, leaving me in utter panic and darkness. In all my years as an activist – working in homeless women's shelters, tying myself to fences in protest of nuclear war, sleeping in outdoor peace camps amid rain and rats, camping on the windy Nevada Nuclear Test Site in radiation dust - I had never felt so lonely. I called the States. I paced the apartment. I tried to read, but was unable to concentrate. Finally, I lay down on Rachel's bed with its splendid red comforter and listened to a tape of Jane Siberry's beautiful song "Calling All Angels".

From my journal that night:

My heart, breaking from the inside like an organism giving birth to itself, to the stories of itself, the cruelty: the lit cigarettes almost put through the soldier's wife's eyeballs, the decapitated heads of her old parents, the 15-year-old girl whom her soldier husband and his friends raped in the car, the pistol the soldiers put into her 3-month-old baby's hand as a joke, the food

they didn't serve the Muslim girl's mother who had decided to give birth to the baby of the Serb who raped her, the Canadian uncle who attempted to molest his 14-year-old niece from Sarajevo who had fled to him for safety, the dirty, stained clothes that arrive in boxes of humanitarian aid that the refugee women are supposed to be grateful for.

It wasn't the cruelty, the primitive horror, that broke my heart. What hurt was how I defended myself against my love for the refugees. The woman who made sweet pastry in what was now her kitchen, bedroom, living room, and bathroom all in one - made pastry for me, a stranger. The one who kept smiling with missing teeth, who gave strength to the woman next to her who smoked cigarettes, smoothed her skirt, apologized for her messy hair. My heart broke into love. Tears broke out of my eyes like glass cutting flesh, breaking me, making me no one, no longer concrete, broke through my craving for definition, authority, fame, broke all that into tiny pieces that would not hold, becoming liquid, then nothing I could identify, nothing that resembled me or the matter of me. There was just pulp. Masses of beaten bloody pulp. There was just melting.

After my night in Rachel's bed, my journey was transformed. I began to see my interviews as sacred social contracts. I could not simply take stories, events, feelings, from my subjects. There had to be an interaction. I had to be present with them. I had to be vulnerable. I had to love. I could no longer protect myself, stand outside the stories I was hearing. War was not natural. I would never be comfortable with atrocity and cruelty. I found myself crying often during the interviews. I felt little, helpless. Old defenses, identities, approaches died away.

(...)

Eve Ensler

(Eve Ensler is a playwright, screenwriter and activist. She is author of *The Vagina Monologues*, founder of the *V-day* - global campaign against violence against women, and a long-term friend of the Center for Women War Victims.)

(Women Recollecting Memories, 2003)

Originally written in English

Notes on a Life in the Background

My name is Senka. I lived and worked in Sandžak for thirty-one years. I spent twenty-three years in Priboj on the Lim, a place which has become famous because of its long-time presence in the media, like all places in Sandžak, for that matter. I have very nice memories from that area. I can say that part of me has remained there, in spite of the fact that life in the provinces is far from being easy.

The people of Sandžak lived "well" before the outbreak of the conflict. The previous system arranged our lives, and tailored and altered them, while we were either silent onlookers or "believers." I had never been part of the power structure, but my fellow teachers zealously followed the regime's directives; its main task was to help the reigning ideology permeate the pupils' minds and souls through the entire syllabi and curricula. Only math lessons might have remained unaffected. However, there was no resistance. A few merely superficial changes occurred, but they were a far cry from allowing our students to develop as free independent thinkers. Everything was pre-coded. I had my inner rebellions and dilemmas; every time I tried to change this, I came up against a wall. The only thing I could do was to make my pupils' school days a little bit more pleasant by giving them love and warmth. I hope that at least some of them will remember me by that.

... There had been great changes in our country. The rule of communist bureaucracy was replaced by the rule of nationalists. When all of a sudden, former "fighters for self-management and workers' rights" became ardent Serbs, Croats, Slovenes etc., most people did not realize what such an overnight change would eventually lead to, let alone that it would lead to war. The demonstrations of the 9th of March 1991 had an unpretentious pretext; however, thousands of embittered people rallied in a manifestation of a pent-up longing for freedom, against the year-long artificially maintained peace and silence. The image of a prosperous country vanished overnight. Like a raging torrent, huge masses of people poured out their discontent, despair and yearning for freedom. I was there, on the squares of Belgrade that March and I will always remember those precious and beautiful moments of my life. Those unforgettable days in Belgrade bore freedom in the air. Not even the tanks that rolled down the streets on March 9th scared the crowds away. I still recall thousands of beautiful young faces and I wonder why Belgrade was left alone at that time.

Perhaps it was a bad omen for the tragedy that followed.

... I was back in Priboj, working. The war started. Conscriptions, fear

and propaganda. The troops were everywhere to be seen. I had school holidays, I came to Belgrade. People in uniforms outnumbered those in plain clothes on the streets. That autumn, Priboj was still a relatively quiet place.

However, tension could be felt in the air and it augmented along with the escalation of the war. Accusations and alignments began. From the very beginning, I had a firm attitude concerning the political developments: I opposed nationalism and the theory of blood and land. I persistently advocated my principles. That entailed conflicts and accusations. As a result, I was labeled, insulted and avoided. The only support that I had came from my three wonderful friends: Bilja, Dana and Vuka. The situation in the school was intolerable. Nationalistic propaganda was in full swing on television, within our community and even among the pupils' parents, and I tried to neutralize its effects on my pupils. I suggested that the theme of essays in honor of the special "The Day of School" be "peace." My suggestion was rejected.

I was in a dilemma when I was asked to take over a class taught by a colleague who had been drafted. I didn't know what to do: I was against the war and there I was, helping someone take part in it. I refused to serve as a replacement and to be paid for his lessons that I had substituted for already.

The fall of 1992 saw the first emigrations from Priboj. Some of my colleagues simply stopped coming to work. It was as if we had never worked together. They were gone. Some people maliciously asked why they had left Priboj, the place where they had lived so well. I received threatening telephone calls.

And yet, in the fall of 1992, I cherished new hopes. There was a pending election. But people became more and more estranged from one another. I spent many sleepless nights. I had nightmares for fear my son Peđa could be forced to take part in the tragic war like thousands of young men who had already been drafted. I didn't open the door for anyone, except at a sign previously agreed on. In spite of that, I did my best to overcome my fear and it worked. Instead of becoming estranged from people, I collected signatures in favor of a referendum against the war. The clandestine work went well. My Moslem colleagues frequently expressed their gratitude and many whom I did not know personally came up to me. Some of those I helped told me: "Thank you for talking with us." No comment.

My friend Enisa, a young physician who was fired for allegedly being rude to the reservists, rejected my offer of help because she was afraid. Her sister and her brother-in-law had already left Priboj having sensed that overnight, they had become "enemies" to be shunned.

My friend Alma came to see me and to confide her fears about her only daughter – a child she bore after twelve years of marriage. Her relatives had lived in Prijedor until the outbreak of the war. Now the seven of them lived scattered in seven different countries. Alma loved her native Bosnia very much and she profoundly longed for it. She once told me: "I know, Senka, that you would try to save my daughter Merima." That utterance created a

terrible confusion in my head. I started making plans for Merima's rescue; I looked for support among reliable friends. And we devised a plan. Merima was going to be safe, whatever happened.

... Then the kidnapping at Sjeverin happened. Passengers had been seized from a bus. Nataša Kandić[1] asked me to help her contact some people in Priboj and I did whatever I could. Stories about a horrible massacre were being circulated. The towns of Višegrad and Rudo were nearby. Paramilitary units paraded recklessly through the city. Moslems kept leaving Priboj en mass. I saw trains full of those unhappy people moving in the direction of the unknown, and I will never forget images of old women with bundles. Each of them could've been my mother. I wondered whether I would experience a similar fate one day.

I was scared.

The kidnapping at Štrpci did not elicit a public protest. There was no support for the families of the kidnapped people. Everything was covered by a veil of silence. Strange rumors were going around. The authorities promised to conduct a thorough investigation, but they did nothing to catch those responsible for this crime - which warranted the conclusion that they had masterminded it.

I often traveled through the station of Štrpci, where derisive comments invariably accompanied the scene: "Brace yourselves, Šrtpci is the next stop, ha, ha, ha." I could not believe my eyes, nor my ears.

... Nothing happened accidentally here. Nationalism has maimed everybody in this area: hatred, primitivism, greed and malevolence. Our lives are determined by Brussels and Geneva. I am confused and grieved. For family reasons, and also because of the adverse circumstances at work, I opted for early retirement. I really could not go on working at the school any longer.

I live in Belgrade now. I have devoted myself to my family and my wonderful friends at *Women in Black*. I spend a lot of time with them.

I like our street vigils. They make me feel good.

Senka Knežević

(Written by memory in January 1994)

(Women for Peace, 1994)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

[1]. Director of the Humanitarian Law Center in Belgrade.

Getting to Know Myself

I am already nervous and have been pacing around the room for more than two hours, intending to write down what I feel. As usual, I don't know where to start, because I feel terribly nervous. I don't want to finish this article in a hurry, like the other articles which I have written until now, and have it wind up in the trashcan. I have to admit that what I am about to write is more important than anything I have written until now. Why do I think this? Because I have begun to think differently, to speak differently and to communicate differently with people. I have to admit that I have more courage now. I feel that I am maturing through new experiences. That I am beginning something. For the first time I want to say what I haven't been able to say until now, or haven’t had the opportunity to say.

What is my reason?

What affected me?

Never before have I been so proud to be a woman. I have always fought for my rights. To the extent that I knew about these rights: the right to life, to expression and freedom of thought, work, education, lifestyle... As far as lifestyle goes, in the environment in which I live there is not so much space and possibility for accomplishing this. First of all, I come from a patriarchal environment, where women's rights exist only in theory. Women's rights are only talked about, nothing concrete is done. Although a political solution (for Kosovo) has not been found I don't think that we women should wait for the big political problem to be solved in order to be able to fight for our position. I don't want that we, as women, wait with our arms crossed for others to give us permission to fight for our rights. Our rights as women continue to be endangered, not only by the regime, which has oppressed us for a long time, but also by the patriarchy. As women we are raised to act violently against ourselves and not to support each other, as we would like to do. With such a position in the society where I live I tried with my way of thinking to live in a way that suited me, but with so much confusion, political instability and other problems, it was very difficult. I was convinced of this when I continued the third year of Architecture studies at the university in Prishtina. That's when we were thrown out from the university building for not accepting the Serbian regime rules over institutions.

All my dreams to be an architect were fallen apart then. I have to admit, however, that I was not sure if I wanted to be an architect or not. I was simply not sure of myself anymore.

After getting thrown out of the university, we stayed on the street

for about eight months while the parallel education system was being organized. Our young people ran off to all parts of Europe. I will never forget that year 1991/1992. That was the most difficult period of my life, and I think for many others as well. I didn't know what to do with myself. My parents had been fired from their jobs, my two sisters had already left for London while I and my third sister stayed in Prishtine. Everything had to be paid for, including university, which opened a few months later. Conditions for work and studying were horrible. I couldn't accept such conditions for studying, I still cannot. This was a very significant experience in my life, I hoped that having had that experience it would be easier for me in the future, but it was a bitter experience. Occasionally I did not see the light at the end of the tunnel. I decided to go abroad somewhere and to start anew. At the bottom of my soul I did not want to do this, but I tried anyway. I went to Holland in 1992 to do something for myself and for my family. I returned after 10 days in a serious depression. Something inside told me: No, you don't want this, you want something else, you should live there where you were born and try to contribute in changing the cruel reality.

In 1993 we returned to the university and we started to hold classes in private houses in poor and primitive conditions. Classes did not resemble normal education, classrooms were cement and we sat on wooden benches for seven hours per day. We had to accept and get used to those conditions for studying. We finished our lessons at home because we didn't have enough benches for drawing. I was never able to accept such conditions for studying. Because it was so terribly expensive I had to find a job, at least to cover my expenses for university. So I worked as a baby-sitter and watched my friend's child so that I could buy myself faculty supply such as tracing paper, drafting paper or some small thing. That lasted six/seven months but nothing had changed in me. I was unhappy.

In May 1994 something else happened that really affected me. Inspectors from the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs arrested my father for political activity; he allegedly established the parallel Kosovo Economic Chamber of Commerce. I was even unhappy. Then, for the first time in my life, I realized that I had no friends although I thought I had. I felt the need to speak with someone, but unfortunately I did not have anyone to talk to. We were in a bad financial situation, so the two of us older sisters had to find work because we were all students. Only then did my mom got back to work, people rumored her loyalty towards Albanian national cause. Two months later my sister and I found work. Six months later my father was released from prison while he waited for the legal proceedings. Things started to change. My other sister found a job in the Council for Human Rights in Prishtine and my father began to work in the parallel Economics University in Prishtine. Until that year I was an activist in the humanist movement in Prishtine. I tried with my strength to bring that movement to life in Prishtine but it was very difficult to persuade people to volunteer to spread antiwar ideas. People thought that this idea was too utopian and that we Albanians

should first establish our (Kosovo) state. It was very important to guard myself from the exclusiveness of the environment in which I lived. I thought that it was good to love one's people and not to hate another; I still think this, now that I have more experience. It seemed to me that if there was anyone guilty for what was happening in Kosovo and in former Yugoslavia then it was the Serbian government with Milošević and other politicians at the head. I still think this today when I have a large number of friends who are Serbs.

In November 1994 we went to Budapest with the humanist movement from Belgrade. This was a very big experience for me. We made direct contact with people from Belgrade and found out from them what was happening in Belgrade. They were also interested in our situation in Kosovo. That movement gave me the strength to continue to pursue human rights. By then my sister had started working for the Council for Human Rights, I joined her as a volunteer.

I was most afraid of depression though. I changed two or three jobs before I found what I was looking for. I needed a job so as not to fall into a severe depression, because I would not know what to do with myself. I took university exams only when I was in the mood.

I felt helpless and useless, regardless of what I was doing. To live in a patriarchal environment with such intense political pressure, to get along with people who pretend to be happy when it is difficult for everyone, I couldn't allow myself to do this. I was sure that I would not get married like my friends in order to act like a good housewife and to give birth to a child whom I would not be able to feed. I would not want to finish university so that my diploma could serve as proof that I was worth something, and later to sit at home waiting for happy times. What else was left for me to do? Just to continue to fight for my position in the community in which I live. But how?

In those most difficult of moments I got a job, the likes of which I hadn't even dreamed of. The doors of my future happiness opened before me. I needed time to convince myself that I was not worthless, that I know what I'm doing and how I'm doing it, that I will continue this path to the end and that I will not give up at any price. I knew that I would have problems in the beginning, but I did not know of what nature those problems would be.

I got a job in a non-governmental organization in Belgrade, but I was to research human rights violations in my own community. I liked this job from the start and I love it even more now that I have more experience.

I will never forget my first day in Belgrade. I had been in Belgrade previously but I had never felt such warmth from people, from those who greeted me at the workplace. For a second I thought that perhaps I was dreaming or it seemed to me that people were very friendly. A turn of events took place in my life, though I felt this later. Each time in Belgrade was a big challenge and experience for me. I never knew what would be waiting for me the next time. Perhaps it was fate or luck that I happened upon such a circle of people. Slowly I started to see myself as a human being who does not belong to only one community or environment. I knew that I could do even

more for all of humanity. I decided to deepen my knowledge of human rights, and later of women's rights also. I found out that women's rights are human rights, that a human being endures all sorts of violence.

Each time I was in the field, I felt stronger and closer to people, each time I met a different character of people and different behavior. I remembered and learned much of that which was useful for future work.

My next experience was the WOMEN IN BLACK meeting in Novi Sad in August 1996. I went there uninformed, unprepared and undecided. I have to thank Ursula Renner, who came to my organization and invited me to participate in the meeting. I didn't have any idea what would happen there and who would be present. I decided to go, though I was not at all sure.

I saw that one of the themes would be lesbian rights. I had some prejudices against lesbians. I didn't know then that lesbian rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights.

In Novi Sad I met different kind of women from all over the world. I felt a certain power which I hadn't known until then, I was happy that I belonged to the female gender. There I gathered strength to fight for women's human rights, and those rights, together with children's rights are the most endangered in the world. I met wonderful and intelligent women from former Yugoslavia. It was the same with other women from other parts of the world. I found the support to go on. There for the first time I sympathized with women from Bosnia and I realized what they had gone through during the war. I was inspired by that solidarity and sisterhood among women from former Yugoslavia and the rest of the world. That helped get the chaos out of my soul. I was able to get out of my own environment, which surrounded me with politics and nationalism, fear and worry about the future. And at that time this was very difficult, and is even more difficult today.

Since I started working many things have changed. Some for the better, some for the worse. I lost a large number of friends, and didn't know why this happened to me. Without justification all these people who meant so much to me, each in his/her own way, slowly started to distance themselves from me. I did not betray them because I started doing something they did not understand or because they did not want to understand me. They never asked me how I feel, just how much I earn. I sunk into a crisis but I didn't know what to do. The job was very important to me, but on the other hand I couldn't deal with the fact that they would no longer socialize with me. One thing I was sure of was that my job was very important to me and that I was not doing anyone harm. I began to hang around with other people in other circles. These people started to mean more and more to me each day. That circle is very small but I hope that I will slowly widen it.

Ursula helped me to understand the situation a second time and suggested that I speak with a psychologist. She directed me to the women's center to speak with Lepa.

I am used to solving my problems on my own. This was a different sort of problem though. Things started to develop, however, and I went to see a psychologist again. How did this happen?

In Belgrade, at the end of January this year while the protests were going on, I left work tired and headed toward Terazije to take part in the demonstrations against the authorities in Belgrade. On Vlajkovićeva Street I ran into Nataša, Lepa and Kaća. I thought, what a coincidence, I was thinking about how to get to the center of town but I couldn't decide, and there they were standing in front of me. I was very happy to see them. I think they were happy to see me also. We went to a restaurant for coffee and talked about the situation in Belgrade and Kosovo. I made an arrangement with Lepa to go talk to her the next day at the center. I could barely wait to go although I was nervous. She listened to me till the very end, explained to me that friends must change. Life is dynamic, friends change. She gave me support to believe that I am right in thinking and feeling what I do, that a little more time is necessary for things to take their place. It meant a lot to me that I had talked with her. Now I have a wider circle of new friends and they mean a lot to me. Especially the large number of friends which I have in Belgrade, and I'm happy because of that.

Nora Ahmetaj

(Women for Peace, 1997)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

My Seven War Years

As I subsequently found out, my attitude towards nations (and everything else) has been determined by these facts: my papa, Boris, was a Russian who expressed his national sentiments by watching Russian films (including the most moronic ones) devoutly and patiently (unlike films from other countries) and playing chess (he was a dedicated chess master as much as he was a dedicated gynecologist). My mother, Vukosava, was a Serb on her father's side (and by disposition), but also half-Slovene on her mother, Maria's, side, (whom everyone in Zagreb and everywhere else knew only as Dušanka). Until 1971 when I lived in Topusko, I believed that (having been born in Zagreb, which is in Croatia) I, too, was a Croat. That year I realized - because I had raised my hand in class at the mention of what was the "wrong nation" in my case - that I was not a Croat, and ever since, to this day, I have been nothing. At that time, I had been a Yugoslav person for years - officially - just as today I officially say I am a Russian, although in national terms I feel… nothing. In other words, I am an idiot, according to my friend Pera Luković. In 1992 in the very heart of Zagreb, having right there at the bar converted all the cash from the sale of *Vreme* (which no longer arrived in Zagreb by regular channels) into *Stock* and having publicly stated "Croat people, thank you for not slitting my throat," he was asked what his ethnicity was and answered: "I am an idiot."

To this day and from my perspective, this is the cleverest answer I have ever heard.

At times I thought that my father made some idiotic statements. In Zagreb, when we moved into a flat in the street once called Svetozara Markovića and today renamed Filipa Grabovca (which is still my "age-old hearth"), he would not let us destroy a tile stove, saying: "It will come in quite handy if there is war." Neither my mother (otherwise an energetic and self-willed woman) nor I (a mere child at the time) contradicted him; we simply thought what we thought. Then he said to me once: "You know, the war years are a kind of deferred life." I did not understand him then. But years went by and the time came for my own "deferred life" (and why not admit it?) it still continues and this is the end of 1997.

At that time, in late 1991 and until the spring of 1992, I lived between Zagreb and Sarajevo. My decision to go away for a while was made in a moment when many "undesirables" in Zagreb (including me) had their telephones cut off and when my "voluntarily" mobilized friend (he had been picked up that afternoon) called me panic-stricken and asked me in a daze if

I had anyone on Braća Domani Street whom I needed to "perform an evacuation" that same day. We sent Djurdjica to sleep at her daughter's in the other part of the city. That night, tanks set off from Belgrade towards Croatia (directed towards Vukovar as we were to learn later) and that night, a coffee bar on the ground-floor of a skyscraper on Braća Domani Street was blown up. Miraculously, nobody was hurt although the alert had just been sounded and everyone was supposed to get down to the ground-floor because there was no cellar. Poor "timing," we noted.

This was where a news contribution originated which made Djurdjica cry and pronounce us enemies. Djurdjica was our secretary with an "unsuitable" work booklet (from *Borba* to *Communist*) and she was a child of partisans; her mother had been killed by an accidental bomb that fell on Trnje in Zagreb in 1945. The censors cut out the sentence: "Good night, Yugoslavia, the country which is not." We all felt abandoned and lonely. Yugoslavia truly did not exist any more. But outside Croatia, it seemed to us, nobody realized it yet and nothing was ever the same again. That is how it is today at least, viewed from a "historical distance."

The next day, I went to Slovenia and then, accompanied by my father's and mother's tears, "se veda" (*naturally*) by plane to Belgrade and then on to Sarajevo. All I remember from that time is brightly-lit towns and their inhabitants who seemed to know nothing and live normally and with lights whilst my Zagreb was in the grip of darkness, war and gunfire.

I remember how, totally stunned, I said then to my friends in Belgrade: "To drive you just once to dank cellars, to rats, just so that you feel that humiliation..."

They laughed a little, even if in grief, because they were among those who saw it all - whilst I whined and the next morning took an early JAT flight to Sarajevo.

That day, none of us knew the truth about Vukovar yet, nor grasped that the things which were going on where I had arrived from, were indeed a war in the true sense of the word.

For a while I was overwhelmingly disgusted by everything around me. Today it is hard to remember the exact feelings; all that remains, namely, is a lump of pain somewhere inside and now it needs to be disentangled and explained, and I am doing it for the first time since it all began. I fear now that my attitude towards the time and the experience behind me is pathetic.

The time has probably come for all of us to take stock of the years behind us. Although they still count me with all sorts of enemies, I think that I am right: at no one moment did I hate anyone except all sorts of war criminals. On all sides.

And I believe in The Hague.

There is no one I need to normalize or make peace with. I have never quarreled or not been normal with anyone.

I have no chetniks and ustashas among my close or distant family and, at any rate, my chosen people are my friends - not my relatives. I proud-

ly point out that I am a child of a mixed marriage: for heaven's sake, my mother is a female, my father a male; what's so strange and unusual about that? My friends have remained mine, by and large. I guess that those few among them who went mad during those past years never were my friends.

Needless to say, the war scars are many. Not one of the towns I lived in are what they once were any more. I only pass through Slunj (although they still sell the best bananas in the world at the same place as in my earliest childhood). But Slunj is not the same anymore. Just as in my earliest childhood some vicious people poisoned my German shepherd Teddy, so Rastok has disappeared from the face of the earth today; and Uncle Joso, the owner of the greatest flour mill in the world, (the one in Rastok) decided to die in a Zagreb home for the elderly. He had nowhere else to go to anyway, but nobody could summon the courage to tell him that.

I will not go to Sisak while war criminals hold the power there and while crimes are glossed over in silence.

I have been to Gospić. The house I lived in does not look like my memories at all and I doubt that my attic room is still there. All I know is that my neighbors survived and that maybe they are guarding our childhood attic door (of which no one has any clue about, to this day). The local people and my erstwhile neighbors are weighed down by the shades of the missing. This includes my friends' fathers, my parents' friends, my teachers and my first schoolmates. And they maintain their silence. I live in the hope that their silence means shame and that they are still good people.

The only thing I take pride in is that I did not keep silent. Veco Kocijan and I were the first to speak out, and today the newspapers and brave *Feral Tribune* "fellows" confirm what we all knew all along.

I will not go to Topusko unless Milka returns.

And on the road between Topusko and Gospić are Plitvice Lakes. I will not go there, either, because Vesna, Mira and Maša's mother, Milka, is not there anymore and she makes the best *basa* in the world which I have not tasted since 1991. And will not, evidently, since there is no *basa* from Lika like hers and she is not there.

Once I said to someone: all my towns have been destroyed. Some, like Ogulin, may not have been destroyed physically, but in that other sense - not the Yugo-nostalgic - but that quite human sense of this word.

When they call me a Yugo-nostalgist, I pronounce the historic "no". For I am a Yugo-zombie (whatever that may mean), and whatever it may have ever meant to anyone. It means: I feel cramped within the borders they've confined me in and among the memories I have, yet these are nothing compared to the memories of my acquaintances and friends who suffered "losses in men and equipment." Although Dunja, whose memories are in Vukovar, hates no one and I've never quarreled with Branka.

I will not believe that Croatian and Serbian are different languages and I believe that only the emotionally destitute refuse to learn Cyrillic. I believe that some of us are right, no matter how much they try to hammer

into our heads how the Frenchwomen who dared to fall in love with some Germans in the last war ended up, or vice versa.

My friend Kika, the only one of us who ever went to church - Catholic, is married to a Serb in Banja Luka. And she says: "No state will destroy my marriage." Mirjana, our friend in Ogulin, says: "I have no one left - most of my friends went somewhere else during this war!" Branka, our third friend, died somewhere in Titovo Užice, where she had married long before the war. None of us could attend the funeral and her parents in Karlovac were denied visas. We do not know her two children. Her cousin Neven is listed as "missing" on a refugee column on the road between Lička Jesenica and Banja Luka and his son comes from Crikvenica to visit his grandma in Ogulin and keeps asking: "Grandma, when will my daddy come back?"

And anyway, today we all live in the place where we hold citizenship.

Tanja Tagirov

(Women for Peace, 1998)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

We Remember

In a country which was called Yugoslavia, a four-year war created enormous differences among people. Nationalistic regimes divided people according to their names; into their own and others. Which name you had in a certain place, under a certain regime, became more important than life itself. And then there was your home address. Whether you were in a war zone or not determined your fate. Thirdly, if you were endangered for one of the first two reasons, was there a chance for you to move from the address they were shooting at? If so, where would you go?

Those are the first few sentences of the introductory text for this issue of the Feminist Notebooks. Jadranka and I are writing it. She doesn't really enjoy writing. We talk, then read what I have written, and again talk about it. She tells me what to write. This is a journal with a few of our thoughts and a few fragments from our life together during the time of war.

Jadranka removed her children from the wrong address, from the center of Sarajevo, and came with them to the center of Belgrade in the beginning of 1993. One part of Jadranka's family stayed in Sarajevo, her past, friends, her people, *čaršija*[2]. The whole time, I have been at the right address, in the center of Belgrade, with the right name for this city. The two of us met at a women's meeting immediately after her arrival. Since then, we have experienced different news and events in a similar way.

First We Went Through Pain...

We were concerned about the women, children and men who suffered, who didn't have anything to eat, or who lived under shellfire. It was immediately clear to both of us that pain should be transformed into political action. By the time Jadranka came to Belgrade, we had already begun *Women in Black Against War*; she got involved right away, I had been there since the very beginning. Jadranka then began working with women refugees in camps around Belgrade. I had been working with women refugees in the Women's Center. There was as much work as we wanted, or rather, as much as we could handle. We didn't stop during the whole time of war. We worked totally separately, each deciding for herself what to get involved with, coming up with projects on our own. We gathered with other women and came up with project proposals in order to receive funding. We worked to make women victims of war independent and strong. All of our work expressed our feminist politics

[2] Čaršija is a part of a town, almost always located in its very centre and which mostly developed its form and name during the Ottoman Empire rule in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It represents one of the most important characteristics of the Ottoman town, being its commercial centre, a zone in which most of the activities were taking place.

against war; even though Jadranka hadn't even thought of feminism before she came to Belgrade, and I had already been involved in it for ten years. Jadranka immediately dove in and took on political responsibility: women's solidarity, support to women, and everything else that presented a way of surviving for feminists under the Serbian regime. Our feminist politics against war included organizing women and the visibility of our political opposition.

Staša Zajović began Women in Black on October 9, 1991, and since then we have stood on the streets every Wednesday. On Wednesday mornings we would think about getting dressed in black. Standing in black was our personal public act of showing that we disagree with the politics of nationalism and killing. The morning search for the black shirts that we wore on Wednesdays reduced our feelings of helplessness and guilt. We traded black pants. We dressed in black, which meant that we didn't agree with anything that the Serbian regime was doing, especially not with its hate-producing language. During Women in Black vigils we were silent. From Wednesday to Wednesday, the four seasons of the year, several times over. With banners and leaflets. Completely determined. At the vigils, there were few of us or many of us, totally different types of women, feeling that we weren't alone. Standing together increased solidarity among us, a love toward those who have similar political views, and this saved us.

... Then Through a Feeling of Guilt

Because she left her home and her loved ones among the shelling. For me, because I am at the right address and because of the helplessness which overcame me. In women's groups, we had had many discussions about guilt and pain. Therefore, in the introduction under this title, we decided to write about how we survived for two years by sending packets to women in Sarajevo. This meant thinking about the packets in the supermarket, or on any trip through town. It meant thinking about the packets when foreign women came and asked what we needed, or when they brought us a gift, which we left in the closet for the packets. It meant that every time I went home, I would look in front of the store to see if they had thrown out cardboard boxes which we could use for the packets. Then I would drag them in. In my home there were always empty cardboard boxes piled on top of each other to the ceiling, just in case. We traded cardboard boxes. Jadranka always knew where to get what in town, what could go in the packet and what should not. When she pulled up to a red light in the car, she would look left and right, and if she saw a store she would look "at the prices, to see if there was something cheaper there, for the packets." Jadranka always knew what women in Sarajevo needed; where and when to bring the packets. There was a fantastic feeling of security. I would just ask Jadranka, and then know exactly what I needed to do. That's how I pulled myself out of depression; it seems to me that in the beginning I was more depressed than she was. And depression in times of war, for those of us who are not in the war, is a luxury.

We traded canned foods and other things. We waited in lines, or better yet, Jadranka always knew someone, so we almost never waited in those

lines for long. In the lines for the packets, something always happened. We met up with people from Sarajevo. We listened to stories of people's loved ones who had remained in Sarajevo, how many months they had been living in a basement, or without electricity or water. We would always run into Lula Mikelj. She alone surely hauled, drove and packed several hundred packets. Lula also knew everything about the packets. For example, she knew the most efficient way to assemble the packets: after you pack everything carefully, then you take beans and fill up the remaining holes. From my life in Belgrade it was not easy to imagine what one bean meant to an address of hunger.

Once, two sisters brought a packet for the first time. When it came time for them to pay, one of the sisters had trembling hands. The other one was so distraught that she couldn't help her. They just kept apologizing and asking if it was possible that the packet would really get to the people. In those lines, Jadranka and I would be like social workers, with ropes, markers and tape, helping others to wrap, to open wallets, to carry, to copy addresses, supporting those who were distraught. Jadranka did everything the same as I did, but faster and with more skill, while I was slower, constantly asking her what I should do, and with a few more tears in my eyes. Jadranka always seemed as if she didn't have time to grieve, to react emotionally or to think a lot. When every bean and every minute are important, then there's no time for guilt and emotional melancholy.

We sent the last round of packets in January 1996. By then it was much easier.

That's How We Got Rid of Guilt and Overcame Pain

Then in March 1995 we organized a meeting in Istria: ten feminists from Belgrade met with ten feminists from Zagreb. In Zagreb we boarded a bus reserved just for us and headed off for the sea. For the first time since the start of the war we saw our sea. Whose sea? It is no longer ours. The sea was as it had always been, peaceful and blue, but we were foreigners in the country of the sea. We needed passports and visas. We talked about this while we were together, and about what it means to be disappointed in friends, how nationalistic politics divided us deep within and against our will. We listened to one another.

The war in Bosnia was still going on, but we wanted to reestablish trust with one another as soon as possible. If we are now writing this descriptively, it is because there was too much emotion to put into the text. We could, for example, say that Nadežda cried for a day, Slavica for two days, Dasa for two days, I cried periodically, Ljiljana periodically, Ana was silent. But on the last evening in the Istrian tavern we all sang with Istrian women who also cried from time to time. We had to come to terms with the idea of new states, to leave behind images of prisoner camps and images of the dead with whom we had lived, because we were concerned with the sufferings of people, and needed to come up with plans for the future. This meeting cleansed us and brought us closer to our friends from Zagreb. We really

got to love each other. This is how we established *Former Sisters Unite*, a local phrase which meant that sisters from the states of former Yugoslavia would work together to create a common world for women.

Then, for the first time after the start of the war in Bosnia, we went to Sarajevo. That was in April 1995, with a group of 38 of us, organized by the Serbian Civic Council in Sarajevo and the group *Living in Sarajevo* from Belgrade. In order to get there we had to change buses five times and cross four borders in a 40 hour trip. Under the airport, we passed through a tunnel for rats and people. We walked through the streets while killers observed us from the hills around the city. Again Jadranka knew everything, which streets we shouldn't take, at which corners we should run. Again with her, I felt so safe. When we went to visit my former neighbor Fika, I was nervous, what will Fika think of me, what will she say. After ten years, Fika opened the door and said, "My Lepa". Then we climbed the stairs, and Jadranka knew that she would now have to talk with Fika, because due to the tears, I simply couldn't speak.

When we returned, we wrote a letter to all the women of Sarajevo. The letter is in this book, as is another, written in response to us by Mubera from Sarajevo.

In August 1995, columns of people with tractors and cars showed up in Belgrade. Again there was terrible news. Before that, the Serbian military had killed 10,000 men in Srebrenica, now the Croatian authorities had thrown out 150,000 people from the Krajina. Bojan, Rada Žarković and I... many of us immediately headed out to bring aid to people on the road. That was August 16th, the 12th day of their trip. All absorbed in thought and exhausted. Red eyes from the dust and exhaustion. Some of them had traveled half the trip on foot. Many women's shoes had worn through. The question of the meaning of life lead the column in an unknown direction. Where to? What now? One elderly woman, dressed all in black, rested on the side of the road. I asked her, "Grandma, how do you feel?" She replied, "I'm afraid." "What are you afraid of?" I asked. "That I will get lost". Removed from her life forever, the old woman was part of a column in which no one knew where they were going, but she knew that in that darkness ahead of her, there was a better road and a wrong one. That night the rain poured down, and the next day when we talked, it was obvious that neither Rada nor I had been able to fall asleep.

In October 1995 we traveled to Tuzla for a meeting of the Helsinki Citizen's Assembly. Seven buses and three cars, again via Hungary, Zagreb and Split. There were many people there from all parts of the former country. Many were so happy to see each other, and at night would sit together, talking, looking at each other. Everyday Jadranka and I were at the debates with women from Bosnia. In the evening, people went to the disco. One evening, in the middle of the disco music and dancing, the music stopped and an alternative theater group performed a short war scene on a stage in the middle of all the people. Six young people, in the background noisy machine gun fire, shooting, one blind man with a cane, one girl with inartic-

ulate speech, more gunfire, shooting, some of them dead, falling to the ground. It was all very moving. I was not there, but the next day I heard from an American that something strange had happened during the previous evening at the disco. He said that the music stopped, and then war scenes began. He was horrified. What's the point of war, now, when young people are having fun? He thought it was morbid and ugly. Or else he's not from an address which would allow him to understand. Jadranka and Selma from Zenica were there. Selma said that the performance was excellent. The point is, she says, that we don't forget what happened in the war. This way, after a moving scene we can relax, continue dancing, because the war is constantly inside of us anyway. We will not forget.

At the last discussion in Tuzla there were more than 30 of us, and there we agreed that it would be important to plan a meeting for women from Republika Srpska with women from the Bosnian Federation. And we did this. It was organized in Banja Luka by Women in Black from Belgrade and the Center for Women War Victims from Zagreb. There were three of us from Belgrade, three from Zagreb, six from Banja Luka and five from Bosnia. The meeting was excellent, we exchanged many facts about how we work with women victims of war, what problems we face. This time we did not enter into debates about who started the war and who is guilty. We left that for later; our aim was to provide a place where women could establish a relationship of trust. Because the idea of civil society means that every citizen decides for him/herself. Therefore, it is necessary for much work to be done on an individual basis, and small encounters. During the war between the estranged countries, only women's groups and, in addition to us, human rights groups and independent journalists, constantly insisted on cooperation. Considering that feminists from Belgrade and Zagreb had accepted each other as sisters, our presence itself in Banja Luka was an event for the history books. At the end Belma said, "I have been waiting for this moment for five years and..." then she couldn't go on. For many of us, the era of crying is still not over; however the worst has passed.

Jadranka was not at this meeting, she was unable to attend, but in her place Rada Žarkovic went. Jadranka said, "Rada... she's the same as me." They're not the same, because when they work in the field for the whole day, Rada tends more toward emotion while Jadranka goes into action. At night, they both like to live it up, till all hours of the night. In the morning, again on their feet. Rada came to Belgrade when Jadranka did, but from further south, from Mostar. Rada is Jadranka's friend. They both work in projects with women in refugee camps. Jadranka organizes what is needed, transports it, thinks about each woman in the camp, whether she needs glasses or medicine or socks. Rada talks with them and listens to them.

While I am writing this, and while Jadranka tells me what to write, the date is June 23, 1996. Peace has been signed in Dayton. Jadranka has already been to Sarajevo four times. Yesterday, with Bojan, she took her son to Sarajevo. She left in the morning, dropped off her son, went for a walk in *čaršija* and returned that very night. Jadranka did this as if everything is OK,

like in the good old days. *Čaršija* was roaring with music. And the people of Sarajevo say, "We don't want to forget, that's our decision. We cannot forget, we want to forgive when we can, We want to talk and work together when we can. We want music, but we don't want to forget." Behind the music in *čaršija*, who knows, maybe they can hear shelling, hunger, sickness, crying, puddles of blood.

Jadranka says that Dayton brought peace, but among refugees it created tension and depression. Fear of the future. During all the years of war some women were able to want to return, they were able to dream. Now that the Dayton paper has ordered that refugees return, the dreaming must be interrupted. Panić has been created among those who have nowhere to return to, among those whose men were forced to go to war. While the war lasted there was justification, because their situation was not resolved. When the war ends and peace begins, changing nothing for refugees, then helplessness transforms itself into total senselessness, endless depression. What does refugee identity mean after the war? Currently in Palestine, 72% of the population have been refugees for 40 years already. In Lebanon, 83% of refugees have not returned after the signing of peace. Currently throughout the world, from territories of the former Yugoslavia, 1.5 million people have refugee asylum.

We know that every national state has politics to fill its own state with its own national names. Five years after the war has arranged these names, each name in its place, the nationalistic politics of the Serbian and Croatia authorities continue. From the beginning, the Bosnian authorities have been between these two monsters, and have not had much choice. So, for a family with an Albanian name returning from Switzerland to Kosovo, the Serbian authorities wait at the airport in Belgrade and send them back to Switzerland. The assumption is that Kosovo is reserved for Serbian names. A woman with a Croatian name and refugee identity in Croatia, who wants to return to her town in Bosnia, cannot because in that area Serbian names rule. From the Croatian authorities she receives a house in the Krajina where she does not want to live. The assumption is that the Krajina is reserved for Croatian names. And that is a house which a woman with a Serbian name wants to return to; currently she is in a refugee camp near Belgrade. Her Serbian name belongs to Serbia, but Serbia is already full of Serbian names, because there are already over half a million refugees. If she cannot choose anything, nor can the woman currently in Zagreb, nor the woman currently in Belgrade, nor the one in Zurich, what sort of states are in question? When the fate of citizens is determined by their names...

Jadranka was fortunate, she will return to her old address.

June 1996, Belgrade

Lepa Mladjenović and **Jadranka Milićević**

(Women for Peace, 1997)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Divided Cities

Before setting off we spoke about the sites of pain and crime we would be visiting, and about how difficult it would be to bear. I had been preparing myself for the pain from the past, and came back from the trip with the pain from the present. Over the past ten years, I have been living in a nationalist state, and I have now experienced five forms of nationalism in ten days. *The Caravan* was, for me, a journey from one divided city to another. The idea was to visit multi-ethnic cities and towns, and to talk with local authorities and nongovernmental organizations. But even the multi-ethnic towns were divided.

The first image was from Vukovar: the divided high school, with one staircase for Serbian teachers and students, and another for Croats. Each ethnic group had separate cafés and separate shops. When I returned, the image of separate staircases became a metaphor for every place we had gone to. And yet, this was not a new phenomenon: in Kosovo, separation between Albanians and non-Albanians has existed for years.

In some places (such as Kraljevo) things seemed different. They told us at the City Hall that, being as they were a mono-ethnic community, they had no inter-ethnic problems. The response to the question concerning the living conditions of the Roma people was that they are tolerable, as long as they do not interfere with public peace and order. Local authorities never saw the Roma people as a political entity, but as a social problem. The Roma live in ghettos on the outskirts of the city – which makes Kraljevo yet another divided city. In Skopje they told us that the city is divided by the river into the Macedonian and Albanian parts, just like in Mitrovica and Mostar. Moreover, there is a village in Macedonia called Lipkovo, with an all-Albanian population, flying the Albanian flag which was made illegal by the Ohrid Convention of 2001. All the Macedonians have left. The Macedonian-Albanian joint police forces do not patrol there. The Municipality officials told us: "Let the Macedonians come back, and we will keep an eye on them." But there are no conditions for their return. Therefore, there is an invisible dividing wall in Lipkovo, because the others are not there. Likewise, there are many all-Macedonian places, where the others cannot return.

Division also entails divided emotions, divided thoughts and divided values and symbols. Very often small communities have a tacit social consensus that excludes others, which means you must not be a non-nationalist. The Serbs in Kosovo cannot use the word "Albanian": if they do, it is seen as a betrayal of the Serb community. If they want to survive in that communi-

ty, they have to refer to Albanians as "Shiptars". As for Albanian men and women, if they want to survive in their communities, they must not use Serbian language in public. In Prishtine, we spoke English in the street. In order to understand both sides, I wanted to learn the facts. When I wanted to hear the Other, what was I to do with my system of values? And if I wanted to understand them, I had to hear them first. However, listening does not mean voicing any opinion. As I listened, I learned who the Other was.

What we saw was how the process of creating a nation is partly carried out through crime. Croatia is full of monuments to national heroes who died in the patriotic war, even when the victims were civilians. And this is also true for Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia. The monuments, music, bookshops, baby names, language – everyone keeps digging out the "ancient" roots... Everything is fraught with emotions, in an attempt to establish national identity. The new chetnik songs in Serbia are full of compassion for mothers grieving after their sons who were killed by the communist enemy and seeking revenge as if it was an ongoing war.

There was another dimension: namely, the effort to reach a consensus on war crimes. The representative of Serbs in the Kosovo municipality of Kamenica said that the Serbs had been the most affected by this war, whereas the Albanian representative said that his people had suffered the most. The situation was similar on our bus. Many women avoided blaming "their own people", and found it even more difficult to blame "others". Therefore, the crimes were often referred to in neutral terms, such as "what happened to us", or "there was an incident here", although the "incident" had actually been a massacre. Very few women of *the Caravan* spoke about the crimes committed by both sides in the areas where they lived. Those people who chose to live together usually decided not to speak out – thinking that silence was better than reviving conflicts. Thus "together" actually meant "in parallel, side by side, but not mixing", which is the case in many instances throughout the world.

There were touching moments on the bus: three Bosnian women from Srebrenica decided to join *the Caravan*, which meant crossing the River Drina for the first time in ten years. One of the women had a husband who had been killed on that very frontier between Bosnia and Serbia. We crossed it on foot and dedicated a moment of silence to the victims of the war. After her husband's death, this woman had sworn never to cross the Drina again. But she was not alone; she had our support. Later, she spoke about how she had cried on the bridge and was glad she had made it to the site of the crime and overcome her inner boundaries. She felt greatly relieved.

In Novi Pazar, local activists organized a party in a local hotel. We knew that music could be considered a political act. An Albanian from Prishtine and a Bosnian from Tuzla sang an old Bosnian song together. They stood before the microphone, staring into the distance as if they had always sung together, and touched us deeply. Then the Albanian sang a sad Albanian love song. I couldn't understand the lyrics, nor recognize the melody. Where

had I lived all those years if I knew all the songs "from Triglav to Djevdjelija",[3] but not an Albanian one? Then the Serbian *kolo* (folk dance) started. My associations to it were Šešelj, the chetniks, turbo-folk – I felt a slight pain in my chest. For years I couldn't relax with that sort of music. I saw women dancing – women from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and Macedonia – holding hands, laughing and rejoicing. They were dancing and I couldn't move. They were so cheerful and beautiful. I looked at Žarana, then started to smile. I felt warm inside – the activists were crossing borders.

Divided cities, but also the women we met everywhere, capable of hearing the Other. And once you hear the Other – the image she has of herself, with her own values and system of interpretation, you learn a new language. Indeed, cities are divided, but some activists speak many languages.

Lepa Mladjenović

(Women Activists Crossing Borders, from 25th of May to 9th of June 2002; *ProFemina, 31/31, 2003)*

[3.] Triglav is the northernmost mountain peak of Slovenia; Djevdjelija is the southernmost point in Macedonia.

Women from the Back Seat of the Bus

The bus from Belgrade to Doboj. It is tattered; I take a free seat. This is my first time traveling to Bosnia alone. People with bundles surround me. In the back seat, women and children are sitting. The women are trying to keep the children calm "so as not to disturb the other passengers." They communicate in glances; they exchange the uneasiness they feel almost in whispers. I feel a cramp in my stomach. I know that the women from the back seat have undesirable names. What are the signs of "spotting them"? They carry children in their arms, and as the bus is nearing the border, they take out some papers and hold them in their hands; lest they should get confused and fumble if some uniformed men get on the bus even before the border.

I gaze through the window. There's a break before Sremska Rača, the so-called "border-crossing". The same cafe where we used to come daily, last August, while the rows of those expelled from Krajina were coming in. The women from the back seat get off, their children run around the bus. How should they keep them calm – "even outside they are in the way"? One of the women from the back seat shouts at a boy: "Safet!" They, as well as I, heard that. A name that demands explanation, apology even.

Immediately after we cross the border, a uniformed man bursts into the bus and shouts: "Are there any Muslim or Croat names on the bus?" The bus-driver answers affirmatively. We go on. Just like in the film *Ko to tamo peva*[4]: "Driv, Miško!" We enter so-called *Republika Srpska*. The landscape is tame. There is another check after a half-hour's drive. A thorough one. On the documents bearing Serb names, they just do a routine check. Then they announce: "Those with Muslim and Croat names, follow me". The women from the back seat get off. They leave the children with a cousin with a desirable name. My guess that the cousin is the sister-in-law of one of the women that were taken off the bus proves right. The other people barely have any comments on this. This is "normal procedure". The convulsion in me increases; I get out to have a cigarette, I do not speak to the other people at all. I just observe. Trucks loaded with logs come from the opposite direction. They are taking all that to Serbia. Business is flourishing.

Half an hour later, there are no signs of the women from the back seat. They have taken them to the "shed", for questioning. Apart from the women from the back seat, they have also taken a five-member family, with

[4] Who's That Singing Over There, a Yugoslavian film, 1980

Croatian names, I think. One hour later, the women from the back seat return. They are flushed: "It went well, they were polite." (?!) They embrace one another; they do not reproach their children as they did a while ago. They are relaxed on the back seat of the bus. One of the women says: "I am going to Srebrenik. I haven't seen my family for five years." Next to them, a man holding a bottle offers it to one of them: "Take a sip, sister. I know what trouble is. I haven't seen my sister for five years. She lives on the other side. I never part from this (he points to the bottle)."

I glance through the window. Election posters along the way. All of the faces on them are grinning, Arkan is laughing in our faces. His posters become more numerous as we near Bijeljina. An elderly man gets on at one of the stops. The conductor asks for the fare from him and the old man explains in a trembling voice: "I swear by my mother, I haven't got it." The conductor shouts at the old man:"What do I care? Driver, stop!" The old man takes out his military ID. That enrages the conductor: "What should I do with that, you old fool?" (I think to myself: "show it to Mladić!"). What do I do so as not to embarrass the old man further? I look around myself, look for support to raise the fare. I give him the money. The conductor says to the driver: "Keep driving." The old man keeps repeating: "I am ashamed. Thank you, thank you..." I do not want him to feel awkward, to express "gratitude" to me. The man sitting next to me has a big potbelly. I keep moving away from him. If only I could jump out the window! I think to myself: "warrior, who knows how many he has killed!" Twenty minutes later the old man gets up and runs through the bus to the conductor. The latter loses his temper and throws the old man out of the bus. Trembling, I get up: "Why are you doing that? People, he just threw that old man out! What did that man do wrong?" The men around me are astounded by my reaction. One of them says: "I bet this is your first time here. Oh, we're used to all sorts of things." The one next to me says: "This is chaos. Don't protest. Anything can happen here." The one with the bottle: "All this is war syndrome. A man kills another man here just because the other one has a car."

I am dumbfounded. I just want to reach Lončari. There are the borders of four states: Bosnia-Herzegovina, IFOR[5], the so-called *Republika Srpska* and the so-called *Herzeg-Bosna*. IFOR armoured vehicles and tanks are around, their barrels pointed at us. I assume that taxis for Tuzla are parked behind these. I catch sight of the brother of the woman from the back seat. She rushes up to him. They weep. I tremble. The man next to me also gets off there. He did not "meet" my expectations. He did not belong to the Republika Srpska Army; what I feared the most. The important thing for me was that he was going to Tuzla. We took a taxi together: the four of us, plus the driver. Two Croat women from Tuzla who have visited all the states, paid the exorbitant tax for RS and reached the border with FR Yugoslavia, but

5. IFOR: The Implementation Force of the NATO-led group SFOR (Stabilization Force) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. IFOR was also known as "Operation Joint Endeavour"

"normalization" is not for normal people; they weren't allowed to enter FR Yugoslavia. They had come back.

I feel more relaxed. The driver is chattering; he shows us around like a tour guide: "Here is the Arizona market, if you wish to stop there. That is where families (from all present entities, states) met for the first time (in 1994). It became a market after the war; cars with license plates from all districts are there."

The rain is pouring down, I feel content; I do not mind at all, I am going to Tuzla. The taxi drives to the Bristol hotel. I do not want to wait until it has stopped pouring. I want to get there as soon as possible, to see those people who are dear to me. I drink coffee alone on the terrace of the hotel. "Bosnian" - the waitress corrects me: out of habit, I have asked for "Turkish" coffee. I am smiling, serene. A meeting of *the Civil Dialogue* is in progress. Jadranka, Lino and Goran are rushing in my direction. I see Goran for the first time. What a thrill!

August 1996

September l, 1996. All of us "traitors" of all ethnicities and states are getting onto a bus. We are going to Crikvenica. Again, the border of the four states in Lončari: only 20km away. When we stop to stretch our legs, the bus-driver tells me: "Bosnia is occupied. Which army is it that brings goodness and happiness?" You and I know that it can only bring misfortune, but the "high" representative M. Steiner claims the opposite, that it "brings and keeps peace for us!"

I always get excited when I hear people speaking against any army, so I almost scream when I hear Marko Oršolić, a theologian of liberation from Sarajevo and a refugee in Berlin, say in Crikvenica: "All those in uniform, except for firefighters, are enemies of civil society."

Staša

(Women for Peace, 1997)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Three Thousand Roses for Three Thousand Victims

On May 25th, Staša, Violeta, Ljilja, Senka, Nevzeta, Uma, Miloš and I went to yet another commemoration in a place where a crime had been committed. Once again, we performed our "attendance" in solidarity.

The old city of Višegrad is a symbol of our youth and our love - the city with the most beautiful bridge that connected the east and the west, the left and the right banks of the Drina for centuries. But now, it is a bridge of weakness, human idiocy, pain and sadness.

Three thousand roses for three thousand victims. Because of whom? Because of whose ideology? Just because they were born into a different religious community, 3,000 innocent women, children, and men were killed from May to June 1992. My Višegrad, 65% of your population was Muslim then, but today you have only one Bosniak resident - the one who maintains the mosque - only one. In the name of what?!?

At the edge of Višegrad, coming from Užice, there is a Bosniak cemetery. Throughout it, sprouting like poppies, there are wooden markers with inscriptions, *NN #324, NN bones #197, NN bones #69*. I quickly realized that *bones* means that there is no DNA available from a close living relative. Everyone was killed. Unknown sister, when will you no longer be *NN #186*? When will I be able to give you human respect, so that you, as a victim of pointlessness, are not unknown?

On the morning of May 26th, we crossed the bridge to meet with one-time residents of Višegrad who came from Sarajevo by bus caravan to their city where they can't live any longer because of "higher Serbian goals." How absurd! When we reached Užice Corps Street, we came across a monument of a Serb soldier wearing a traditional Serb soldier's hat. Ljilja went to check if the monument was from the First World War. Pain and shame; it is not. "Gratitude to the Republika Srpska fighters from the thankful people of Višegrad" is inscribed on it. No wonder 65% of the citizens born in Višegrad no longer live there.

We sit in the courtyard of a café and drink refreshing coffee with the first families who arrive by car. Beautiful Sabina, a biology student, calmed her mother, who, through tears, explained that the police officer who sat across from us (and who smiled like a bully) now lives in her house. "You know, there was a Red Cross collection center here in '92. The police officer said that I signed a statement that said I voluntarily abandoned my city and my home. What could I do? My husband was killed. I had to leave with my

three daughters. What else could I have done?" Her tears trickled down her pained and tired face. She turned her head away shamefully because it showed her pain.

A few minutes before noon, the bus caravan arrived with a police escort. Former residents who had not been able to return to Višegrad arrived. Children and young people carried a white banner with drawings of flowers and the words *Three Thousand Roses for Three Thousand Victims*. We walked right behind them holding the banners that we had brought with us. The others from the buses followed us. On the rampart beside the bridge, three thousand bouquets of roses were arranged. Nedija, a remarkable woman and the president of the *Disappeared People and Civilian Victims of Aggression Association - Višegrad '92*, explained to us, "You see those boats in the Drina? The ones downstream at that bend? They are waiting there for us to throw the roses. They will come, gather them up, and sell them. Last year, they earned around 1,000 euros from that. Today, they won't be able to earn that much." O people, to what level of inhumanity can we sink?

The speeches began. The first speaker was a representative of Republika Srpska, its governmental Vice President. During the speech, his voice broke. He cried real tears, as if to seek forgiveness, as if to justify the unjustifiable. Hey, Drina, bloody Drina! At that moment, his voice was overwhelmed by music from the speakers of a café - the singing of Ceca Ražnatović. How can forgiveness be found when they are not civilized enough to respect the pain of the families of innocent victims? Where is the humanity and solidarity? Staša spoke from the crowd then, the voice of a pained woman, "There is no excuse." Others in even more pain replied, "Don't. Do you know all that they suffered? Don't do that." A male voice from the crowd replied to Staša's words, "Don't talk that way. The criminals will kill you." Beside me, an older man who was holding the *Women in Black against War* banner with us, told me, "My dear, you all need twice as much courage to come here as we do." We slowly left the bridge. I heard two women speaking; one said, "I know them. They are wonderful. They go everywhere - even to Potočari." Men and women, young and old, approached us and said the same thing, "Thank you for coming. You don't know how much it means to us. We will never forget you or be able to thank you enough."

We were standing in the shade of a tree when women who were sitting with their children called out to Violeta, "Come dear, it's cooler here. Come, refresh yourself a bit. We have cheese, bread, and water. Come and have some." Violeta approached them and spoke with them as if she had known them a hundred years. They called me over. After taking insulin, I have to eat something. A beautiful girl with the warmest expression, a heartfelt smile, offered me a slice of bread with cheese. She worried about how I would be on the road back and if I had eaten enough. Pain, pain which becomes bitterness. Warm-hearted girl, I beg you for forgiveness because the killers of your loved ones still walk free in your city. How can I apologize for the fact that not one NGO activist from your Višegrad joined us today?

How can I explain to you the shame and pain that we carry within us because someone hurt your family in our name, in defense of their Serbia? How can I do this when you, with the warmest smile, offer me refreshment and worry about our return to Belgrade? How can I beg you for forgiveness when I am powerless to awaken your fellow citizens from apathy so we can finally condemn all crimes and jail all villains? When will we meet with your sisters from both sides of the Drina without shame?

Novi Sad, 28.5.2007

Nada Dabić

(Women for Peace, 2007)

Translated by **Stanislava Lazarević**

Expanding Our Civil Space: Women in Peace Initiatives

I remember the summer of '91; the heat and the oppressive feeling of anxiety. I also remember having this need to do something, a need that I felt like a pain in my stomach. The space we worked in, we breathed in, the space we had been building for years, began to dissolve, shrink, and disappear. During that humid summer it became completely clear to me that all that we had built by way of Green Movements and Women's Groups was sinking from day to day. In 1991 we talked about war with disbelief. The word war still had the taste of something that could not possibly happen - even if a lot of blood had already been shed; even if Krajina had already been cut off for almost an entire year. Everything indicated that it would be a bloody war, but somehow, we could not believe that it was going to happen to us. Us, of all people; like with cancer. Why us, why now?

During that tense summer, we began a campaign. One evening, on the patio of "Zagorka" restaurant, we decided that we wanted to launch the *Antiratna kampanja Hrvatske* (Anti-War Campaign Croatia). At that time, we still found it difficult to talk about war because - when does war really start? How much blood has to be shed for us to believe that a war has already started?

The illusion that we could actually stop the war soon faded away. When the bombs started falling on Osijek, the war drew dangerously near. The gunshots and sirens left no room for doubt. The war was happening to us at that very moment. We plunged into a whole slew of projects which we wanted to work on so as to preserve a small flame of non-violence, to mend already broken ties, or to make new ones such as had never existed in these parts before.

We started the first anti-war actions on Ban Jelačić Square and in Tkalčićeva Street in Zagreb. Šura Dumanić was working in Rijeka at the time, and she initiated peace actions there. In the second year of the war, in May of '92, the *Centar za mir, nenasilje i ljudska prava* (Centre for Peace, Non-violence and Human Rights) began its work in Osijek. That summer we also organised our first volunteer projects. In September, *Suncokret* (Sunflower) was founded. Then, in late autumn, when reports started arriving about the rape happening in Bosnia, a group of women gathered together who later founded the *Centar za žene žrtve rata* (Centre for Women War Victims).

During 1992 and 1993, organizations also started up in Poreč, Pula, and Split. In 1993 a volunteer project started its work in Pakrac – the first of its kind in an area protected by UN forces. It was there that we cooperated

with volunteers from Belgrade's *Most* (Bridge) organization. That same year, *B.a.B.e.* (Be active Be emancipated) - *Women's Human Rights Group* was established. Organisations also sprang up in the small towns of Daruvar and Županja. Information circulated between the different groups on pieces of paper and at meetings, but from 1993, a large part of the messages went through *ZaMir*, an electronic e-mail network with local hubs in Zagreb, Pakrac, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Tuzla and Prishtina. After the breaking off of telephone ties and the suspension of mail service in 1991, *ZaMir* became our first chance of communicating with all the parties crossing the lines of division.

In 1994 we also started up the first organisation dedicated to seminars and workshops: *Mali Korak* (Small Step) – *the Centre for the Culture of Peace and Non-violence*. Education became more and more important. In 1995 we started the *Women's Studies* programme. And now we are planning on setting up *Peace Studies*. We expect to begin with an experimental programme in the spring of 1997.

During these past five years, women and men volunteers have invested more than a hundred thousand hours of volunteer work, and we have organized seminars and workshops on conflict resolution for several thousand teachers. Human rights groups helped out by offering advice and giving direct protection to thousands of people affected by war. Organisations linked to the coordination of organisations for the protection of human rights are still working in particularly difficult conditions in Krajina, Lika, Banija, Kordun and Western Slavonia. We have organised self-support groups for tens of thousands of displaced persons and refugees. We also launched *ARKzin*, which originally started out as a small newsletter, and is now sold at newsstands. We have also published several books and printed hundreds of thousands of flyers.

There were both women and men among us. There were, however, more women. Maybe it was easier for us to choose non-violence. As the eternal "other", we can better understand that problems cannot be solved with violence. We are constantly beginning something, like endless housework. It is as if the routine of repeating the ritual of cleaning is our direction. We are constantly gluing together pieces of broken cups. We are eternally creating things from nothing: sometimes dinner, sometimes a painting, and sometimes relationships and threads of communication within a local community...

The choice of non-violence is always difficult, as the environment moves us towards violence. This choice is particularly difficult during wartime. Violent behaviour is the dominating form of behaviour. Immediately below the surface, as soon as you scratch beneath the list of the *Ten Commandments*, lies the heart of the national proverb *Tko jači, taj kvači* (The one who is stronger gets everything by force). Very early on we get the message that violence is really the most productive form of behaviour. During wartime, the use of violence is legitimised by the needs of countries and nations. The whole pre-war women's scene was polarised by this question of choice.

In spite of the fact that five years have passed from the moment when some women said that violence was necessary (as Croatia had been attacked), and other women claimed that the non-violent way was still possible, a deep abyss of dissent still divides women's groups.

All of us who had chosen non-violence spun a web, marked our space and brought it to life with our initiatives - while opening this space for new women. Together with them, we are finding ways of preserving and renewing dignity. We brought ourselves into it, bringing all our gifts: our time, our difficulties, and our enthusiasm; and we inspired others with this.

The aim of our projects was the realisation of several important goals. It was important for us to remain steadfast in *protecting our values in spite of pressures*. In times of war, when the wave of blood becomes high and even too high, many people are prepared to say that there is no other way and that it is only with arms that we can defend what we are and what we have. It is at that precise moment that it is important to say that there is another way. The non-violent way is not always clear-cut, and it is not easy to explain to those who are in pain and who are angry at having lost their families and friends. But it is important to preserve and to explore this different path and to save this live experience of refusing violence for those who cannot point a weapon at another human being, and for the times when the wounds of war will be healed and when the whole community will once more want to establish a different system of values. It was important to promote human rights in times of irrationality because the idea that human rights were universal and indivisible must always be promoted. It was important to emphasise the significance of dignity for each and every one of us.

By promoting the values of non-violence and the protection of human rights, *we were building and expanding our civil space* - a space in which we could breathe and work. A space in which we could be ourselves and where we could create new relationships and projects and live our lives defying the violent demands of the state. The energy of many activists often goes into the mere preservation of space, and not into the widening of circles, because the efforts of resistance are so great that sometimes we do not have the strength to create and can keep a small light, just enough to keep it for some other, better time. But sometimes we recharge our energy. Then the boundary of our space becomes more permeable. Suddenly, there are new people coming and the processes continue through their creations.

Inside our civil space, we learned that one of the most important goals of our work was the *giving of strength and encouragement to women in order to leave behind the role of victim*. In working with women, we have supported them in expressing their traumatic experiences. We have offered a hand, but also showed them that it was important to mourn, and that, after mourning, to continue walking with full female dignity. There are many women who underwent horrible experiences during the war and simply continued carrying on in the role of victim. This is certainly one of the most popular roles in this region. Regardless of which side of the conflict they were

on, people find many reasons to see themselves as victims. They block any path of exit from the situation they are in because they put themselves in a position where other people always decide about their lives. We have encouraged women to take over the responsibility for their own lives and to become aware of their own power so that they can continue on their way, with their own strengths, supported by a wide network of women.

Starting a *dialogue* between groups that have difficulty communicating (or do not communicate at all) was an important task for a whole stream of organisations. The polarisations were large not only between the Serbs and the Croats. All of the divisions in Croatia are as sharp as a razor. In addition to one's national, religious and professional identity, there are also other reasons to retract into one's own group: to build safety inside a group of similar people and to feel protection and warmth inside this somewhat narrow world of "those who are like me." Those "others" fill us with fear and distrust. Excursions out of the slightly stale "we", into the insecure, unknown, and threatening "they" are rare. We all know how difficult a dialogue is between Serbs and Croats, but often we are not aware of how difficult a discussion or an agreement is between Catholics (who are the largest religious group in Croatia) and all those who are non-believers. The Catholics would call us atheists. We are aware of how difficult a dialogue is between displaced Serbs and displaced Croats (because we are trying to facilitate this in the *Coordination of Peace Organisations for Eastern Slavonia Baranja and Western Sirmium*), but we frequently forget that our own civil scene is too often separated by high walls of distrust from others who are not involved. Nevertheless, we are learning the skills of communication more and more, and we are communicating with all those who do not think in the same way as we do.

This war was (for me, personally,) a means of change and learning. For more than five years I have been living between stress and knowledge. Five years of living in a state of emergency has sharpened my ability to survive (which can be condensed into one key phrase: a complete openness to change). For everything that we do in the Peace Groups, Women's Groups and in the Organisations for Human Rights we also need ingenuity, energy, stamina and openness to pain and joy. And the results slip through our fingers, they disappear like a mirage. The exhaustion from responding to the steps made by the government is enormous and does not pass easily. It is immensely tiring reacting to the moves of those in power. It is immensely tiring keeping a position of balance while swimming in deep water and keeping our heads above the surface so that all those who are holding on do not drown with us. Are we only straws that a storm plays with, or are we tree trunks that give security and the possibility of safety to someone who has already shed all hope? Or, are we islands - some islands of sanity in a sea of war madness, at a time when almost everybody accepts exclusiveness as the only possible way and are prepared to pull the trigger to defend their fragile, shaken and insecure identity?

When I feel sad and when I am tired, what saves me is the knowledge that I can lean on a wide network of women from Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Vojvodina and England. Our network of support is stretched across continents and enables us to widen our civil space no matter where we are.

Vesna Teršelič

(Women and the Politics of Peace:
Contributions to a Culture of Women's Resistance 1997;
Women for Peace, 1997)

Translated by **Renée Franić**

Terms and Acronyms

Bairam, or Bayram: A Muslim holiday

Balija: A derogatory term for a Bosniak (Bosnian person of Muslim faith) is a term used to describe descendants of Turks of Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. The term is also used in a derogatory way to call anyone who is a Bosnian Muslim or considers themselves an ethnic Bosniak.

Balinka: A derogatory term for a Bosniak woman (Bosnian woman of Muslim faith)

BiH: Bosnia and Hercegovina

CCD: The Croatian Council of Defense (Hrvatsko vijeće obrane, HVO) was a main military formation of the self-proclaimed Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosnia during the Bosnian War. It was the first organized military force with the aim to control the Croat populated areas. It is not to be confused with the Croatian Defence Force (HOS) which was a separate Croatian military unit.

CDF: The Croatian Defence Forces (Hrvatske obrambene snage, HOS) was the military arm of the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP). The last HOS unit was dissolved in 1993 in central Bosnia. The guiding idea of CDF was to return the east border of the Croatian state to the one existing in the period of the Independent State of Croatia during the WWII.

CDU (**HDZ**): The Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica) was the major Croatian party.

Chetniks: The Chetnik movement or the chetniks were a Serbian-nationalist/royalist paramilitary organisation operating in the Balkans before and during World Wars. During the WWII, they were collaborating with Nazi Germany in fight against the partisans. In modern times, especially during and after Yugoslav Wars, the term "chetnik" came to be used as an ethnic slur against Serbs. However, some Serb nationalist and paramilitary organisations self-identified with the term.

Čaršija is a part of a town, almost always located in its very centre and which mostly developed its form and name during the Ottoman Empire rule

in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It represents one of the most important characteristics of the Ottoman town, being its commercial centre, a zone in which most of the activities were taking place.

IFOR: The Implementation Force of the NATO-led group SFOR (Stabilization Force) in Bosnia-Herzegovina. IFOR was also known as "Operation Joint Endeavour".

Keraterm: ceramics factory; **Keraterm camp** was a concentration camp (also referred to as prison and detention camp) near the town of Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1995. The camp was founded by the authorities of Republika Srpska (RS) and was used to collect and confine civilians of Bosniak and Bosnian Croat nationality. According to ICTY indictment more than 3,000 detainees were held at Keraterm and some 300 of them were killed.

KFOR: NATO troops in Kosovo

KLA (**UCK**): Kosovo Liberation Army

Markale (marketplace) **massacres** were two massacres committed by the Army of Republika Srpska on civilians during the siege of Sarajevo. The second attack was the stated reason for NATO air strikes against the Bosnian Serb forces that would eventually lead to the Dayton Peace Accords and the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Omarska camp was a Serb-run concentration camp in Omarska, a mining town near Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina, set up during Prijedor massacre. Functioning in the first months of the Bosnian War in 1992, it was one of 677 detention centers and camps throughout Bosnia during the war. One of the most infamous camps where non-Serb civilians and Prisoners of War were kept and often brutally tortured and killed.

PDA: The Party of Democratic Action (or Stranka Demokratske Akcije - SDA), was the major Muslim party.

Republika Srpska: often abbreviated **RS**, is one of the two political entities which represent a lower level of governance in the present-day country of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the other entity is the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

SAO Krajina or Serbian Autonomous Oblast (region) of Krajina was a self proclaimed Serbian autonomous region (oblast) in Croatia. It existed between 1990 and 1991 and was subsequently included into Republika Srpska Krajina. SAO Krajina was the main section of the Republika Srpska Krajina, also known as *Krajina proper*.

SFOR: The Stabilization Force was a NATO-led multinational force in Bosnia and Herzegovina which was given the task of upholding the Dayton Agreement.

Shiptar: A derogatory name, used in Serbia, for an Albanian person from Kosovo.

Slava: the Orthodox Christian custom of honouring a family patron saint. It is celebrated by the Serbs, but also in parts of the Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, as well as among some Croats and the Gorani (a minority South Slavic ethnic group).

Storm (*Oluja*): A large-scale military operation carried out by Croatian Armed Forces, with the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to retake the Krajina region into Croatia, which had been controlled by separatist ethnic Serbs since early 1991. The operation, which lasted only 36 hours, was documented as the largest European land offensive since World War II. It began on August 4, 1995 and ended with a complete victory for the Croatian forces four days later.

Trnopolje: village near city Prijedor; **Trnopolje camp** was a detention camp (also referred to as ghetto, prison and concentration camp) established in the village of Trnopolje near the city of Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina in the first months of the Bosnian War (1992-1995). Nominally "a transit camp" for members of the non-Serb (mainly Bosnian Muslim/Bosniak) population of the Prijedor region it was described by a United Nations Security Council report as "a concentration camp".

UNHCR: United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNMIK: United Nations Mission in Kosovo

UNPROFOR: The United Nations Protection Force, was the first UN peacekeeping force in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the Yugoslav wars. It existed between the beginning of UN involvement in February 1992, and it’s restructuring into other forces in March 1995.

Ustashas: Croatian Revolutionary Movement, founded in 1929 as a nationalist organization that sought to create an independent Croatian state. When the Ustashas came to power in the Independent State of Croatia, a state established by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany during World War II, its military wing became the *Ustashas Army*. During the Yugoslav wars, the term "ustasha" came to be used as ethnic slur against Croats. However, some Croat nationalist and paramilitary organisations self-identified with the term.

Vreme (*Time*): an independent weekly magazine renowned for its sharp criticism of the ruling policies of the time.

White Eagles (*Beli Orlovi*) (1991-1995) were a Serbian paramilitary group. Testimony at the International War Crimes Tribunal indicates that the White Eagles were responsible for a number of atrocities during the Croatian and Bosnian wars, including: the Voćin massacre, Višegrad massacre, crimes at Foča, Gacko and others. Various members of the White Eagles were indicted by the Tribunal.

YNA (**JNA**): The Yugoslav People's Army also known as the Yugoslav National Army

Zenge: The Croatian National Guard popularly called *zenge* from the Croatian abbreviation (Zbor Nacionalne Garde, ZNG)

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* The bibliography consists of all publications comprising women's stories available to the editors. Titles of the publications from which the texts were taken are in bold type.

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