

COLORED EGGS

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A story based on true events

N.G.

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Dear reader,

This is a story based on true events during the war in Croatia (1991 - 1995). I used the characters of twin sisters Tina and Nina who must leave their home city Zadar because of the war. In their house were three valuable multicolored eggs left behind. They wanted it to be saved. As I was still living in Zadar and the sisters were already in Sweden I was asked to save the eggs.

My mom and I were trying to save the precious eggs. I described the war situation back then as I had experienced it while I was a teenager. I saw a lot of destroyed houses of the people who left the city at the time. I also described survival of me and my family in then attacked city.

One of the main characters is Tina who wants to come to Zadar at any cost. No matter the war and danger of coming back. In the meantime, she got married to her boyfriend in Sweden. But still, her only wish was to come back and visit her granny in the village nearby Benkovac in Croatia. I described her travelling to the war zone and visiting Zadar with the UN forces. There she faced her destroyed and burned family house. The family had left everything behind, her mother recalled her embroideries that were left back in the family house.

"How many times did I stab myself with that damned needle while trying to finish all the embroideries? How many evenings did I spend in front of that dim light, over that squinting lamp in the living room; finishing the embroideries that were not even saved in the end!? She suddenly jerked when she awoke from the dream, she was for a moment in. Suddenly she came back to reality again. She felt that her eyes were full of tears which were now unstoppably flowing down her red cheeks. The Swedish woman quickly pushed towards her a package with paper tissues. Rajka took one out and wiped away her tears. They didn't stop flowing down this woman's cheeks. She drank

some water and continued talking. And then they suddenly dropped a bomb in front of our house, late in the evening."

At the very beginning of the book, I explained life in Zadar while it was Italian and called Zara. The inhabitants of Zara left their homes at the end of the Second World War.

"As if afraid that someone might hear them some people were softly whispering that at the end of the Second World War the Italians had to leave their beautiful villas on the peninsula in the old town of Zadar. The Italians who used to live there until the end of the Second World War left all their valuable possessions, big old villas, expensive dishes and beautifully decorated furniture. And left their houses in Zara forever. One couldn't take anything with him except basic things. At the time Zara was mostly located on its peninsula. It was surrounded by ramparts from the outside. The old town with its beautiful buildings made of white stone looked like a huge fortress surrounded by defensive walls all around it. Inside and behind the massive stone ramparts were beautiful big villas. There used to live wealthy Italians."

Just like Tina and Nina, the Italians never came back to Zadar again. At the end of the book Tina and Nina's granny was brutally killed. Just after the action "Storm" in 1995 and shortly after the end of war. This was based on true events when more than ten old people were brutally killed in two villages next to each other. I used a lot of newspapers articles published on the internet as a proof of authenticity of the events happened at the time.

I apologize for grammar mistakes I made while writing the book. Please take into consideration that English is not my native language. I wrote the book deep from my heart while trying to describe my personal experiences from the war. Because of the sensitive and delicate war subject I decided to publish my first novel anonymously.

1 THE SAVIĆ FAMILY

Tina and Nina Savić were born in Zadar in 1977. Even though twins who were born on the same day the two did not look alike. On the day the two sisters were born they already had long, dark and curly brown hair.

They were very beautiful and cuddly babies. Sisters didn't cry very often. They just calmly looked at the world around them and smiled happily all the time. They were looking around with their big blue eyes trying to get attention from their mom Rajka. The two grew up surrounded by a lot of love which they got from their parents. At that time, Christian Orthodox children were usually not baptized. Their parents were members of the Communist party which at the time did not look kindly on the church, religion or religious holidays itself.

That was the reason that neither Tina nor Nina was baptized by their parents when they were babies. According to the church rules and Christian religion one should baptize their children while they were babies and certainly not after their first birthday.

In fact, only a few said that they were visiting cathedrals, attending Mass or religious education in churches on Sundays. On the other hand, Catholic children were usually baptized in time, while Orthodox just sometimes. Catholic ones were baptized as that should be according to the church rules, ideally before their first birthday. After that they regularly attended churches and religious ceremonies with their parents.

At the same time Christian Orthodox churches were mostly empty. Although beautifully decorated, full of nicely painted icons on the walls, it was not very busy inside. On the other side, the Catholic ones were crowded and one could comfortably sit in it during the long Mass. In Orthodox

churches one had to stand during the long ceremonies all the time.

Almost every part of our city had one Roman Catholic church. On the other side, there was just one Eastern Orthodox church in the old city center. Allegedly, a long time ago it was a Catholic church as well and they decided to grant it to the Christian Orthodox out of solidarity. That way Orthodox believers could practice their religion and visit churches more often as well.

Even though they granted the beautiful church in the city center most Orthodox children remained unbaptized just like their parents who did not believe in God. Others did not even know what their religion or of their parents was. There were plenty of mixed marriages and villages where both Christian Catholics and Orthodox used to live together. Because many were married with each other most of those usually declared themselves as Yugoslavs.

However, there were those who did not like the ones visiting churches. Youth Day was celebrated each year on May 25 and was regarded as the biggest holiday of then Yugoslavia. It was organized in honor of our president Josip Broz Tito. Just before the big celebration in Yugoslavia our teacher Slavica asked loudly:

"Let everyone who goes to church step forward. Let me see two fingers of yours if you attend a church on Sundays for the Mass or religion education," said the teacher loudly in front of our classroom.

It was aimed to the Catholic ones who usually went to churches on Sundays. At the churches was organized religious education for them. It was decided to do so after the Communist party took power in our country and after the Second World War. Then was decided that children cannot have religion classes at schools anymore.

There was silence in the classroom. At first, no one dared to step forward.

I think it was my second or third primary school grade at the time. I can't remember all the details, but I still know that I felt very uncomfortable and confused. I couldn't tell if it was something that our teacher adorned and appreciated, or something that she didn't approve at all. I only remember that our teacher Slavica lived in a big white villa not far from our primary school.

About seven pupils stepped forward in front of our classroom. They thought it was no harm to go to church on Sunday and attend Mass or religion education.

In fact, the church teaches us to love all the people and other kids around us so what could be wrong in attending churches? And why should it be condemned? And from our dear teacher?

The teacher invited those who shyly had raised two fingers to come in front of the classroom. They must stand in line in front of the rest of us. Then she explained how it was wrong to go to churches, because it does not teach anything, God does not really exist and going there is useless.

"When your parents send you to church every Sunday for the Mass or religious education you only waste your time. You'd better use that time to write your homework and practice reading, spelling or mats at home. Instead of going to church," explained our teacher to all of us. Especially to the ones who were standing in front of the classroom.

They just looked confused with their little innocent eyes, feeling guilty for being put in front of the classroom because they were going to a church.

It was an event that remained deeply engraved in me. It was never clear to me why our teacher Slavica disapproved

and what was wrong with the children who were going to church on Sundays. If they parents approved.

I didn't dare to ask anything concerning churches at home. Sometimes it happened that I simply didn't get any answer to some questions I used to ask at home. Or my parents just looked strangely at me. I guess they were afraid of saying something wrong. So, I remained still and pretended that nothing had happened in the classroom that day. I just tried to forget this event and didn't think of it anymore.

Still, I remember that my friend Toni was one of those standing in front of our classroom. He was trying to explain to our teacher Slavica why he went to church every Sunday. On the other hand, she believed that his parents wanted him to go there and that it wasn't his own free will. He tried to convince her that God really does exist.

"One day you will see that He really exists. God lives up in heaven," Toni was trying to explain to her.

The teacher laughed loudly and mockingly at him. With her body language she invited the other pupils in the classroom to follow her laughter. After that the other kids had started to imitate her. They were laughing mockingly at my classmate as well.

Toni was just standing proudly in front of our classroom. He was looking defiantly towards the other children who were laughing hard all the time and were supported by our teacher Slavica in front of them.

I was totally confused. What was it all about? It wasn't still clear to me. I just pretended that I was writing something in my notebook. Not moving I was still sitting in my school chair trying to hide from the others.

2 JOSIP BROZ TITO

Youth Day was a holiday celebrated throughout our common homeland - Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ shortly). It was on May 25 when the birthday of our popular president - Josip Broz Tito - was celebrated.

Tito was a real gentleman. Always nicely dressed wearing a modern suit and tie. The jacket of his was usually decorated with various medals that should show to the people of Yugoslavia how great and important he was. He was the one responsible for the victory against fascism during World War two, but for the brotherhood and unity among all the peoples of Yugoslavia after the war as well.

All those medals Tito wore on his chest couldn't always fit on his left, so he also wore them on his right side. All those merits he received after World War two were strange to me. As a little kid I just considered it completely unclear. Tito seemed to be responsible for everything we had back then. He was something like our king that we actually didn't have. Or at least a god from Heaven walking here on Earth among us. Nothing offensive was to be said against Tito. One shouldn't curse or say something against him in front of the others. There were few sentenced for disobedience to Tito. Suspected they had said a dirty word against Tito and later ended up on "Goli otok". Without evidence proving they really used such a dirty word against our president Tito were they sent to the island to dig and transport big heavy stones all day long. They were imprisoned for years and must serve their punishment on the abandoned island "Goli otok". It was the island of fear not popular among people of Yugoslavia back then.

Tito often appeared during various ceremonies where he usually gave philosophical smart speeches about brotherhood and unity of the whole people living in

Yugoslavia. He was talking about Yugoslavia which should be endlessly adored, loved and respected from all of us.

“Sensitive like an eye!”

He used to repeat this phrase as if he himself was afraid that Yugoslavia one day could fall apart. Sooner or later.

Tito used to visit various cities where people were organizing ceremonies in his honor. The popular president seemed like a person coming from some other planet or even someone coming from some other country far away from communist Yugoslavia. He possessed many houses, villas and summer residencies all around our big former state. He was to be seen all around and everywhere in Yugoslavia. He used to smoke black thick cigarettes as if he came from Cuba. Tito spoke with that strange accent that didn't really resemble our language. Officially he lived in the capital of Yugoslavia, in Belgrade Serbia. But he often visited all the various popular destinations of the former Yugoslavia. Usually, he was on Brijuni islands during hot summers. There he used to organize receptions to various representatives and guests from all over the world. At the same time, they were enjoying the luxury of his private "Safari". Tito had a collection of exotic animals brought from various parts of Africa on the Brijuni islands.

I remember that we could only watch wild animals on television back then, the first or second program at the time. There were no more programs on our TV. Some of those that lived in big cities like in Zagreb or Belgrade could go to the city zoo there and adore such beautiful animals alive. Just a few of us have seen such wild animals alive. Except, of course, Tito and his wife Jovanka including some of their close associates.

There was no zoo in our little Zadar. In fact, there was a small park for children to play and they had few exotic

animals there. One could see turtles, rabbits but a strange little monkey as well. I always wanted to steal that beautiful monkey with little human hands and fingers. I still can remember that little monkey eating grass while holding it with his cute little fingers. I wanted to have that cute animal at home with me. But of course, this was just a wish of mine. I never saw elephants and giraffes alive when I was a little boy.

But on Brijuni islands were elephants, giraffes, zebras and various colorful birds. Once I had also heard that Tito received all those beautiful animals as a gift from his friends from all over the world. They said it on TV once. Representatives who came from Africa brought poor animals as a gift to our president Tito. Brijuni was considered an ideal place for the wild animals. Although Brijuni islands are not in Africa they do have mild Mediterranean climate and wild animals cannot escape there. It is surrounded by the Adriatic Sea so they could enjoy the vastness and pastures all around the island. Just like somewhere where they used to live, far away in their homeland of Africa.

It was said that our president Tito was respected by all the important people of the world, but from locals as well. He was welcome in all the countries of the world. Yugoslavia had a very good reputation at that time and the citizens of our country traveled with red passports all around the globe. They didn't need a visa.

Everyone adored Tito.

At least it seemed so.

President Tito was born on 7 May 1892 in Kumrovec, the Republic of Croatia, then part of SFR Yugoslavia. The big country consisted of six republics including two autonomous provinces - Vojvodina and Kosovo.

I remember that Youth Day was celebrated with different activities, various performances and events in the city center

and football stadiums all around. In primary schools the day was celebrated like an important event as well. The personality and work of Josip Broz was highly praised. People were drawing a huge transparent saying:

"We love you, our dear president Tito!"

The baton of youth was carried all around Yugoslavia. It traveled throughout the entire six republics and two provinces of former Yugoslavia.

Although Tito was born on a totally different date and day his birthday was officially celebrated on May 25.

I didn't know exactly when our president Tito was born. Back then, I didn't even know the exact birth date of my parents. As a little kid I hardly knew that Tito was our famous president. His date of birth must be known. At that time, Tito was more important than anything on Earth. But not to me.

One had to know basic things related to his character and work. Especially the date relating his birth.

So, one day there was an assignment at our school that said: "When was the president of our Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) Josip Broz Tito born?"

I didn't know the right answer to this question, so the teacher got very angry. She became very upset and shouted at the top of her voice yelling at me: "How come you don't know when the president was born? We all must know that!"

My teacher was yelling as if it was the most important thing in the world. I felt confused and embarrassed while lowering my head sadly. Actually, I didn't really understand what was so important about Tito and the date of his birthday. The teacher made me write the date and year of our

president's birth on the blank white sheet of my notebook. I had to write it all day long.

It was the day when I started to hate our dear president Tito, as we used to call him in those days. After I had written the date of birth of the president of Yugoslavia a thousand times on a blank sheet of a white paper my teacher was no longer my dear one either.

Tina and Nina Savić went to the same primary school. At first the school was named "Smiljevac" but later they decided to change the school's name to "Maršal Tito" Primary School. However, even this name didn't last long because Tito became the main enemy. He became undesirable and was thrown out of Croatia. It just happened overnight. In the early nineties. His character and work were no longer respected among Croats. He suddenly became unpopular and was guilty for everything bad that had happened in Croatia until then. Nobody wanted to hear about "dear" President Tito anymore.

After the first free parliamentary elections in Croatia and after 45 years of the Communist one-party system in 1990, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) won. Then the new president of Croatia, Dr. Franjo Tuđman, appeared suddenly among us. He advocated the independence of Croatia, prosperity and a better life for all of us.

Very popular back then the new president promised that after separation of Yugoslavia Croatia would become a new Switzerland. A rich, wealthy, prosperous and well-developed country.

Everyone believed in a dream that we would become a wealthy and prosperous country where people will be happy and rich. But it could happen only after the independence of Croatia. And after we divorce and leave Yugoslavia for good.

Tuđman did not respect works of the former Yugoslav President Tito, the Communist Party and regime which was considered bad for Croatia. Many believed Tuđman and his

stories about rich, wealthy, well-developed independent Croatia. People believed in "new Switzerland" fairytale. People couldn't wait for Croatia to become independent and to leave Yugoslavia forever. Back then it was said that "they were stealing and taking most of our money from Croatia". Allegedly the stolen money, as it was said, "was transferred from our Croatia to the Yugoslav capital Belgrade and to Serbia."

Just like me Tina and Nina had to walk about three kilometers to school every day. We used to carry heavy backpacks on our tiny shoulders. On foot.

Our school seemed very far away at the time. I still remember that we went along a white narrow path. It was a wild road without asphalt. It always seemed very long and tiresome to walk to our school that way. At the other side of the neighborhood was a highway. Back then there was no paved sidewalk nearby the highway, so our parents did not allow us to use that way. They were afraid of the busy car traffic along the road and that an accident could happen. Or even worse, that someone could hit us by car.

"It's better to take the safe path, because there are no cars driving there. Along the highway they drive crazy and fast all the time," my mother used to warn me all the time.

We always had to carry a lot of various books, notebooks, and other school supplies that we needed for classes. Those were the times when almost everything was carried from home. In schools we only had desks, blackboards and chalks. Anyway, we were still happy with all the colored chalks we had. We always packed the bags in the evening so that we could start our journey to school carefree early in the morning.

Tina and Nina lived in a house nearby. In the same neighborhood where I used to live. I could clearly see their

house from my own balcony. Their father Slobodan moved from his village to the city of Zadar in the early seventies.

It was the time when young men and women from the surrounding villages, as well as from the villages further away, decided to move to the city. Zadar was just beginning to develop and expand all around and it offered people from the villages safer and better future life. The city was getting bigger and lots of people from the village saw their better future in the city.

Slobodan was back then a real country boy. He decided to come to the city as well. With the help of his parents, who granted him all their savings, he managed to buy a plot with the intention of building a little family house on it. Usually at that time in our settlement one could buy smaller plots of around 300 square meters. After that they had started to build houses next to each other.

Slobodan quickly started to work at a place of an experienced carpenter. There he learned the trade of carpentry himself, which he would later successfully proceed in the basement of his little family house.

He quickly met his wife Rajka, whom he proposed to and married. Rajka also came to the city from a nearby village. Just like all the others she was looking for happiness and better future in Zadar. But for a good opportunity and a husband as well.

Slobodan started to build a house in then less populated part of the city of Zadar. Back then, our settlement looked more like a large construction site. Many dug the foundations of the houses themselves, including Slobodan himself. Only when people could no longer or didn't know how to proceed the heavy work themselves would they hire workers to take over the heavy construction work. The workers would continue to stack the blocks until houses had taken its complete shape. The roof was done separately, so roofers had to be hired for that part of the job. People were building all

over our neighborhood at the same time. A lot of new houses appeared like mushrooms after the rain.

Construction workers usually came from Bosnia and Herzegovina to work temporarily in Dalmatia.

Some were pleased with the foundations only, while the others dug entire deep basements by their bare hands. They had to break stones with a heavy pickaxe and pull it out manually themselves. They asked their neighbors to help them to get those heavy rocks outside deep holes. After that they would help their neighbors if they needed some help with their work as well.

This method of digging last several years. It was a bloody and heavy digging work. Their hands were often full of blisters. As they tried to save some Yugoslav dinars for the construction of the future homes, they often did the hard work themselves for more than a year. Most of them tried to dig as deep a hole as possible and made a huge basement with a solid foundation of a future big house.

Many future residents of this neighborhood, that was situated only a few kilometers from the old town itself and beautiful beaches, had no idea that they would leave their houses because of the war. All the basements and foundations, including their houses made themselves and dug with their bare hands while pulling heavy stones out of the deep holes will be left forever.

One day, not by their free will.

But because of the war!