



25th ANNIVERSARY

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA

LETTERS FROM BOSNIA

Dear Friend,

Let me start with telling you a simple Srebrenica fairytale:

Long time ago, in a land far away, one little girl lived a happy, normal life- all fairytales begin like this...What I can remember about life before the war is a happy childhood of a seven years old girl who was cheerful, childish, full of life, surrounded by love and friends. She didn't need anything else. It was a perfect happy childhood. I had a home, friends, a dream of becoming a pilot one day, hope, imagination... I started school, met some new friends, had My first favorite teacher, got my first A. And then boom: WAR!

That seven years old girl did not know what war was nor why there was no more going to school when she had just started. She didn't know why her father didn't go to work anymore even though he used to go. She didn't know why every now and then there was a loud earth shaking noise, and why they all had to lay down on the ground whenever we heard a 'bang', or why her father decided we they needed to go from their own home to other villages; and, then to a town. I can still feel the blisters on my feet while I was trying to keep up with the others. I had so many questions but nobody seemed to pay attention to me.

It was still war! Hunger and more hunger!

I started to forget some people I used to know, I couldn't remember the taste of bread and salt. I heard people saying that 'they' are getting closer to the town. It made me feel like I couldn't breathe. At night, I dreamt about the taste of chocolate. I was wondering why everyone was talking so quietly as if we were hiding.



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I didn't go to school anymore, and I didn't see my classmates from 'the other side of the Drina River'. Why?

I kept thinking if anyone could see or hear us. If there was anywhere some salt and bread, and why was it that nobody heard all of the people crowded in that small place...Why is it that nobody heard us? As if we were not loud enough with our screams.

Now I know that the scream could be heard up to the sky. It's just that everyone's ears were covered. There were so many tears, screams, sleepless nights, hunger, blood, death; and, what I remember the most is my dad's look in his eyes... as if he already knew, at that time, the end of this story. His eyes were so deep and his face was pale. He was not afraid for himself, because he would often say to my mom that 'he could make it, but what about the children, they would kill my children'.. That same look and the same face, I remember from July 11th, 1995 when they separated him from us in Potocari. His look told us thousands of stories without a single word.

There were so many questions in my little girl's head that no one had answers to, not even then, not even years later, and not even now.

And I still have that one question: WHY?

We are different, we are who we are. This land cannot be taken elsewhere nor can it be called by some other name. So that is why I ask that same question: Why? Why did they have to kill, why did they have to separate mothers from her children, why did they have to punish children in this way...

On that 11th of July, they killed my dreams, hope, love, imagination, childhood and all that was beautiful.

Now, after all these years with countless questions and not a single answer, I live in my Srebrenica again. Yes, my Srebrenica! It is difficult to live here. Coming back here was even harder than I thought it would be. We had to go through it all again... the fear, humiliations, separations... I try to teach my three children to remember well who they are and what happened here. I try to teach them that in our town genocide was committed, that the rest of our country suffered a lot as well. Above all, I try to teach them to love their country with all their hearts, to be good-hearted individuals, and never to judge anyone who is different, looks different, speaks or works differently.



I don't want to look into the past but it is the past that cannot and must not be forgotten, because this past will somehow always be part of my future.

The future that I want for myself and my children is here in my hometown, in my country. I don't want to live anywhere else and wait for others to create my future. Living in Srebrenica again and raising my children here is my own debt to my father and all 8371 other men and boys killed in the Srebrenica genocide. The least I can do is to remember and talk about what happened. That is what we all must do, for our children and generations to come.

Srebrenica is a reminder that although very silent it speaks very loud!

Sincerely,

Amira Malkić-Salihović

Srebrenica