



25th ANNIVERSARY

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA

LETTERS FROM BOSNIA

Dear Friend,

I was born six years before the war began in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I lived a carefree life with my parents and brother in Zeleni Jarad, near Srebrenica. My hometown was named after a small river that flowed near my home. It was a place filled with children's laughter. It was where we used to play the most. It was a newly formed village near eight factories for wood. I had a home and my favorite doll. I had freedom. I had my smile and happiness. My parents had their plans and dreams for a successful future for their children.

It all disappeared in a day, in a flame. My hometown became our prison in April of 1992. My dreams of a happy childhood were replaced by days where I was growing up too fast. I became a grown-up with responsibility and a quest to survive. There was no room left to play or smile. I never imagined that after the war my hometown would become a place with the largest number of mass graves.

I started school during the war. By July 1995, I have completed the first three grades of elementary school. The first day of school symbolizes happiness, new knowledge, a foundation for growing up and independence. It was all supposed to be like that but somewhere else and for someone else. Those days were not carefree or happy for me. Those days were days of survival. I don't even remember my days spent in school. I don't remember how I have learned to read or write. I just remember my notebook. I only had one notebook. It was small and blue like the sky, with a couple of pages and a few letters; UNICEF was written on it. I would use it to write the lecture for the day. I would go home, memorize the lecture and then I would erase it all so I could use it again the next day. My first three years of education were in a small UNICEF book with few pages which were blue like the sky.



When a child survives a war, years later he or she realizes that they were never a child. A gap remains that has to be fulfilled. He or she does not fear death because they have already met it - somehow have touched infinity. And, to return to a place where grave crimes were committed, one can not leave untouched. You realize that a precious life was taken from someone but that you have survived to be their loud silence. As such, small steps make necessary differences. This is why small individual steps are important for the historical culture of memory.

In search for my Light, my quest to be a Light for others and my feelings of responsibility led to the little girl who does not remember how she learned to read and write, who is from a small town with the largest number of mass graves, to write her autobiography titled "My smile is my revenge." I had at least 8372 reasons to do so...

Sincerely,

Dževa Avdić
Srebrenica