



25th ANNIVERSARY

REMEMBERING SREBRENICA

LETTERS FROM BOSNIA

Dear Friend,

I was the youngest of four and overexcited to start first grade. My hopes were shattered to pieces when I saw a military truck in May of 1992 not too far from my preschool. I didn't understand it. I felt fear and couldn't stop crying until I saw my mother. It was the last time I felt like a child - instead of starting first grade, along with my family, I ended up in the Trnopolje concentration camp.

My third oldest sister held my hand, never letting go because our family was separated in the concentration camp. The two of us were with my mother, who despite being strong, was shaking and crying most of the time. When we were "transported" from Trnopolje to Gracanica, we ended up at a local school. I vividly remember my mother gently touching one part of the surface of a school desk. At the time, I could not properly read but she whispered my father's name. It was the first time in months that I saw a glimpse of hope in her eyes.

It was a miraculous moment when my father called my name at the train station in Croatia. I barely recognized him. He was gray and old as if decades have passed. We became refugees. The experience of a child refugee is a thousand pages long but there is one page that has given me the strength that I have today. I did not start first grade until 1993. However, I did learn to read and write. My second oldest sister became my first and the most influential teacher. She found a board at the refugee center and, despite being only 17 years old, taught me the most important lesson of my life; the power of letters and words.

It is this lesson that I carry on today and hope to teach others to do so as well. The letters we write and the words we utter have power. The genocide in BiH did not happen overnight. It was systematically planned. I survived to be a voice for those that did not. I choose to carefully write letters and utter words. It is the first step in preventing hate, atrocities and genocide. It is the first step in feeling alive.

Sincerely,

Elmina Kulasić

Kozarac