
DEAR READER

For many people, war is an abstract concept. It happens on TV, on social media, in bits and fragments that are totally disconnected from the lives that many of us here in North America live. For me, war has been an altogether too real chapter of my life. I wrote this book to take readers on a journey with me, to take them through the chaos and the devastation and the rare moments of beauty that encapsulated my escape from the war in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

Picture this: a young woman in her twenties, cowering under rickety stairs, surrounded by smelly shoes and cobwebs, a TV blaring an emergency broadcast somewhere in the house, praying that the shelling and explosions cease as the night starts to fall. She closes her eyes and pictures a different life for herself, a quiet life: cuddled up to someone on a couch, in front of a fireplace, a remote in her hand, watching a TV where she can change the channel at any time.

This dream is my reality, now that I'm settled in my life in Canada, surrounded by my family, sitting in a house that is safe. Shelling hasn't happened on this soil for more than 200 years—this land does not know war. Some things are different of course: the remote control of my dream is now an iPhone, with access to social media and access to more news than I ever thought possible. However, some things haven't changed, particularly with the recent events happening in the Ukraine. This time, I have control of my news feed, but every day I tune in and see the panic in people's eyes, my own former panic reflected back at me watching these people try to save themselves from the conflict burning their homes.

It's strange, the coincidence or turn of fate that should have my book ready to publish when current events threaten to bring me

back to the scariest period of my life, even though I know I am safe and secure living in Canada. But this story has a message for everyone, a message that grows more important with every new instance of conflict on the global stage. For those who have only ever known a peaceful life, I hope this book will help you learn about the horrors of war when trying to survive as a civilian and will push you to prioritize compassion for refugees displaced from their homes. For my fellow survivors, I want you to know that you have all the strength and courage that you will need to face any reality, and in the end, this too shall pass.

Within this book, readers will see how the advent of a war can sneak up on you with little to no warning. Starting from my peaceful life in Sarajevo, you will follow my trek across four countries, predominantly on foot, occasionally hitchhiking and always relying on the kindness of strangers to only ever stay but a few steps ahead of the frontlines. You will watch my family splinter apart and struggle to come back together, fracturing around me as our nations shifted their borders. But you will also see moments of kindness within the strife. Moments of peace that I've chosen to outline with recipes, since food and cooking represented instances of joy for us. Take note of the recipes, created by my mother, and transcribed from her handwriting via my own translation. There are fifteen recipes in total, each one made possible by the times when we had a home during our plight. While we were on the run, there wasn't time for cooking—there was only a need to survive. But when we had shelter, when we were together, then you could feel the love that arose from the ability to make a meal together.

While reading, please take the time to make a recipe or two. Make them and think about the stories of survival and perseverance. Remember, home is wherever you decide to build it. And we all deserve the safety and security to build a home, and to cook with our loved ones. Surround yourself with people you love and appreciate and be forever grateful for every day of peace.