

IMPULSE TO SURVIVE

A Childhood Memoir

by Radovan Hajduk

Dedicated to my wife Tanya, thank you for inspiring me every day to be a better person, I love you.

CHAPTER 3: THE RED HAIR RIBBONS

Milenko was Mila's oldest son, but he was not her oldest child. My mother was just sixteen years old when she first married. Her marriage into a well-off family was followed by several miscarriages. She would later claim she lost her babies because her mother-in-law made her do hard work while she was pregnant.

Girls who entered marriage without any dowry were looked down upon in those days. Sons were expected to stay at the homestead, and the new bride was expected to serve everyone, even to the point of washing the feet of all the members of her new family.

At age nineteen, Mila gave birth to a girl and named her after herself, Mila. I think she wanted to leave her mark on the child forever. She later called her Miluška, but the girl resented that name.

According to my mother's stories, her first husband was a playboy. He dressed like a sheriff, with a cowboy hat and boots. That was a rare sight in Communist Yugoslavia, even

The grandparents suddenly became parents again. They raised Mila's Mila on their own, and they did it well.



Mother's parents, Sara and Ivan Marković

Mila visited her daughter occasionally until the girl was nine years old, because of a small bicycle.

Our mother gave birth to two boys with Stanoje. Milenko was six and Željko was two in 1968, so Stanoje was still around.

Mila's final fight with Stanoje was over little Mila.

Stanoje owned a small construction business. That was a big deal under socialism. Mila wanted absolute control over the finances, especially when it came time to pay the workers. She insisted that they come to her for their wages.

I cannot imagine what my mother would have done to a daughter who lived with her. Knowing how she treated us boys, I am afraid to imagine what little Mila's life would have been like.

It is often said that we do not choose our parents, but we can choose what kind of people we become.

Thirty-six years passed before I convinced Miluška to pay a visit to our mother.

Mother immediately recognized her, and how could she not. They were mirror images of each other, except that one was nineteen years older.

They spoke for an hour, enjoying their one true love: cigarettes.

Mother recalled to Miluška through tears, "You snatched money from my hand!"

They would never see each other again.