



## Premio Internazionale Carlo Scarpa per il Giardino

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### Osmače and Brežani

Srebrenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Irfanka Pašagić, Tuzlanska Amica

### Adopt Srebrenica

When Edi Rabini, guardian and promoter of Alexander Langer's thought, in an informal conversation, asked me how he could help, I do not remember exactly what my answer was, but I know that my message was: come and be present in Srebrenica.

It is a phrase I often repeat to people, but I was sure that he heard me. And that he understood.

That is shown by this award for Muhamed and Velibor since it would not, certainly, exist without him.

Srebrenica, once a beautiful small resort town in north-eastern Bosnia, known for its thermal springs, the only of its kind in Europe, described by Evlija Čelebija, a famous travel writer from a long time ago, as a sponge soaked with healing water, was being murdered, isolated during more than three years of total indifference towards it, and received a final blow in July 1995, live on television, before the eyes of the entire world.

*Srebrenica. I giorni della vergogna* [Srebrenica. The days of shame] is a book written by Luca Leone.

Thousands dead and thousands missing. And even a bigger number of those who continue to live with deep wounds that heal slowly.

And after all, we have no right to say we didn't know.

The recovery of something destroyed in such a systematic way, as Srebrenica and life in it has been, takes time. And a lot of friends, and a lot of support, and a lot understanding.

I learned a long time ago that the wounds caused by human evil can only be healed by human kindness.

For years I have been working with children and youth who lost their parents during and after the war. And I admit that I have learned the best life lessons from them.

Immediately after the end of war, when collecting and editing for a small collection of essays written by children living in the Home for children without parental care about their memories of the time when they lived with their families and celebrated holidays with them, the time when they lost them, and the fears they experienced, about the arrival and the life in the Home, we spent days trying to think for a proper title. Besima, a psychologist from that Home, the woman who helped me form inextricable bonds with those children, suggested we asked them. "All of that is in my heart", is the title they chose right away.

The best way to help is if, at least for a moment, we look into those hearts filled with memories. Good memories and memories of the other kind.

Tuzlanska Amica planned all of its activities by listening and remembering what the ones wounded by the war were telling us, trying to do the best, together with them.

Thanks to the immense comprehension and friendship of numerous organizations, first of all from Italy, some of which born after meeting us and our work, we were able to ensure that the trace of our presence was everywhere; sometimes hidden in the hearts of those who we were helping, sometimes visible.

We were lucky to meet good people in the days when we needed warm words, help and support. With Edi Rabini and Alexander Langer's Foundation, with us for years are Spazio Pubblico di donne from Bologna, Cral Telecom Emilia Romagna and Cral Telecom Liguria, Regione Emilia Romagna, cultural association Macondo from Bagnolo in Piano, associaton Macondo Tre from La Spezia, association Adottando from Bologna, the

magazine «Una città», associaton Solidarietà 1991 from Villa di Serio, associaton Banca Aiuti from Rimini, and many others.

Instead of writing the names of the organizations I would rather write the names of the people who work, because people make organizations.

We started as an informal group, during the first days of war, at the time when we were lost ourselves, wanting to help the lines of women, children, and old women, coming to Tuzla from concentration camps. It was only later that I realized that it took courage and that it was a unique experience and that, during the days when death was all around us, when we and they were hungry and afraid, we tried to alleviate their psychological suffering.

For years, we have been faced with the stories of Srebrenica by those who have never visited it, with numerous projects that cost too much and have no visible results, projects created in offices, far away from the realities and needs of this special town.

I remember a young man from Srebrenica who said that «if it goes on like this, we will be like a museum of wax figures: they will come, look at us, and leave. And give some money like they are entering a circus».

When I talked to Edi about the ways to help, I wished that, besides those who come to Srebrenica only once, who write a book and think they know what should be done, and those who think that money can wash away their lack of action in the time of evil, there were those who would come because they truly wanted to, who would listen, give their support as well as criticism when needed, those who cared about what happened and about what should be done to create a different future.

I knew that there were young people in Srebrenica who do not accept the situation of division and the truths of their ethnic group. The youth who is prepared to face the terrible time of war and crime, but also to find hope in what Srebrenica once was: that future can be built together and without hatred. Brave, young people who want to live in that town, the town painted in black letters in Europe's history.

And combat for something different.

Courage also means staying in the town that is forever marked, and that, even today, has little to offer.

Srebrenica today is something quite different from what Srebrenica once was. The only beautiful and good thing you will find there is people.

Like everything in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the memory of Srebrenica is also divided in two parts – the one before and the one after the war. The traces of the past are invisible, but they exist in the souls of the survivors. That memory is precisely what should be preserved for the young generations and the ones to come.

I knew that to preserve the stories from “before” means to believe that evil cannot win and that new future can be built on what was good and what cannot and must not be ruined and forgotten.

That is the reason why I talked about the need to come to Srebrenica.

That is the reason why I talked about the need to write down the past of Srebrenica and the beautiful stories from that town, through the forming of a documentation center.

That is why I wanted a group of young people to get space where they can be together and talk together about the past and about what kind of future they want.

That was the origin of the idea to organize the International week of memory as a confirmation that we haven't forgotten Srebrenica and that we are near.

I did not like the name Adopt Srebrenica at the beginning. Today, I am grateful to Sabina Langer for recognizing all the power and love that the word Adopt carries. Because, if you adopt someone, you do that because you want to. And you do everything to make the person happy. Together with you. And only when you are sure that he can go on on his own, you let him fly away. But you are still there, to feel joy and sorrow, to hear from him and for him to hear from you when you need it.

I remember the first International week of memory.

Being used to an increased number of activities during the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide, they looked at us in amazement. At the time when the streets were usually empty, we were there.

When we were looking for families that could accommodate the participants, mostly young people from Italy, no one was interested. The families, which before the war lived from tourism and competed in showing kindness to guests, refused the idea to continue doing so. We realized that, after years of trauma, they stopped believing they could do that and that they knew how. We had long conversations with them, we explained what they should do, we reassured that it was much simpler than what they had been doing before, we told them that no one would mind if the accommodation was not ideal. They somehow agreed and we were witnesses to their joy when guests left happy. The following year the number of families who wanted to accommodate the participants was too large. When we informed them that they should provide breakfast for the guests, they were shocked: again the same feeling of powerlessness and helplessness. We could have given up as well, but we didn't, we knew those were the consequences of what they had gone through. At one conference, the representative of the UN referred to this behavior of the people from the refugee settlement as laziness! And if he wanted to, he could have realized that the loss of interest in the previously common activities, the feeling of being deprived of future, the feeling of helplessness, were all common reactions to a long-term traumatization.

When everything was finished, their happiness could be felt. And the money they earned was not less important: most families were happy because for the first time they did not have to worry about firewood during the long Srebrenica winter.

We make and we still make one step by time. Listening and deciding with them. Talking about the past, but with always in mind the future. Organizing visits to present the beauties of Srebrenica and its tempestuous history. Tanking numerous artists and experts from different fields, numerous young people to learn a lesson in Srebrenica.

Organizing educational seminars and workshops with young people from Srebrenica.

We always overcame together the difficulties. It wasn't hard.

We do not think that the project Adopt has made a miracle in Srebrenica.

We do not think that we have completely changed their lives.

But, we and they know that they have friends in us and that our number grows with every day that passes. That's the reason that they welcome us with joy every time.

And that some traces always remain. As buckwheat fields on hills above Srebrenica.

Srebrenica must become the town of memory.

But also the town of hope.

The town where we could learn lessons. And hope that this time this lesson can be really learned. To not repeat, like is it repeating today in Syria, Ukraine...

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