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WHENEVER IN THIS PUBLICATION THE MASCULINE GENDER IS USED, IT SHALL BE DEEMED TO INCLUDE BOTH THE MASCULINE AND FEMININE GENDER OF THE PERSONS TO WHOM IT REFERS.

1 MALINA STANOJEVIĆ

Marija and Malina differ in two letters. Not even a deeper exploration would have found more drastic differences. Both were born in the countryside, albeit at different times. Marija was more than two hundred years ago. As a young woman, she decided to join Karađorđe's insurgents. It was the only way to help the liberation and recovery of Serbia. It happened that at that time, Karađorđe, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising (1804-1813), had to leave Topola for a couple of weeks. He swore his brother Marinko to watch over this town. Upon returning, Karađorđe found out that Marinko had made use of the borrowed power and had molested several women. Karađorđe's decision was tough to make, but it demonstrated his right-minded nature and increased people's trust in him in the coming times. He sentenced his brother to death, thus showing he respected women as equal to men and that equal punishments and rewards apply to everyone, whether a government official or a commoner.

However, it is worth noting that Marija had to disguise herself as a man to join the insurgents.

Malina is a woman with high determination and no less courage. But living and working today, when few people hear or recognize a rural woman, she felt she needed to organize fellow females from her and other villages into an Association. And she has made them visible. United, they encourage each other to raise their families and grow villages even more successfully. And since equality is a universal principle today, unlike Marija, Malina does not have to disguise herself. She enjoys equal rights with men.

Just as uprisings or companies, clamor singing needs a leader. And is the same with idea realization. Malina Stanojević from Priboj makes her wishes come true thanks to her determination to step forward and invite. And then to be first among equals.

- ***Clamor singing** is a traditional singing style and part of the intangible cultural heritage of Serbia, - leisurely says Malina, who practices, among other things, this kind of folk singing. - This singing style has been particularly kept in the Zlatibor District. This summer, a third clamor signing festival was held in Priboj. Priboj is a town on the Lim River. Interestingly, clamor singing styles on the left and right sides of the Lim differ. The festival aims to make performers, songs, and singing styles equal.*

Clamor singing is usually performed by two singers, but one starts the song. Others join later and follow. Both then and now, people from these regions sang and still sing about harvest, mowing, and love. It is performed at celebrations, weddings, during agricultural works, or rakija cooking. "Rada, where did you lose your herd?" On the mountain, waiting for my dear..." - voices ring through one of the songs. The whole story is told in just two lines, one question and a short answer. Malina is also the winner of the Zlatibor District Award for Cultural Heritage and Customs Conservation and the winner of one of the clamor singing competitions. It is no surprise since whatever they do, women leaders do it the best they can and, most often, more successfully than others.

“Let’s Save the Village” (“Sačuvajmo selo”) Women’s Association, founded by Malina in 2012 together with five other women, today counts more than a hundred members. During a decade of work, they have focused their activities on three sections. One is about strengthening rural women’s position in agricultural development and keeping up with new technologies, the second is about conserving handicrafts, and the third about conserving cultural heritage. - *Young people today are into foreign language songs, which is no surprise, as they are mostly exposed to these songs through the media. With this in mind, we have come up with the idea for the event “Triple Border without Borders”, - explains Malina. - Singing groups performing folk songs compete, and it is such a joy to see young men and women conserving the tradition by participating in the competition. They hint at a future that will undoubtedly be better thanks to the firm roots. This Priboj festival is held every June and also includes a local and handicraft product fair and a lenten pie-making competition.*

Furthermore, this lenten pie-making battle “threatens” to become more massive, tense and exciting, considering that one of the following Association’s projects is cooperation with the young people of the town: - *They will show us “tips” that will make us more agile using mobile devices and navigating social networks, and we will teach them how to make the best lenten pie, - announces Malina, with a smile revealing child joy at new encounters. We can almost imagine her as a three-year-old girl nicknamed Vrabac (sparrow).*

- *I don’t remember what actually happened. I was little, and I suddenly got sick and lost consciousness. My father carried me to the doctor in his arms. Passing by the fountain, he washed my face. It brought me back. Opening my eyes, the first word I uttered, who knows why, was - sparrow. Hence my nickname. My neighbors only know me by that “name” to this day.*

Malina, called Vrabac, was born in Donja Bela Reka settlement in the Nova Varoš municipality. The most difficult question for her is where her heart belongs more - among the people of Bela Reka or in Priboj on the Lim River. She gives a *diplomatic* answer: - *I left the village, but the village did not leave me. I grew up on fields, with cattle, poultry... My parents, of course, were engaged in agriculture, but only enough to meet the needs of our household. And I, somehow, have always wanted to go further, beyond the fence of my village, to help rural women become visible.*

She was 13 years old when she moved from the village to the city to continue her education. While attending secondary school, she lived alone in her father’s house. Having finished higher education on time, at the age of 22, she got a job at the Car Factory in Priboj, where she retired. For thirty-five years, she performed all the so-called male jobs: she was a designer, supervisor, electrical fitter... A miracle! She spent her entire working life in a male-dominated staff, and never had a single conflict or issue. As if justifying herself, Malina adds: - *It takes two to fight. If an ill-will person is trying to drag you down to their level, you should definitely get out of the way because once an ill-mannered or aggressive person drags you down to their level, they will surely beat you. You won’t manage there, - wisely says this dragon lady, who has been officially holding this title since 2019, when she was honored with the same name award, “Dragon Lady” of the Association of Businesswomen of Serbia, by Brankica Janković, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. Not considering that diversity without harmony deserves more than one sentence, Malina “diverts” from the topic to present with pleasure the*

activities of her members, associates, and collaborators, which made the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association recognizable in our country and beyond.

- *A man alone can’t do much. Is that so?* - she asks, confident of the implied answer.

Malina is a woman of incredibly suggestive energy, even when her questions are not hypothetical. - *I draw all my ideas from communication with women. I listen to them. Take notice. Observe. Ask. But even this would not have brought the results we are proud of today if it were not for the support of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. Indeed, quite a lot has been done in a relatively short time. The successful implementation of the Women’s Association projects brought us primarily economic empowerment but also strengthened the self-confidence of rural women from the Priboj area. We implemented more than 30 projects and acquired equipment worth over EUR 200,000, distributed dozens of greenhouses, acquired fruit and vegetable processing equipment, got trained in writing projects and creating business plans, we continuously learn to ensure better marketing of our products, mastering of new technologies, advertising, public appearances, creating power-point presentations... If you could have only seen these women in the beginning! When the reporters came to interview them about the association activities, and they saw the camera, they would run behind the house, ha-ha. All our female members are now digitally transformed. That is perhaps the most significant. They now know how to communicate in a way demanded by today’s market. We hold regular courses for new members to become digitally literate. We have distributed laptops, and no matter how many we have, we always need more because now we hold Zoom meetings, every woman has her email address, we have a Viber group, a Facebook page, an Instagram page... These women share more important events from their farms in the Viber group. The other day, one of our member’s sows gave birth to piglets, and she immediately posted photos. One of the members told me that she had been mentally revived because, before this association, it used to happen that she did not even say good morning to anyone for as long as three months. Now she socializes daily through social networks with women with whom she shares common interests.*

No matter how much the Association projects of this were financially less demanding initially, the members have remained consistent and persistent to always finish what they started. One could say no project is small for them, let alone insignificant. In the first few years of the Association, Malina recalls, they cleaned up two wild dumpsites, furnished two picnic areas, and built a fountain. As the President of the Association, she keeps herself updated regarding competitions. Thanks to various foundations and funding sources, their plans did become more ambitious but always in line with the capacities of these women. And not only cannot their opportunities be hindered, but now the Municipality of Priboj supports them. At the end of the summer of this year, a meeting was held in the Regional Innovation Startup Center with members of the Working Group for the development of a local gender equality action plan to 2024 for the municipality of Priboj. Lazar Rvović, the President of Priboj Municipality, also gave full support to the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association by participating in the meeting.

The recently held training, again with the support of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, was an opportunity for the association members to show off the new fruit and vegetable processing facility which was adapted and furnished using funds obtained at competitions. A juice press, four dehydrators, apple crushers, a depositor, a pasteurizer, a juicer, a sealer that hermetically closes containers with

appropriate caps were acquired. Both jars and bottles, a total of 3,000 pieces, were also purchased from project funds obtained from a competition. Thanks to networking, they improved the marketing of their final products: ajvar spread, juices, jams...

- We like to show what we have won so far - says Malina using such words Marija certainly used too, freedom-fighting on par with fellow men. Malina demonstrates equal courage, and with another hundred women she has gathered, she is fighting for the recovery of the Serbian village. - And we regularly organize workshops because it is important to learn what we want to know and even more important to learn what we don't know we don't know, - she says, exuding optimism and announcing another professional lecture for the members of her Association, this time on fruit and vegetable processing. - Every rural woman wants to make these beautiful and abandoned areas of ours attractive for the return of those who left, but primarily for the return of the young people, - Malina assures.

- There is plenty we have yet to conquer, - she says energetically, not causing even a shred of doubt in her interlocutor. - Primarily the field of rural tourism. It is our priority in rural development. Greeting us recently, during her visit to Priboj, and recognizing the importance of all our activities, Brankica Janković, Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, conveyed the words of her father, who said that the times would come when we would take our children to the countryside to see what cows, sheep, goats look like because they saw elephants and giraffes in the city zoos. So, there are many reasons for the accelerated development of rural tourism.

The potential for rural tourism development is limitless, considering nature was generous when adorning this area. And not only nature. It is little known that, for example, Serbian tennis was "born" precisely in Priboj, way back in the mid-19th century. At Wimbledon, the "white sport" "happened" for the first time in 1877, and the first tournament in Priboj was held only three years later. History records that following the Berlin Congress, the Austro-Hungarian authorities built a Wimbledon-sized tennis court on the Zelenac field in Priboj, on the coast of the Lim, where the first tournament was held in 1880. Tournaments were held in Priboj until 1929 when the railway crossed the field. Nevertheless, tennis has been reviving in this city, and thanks to the wisdom and goodwill of the women of Priboj, there is no doubt that such data will be found on the tourist maps of this region.

- The potential of tourism here is immeasurable - Malina is convinced and continues to enumerate the peculiarities of this region. - Not only rural, spa, but also religious, for example... In Pribojska Banja there is a monastery of St. Nicholas, mentioned as early as in the records of Saint Sava. It was built in the 12th century and is a unique museum of incredible valuables. It should be shown to the world and proud of.

The valuables were buried in the late 17th century, as assumed by the then head of this sanctuary. When the monastery renovation was nearing its end in 1974, a treasure of exceptional value was discovered about a meter and a half from the floor slabs. All the found objects were neatly arranged in a chest, each protected by a fine cloth. There were church objects, even surgical instruments, jewelry... - all made of white silver and gilded by the most renowned Venetian and Jerusalem artisans of the time.

This treasury is a kind of record that testifies to man's persistence, strength, courage, and desire to fight to survive and live better. Between those unearthed archaeological treasures made of gold and the fruits of the land harvested, cultivated, and watered

by women living in the countryside, there are rivers of sweat and tears but also joys, sorrows, and celebrations.

- Thus united, we feel empowered to continue making efforts to improve the lives of rural women and girls. With the results achieved so far, we affirm our and their capabilities and skills. Our goal is to save the village. That is all! It is our most valuable treasure. A treasure trove of food and love. Our dream is for the rural family to be together, for grandparents to watch their grandchildren grow up.

Just as the names Marija and Malina, dreams differ in only two letters. They can be unrealized or realized. Any research would confirm that this is about the latter, which are achieved to the fullest.

2 DANIJELA MUNITLAKOVIĆ

At first glance, the only connecting point between Nadežda and Danijela is Čačak. Our famous painter was born there in 1873, and one hundred and thirty years later, Daniela got a job and fell in love in the same city.

Despite the time gap, Nadežda and Danijela still “met” in Čačak. Although from different eras and with incomparable professions - one was an artist and suffragette, and the other an economist and activist - these two exceptional women share several other common “denominators”: they are persistent and hardworking, unyielding in the face of their femininity.

Nadežda Petrović was also a prominent member of the Circle of Serbian Sisters, a women’s cultural-educational, patriotic and humanitarian society, and Danijela Munitlaković has been an associate of the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association from Priboj for a full decade and an active member of the Čačak’s Association of Business Women bearing the name of Nadežda Petrović.

- I realized that I am on the right path, that agriculture is the right decision, thanks to, among other things, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. In June 2022, she organized a study visit to Slovenia and Austria for women engaged in agricultural product processing and marketing to learn about examples of good practice in EU countries. The Commissioner for Protection of Equality implemented the project in cooperation with the “Nadežda Petrović” Association of Business Women from Čačak, of which I am a member, and with the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association from Priboj, founded by Malina Stanojević. During the trip, I became convinced that I had been on the right path, that agriculture is a promising field and that the countryside is an inexhaustible source of food and, therefore, a guarantor of material security for us engaged in production.

This is how Danijela Munitlaković who, together with ten other women, spent in late September 2022 in Pribojska Banja two seminar days also organized by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association, introduced herself for this publication. This training, like the previous ones, was aimed at improving the position of rural women and girls.

The low early autumn sun spilled over the glades, burning the tops of the deciduous trees while the coniferous woods, adorned with their eternal greenery, strutted along the slopes of the mountains of the Stari Vlah Highlands. - *Why would anyone wish to leave the village*, - Danijela might have wondered, looking at this gorgeous beauty. But she said: - *Bees! They are wonderful. I am impressed by their organization, their division of labor.*

Two or three seconds passed between Danijela's this and the following sentence. Enough for the pause to swell from unuttered words: - *More than 50,000 bees live together in only two square meters, which is the area of an average beehive. And there are 40 of us, again on average, per square kilometer of the world's land. If only people could live like bees.*

Instead, she said: - *The buzzing of bees has a special energy and healing vibration.*

Danijela was introduced to bees by her grandfather and her mother, so this recollection will color the story with special warmth: - My parents lived in Sjenica. My father was a history and geography teacher, and my mother worked in the trade. And my grandfather was engaged in beekeeping as a hobby. I often spend time with him and the beehives, observing and memorizing. I was born there, in the middle of the summer of '77. Back in November of the same year, my parents moved to Atenica. Then it was a village, and today it is a suburb of Čačak. There they immediately started building the house where my mother and father still live today. In Čačak, I finished electrical engineering school but later decided to retrain and graduated in economics.

Danijela is slim, long-legged, and tall woman with beautiful, well-groomed hands. She is wearing modern clothing but in her own way. A fashion critic would probably define her style as chic. Isn't it prejudicial to single this out? Would the same attributes be included in this passage if Danijela was not engaged in agriculture?

- *When we moved, the hives remained in Sjenica, and when my grandfather passed away, my mother inherited them, completely taking over beekeeping. Because of them, she traveled several times a week to Sjenica and back. Over time, however, it became increasingly difficult for her. She got tired. She could no longer endure the daily obligations at work and home, along with frequent trips to Sjenica. And so it happened that she gave the beehives away to our relatives there.*

I guess those healing vibrations of the bee buzz left a lasting mark in Danijela's mother's veins. Also, we should not overlook the possibility that the Sjenica bees conveyed a message to their friends from Atenica about the love of a history teacher and a trader that - ah, these hasty years - reached retirement. She finally had enough time to listen to the silent language.

- Not long after she retired, my mother said to me one day: *"I cannot do without bees. I would like to buy a few beehives"*, continues Danijela. - *A few years before that, I got a job, and by the time my mother started missing her bees, I was already married. Anyway, my husband and I supported my mother to buy beehives. She took three hives and placed them in her yard. Soon after that, my husband and I bought a property about three kilometers away from Čačak, where we started an independent life. We both love nature, we are both into a healthy lifestyle, we are believers... and we really, as they say, found each other. I have a wonderful marriage. Every time one of my friends gets married, I wish her to have a marriage like mine from the bottom of my heart. Since we started living together, we have*

planned to practice agriculture in addition to our regular jobs in the city. The property we bought was hilly. Together we cleared, cultivated the land, and planted first blackberries, then plums, and then hazelnuts. And that was where we moved mom's beehives, which made her very happy. There was enough space to install more hives, so we did it, since my husband also completely fell in love with bees.

It is easy to find information on electronic encyclopedias that a bee flaps its wings more than 11,000 times a minute. Frequency is omnipotent. And that is why the sound of that incredibly fast bee wing flapping is healing for both the flower and man. The plant will open its pistil, and the man will open the senses. One can assume that the bees supported Daniela at least as much as she supported them.

- Today, my husband is very devoted to beekeeping, and I have focused on honey products. I wanted to make some honey that wasn't boring, - was exactly what she said, using narration that would be expected from, say, an analytical master of advertising. - I didn't want the common honey all beekeepers have, so I started searching. I found out about creamed honey. It is, in fact, ordinary honey homogenized into a creamy structure by stirring in a gentle, slow fashion so as not to heat up. Then I wanted to make the product more interesting and started experimenting. I added raspberries. It didn't work. My honey has gone bad. Then I added dried raspberry. I didn't like that either, because the honey changed its color and had a somehow sourish taste. And then I heard about lyophilization. It is a process that involves first freezing the fruit and then drying it while still frozen. I found freeze-dried raspberries at a processor in Arilje. The fruits look like airy balls and can be ground. So I added freeze-dried raspberry powder to our honey, and voilà! Later, I started making creamed honey with nettle and blueberry.

Since 2017, the Munitlaković family has had its own agricultural holding with approved honey storage and packaging facilities. Detailed and legally required analyzes are a standard for all production lines: classic honey, honey with fruit (creamed honey), honey with nuts, "imuno" honey line with added pollen, propolis, lemon, ginger, mint, turmeric, fennel, anise... They expand their market daily using Instagram and Facebook marketing and sales in health food stores in Čačak and the surrounding area. Cooperating with the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association, Danijela has acquired valuable knowledge and contacts ever since the first contact established on the study trip to Austria and Slovenia, initiated by the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. Training on marketing methods and digital transformation are benefits Danijela emphasizes when talking about this collaboration. Her holding has economically strengthened and she has gained the necessary entrepreneurial confidence, so she plans to open a store to sell her products.

- "Fruits of Serbia", that is the name of our brand. I did my research, looking for an appropriate and unused name, and I even consulted BRA (Business Registers Agency). At the same time, Jelena Mladenović, a graphic designer and my younger sister, supports our brand from her field, so we have created our logo, sign, packaging, - Danijela praises her sister without modesty faintly discernible when she talks about herself. She continued the story about the plans: - My husband has a congenital problem with veins and whenever he wears a protective suit to work with bees, he rolls up his trousers so that his lower legs remain exposed to bee bites, and his pets can "help themselves." Sure, he gets a few bites, but his vein problems have become more tolerable. And this, among other things, encouraged me to enroll in the Beekeeping and Apitherapy Academy because I want to improve my skills in bee treatments and products.

As a little girl, Danijela enjoyed playing with various kitchen ingredients she used to make "magic creams," dreaming of becoming an alchemist one day rather than a teacher - as her mother urged her, given the considerable number of educators in their family.

*- And that is how I have recently started making cosmetics, - she continues with a smile.
- For now, I have body creams, facial creams, skin care oil, deodorant, lip balm... I am still testing these products on myself, and when I am completely sure and satisfied, I will do the control and certification of all products and will definitely expand my cosmetic line. Of course, all products are honey-based.*

Nadežda Petrović's father was also an educator. A drawing teacher. Nadežda's family also moved. Our internationally recognized artist also adapted to times, so even though she was an educated painter, she did not shy away from helping the wounded fighters in the Balkan wars or becoming an excellent war reporter. The power and strength of a woman, which do not make her unequal in the least, are always recognized by the great deeds women are capable of despite difficulties or obstacles, but also by the details. Nadežda's family home was, according to the story, always festively adorned: crystal glasses, desserts for unexpected guests, and pictures in frames revealing the host's refined taste. It is the same with Danijela.

- Everything I do, I try to make it joy and pleasure. I, for one, don't have two cutlery sets, you know, the everyday one and special one for celebrations. My husband and I eat using that one, beautiful set every day, and I will always serve food in the dinnerware set. If we want to make a toast with wine, it will always be from appropriate glasses, - she says, and then, almost confused by the question about free time, mentions her girlfriends with youthful cheerfulness: - We often travel, sometimes all four of us go, sometimes two, three... , we are all friends from school and university. A few months ago we were at the sea, before that in Istanbul. I also enjoy historical films - here too I resemble my dad, I love history. My husband and I walk a lot, go on trips. We don't do anything on Sundays, sometimes we just rest, sometimes we go to the liturgy.

Nadežda, Danijela, and any other accomplished person always share exceptionality and unobtrusively strong determination to adapt to the circumstances without going against their wishes and without harming anyone. On the contrary. City or village, woman or man, this or that nationality, light or dark skin... - nothing predetermines, nor can it restrict, the commitment which, as a rule, is never aimed at the personal, but always at the common good.

3 SNEŽANA TICA

***Every bird has a song to sing* is an old saying Mina Karadžić singled out, among others, when editing a book of folk songs. It was in the mid-19th century. Back in those days, this woman entered encyclopedias as significant for the culture and enlightenment of her people. She was also an excellent painter and writer engaged in translation and humanitarian work. But, in order not to drift away from the topic, we will just give a memory refreshing fact that Mina was the daughter of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, who invented the Serbian Cyrillic alphabet with 30 sounds represented with one letter each. The famous Bernard Shaw bequeathed in his will a substantial amount of money to whomever Englishman who reformed their alphabet based on this script.**

That every bird has a song to sing is confirmed by Snežana Tica¹. Whoever said - a rural woman - would not be wrong. But he would stay on the ground without the courage to fly up and meet this energetic fighter for life and meaning. More than 140 species of birds can be heard singing and chirping all over the Priboj sky, in the forests and yards! The sparrow chirps, the pigeon coos, the goldfinch cheeps, the falcon screeches, the quail whistles. It is the same with people. And here we are talking about a strong-wing "bird" called no other than Tica. Snežana Tica. And she lives in Priboj na Limu, a town on the so-called Green River.

Snežana has been retired since she was 52, when her heart was reduced to only 15 percent of its strength. It was the result of multiple surgeries performed after she fell getting off the bus and broke her hip, foot, lower leg, femur, and arm. And although medical analysis after heart valve surgery indicated that her cardiovascular "figures and math" have improved and reached 25 percent, Snežana's heart sings today with an aria passing on benevolence and strength to every interlocutor.

Introducing herself, she says that the Lim flows through her life in every sense. She was born on one side of the river and married on the other. Having flown from one bank to the other, Snežana Laptošević became the bird of Priboj. And she has held on to her husband and new family ever since. Because, in the "Serbian Dictionary," Vuk Karadžić says that "priboj" refers to a place on the water where there is almost always a wind that pushes a person to hold on to the end, where he feels safe.

The Tica family originates from the karst and barren ground of Glamoč. From this nowhere-land, people always tiptoe to see what lies beyond, behind the mountain peaks surrounding them. Tiptoeing, they grow up into tall people. Well, then, what would the new daughter-in-law joining the Tica family be like but tall, slender and stout like a fir of the surrounding dense conifers.

Today, Snežana lives in the suburbs of Priboj with her husband and younger son, who works at the newly opened AFT, a factory that maintains Priboj's former reputation as a regional automotive giant, leastwise with these German car part producing plants. Her elder son married, got a son, and lives with his family in Belgrade. Not far away is the village of Dobrilovići, where the Tica

1 Translation note: In Serbian, "tica" stands for "a bird"

family has their own holding, which is healing for each of them.

After finishing secondary school, Snežana qualified as an administrative technician. Unfortunately, with the shutdown of FAP (Priboj Car Factory), in this area, it was impossible to find a job, at least in that profession. Hence, Snežana got a job in Priboj as a hospital cleaner. As her parents have always been engaged in agriculture, she grew up between seasonal jobs in the fields, in the orchard and garden, helping her parents with household chores. After getting married in 1984, Snežana moved to the village of Dobrilovići, on the other side of the Lim. Her husband's parents, with whom they shared the house and the days, were also engaged in agriculture, and nothing was more natural for Snežana than to continue helping her new family. Hard-working and harmonious, the Tica family with two wings, their two sons, has had their own holding since fifteen years ago.

- We have 2,000 raspberry plants, and I love them very much. I find taking care of them the least demanding, whatever it takes. We have other fruits, vegetables, everything... even watermelons, extremely sweet, - says Snežana, who seems to be most proud of these "really the sweetest watermelons," as she will repeat. - We also have plums, we make požegača rakija, and get a lot of compliments for it. There is no advertising except that word-of-mouth marketing, - she says smilingly. - When we go to a patron saint day celebration (slava), a wedding, we bring bottles of our rakija as a gift, write down the producer, and then people look for us. I also make liqueurs. Chokeberry liqueur, which I produce according to my own recipe, is in particular demand.

Snežana reveals her recipes without any hesitation:

- I put 350 g sugar in a liter of good red wine, add half a kilogram of chokeberry, two cinnamon sticks, and four to five cloves. After bringing it to a boil, I let it boil for another fifteen minutes. When it cools down, I add 250 ml rum. It really turns out great. I also get a lot of praise for the young walnut liqueur, which I especially recommend to people with thyroid gland problems. I don't experiment with the measures, I always make it like this: I put 18 young and smaller walnuts in a jar. Not too small, more like plum-size, and I prick each one with a fork. Then I sprinkle them with sugar, just enough to cover them. I occasionally stir the contents in the following days without opening the jar. I just shake it. As the sugar dissolves, it forms a black liquid. The jar should be stored in a bright place, in my case it is in the pantry, but next to the window. When the liquid forms, the jar should continue to be shaken, but now it can be opened and the contents can be mixed with a wooden stirrer. I repeated this daily until everything melts away. Then I strain the resulting mixture and add rakija to the strained liquid. When I want a stronger walnut liqueur, I add more rakija, but I always put our požegača, I find the liqueur the most delicious with it. Although any rakija can be used, according to the liqueur strength I want. To one's taste.

The biggest demand for Snežana's products comes from Belgrade, and since she became a member of the "Let's Save the Village" Association, the opportunities for marketing and the necessary support have expanded.

- Yes, - Snežana confirms. - Thanks to the cooperation with the Association, now there is not much difference between the lives of rural and urban women, apart from the fact that it is better in the countryside, - she makes a witty remark and continues: - The Association organized a series of training, and now rural women engaged in production have the opportunity to benefit from the 21st-century advantages. We are digitally literate. We can use an internet browser. All agricultural innovations are at our fingertips, thanks to mobile devices. We try to apply the knowledge we received at the training. For example, we

regularly hold Zoom meetings. I have just scheduled a meeting today for Friday at 9 p.m. Topic: "Winter and recipe exchange."

During the conversation, Snežana often emphasizes the importance of cooperation with the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association. - *You know, it all works well. The Association, that is, our President, writes a project; if it is accepted, rural women are provided assistance according to the project plans. This is sometimes training and sometimes concrete help with agricultural machinery. For example, thanks to one of the Association's projects, I got a tiller for raspberries and vegetables. And since seven days ago, I have my own laptop, so I immediately scheduled a Zoom meeting, - Snežana adds optimistically.*

- *The potential of the village is so immense that it should be developed and supported as an activity of national-strategic priority and importance. First – the food. We produce it here. Whatsmore, we produce organic food. We don't spray it with any chemicals. When we make rakija, we use clean water. And not to mention rural tourism. We are very rich in opportunities for the development of this economic sector and I am happy that our president Malina Stanojević has a plan for us to work together in the future to improve rural tourism. Our holding, for example, is under Lisja stena. My younger son is planning, and we and the Association will support him, to build an ethno village. Up there, at about 1,200 meters above sea level, it's so amazing, you know. The most beautiful viewpoint! The view reaches as far as Stari Vlah including Crni Vrh, Banjski Brdo, Potpeć Lake and Tornik on Zlatibor Mountain. Even now there is many hikers. Dense forests, fairytale-like trails. And there is something to learn. There, on Lisja stena, are the remains of a Greek cemetery. The story has been told ever since our ancestors that the Greeks used to live there with us, but moved away many centuries ago, when it happened that snow fell on St. Elijah's Day! It is on August 2, and it snowed!? According to the story, the Greeks found it very cold and strange and moved away from here. And the cemetery remained to preserve and tell those stories. And how it will do that if we, the locals, don't make an effort?*

Pribojska Banja, located within reach from Priboj, is also known for the monastery built in early 12th century at a site with gushing warm, healing water. The water temperature is always 36.6 °C. In the old days, when these sources were called simply "hot water", a hospital was built there, so it comes as no surprise that archaeological excavations here found many objects of inestimable value, including surgical instruments that were used in this area centuries ago.

- *I like visiting my older son in Belgrade and going on vacations, but I mostly enjoy working and watching historical TV shows, - answers Snežana to what she likes doing in her spare time. - I loved watching Suleiman the Magnificent. But whatever else I do, apart from tending to our holding, I feel I am going to miss something. This is a beautiful and rich area. Our climate is such that penny bun grows wild here. There are also chanterelle mushrooms, oyster mushrooms, "chicken of the woods"... Anyone who is hard-working can make money from mushroom picking. The other day, one of the members of our Association from a nearby village picked 134 kilograms of penny bun mushrooms in one day. The village is a true "mine." An inexhaustible source. Those who do not shy away from hard work cannot be hungry here. Milojka was not bothered walking around the forest and harvesting, and voila! She made money!*

It is the end of October. Snežana is in no hurry, but her story goes back to listing all the benefits she enjoys thanks to her membership in the "Let's Save the Village"

Women's Association and the products from the family holding: - *I also make juices, mostly from apples, and sell them either at the market or through the Association. These days I am finishing two salads, which I will use for own purposes and sell. I grated two kilos of carrots, added salt, mixed them a little and poured them into jars. Then I added parsley to each jar, a finger-thick layer on top of the carrot. I added finely chopped garlic cloves on top, a spoonful of alcohol vinegar, enough oil to soak, a teaspoon of ground pepper, and then I pasteurized all the jars in the oven at 90 degrees for 90 minutes. A delicious salad. I also make a very special one, a specialty made from two kilos of chili peppers, two kilos of white grapes, and half a liter of vinegar. Oh, how deliciously spicy it turns out!*

Every bird has a song to sing. If Mina Karadžić personally was to describe Tica Snežana, she would certainly single her out for her original "recipe aria", for her food and drinks made of chokeberry and cloves, young walnuts and a good "požegača" rakija, for her chili pepper and white grape salad. It must be that Mina recorded Tica and the other members of the Association in advance with the proverb: - *Where there is harmony, there is victory.*

4 ALEKSANDRA STANOJEVIĆ

There would certainly be as many coincidences or similarities in the one hundred and eleven years that spanned between Nadežda Stanojević and her family namesake Aleksandra. The older one, born in 1887, spent her childhood in Pirot, and the younger one, who was born in the late 20th century, in 1998, was born in Priboj. More precisely – in Pribojska Banja. Both of them, each in their own town, finished elementary and then secondary school as the best students in their generation. Both graduated with honors. The first on a topic that was suggestive of her future work in healthcare and treatment of children, and the second defended the thesis entitled "Professional rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities." At the very beginning of the last century, Nadežda became the first female pediatrician in Serbia with the specialization she acquired while interning in the world's oldest children's hospital, founded in 1803 in Paris (France). And Aleksandra - taking the slow steps conditioned by her muscular dystrophy - approaches the realization of her dream with the energy of a hurricane - first to get a PhD in legal sciences, and then to enter the courtroom where she will honorably dispense justice in the most righteous way.

Whichever source of information is used, Dr. Nadežda Stojadinović is a uniquely described as dedicated and modest. No less admirable is Aleksandra, the heroine of this story, who, if she decides to do such research, might find common roots with the pediatrician from Pirot.

Aleksandra's sails are driven solely by love. The love she shares, and the love showered on her by the people she encounters or whom fate has assigned to her as the closest ones. Thanks to this, she does not hesitate to look at the constellations and reach for

and conquer the heights she aspires to:

- Good people have always pulled me to heights. There were those different ones, but I did not follow them. I went after those who saw my abilities and my knowledge, not my disability, - she says with a seriousness that every time exudes cheerfulness, self-confidence, and energy, which puts some of her interlocutors to shame facing them with their prejudices and makes them instantly change and improve their opinion about the borders of intellectual, educational and all other reaches of persons with disabilities.

- As I couldn't manage to sit on my own until my first birthday, after extensive medical examinations, I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. It is not a disease, and there is no cure for it. It is a condition. And I had to learn to live with it. Then followed daily trips to Belgrade for treatment at the Special Hospital for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Neurology, at the Rehabilitation Institute in Sokobanjska. Until I was seven, my family and I lived on the Priboj - Belgrade - Priboj route. And just before starting the first grade, I stood up on my own. Since then, I have been in rehabilitation in Pribojska Banja, where I live and, as you can see, walk. With my mother's help most of the time, but - I walk. I did not let my disability stop me. And why would I? And why, in general, should I see it as a disability? Everyone has some problem. There is a saying: when everything is fine, put a pebble in your shoe.

Pronouncedly weaker graphomotor skills did not slow down Aleksandra in the least compared to her classmates. On the contrary. By the end of that first school September, she had learned all the letters, both print and cursive. The gentle and patient persistence of her teacher and her mother made Aleksandra, showered with so much love and trust, feel strong and be a seven-year-old example of where there is a will, there is a way.

After elementary school, Aleksandra enrolled in secondary school, former Beli Manastir, a renowned school in the Zlatar District. She graduated as the best student in her generation.

- My mother wanted me to enroll in secondary school where I would get education for a developer, to be able to work on computers, but I only wanted to go to grammar school to study socio-lingual sciences. Mom agreed, she believed in my choice, so today I speak English, German and French, and I also use Latin. When I finished grammar school, I enrolled at the Faculty of Law, from which I graduated in due time. Now I am finishing my master's degree, and after that I plan to pursue a PhD to fully fulfill my dream: to one day be a judge in my city.

Whoever listens to her while she talks knows that it will be exactly like that. Her wishes grow out of noble motivations "watered" with complete confidence in the power of education and mutual human support. So there is no doubt that Aleksandra will enter the courtroom and deliver justice righteously.

According to UNESCO, 775 million people in the world cannot read or write. Of these, two-thirds are women. Aleksandra interprets it in the context of social circumstances and conditioning and does not refer to her success as special. She is happy to live in a country where every kind of discrimination is taken care of and she believes that making women literate is understood as both a right and an obligation. Of course there are always exceptions that prove the rule, and the rule is that nothing should stand in the way of education for any person in the world. And certainly there are always obstacles that are easier to overcome by joining together.

Speaking about this topic, Aleksandra gives a good example of the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association: - *That Association confirms the justification and benefits of joining, in this case of women, more precisely rural women. In its ten years of existence, they have achieved exceptional results. And this is seen by members of the Association, local and regional public, and the media. Mom has supported the President of the Association from the very beginning. And I immediately joined. When I was younger, I helped the implementation of the first projects, and then, as I became more qualified, I was also involved in website maintenance, social network administration, legal counseling and drafting association documents and filling out competition applications.*

That first project, sponsored by the Municipality of Priboj, included the construction of a public fountain and Jarmovački potok picnic area furnishing. For the beginning of their work, as well as their affirmation, the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association chose a socially responsible action, which launched them in the media as consistent, persistent, and responsible. - *The built fountain is dedicated to the Thessaloniki soldiers from this region, and since one of the priorities of our Association is cultural heritage conservation, we made an effort and succeeded in preserving a part of our history and, at the same time, managed to find a way to attract young people and families to come to that picnic site located in the immediate vicinity of Priboj. We did this by clearing and furnishing, which included setting up grills, benches, trash cans, and other picnic furniture.*

Connecting rural women with the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association empowers both rural women and the village. And the results of this useful sharing are evident on daily basis.

- *I am delighted with Malina’s ideas and commitment. As the President of this Association, she combined the nice and useful, empowered rural women, used the right way to make them more self-confident, capable of realizing their strengths and opportunities. This Association gave all members the opportunity to show their products, to take them out of their homes, to receive recognition for their work, to sell their products outside their villages and beyond the market stalls, to earn extra money by offering their products in other markets as well. Thus united, women are stronger and even more capable of achieving their goals and improving their position, as well as their village. Multiple signs of progress are noticeable: both from the social and legal-formal aspects. And what is perhaps the most significant - they are also economically empowered.*

Thanks to the implemented projects with which the Association applied for dozens of different competitions, the members received greenhouses and various agricultural tools such as tillers and fruit presses, as well as laptops, along with continuous professional training on better marketing of their products or digital literacy, which is the necessary 21st-century “language.” Aleksandra explains: - *Thanks to this Association and its cooperation with the Commissioner for Protection of Equality team, some members visited Vienna and Slovenia for the first time. Namely, that institution organized a study trip for rural women engaged in agricultural product processing and selling. In this way, some of the members of the “Let’s Save the Village” Association learned about the examples of good practice in these countries, and many of them, and it should be emphasized, had the opportunity to stay in a hotel for the first time.*

Aleksandra feels happy that she belongs to an Association committed to provide its members with a better quality of life and encourage them to plan and dream.

- Mom is there to support the family, father runs a craft store, brother is an entrepreneur and construction contractor. He too helped the Association with his construction machines when needed. And I am a lawyer of the Association, and I plan to stay and hopefully help even more the empowerment of rural women and villages, - says Aleksandra.

Her family namesake, Nadežda, the first female pediatrician in Serbia, also successfully fought for women's equality, education, children's rights, and a better position of mothers, always thanks to association. First, she started the Mothers Counseling Center. She was the first in Serbia to start administering the BCG vaccine (against tuberculosis of newborn children). Then she founded the "Serbian Mother" Society, whose mission, among other things, was to encourage mothers to abandon prejudices related to the treatment of children and to become "medically literate" to the extent that they can prevent illness in children, but also effectively help them in a way that will not put children at risk until the doctor's arrival.

With comparable energy, Aleksandra is active in providing legal support to the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association and communicating about the Association's strength and the results of their efforts to the public.

It also happens that women join together despite the decades separating them. That is how the two Stanojević women of this story together bridged a century with their notability. One from the past, the other from the present, both looking at future times.

5 SUADA AHMETAGIĆ

Older residents of Međurečje still retell the story of a Turkish bey who gave one of his wives a hundred hectares of Međurečje land. Wealthy and powerful, he made sure that piece of land, after the annexation, belonged to Austria-Hungary, which would later use this wooded area for felling and disposal of timber. Today, the former bey's territory belongs to the municipalities of Priboj in Serbia and Rudo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbian part resembles an administrative "island", considering that to reach Priboj, 25 kilometers away, the inhabitants of the village of Krajčinovići cross the state border four times: the Uvac border crossing on the Serbian side, and then on the Bosnian side, the Vagan border crossing and the Ustibar border crossing. And when they finish their work in the city, they need to return home the same way. Eight borders in total!

It is not the bey's wife's fault. Even if she dared to refuse such a gift, she would not dare to face her husband. It was the nineteenth century.

Suada lives in Krajčinovići. To get to Priboj, she also crosses four border points, two Serbian and two Bosnian. And she does the same on the way back. But this is the 21st century. No one blames the bey's wife anymore. And some other women push the limits of their rights and opportunities and don't mind the geographical ones.

Suada's "*hayat yolu*", i.e., the path of life, was also determined by her year of birth, at least only to the extent of referring to that coincidence only here for this occasion. Namely, the year 1975 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Women. Although Women's Day has been celebrated in Serbia since 1914, this internationally recognized support for women contributed to the fight for the economic, political and social equality of women being more intensively launched here as well, and subsequently strengthened. For too long, it has been difficult, and sometimes impossible, for women to exercise their basic human rights, and, in particular, rural women have been overlooked in terms of justice and equality. With limited employment, education, and economic independence options, they were reduced to their own yards. However, thanks to the activities of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, especially during the last decade, rural women have been recognized as a priority target group in creating campaigns affirming gender equality, as well as in competitions of institutions in charge.

The "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association, which is today a role model for purposeful joining and socially responsible activities, is one of the organizations with the mission of empowering rural women. This mission was also recognized by Suada, who is overly satisfied with the cooperation and points out the importance of such an association to her and her entire family, including the village.

Suada comes from a family that was also engaged in agriculture, though for its own needs. She grew up in such an environment and on these same slopes, so she begins the conversation with a sentence emphasizing how much she loves agricultural work and rural life. By getting married and expanding her family, this love grew even stronger.

- Our house is next to the Monastery of St. Archangel, built by Mehmed Pasha Sokolović in the 16th century. There is a river next to it, clear as crystal. You can drink water from your hand. Peace, tranquility. Now that we have a good road, electricity, internet... - now living in the countryside is the most beautiful thing, - Suada is satisfied, and substantiates her belief with a description of life in Vienna: - At some point, at the beginning of our marriage, my husband and I went to Austria to find jobs there, and although we had all the conditions to stay, because we have relatives in Vienna, we decided to return. And we haven't repented, we love living here.

Thanks to the holding, she and her husband built a nice, spacious house and ensured their two children get education. Today, their daughter is a law graduate, and their son has a master's degree in civil engineering. Five months ago, the Ahmetagić family also had a grandson, may he be healthy and happy.

Although she finished secondary school for electrical engineering, Suada continued to practice agriculture when she got married. Living and working in harmony and division of labor contributed to the expansion of this holding today still engaged in animal husbandry and vegetable growing. Joining the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association was a "wind at the back" to move faster and more successfully along the path she determined together with her husband:

- We have 30 ares under 7,000 raspberry plants, - Suada begins to list. - We also have eight Simmental cows, each giving about 25 liters of milk per day, which we sell. There are also various vegetables and fruits, but the most important thing for me is that I

love what I do and that I now have enough years and experience to know how to do what I love the best possible way.

Moreover, Suada points out that she now timely plans all activities related to the holding and keeps herself updated about novelties in the fields she deals with on the Internet.

- The "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association helped me the most with education and computer literacy. You know, we, women from the village, were treated as if we were in the background for a long time, but - step by step - with the President of the Association, we learned, and we will continue to learn how to go public with our products, wishes, plans... Along with trainings and workshops, all Association members use the advantages the Internet offers today. Everything is available to us. Information about new varieties, new technologies, and marketing methods. Membership in and cooperation with the Association helped my family holding a lot. For example, we were among the first to get a greenhouse, 100 square meters large. It is precious. We also had support when it comes to mechanization. Of agricultural machines, we got a tiller for raspberries. That saved us 700 to 800 euros, which is how much we would have to pay for the tiller if we had bought it ourselves. So, the Association also helped us financially. We don't get money, but we get knowledge and guidelines for further production, which has consequently grown our incomes.

Observing the beauty of the landscape, the land that pays back with fruits, the harmony of man and nature and the unhurried life Suada and her husband lead while patiently and continuously performing numerous chores, their interviewer feels uneasy asking about how they spend, for example, their summers or winters. When the interviewer's curiosity wins, Suada replies:

- You mean free time? Free time... , - she repeats, as if trying to remember what frees up time or what time freedoms are: - I have very little free time. When I am not working on the holding or doing housework, I browse the Internet. I like to read the news, to be up to date. And I especially like when, during the summer evenings, after I finish all the work, at around 10 p.m., I sit in front of the house and listen... I listen to crickets, frogs, glowworms come by, I feel that I am a part of nature.

Then she adds even more joyfully: *- My husband and I, of course, enjoy most when we go to see our grandson or when he comes to visit us.*

We were almost deprived of the following lines, which speak volumes about rural women, but luckily, near the end of the conversation, Suada remembered her greatest passion, her hobby with which she infected all the household members. Since the children became independent, she and her husband have maintained a beautiful garden with ornamental plants on their own. She says they mostly have roses, but also grow dahlias, gladioli, hydrangeas in wonderful colors, and marigold, which "is a must, its flower lasts until first frost." Three years ago, by the audience's votes, she won the "The Most Beautiful Oasis" competition in a campaign held on the territory of Prijepolje, Priboj and Nova Varoša and was thrilled.

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Despite those numerous boundaries, due to which previous ages cast an unjust blame on the soul of one of the bey's wives, Suada notices that her village is slowly reviving.

For now, only during the summer, but even that is a noticeable step forward that instills optimism: - *I would say that one can see that the village has been slowly regenerating in the last couple of years. Indeed, for now it is seasonal, from spring to autumn. People come, cultivate the gardens... That is the period when our village comes alive. Are there any young people coming back? A little, but yes. It will be better when the system provides, for example, maternity benefits for rural women, when pensions are regulated for people engaged in agriculture living outside the city.*

...

It was left unsaid but is somehow implied, so it is not too bad to repeat: even if the bey's wife had refused Medjurečje as a gift, the bey would have punished her. And given the land to someone else. It was the nineteenth century. Therefore, it is high time to remove the collective "guilt" from women just because they are women. And get rid of the yokes of prejudice.

6 DANIČA RUŽIČIĆ

They were 26 years old when they took off. Danica Tomić, in 1932, on the wings of an aircraft, as the first female pilot in Serbia and the first female pilot in the world to perform loops, and Danica Ružičić - in 2008, on the wings of joy. Then, despite the medical experts' assurances that she would not be able to have children, she gave birth to her first girl.

And not just loops. Danica Tomić also performed "bell," "cobra," "roll," "Immelmann," "traverse," "break," and various aerobatic maneuvers, from "braking" to "jumping" in the air. Flying a plane.

Her namesake, Danica Ružičić, does not lag behind. On the contrary. Three years later, she and her husband had a second daughter. And then, though they did not plan, they had a son, Mihajlo. Loops of fate are often more exciting than those of the pilot, and require equal courage and persistence to avoid forced landings or crashes.

...

Danica Ružičić was born on the last day of March in 1983. She spent her childhood in the village of Puhovo, in the Municipality of Lučani, in the Moravica District. There, in Lučani, in a small town by the Bjelica River, she finished elementary and then secondary school of economics. This young woman with a modern appearance comes from a family that was engaged in agriculture. - *We always had fruits, vegetables, poultry... - she explains, - but we produced it only for our own needs.*

She got married at the age of twenty and has been living in Guča ever since. As she got into the habit of helping in and around the house from an early age, she immediately

adapted to life in her new family.

- At first, we lived with my husband's parents, and then my mother-in-law got her inheritance, so we bought the property. Now we have chickens, pigs, we grow vegetables and fruits, and we grow raspberries on 12 ares, which is how much one family can cultivate, - says Danica. She does not say that she wasn't employed until a year and a half ago, but says that it was then that she started a job in her field for the first time. This more precise language determinant is the result of one of the lectures on the topic "Concept and mechanisms of protection against discrimination," which Danica recently attended and which was held by Ivana Filipov, an independent adviser in the Complaints Department of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. - You are not unemployed, - Ivana said on that occasion. - On the contrary, you are very busy. You are not in an employment relationship with a company, but you are very busy. Don't downgrade your household chores.

Until she started working as an economist in one of the companies in Lučani, apart from housewife and agricultural work, Danica also did other different jobs so that, as hardworking and persistent as she is, she could help her husband and financially support the family: *- I also worked in fast food, in the cold storage, - says Danica. - Like my husband, who after finishing secondary school worked as a millwright, and then, with the socio-economic turbulence, when he lost his job, also changed several companies.*

The Ružičić family plans to establish a holding in the near future. In this, they are supported by farmers whom Danica met thanks to the cooperation with the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association. She is overly satisfied and says that she learned a lot: *- The joint study trip to two EU countries meant a world to me. It was useful to learn about Slovenian and Austrian examples of good practice in processing and marketing agricultural goods. Also, in a relatively short time at various trainings, I learned to use the Internet, social networks, e-mail... but in a purposeful way. So, they have trained me to find information on the Internet that facilitates my business and to communicate with other women from the village to exchange recipes, photos of products, solutions to problems that I encounter in my business.*

After registering her holding, Danica will join the Women's Association in Guča called "Dragačevke." It is important for her to provide support and be active at the local level as well. She notices changes for the better and is satisfied with the state incentives for rural development, but underlines that more is needed: *- It is one thing to buy land or a house, and the other to maintain it. It takes subsidies too.*

You can hear the sadness in her voice when she states that Guča is not developing according to its opportunities and potential: *- Although Guča has about 850 inhabitants, it used to have a Court and four classes in each of the eight elementary school grades. Now there is one class per grade. People leave, especially the young, and there is no support for the increase in the birth rate in this part of the Moravian District, so, for example, families pay for kindergarten for their third child.*

However, Danica says that she would never leave the village. And that she is satisfied: *- I love Guča. The village is the right place for children to grow up. Us, parents, being carefree is priceless. I don't worry when my daughters leave the house to take a walk by themselves, I know who they are with, where they are... Coziness and security today is only offered by life in the countryside.*

The village Danica describes almost poetically instills will and desire in her: - *From the office, after returning from work, I enter the vegetable garden. I need this exchange of different spatial energies, and I do not find these different lifestyles disturbing or tiring. On the contrary, they complement each other, making me more satisfied.*

For Danica, leisure means music and books. She likes to listen to ex-yu hits, which remind her of past times - the times of youthful carelessness. And, the book she immediately lists as her favorite is Dumas' novel "The Count of Monte Cristo". It is not surprising. Justice-loving and with a refined sense of philanthropy and reciprocity, it is almost certain that, at least on a subconscious level, she recognized herself in Edmond, the main hero of this book, and the strength of female association in the wise Faria. And just like Faria educated and taught Edmond Dantès mathematics, chemistry, philosophy, languages, medicine and fencing over the course of eight years, so do women's associations train their members to work on a computer, ways to get greenhouses or agricultural machinery, use social networks, market their products... And just like Faria revealed to Dantès the secret about the buried treasure, so do the united women - mutually supported - learn how to find the buried treasure every day together, with their hands and knowledge. On their farms, in their households, in their families. And in themselves.

...

This story started with a reminder of another Danica. The first female pilot in Serbia. The record of the commission before which she took the flight test has been kept, stating that she was the best in her class. She flew the plane in a safe and sober-blooded manner. She landed at 19:00. It was already slowly dusking over Belgrade, which made landing conditions difficult, but she made it without any issues. Despite, one might say.

Danica Ružičić did it years later. She talks about this with particular cheerfulness: - *My husband and I had no children even after five years of marriage. There were gynecological opinions that I would never be able to get pregnant. We lived in a community then and I felt a lot of pressure. In the meantime, my husband's younger brother also got married, brought a new daughter-in-law, and they immediately had a son. We all lived together, and I felt even more pressure and suffered for not getting pregnant. And then it happened. Despite! And our first girl was born. Three years later, the second. And five and a half years ago, we had a son. He surprised us all - she laughs. - When I now look back on our five, so to say, childless years, I conclude that that period strengthened us further and brought us closer.*

To the Ružičić couple, all subsequent problems seemed smaller and more surmountable. They find great joy and help in their children. They named them: Milica, Marija and Mihajlo.

- *All your names begin with "m," once said Danica to her children with a bed time story.*
- *Your name too begins with "m," - added one of the daughters. - "M" for mom.*

7 LJILJANA OTAŠEVIĆ

Ljiljana Otašević was born in Priboj, grew up in the village of Crnuzi until she got married, and today lives in Brezna, about 25 kilometers from Priboj.

Ljiljana Otašević was born in Belgrade and moved to Toronto (Canada) as a graduate painter, where she still lives and works.

Two different roads, separated by two distant latitudes and longitudes, are the residences of two energetic and hardworking women of the same first and last name and the same age.

Ljiljana Otašević is known as Lily in Canada and is admired by the art world as a notable designer and sculptor. The frames of her intimate worlds are called “Break-Wave” or “Fabric of Place”... which are, in fact, the names of her sculptures put up in downtown Toronto. Ljiljana from Brezna would probably also use these words to describe her world that “flashes” in front of her eyes when she climbs a nearby hill from where she can see the meanders of Uvac, Dubrava Monastery, and orchards and vegetable gardens at the bottom. And the land she cultivates with her husband.

Apart from sharing the same name, here, too, the two worlds, two Ljiljanas meet: at the springs of their own joys and the art of living and love for what they do. And that, in all its beauty unfathomable sight of their desires they are determined to fulfill – is the identical world of all satisfied women.

Ljiljana Otašević and her husband are engaged in agriculture, vegetable growing and animal husbandry. They live in the village of Brezna, which is considered one of the most beautiful in the Priboj region. It has only about fifty inhabitants because, during the previous decades, the place was quite deserted, and its houses are scattered across the fertile plateau. There are also empty ones. The descendants of the former owners went to the cities, to the world, or to Belgrade, Čačak, Priboj... In the summer, the yards and houses come to life. Some return temporarily, seasonally. – *And there is one couple who stayed*, - Ljiljana adds to the observation: - *They grow raspberries, like everyone in the village.*

The village of Brezna is separated from Zlatibor by the Uvac River, and it is located about 25 kilometers away from Priboj, where Ljiljana was born and where she later completed elementary and then secondary mechanical school, acquiring the title of electrical technician. As somehow, at that time, the Priboj Car Factory shut down, her profession was no longer in demand, so Ljiljana retrained as a saleswoman. She worked various jobs, mostly through the youth employment agency, and then she got married. She gave birth to a boy, who - oh how fast time flies - got married just as this publication was written. In the meantime, he also finished primary and secondary school in Priboj, and then graduated from the Faculty of Physical Education. As a young physical education teacher, today he teaches in three schools: in the village of Kratovo, in the old and in the new part of Priboj. Despite his many obligations, he often comes to his parents' house, because he likes to help with the household.

- I come from a village, and ever since I was little, I have loved gardening, working in the fields, tending to livestock... I love rural life. My husband and I managed to build a new house here, in Brezna, and we also built our own holding with auxiliary facilities. My husband worked at FAP, so when he lost his job, he started working in construction. During all that time, I went to the countryside and helped my mother-in-law. We grew gentian for an Austrian pharmaceutical company, but it didn't go as planned. They came, promised a road, but nothing happened. Then a representative of a Swiss company for organic production came, a man whose origins were here, and from then on it was little better. To be able to get a certificate of organic production, he also brought an organic verification expert from Switzerland. I can't tell you how delighted that gentleman was with our food. When he left here for Banja Luka, where he was also supposed to set organic production standards, we made lunch for him. As he was leaving, we suggested packing food for him to take, and he enthusiastically accepted. All the time he praised the cabbage rolls, pork roast, cakes, and pie.

Ljiljana does not like to brag, but we cannot touch upon the pie that the Swiss businessman wanted to take and not mentioning that Ljiljana is the winner of pie making contest at the "Triple Border without Borders" festival. Her lenten button mushroom pie is a "gold medal" winner.

- We have a lot to be proud of - points out Ljiljana and diverts the topic from "personal" to "common good". - Organic food production in symbiosis with rural tourism development is a really huge potential for this region, especially for Brezna, which is a beautiful village. And the location is wonderful, we are right on the triple border, Nova Varoš is near, Zlatibor is over there. A few years ago, we got a paved road. Of course, plot sales were boosted immediately.

And indeed, many agree that this landscape is the most beautiful. Nevertheless, for a while the Otašević family saw their Brezna less often. During those economically difficult times, Ljiljana helped her mother-in-law in her village, her husband worked in construction in Pale (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and in Montenegro, her son was studying. - *Three family members in three countries,* - recalls Ljiljana.

It happened, however, that in 2010, thanks to donations, the Otašević family got their first cow. The husband soon returned from guest work, and they decided to establish and then expand their holding and work and do everything together.

They had never forgotten when their Zlatulja arrived.
- She came to us pregnant and gave birth within two days. Caesarean section! I knew nothing about tending to cattle. Quick, call the vet! They tied her up, gave her local anesthesia, took everything out of her womb, I could see she was in agony, in fear... You know, forgive me for the comparison, but I also gave birth by caesarean section. I understood her look, I felt how much she believed that we would help her, I understood everything. Since then, I have had a special love for cows. Zlatulja the most. We had her until last year, and then we had to sell her. We all cried, my husband, my son, and me. People, why are you selling a cow when you are crying, the buyer asked us. We explained. Eh, we had three calves, three little cows from her. There were also males.

Ljiljana makes cheese and kaymak from cow's milk, and sells these dairy products on the market along with vegetables. The Otašević family currently has 5,000 plants of

raspberry, plum and apple they use to make rakija. They have their own land and their own forest. And 50 sheep. All registered, that is, they receive subsidies for all of them. They also raise pigs, hens, and chickens, and have oxen for draft work: - *We need them to bring wood from the forest. We mostly use it as firewood, there is hornbeam, beech, oak...* - Ljiljana explains.

They also have, she adds smilingly, pooches. - *Pooches?* - she is surprised that he has to "translate". - *Well, dogs. We also have an otter. A red mare, she is still a foal, slender and beautiful like an antelope, it is a present for our granddaughter to play with.*

The Otašević family is trying to keep their holding sustainable and for production and cultivation to first satisfy their family needs.

- *We have excess, so we sell it. The "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association helped us a lot. It was 2015, we had already started to expand our production when I happened to meet Malina Stanojević on the street, who founded and manages the Association. And as soon as she came to Brezna, Malina was delighted. I can boast that for the past seven years of our cooperation, thanks to projects and competitions, I got a greenhouse and a laptop and that, which is perhaps the most precious thing, I became digitally literate.*

Ljiljana's day starts at 4 in the morning, 5 at the latest. She rises with the sun. In summer. In winter, it is still dark. - *A woman always has work to do,* - she states, not complaining. - *The woman is the pillar of a rural household and works as long as she has the strength. I remember walking seven kilometers from home to our forest and the same distance back daily, carrying lunch for fifteen workers. But it was not difficult.*

Speaking about free time, Ljiljana says: - *We hardly have it in the countryside.* In winter, when there is less agricultural work, she knits socks, slippers, scarves and other small clothing items. When there is not too much snow and wind, she also likes to go for a walk with her husband, and when they were younger, they used to go skiing with their son. - *No, we are not very fond of the sea,* - Ljiljana explains, - *although my uncles live in Montenegro, we are always invited to come, but we prefer to vacation here. This summer I was in Pribojska Banja, it was lovely.*

- *What I enjoy doing,* - Ljiljana repeats the question. - *I like our saint patron's day (slava) gatherings with family members, relatives and friends. Our slava is Saint Stephen, it is on January 9. Then we gather, men make barbecue, women make pies and cakes. And I love when we work together to improve the village. Namely, in a few days, the elementary school in the nearby village of Kratovo will celebrate its one-hundredth anniversary. There is a satellite unit here in our Brezna. We were promised it will be renovated. Such things make me happy. And I love a healthy lifestyle, I love the smell of my grandmother's kitchen and the countryside.*

...

Ljiljana Otašević from Brezna gazes at the world that stretches far, far beyond her hearth. Her aspiration for better covers the glades, forests and pastures to other villages and to some other women. Ljiljana Lily Otašević, who lives in Toronto, also carries in her heart love thanks to which she strives to make the world a better place using beauty and kindness. These coincidences are rounded off with another interesting fact: a Serbian-Canadian foundation based in Toronto helped a married couple from the city to start their life in the countryside a few years ago through a

Serbian sister organization. And it was nowhere else than in Brezna.

Thus, the two Ljiljanas prove how important mutual support is for life's ups and downs, for the joy of creation and success. They do this despite not knowing each other. By supporting and standing up for women. Their example is a drive to a new Ljiljana who will perhaps not bear that name but will carry in herself the power of association.

8 VERA PRIJOVIĆ

Although three decades apart by the years of their birth, and several rivers and mountains apart in their future lives, two Veras, then still girls, put on their first gloves with equal faith - each on her right hand.

Vera Jeftimijades – the white, athletic, fencing glove.

Vera Prijović – the turquoise, winter glove she knitted herself.

And both were equally joyful, discovering that you can always find a way to make your wishes come true with enough will and persistence. Guided by their conviction, they both still reach their goals today and are satisfied.

Vera Jeftimijades was the sovereign ruler of the fencing arenas for twenty-seven years, ever since the first glove. That glove defined her life. She won more than eighty trophies at domestic and international competitions and is today known worldwide as the most successful Serbian female fencer.

Her first glove and knowledge of manual work led Vera Prijović down slightly more predestined paths. However, it not only determined but literally extended her life.

- My mother taught me to knit. She is from Pljevlja, - Vera begins her story. - Women there used to knit and weave a lot. I was in the first grade of elementary school when I knitted my first gloves. They were turquoise mittens, and I did some serious work with them.

Although her plans for after finishing secondary school were poles apart, knowledge of handicrafts helped Vera get a job in a fashion house in Kraljevo during the period of socio-economic crisis in our country: *- They really checked your knowledge of handicrafts. I was 19 years old when I applied, and I was accepted, - Vera still pridefully recalls. - I had, - she continues, - quite a decent salary. Unfortunately, the escalation of conflicts and the period of wars in our recent political history forced me to leave the job, because it was impossible to commute.*

Vera still lives in the village where she got married. Hercegovina Goleša is located in the middle between her native Krajčinovići and Priboj. There is the family estate and production holding where she and her husband mostly stay. They also have a house in the city. It is located in the new part of Priboj, in Panja Glava, but they don't spend so much time there. *- But, - they say, - it is good to have an option, if possible.*

During the schooling of their two children, the Prijović family decided to stay in the city. Today, their daughter lives in Belgrade and works at the Mother and Child Healthcare Institute, and their son is employed by a company that has been carrying out works in Germany for some time. In the meantime, he got married, and soon they, joyful in their impatience, will welcome their first grandchild.

Vera worked in trade for nine years. The crisis, inflation and other socio-economic "hurricanes" brought about various challenges, but thanks to the perseverance she learned as an eight-year-old girl, Vera patiently continued to add to her life. She returned to the countryside: - *At the time of general shortages, we were engaged in sheep grazing. From the Day of St. George to the Day of St. Demetrius, that is from May 6 to November 8, we looked after the sheep. A huge herd was gathered from several households, and tending to the herd was then paid 30 marks per sheep for six months. During the summer season, people in the countryside have a lot of work in the fields and don't have time to take care of the sheep, so they hire people to take them to grazing. It was a lot of work, but it fed us at the time. They all had to be milked every morning, and there were more than two hundred of them. But, on the other hand, then we had excellent sheep manure, and this year we paid 50 euros per trailer of manure.*

Emphasizing the importance of the village and the necessity of its preservation with continuous improvement, Vera mentions the period of shortages: - *We have been through a lot, you know. It is much better now. In those notorious nineties, there were no raspberry plantations, nor Malina, nor the Association. I remember a cousin came to visit me, he was a professor and his wife an engineer, they didn't have any money because of the inflation that ate up everything from morning till noon, nor could they buy anything in the city, because the stores were empty. My cousin used to come, carrying a bucket, asking me to give them a head of sour cabbage. I was glad I could help, of course, but I feel sorry that the village has been restored too slowly since then. People quickly forget how important the village is.*

During all that time, Vera felt as if she was being suffocated. And occasionally weak. Constant tiredness. Due to her heavy work, she didn't even have time to complain. But she noticed. Just as she noticed those suffocations became rare and the fatigue somehow disappeared during the summer months she spent in the coastal town of Petrovac when she took up maintaining a villa to supplement the household budget. Years passed. For more than a decade, it had been the same when it came to her health: in the summer, her malaise subsided, in the winter there was less work in the field, so Vera was somehow soothed.

- *And then my husband won a competition, - Vera almost exclaims when talking about this story. Her voice rings out cheerfulness: - He likes those old songs typical of this region, we call it clamor singing here, and he participated in the Festival that is still organized by the "Let's Save the Village" Association. He became a member of the Association before me! He liked that the Association, among other things, fights for the conservation of intangible cultural heritage. And so my husband, singing at that festival with a group from Bučje - won! And the prize was a weekend for two in Zlatibor. We went. And what can I say! Thanks to that competition, and the Association, they discovered the reason for my ailments in Zlatibor - the thyroid gland! We had time there, my husband made me go to the doctor, as the stay in Zlatibor included a medical examination. I operated on the thyroid gland a little later. You see, the "Let's Save the Village" Association, and my husband - with his singing - were a lifesaver.*

One cannot but mention Vera's husband as an example of a fighter for equality. Both in words and in deeds. As a member of the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association, he got 1,500 raspberry seedlings. And today, Vera cannot imagine their business and the survival of their holding without the raspberry plantation. - *Now we have 4,000 raspberry plants. We manage to do everything, one family can handle it,* - she answers about the workload. - *When the winter is over, as soon as it gets warmer, we start: staking, weeding, tilling, pruning. Harvest is at the end of June, for 20 days we don't leave the plantation. But everything is easier with subsidies and thanks to association. Now we also have a raspberry sprinkler and a drip irrigation system.*

Thanks to joint investment and work, the Prijović and several other families are planning to buy a fruit dryer. First, they will build a drying plant. - *We rented a dryer this summer and paid 60 dinars per kilogram of plums. It would be a shame not to save the unsprayed old požegača plums, wouldn't it? But 60 dinars per kilogram is a lot. We have 400 fruit trees, and the calculation says it will pay off,* - Vera explains the decision to build a drying plant and jointly purchase a dryer.

During the sunny October days when this conversation took place, Vera still had plenty of work to do, and her household duties were not waning. - *Here, I roasted some more peppers,* - she says as if apologizing, - *although I finished the preserves for winter last month.* In the pantry of their house, jars are peacocking from the shelves. There are boiled peppers, roasted peppers, ajvar spread, vegetable pickles, sauerkraut, sour cabbage, plum jam, pear jam, various juices, and special chokeberry juice. Vera rejects the compliments and says: - *My husband helps me a lot. That is how we manage to do everything.*

...

The first glove Vera knitted as an eight-year-old girl is important. It has definitely determined her ways. After all, also the way to the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association, of which she is a member today. They are mutually proud of each other.

9 EDINA KADRIBAŠIĆ

One of the most successful women in the world is called Edina.

She was ranked among 1,000 women by the American Biographical Institute Board of International Research. She was born as Hadžirović, in Sarajevo, during the Yugoslav state. Getting married, she became Edina Papo. Today, she is one of the most respected ballet choreographers, and her ballet shows have been performed and awarded on all important stages around the world.

Edina Kadribašić is a quarter of a century younger than her namesake. But she is engaged in agriculture and does not shy away from either sowing or harvesting.

Even Edina Papo does not shrink back from “The Harvest.” On the contrary. I guess in honor and glory of all fearless women, and on the occasion of marking 100 years since the foundation of the National Theater in Sarajevo, the famous choreographer has recently included “The Harvest” ballet performance. On that occasion, in one of the interviews, she stated: - *That disciplined ballet life may seem rigid and painful to some, but the beauty lies in that you are unadulterated and true to yourself.*

Edina Kadribašić from Krajčinovići, who has been working in the fields, with livestock, and in the vegetable garden and orchard since her childhood, speaks similarly. And, she says, she loved doing all the farm work. At the age of twenty, she married a good-looking guy from the neighbor’s house, and since his parents were also engaged in tending to a family holding, nothing was more natural for her than to continue to engage in household and agricultural activities.

She and her husband have three children. The older daughter has a master’s degree in economic sciences, is married, lives in Novi Pazar and two and a half years ago gave birth to a girl and gave her parents a granddaughter. The twenty-six-year-old son stayed in the village and recently, along with his father’s, registered his own agricultural holding. The young farmer grows raspberries, and the agronomists he occasionally consults to improve production say that their “red gold” is one of the highest quality. And finally, the younger daughter, the third child of the Kadribašić family, at only 20 years old, has already enrolled in the third year of the Faculty of Economics.

Edina has been in the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association for less than three years. Her friend and neighbor Suada, who has been a member of the association for almost eight years and who used to point out to Edina little by little the advantages of association and fellowship is to be “blamed” for it.

- My husband works in his sawmill, processing lumber and timber, and the rest of us do work around the land, garden, and livestock, - says Edina. - In these regions, people used to keep mostly large livestock, and since the raspberry business has kicked off, most decided to keep smaller livestock, including us. However, we left five cows. Our property is in an excellent location, in the fertile valley of the Poblačnica, and we use that running water for irrigation.

In the first part of the “My Window to the World” project, Edina got to know more about the Association’s work and the women members. And again, thanks to her friend Suada, who organized in her house gatherings and a workshop on mastering the basics of IT communications, again organized by the “Let’s Save the Village” Women’s Association. Already after a few meetings, Edina assured herself of their benefit. Rural women do not have much time to socialize, so these workshops were also useful in many ways. The members have the opportunity to meet, drink coffee or juice together, exchange experiences gained in the household or in the field, as well as learn something completely new and useful. On one occasion, they were visited by the minister, and the successful project implementation resulted in the distribution of greenhouses and laptops.

By joining the next project of the Women’s Association, the Kadribašić family received a mower for their raspberry plantation. The other members do not miss the opportunity to point out that by Dina’s joining, as they call Edina, the Association got a richer offer. *- Dina is a hardworking and good housewife. Her husband has a sawmill and always a lot*

of workers, all of whom need to be cooked for and tended to. She manages to do all that. And our Dina knits very well. She knows how to knit socks too, and that has remained the "eternal secret" for some of us", - says one of the members with a laugh, praising Edina Kadribašić.

The next step, which Dina is looking forward to impatiently, is the provision of supporting equipment for greenhouse product processing in the villages of the Krajčinovići Community in order to move to the secondary production level for preserves labeled as organic food from the Priboj region.

Krajčinovići, a village on the triple border of Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is multi-ethnic. To some, this place is known because its residents cross four borders along thirty kilometers to Priboj, and the same number of border points when returning to their village. To others, Krajčinovići is significant for the famous Monastery of the Holy Archangels, built by famous Mehmed Paša Sokolović, builder of the bridge on the Drina, in the mid-16th century on his mother's grave, dedicating this endowment to her. Finally, most will mention Krajčinovići for their kindness and harmony, for mutual inter-ethnic support and encouragement, and for the generous hospitality of the residents of this village.

Edina says that it is nice to live here. And that it is wonderful to socialize with women of other nationalities. Get to know their recipes, habits, discover the "tips and tricks" of older housewives with different habits, laugh at shared experiences, enrich own life by adopting your neighbors' culture.

...

In Krajčinovići, people always jump in to help. There is no better thing than to rejoice and work together: when a new life is born, when there are weddings, building the foundation or the roof on a new house... Both when sowing and when harvesting. "The Harvest." Speaking about her ballet performance, Edina Papo described not only the art of ballet but also the life of rural women, so her sentence could be paraphrased: ***That disciplined rural life may seem rigid and painful to some, but the beauty lies in that you are unadulterated and true to yourself.***

10 SVETLANA BOGDANOVIĆ

Svetlana begins the interview for this publication with a sentence: - *I was born in 1966, and I celebrate my birthday on the same day as our Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić, October 9.* However, since the literary narration allows synchronicity to be sought even among people who, at least physically, missed each other in time and space, let it be noted that perhaps that very same ninth day of October made Svetlana, just like Andrić's Aska, prove that efforts and persistence are never in vain.

However, it will be interesting to add to this introductory note another one that

substantiates the “catch” about synchronicities and will try to establish the points of obligatory matches between women who do not want to shrink back, who fight, who do not see themselves as the weaker sex, and who have never met each other. Namely, it is impossible for Svetlana Bogdanović to allow the flood of life events to take her away, not only because of Aska, but also because she bears the name of another Svetlana, Svetlana Velmar-Janković, a Serbian writer of international reputation, to whom Jacques Chirac, the former president of France, awarded the Order of Knight of the Legion of Honor. - *When I decided to name my book “Kinfolk,” - said the writer, - I remembered Goethe’s famous words about “elective affinities,” the phrase the great German poet used to refer to spiritual elective affinities.*

These “elective affinities” will be the thread of this story about Svetlana Bogdanović.

Svetlana Bogdanović was born in Čačak and has been living from her very first days a few kilometers away from this Šumadija city, in the village of Trbušani. Being the only and cherished child, she grew up doing everyday farm work, school assignments, and helping her parents. Her namesake Velmar Janković, who grew up doing daily household chores, school assignments, and helping her parents, was also the only and cherished child.

Svetlana Bogdanović’s great-grandfather Dragomir was a big landholder and continued to build and develop the estate whose foundations were laid by his father. According to his granddaughter, he was a great and respectable patriarch, a *person of repute*, as such capable people used to be referred to.

Svetlana Velmar Janković’s grandfather and great-grandfather were also notable intellectuals. Imbued with patriotism and loyalty to tradition, but also to enlightenment, Janković has published works, among others, with titles that follow the paths of Svetlana from the village of Trbušani: “*Uprising*,” “*The Voices*,” “*Contemporaries*,” “*The Chosen Ones*”...

She listened to her inner *voice*, as well as her father’s unspoken wish, deciding to *rise* into a consistent *contemporary* of her ancestors on whose estate she lives. At the same time, following today’s social norms, she left her son the freedom to be *the chosen one* of his own destiny.

- *When I was little, my grandmother called me “Tuđakuća” (someone else’s house) because, as she used to say, I would get married and move. “We will raise you, we will teach you everything, and you will go to another, to someone else’s house.” My mother raised me somehow differently and often told me that our family’s hearth will always be mine. So, I guess to repay my father who never complained about not having a son, I saved the hearth,* - says Svetlana.

The “elective affinities” line up...

Avoiding the war, Svetlana Velmar Janović spent some time in the village of Vučje, with her relatives. Fleeing from the dangers of earlier wars, Svetlana Bogdanović’s great-grandfather went to the mountains. And not only him.

- *Everyone then took shelter in the hills,* - explains Svetlana Bogdanović, nicknamed Ceca. - *That estate on Kablar, in the village of Rošci, used to be the main one, it was the so-called home place. My parents were the first to descend from Kablar to Trbušane. When my great-grandfather crossed Albania with the Serbian army, and when he returned as a*

winner after three years, he bequeathed that estate. I still have a plum orchard there, - adds Ceca, not hiding her melancholy: - *At one point, I realized that I was the only child and that I should stay to take care of my parents. I don't regret it, but maybe it held me back.*

After graduating from secondary electrical engineering school in Čačak, Svetlana enrolled in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering. As it was common practice, she got married after graduation.

- I was only married for three and a half years when my husband died. With my two-year-old son, I then returned to my mother's, so that she can help me, so that I can help her, - she says, and after a short and heavy silence, she continues. - I started working, because in those years it was not possible to make a living from agriculture alone. I'm still employed and work in a private company, which is why I'm trying to slow down production. What does that mean, - she repeats the question. - In order to get everything done, I try not to make the farm production continuously demanding. For example, I sow corn or clover and water them periodically, I don't have to tend to those crops every day. Or, you have to be in the vegetable garden every day, so my vegetable garden is small, just enough for my son and me. I don't treat the crops with chemicals, and I sell the excess. I've been alone for four years, my mother also passed away, so the main property is here, in Trbušani, so that I could have everything within reach. Here I grow cereals, clover, I also have this small vegetable garden, poultry, pigs...

Svetlana's grandfather had one son and four daughters. He sent his son to school, and he did him credit by becoming a student of the generation. At that time, the grandfather made a tough decision to keep the only male descendant on the farm, so he invited him to return to the village after graduation. - *I think that grandfather never forgave himself. For this reason, I don't build my plans by conditioning my son. On the contrary. I'm here to follow him. If he studies in Belgrade, it is unlikely that he will return and stay here, and if he decides to study in Čačak, then I would further develop this holding because in that case, my son will probably decide to stay here, - Svetlana thinks aloud. - What would I prefer out of those two options? I do not know. It is very sensitive. I only know that I will not hold him back in his choice.*

Acquaintance with Malina Stanojević, who started the "Let's Save the Village" Women's Association in Priboj, encouraged Svetlana. Realizing the extent to which the association of women by interests and professions "affinities" is significant, she dared to start an association with identical goals and missions in her village as well. The "godmother" of that new association is, of course, Malina. She named it - what else - "The Rural Strength." - *I am happy about the interest shown by women. The Association already has members from other villages around Trbušani. There are women from Trnava, Prijedor, Konjević... We also have two Russian members, that's really interesting. Both have been here for longer than two decades. The first one married our man from the village of Prijedor, which is near. When a friend from Russia visited her, she fell in love with a guy from my Trbušani, got married, and stayed here. One recently got a greenhouse. We look forward to learning from our Russian women about their Easter customs, for example, or watching them master our gourmet recipes. It is particularly nice to exchange of experiences, habits, customs... There are innumerable possibilities before us. This mutual solidarity and our association are of inestimable importance. I felt firsthand how difficult it is to be a woman alone in the countryside. It will not be easy to change everything, and it takes continuous education of the entire public, education from cradle, including teaching*

parents about how they should raise their children. Equally male and female. To respect and understand each other. To grow up knowing that they are equal. Many changes are needed, but this association of women is certainly one of the first and necessary steps forward of exceptional importance. With this experience of ours, it will be much easier for our children, especially today's rural girls. All we need is to cooperate, rely on each other and not give up – adds Svetlana, full of enthusiasm.

...

What is the association of women in the “Let’s Save the Village” or “Rural Strength” associations and all others that will follow if not “elective affinities”? How, then, not to look for synchronicity among Svetlanas! They would both agree.



