

# A Boy from Zara

The rebuilding of Croatia

LIDIA KARDOS

**A Boy from Zara © Lidia Kardos 2018**

ISBN: 978-1-925732-67-2 (paperback)

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Cataloguing-in-Publication information for this title is listed with the National Library of Australia.

Published in Australia by Lidia Kardos and InHouse Publishing.  
[www.lidiakardos.com](http://www.lidiakardos.com)

Printed in Australia by InHouse Print & Design.



## **Other books by Lidia Kardos**

### **Train to Australia**

Published by InHouse Publishing, 2016

*Train to Australia* is a moving story of a child raised in the changing socio-political environment of war-torn Europe. Circumstances beyond the family's control sees the parents seeking refugee status but their subsequent action-packed transfer to the land 'down-under' does not put an end to their trials and tribulations in the short term. The immigration process, however stressful, does procure for Australia a quietly devoted and loyal household proud to call Australia home.

### **I "DO"**

Published by InHouse Publishing, 2016

*I "DO"*, the sequel to *Train to Australia*, is a patriotic book that looks at the challenges facing Australia today and the dangers that the author recognises as the precursors of similar instability experienced world-wide in the 1930s and 40s.

The title comes from US President John F. Kennedy's iconic speech given shortly before his assassination in November 1963: "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask instead, what can *I do* for my country."



# Prologue

I am indebted to so many people for this passionate account of a boy's life where his early years are spent in relative harmony.

Growing up happy and content in the knowledge that his future is secure in the safety of his loving family home, his is a case of '**future shock**'.

In the book, we follow almost his entire life.

In the first part the story is mostly told in the first instance.

**A BOY from ZARA** is an unassuming individual born in the tumultuous early World War 2 years when chaos reigned supreme throughout Europe.

As the only male child his entire future is mapped out for him since the day of his birth.

There is no rebellion, only stoic perseverance in the face of later challenges; and there were many unforeseen circumstances outside his control.

He had to overcome many of these by using his wits alone as his father before him had to do.



# Acknowledgements

## **A BOY from ZARA**

Before writing about such an emotive subject I spoke to an incredible number of people. People who bore the scars of war, time and time again; then the question arises:

“How many times can an individual be expected to bear the brunt of conflict?”

Today we have the news of the world instantly at our fingertips. Current affairs are displayed for us in vibrant colour and detail, so may I suggest that we generally have become a largely passive, inured and oblivious society accustomed to the destructive powers of factions within nations exercising control through unacceptable and terrible violence. Inured, because as individuals we can do nothing to change a nation’s mindset.

I say “unacceptable” because it is against humanity.

Then the question arises: “Does mankind have a conscience?”

But words are cheap as my own parents used to say when we and the country of our birth were subjected to the horrors of a war that lasted 5 years and then, when the destruction was almost total in many parts of Europe, the Allied Forces allocated territories to countries deemed to have gained the right to annex parts of other countries.

This ignited more intolerance and hate and Civil Wars erupted.

There are no winners in Civil Wars as there are no winners in any war. But have we learnt from history? I would suggest – Not.

In the **fourth part** of this manuscript I needed to change my approach to the story in order to reflect the changing of the times, the birth and growth of a new generation.

In the second half of the year 2017 I spent three months gathering information from the native inhabitants of the '**one old country of Yugoslavia**'. It has fairly recently been carved up into several discrete and independent smaller countries.

At first, in my quest for the truth as told by survivors, I was rendered speechless. I was stunned and found it almost unbelievable that in a new



and civilised country there were such disparate, contradictory accounts. And still such hate. Hate that is palpable, pulsating and live.

Time has not mellowed the pain nor will the memories ever be allowed to fade. Cemeteries are tended daily by the survivors and these are situated in the centre of towns and villages.

A constant reminder of the past!

So before 'putting pen to paper' I read the memoirs of several refugees and displaced families and authenticated their verbal accounts. I have cross referenced the large amount of information that came my way.

My personal knowledge and experience is also fairly extensive as we, my own family had to flee for our lives with only what we could carry during the Civil war that enveloped Istria between 1943 and 1947. The enormous loss of life during that period is still in dispute because hundreds, if not thousands, of bodies have never been recovered from the Adriatic Sea.

A sick joke that I heard time and time again was told by friends or family of some of these people who disappeared without a trace,

"Oh, he went diving into the Adriatic without taking his concrete boots off first."

After so many years these people have learnt to disguise their still vivid pain behind a curtain of bravado.

I apologise for the direct way that I needed to describe some of the episodes of the war in Croatia but there was no other way.

Many of these events have been merely glossed over in history books and certainly they are omitted because of the graphic nature of the atrocities committed and because of the extreme depravity of the would be conquerors.

The innate corruptness of human nature cannot be described adequately.

On the other hand it is difficult to convey the true nature of the anguish suffered by those family members whose loved ones have been tortured, then executed. More traumatic still if this inhumane torture has been perpetrated on an innocent child and this is the sadistic, incomprehensible nature of the depravation. A depravation that knows no boundaries.

My sincere thanks go out to the people who have helped me to grasp the unbelievable! A lady who gracefully allowed me to use some of her experiences to make this story resonate with the incredible events of the time is quoted where applicable. Thank you Aza.

Of course the names of the individuals mentioned in the text have been changed as have some of the places. However, where I felt the photographs to be instrumental in illustrating situations, past or present, they have been presented unchanged.

To Steve, my supportive and ever helpful husband I owe much gratitude and love. His suggestions have always been timely, well thought out and pertinent. During the writing process he has been forever patient and understanding. Thank you, darling!

Though the Contents page is no longer included in modern storytelling I prefer to include a table of contents as this makes the task of referencing easier throughout the book.

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# Historical Background - Italian Social Republic

**T**he Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*) was established in 1943 following Italy's defeat at the hands of the Allies. On July 25, 1943, King Victor Emmanuel III stripped Benito Mussolini of his powers and had him arrested upon leaving the palace. Several months later, in a spectacular German raid, led by Otto Skorzeny, Mussolini was freed, declared his dismissal a coup, and proclaimed it put down on September 23, 1943. On that same date he assumed control of the northern half of Italy, which he proclaimed to be the Italian Social Republic with its capital at Salò. The Republic came to an end in 1945 when Allied forces ousted the Germans from Italy.

## A Boy from Zara

**Croatia** (*Croatian*: Hrvatska) is a country situated in Central Europe.

It is on the east side of the Adriatic Sea, to the east of Italy. It is also bordered by Slovenia to the northwest, Hungary to the north, Bosnia and Herzegovina to the southeast, Serbia in the east, and Montenegro to the south.

**Capital: Zagreb**

A country of dramatic mountainous landscapes and dreamy deep-blue seascapes.

