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UNCUT

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STORIES

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To my beloved daughter.
A true Original.

FOREWORD

*One day you will tell your story
of how you've overcome what you are going through now,
and it will become part of someone else's survival guide.
Quote from the Internet*

Not everyone who has something to say has to be famous. I am not famous, and that doesn't matter at all. I thought so when I felt the urge bring this book idea to life. I wanted to do it even if I am not famous. We often look at people who are in the spotlight and have their autobiographies to tell us how they got there. But we also often don't want to be in the limelight ourselves. Solely for this reason, their careers usually have nothing in common with ours. So why do we read these books at all? In contrast, this book contains the elements of life that apply to each and everyone of us and can therefore be relevant to everyone. I have something to say about the specific themes of life and I thought it could help other people if they read it.

In this book I only write about the things I can really say something about which is because I have experienced them myself. I therefore only comment on the topics that I have encountered in a profound and incisive way. Only on this basis do I dare to offer you a new perspective and I hope that in this way I will be of use to you. After all, you can expect a lot of openness in the next few hours. I have not researched any of the following life topics additionally. Rather, it's about my own experiences, my very personal view and my interpretation of things. My stories and all the

emotions and thoughts that go with them are real, honest, open and direct. I believe that I have now reached a certain personal maturity to be able to tell and reflect these experiences in a valuable way, and also in such a way that I can pass them on to you.

What amazes me sometimes is that so many major life issues have occurred in a single life, mine in particular. To be honest, one or two themes alone would have been enough to sketch an exciting life in a book. But no, I needed to gather a huge bouquet of experiences. However, I have also experienced and learned a lot through this, especially about other people and myself. Looking back, I have had it easy with exactly nothing. Nevertheless, I always worked tirelessly to get out of seemingly hopeless situations. After such experiences, I have always dedicated myself with boundless commitment to the further development of my life. In the process, I have learned to feel life and its challenges differently, and even more intensely. And as a result, today I enjoy life more than in the three decades before.

I therefore hope that my eventful autobiographical stories will be interesting for you as a reader, entertain you and help you to move on in your own life. I hope that the depiction of my thoughts and feelings will also inspire you to think new thoughts. I would like you to take enough time after each story to think about what you have read and maybe compare it with your own case or a case you know. Through such reflection you will find your own instincts and above all, I hope also the right instincts. I also recommend to write down your thoughts – otherwise they will vanish too quickly.

I hope you take this book into your hands again and again. This book is not a universal guide that offers you

predetermined solutions, but a basis for your own reflection on certain topics and thus for finding your own personal path. This is a recurring and lifelong process, so this book may accompany you for a very long time, because you will always reach for the stories in the book to let them affect you anew.

AN EXCITING YOUTH

I grew up in poverty and in very unstable family and social circumstances. Nevertheless, in the south of Croatia I had the most beautiful youth one can imagine. It is priceless, when despite many traumas, one can mainly look back on freedom, an honest, passionate love and months of sailing in the Adriatic Sea. In fact, everyone should be able to enjoy such a youth because it was the best.

My childhood was not very nice, but in the meantime, I understand what it did to me and maybe what was wrong with it at first. As a very young person, you think that if you didn't have a happy childhood, that you will do everything right in adulthood, just by doing many things completely different from your parents. But it's not like that. The reason is, that if you had a difficult childhood, you will be left alone with the task of compensating different things for a long time. For example, you will spend years treating yourself to all the things you didn't have and satisfying the desires left over from your childhood. The same thing was the case with me too. In my childhood, apart from many moves, lack of attention and bad mood at home, I hardly actively experienced anything interesting or really beautiful. My father died when I was seven years old. My mother never wanted to talk about him. This created a fundamentally strange mood at our home. Then, there was the constant economic struggle for existence. For example, in my youth I had only one pair of jeans to wear. But in return I really took care of these jeans and loved them so much. Due to the

lack of money I learned how to sew clothes. The reason in fact was that I needed tops to go with these favorite jeans, which I could not afford so easily at that time.

What was good about this situation, however, was that I became independent very early on. Since I was not particularly cared for, I started to work on my own very early on. That spurred my creativity. I felt like I was the first person in the world who had made a bikini out of balloons for my Barbie dolls, just to mention one example. I spent many hours alone on our ugly balcony, where I had set up a cosy corner for myself. There I constructed a board game from cardboard, which I covered with a lot of tape to make it last forever. The figures were, how could it be different in the south, made of little stones from the beach.

At home I always had a feeling of emptiness, I was somehow never good enough for my mother. I was always and with everything a burden. When I came home after school, there was usually nothing warm to eat. There was only some money on the table so I could buy a hot sandwich at the store nearby. But it was delicious, warm, with ham and cheese, lettuce, ketchup and mayo. If something was cooked, it was never my favorite food. There was no such thing for me. Actually, the hot sandwich I bought almost every second day was my favorite food.

In our small 24 square meter apartment I had to sleep in one room with my mother until I moved out of it when I was 18 years old. Until then I had no privacy at home at all. That's why I was outside a lot, traveling and gaining experiences with people and situations early on. In addition, we had unpleasant kitchen residents at home, of whom I was so traumatized at the time that I didn't dare go to the toilet at night.

My mother was a primary school teacher, which at that time was a respected profession in Croatia, but she considered herself particularly special because of it. That is why she could never imagine, for example, to pursue another or an additional occupation so that we would be better off financially. We would rather starve than have her pursue a side job. She liked all the other children in her school class, but she didn't like me, her own daughter. She really loved her job, but at home I was never good enough for her. She never told me what I should have done differently or what she would have liked me to do to make her like me. I felt that she didn't honestly love me. I never found out the reason for this.

At some point she became depressed. She never left the house. She did nothing without first clarifying by telephone whether she could possibly save herself the trip outside. My mother always put everyone around her under pressure. In the course of time she lost all her friends.

We were poor and for a while we did not even have a vacuum cleaner. I often had to go to the neighbor and beg to borrow it. The neighbor hated it and I hated my mother for sending me to borrow a vacuum cleaner. Why doesn't she go herself, I often asked myself.

I was always trying to do justice to my mother. I started cleaning, ironing and cooking. But she was never satisfied. She said that I didn't have to do that after all, it was clean enough.

Fortunately, we owned a sewing machine. I taught myself to sew. Then I could tailor some hot tops for my hot pants. I was pretty as a young girl so I tried my hand at modeling a little during puberty. It was quite funny at first. But in the end I didn't like it that much – because there were a lot of

prettier girls in the south than me. I realized that it is not my way to measure and compete with others in beauty.

At school I envied my friend Gogi, who had an intact family and always went to Trieste I believe twice a year to buy clothes. My biggest dream at that time was her red down jacket and brown leather boots. Oh, how I would have loved to have this good-looking outfit combination! The down jacket, the boots and above all her nice, true-hearted big family. I, on the other hand, always came home to an empty apartment and my mother didn't even phone me during the day from work. I only saw her at home sometimes.

My mother quit her job very early. At the age of 40 she already wanted and also got an early retirement. For this she simulated all kinds of diseases. Even if I didn't understand much at that time, I felt that this was very bad, her attitude and her approach to withdrawing from working life with no reason.

As a result, she was always at home and became more and more aggressive towards me. I never knew what to expect from her. That's why I was often afraid to come home. Once I came home and she wanted to show me how terribly late I was (although we hadn't agreed on a time). To give it a dramatic effect, she lay on the sofa in the kitchen and spat foam out of her mouth. She pretended to have a seizure. I was overwhelmed by this sight. In my desperation I picked up the phone and wanted to call an ambulance. But then she suddenly was able to jump up, she ripped the phone out of my hand and yelled at me – I shouldn't do that, it was all be my fault anyway. It was just terrible. I don't even remember how this situation ended. I blacked out from then on.

The advantage of the situation at home, with a single mother disinterested in me, was that it gave me a lot of freedom and little control. I could go wherever I wanted and go out for as long as I wanted when I was 16 years old. My mother didn't care where I was or how I spent my time, except for a few times when she thought she had to make a scene. So from time to time I had to expect that she would wait for me with a stick or slap me in the face for no reason.

Sometimes I stayed overnight on a sailboat with my boyfriend Ivan. Ivan's father had taken a lot of effort to extend this sailboat and beautifully equipped it, with painted wood and lots of special elements in the boat kitchen. It was always very oppressive to sleep on the sailboat, especially in winter, because you could hear the clatter of the masts in the wind all night long. But Ivan and I wanted to get to know each other better and be alone. And we did not know where else to go. So sometimes we stayed overnight in his father's boat. Our coming together was therefore really nice and special. We talked about all kinds of things. Those evenings I hadn't even taken my make-up off. The next day I went to school in the same clothes. My mother didn't even notice. She didn't even ask where I had spent the night.

I never knew how old my mother was. She never celebrated her birthday and never wanted to tell me her age. She hated my father and whenever she said something, it was always directed against men. That my father loved me, I just knew. He died when I was seven years old. His funeral was one of the worst traumas of my life. My mother ended up in hospital out of shock. So I was forced to go to my father's funeral with some relatives, with whom my mother had fallen out. My father is from Runovići near Split. The old women there followed the traditional custom of mourning, sitting around my father's body, crying and singing. It was

cruel. I didn't want to be there and I didn't want to look. So I looked away. I remember a donkey standing next to my grandparents' old stone house the whole time. I wished then that I could have ridden him just to get away.

Money was a sensitive topic at home, but in Croatia this was the normal case – most people had no money. We all improvised. I never asked my mother for anything. As a result, I always looked terrible at school, had to wear self-knitted sweaters from my mother. My first boyfriend Dino, on the other hand, came from a rich family from Makarska. He felt like something better. He wanted to be with me because he thought I was a pure soul, for whatever reason. This he wanted to reserve for himself until marriage. So I immediately got caught up in a childhood love that was too loaded with concrete plans and perspectives. This was very constrictive for me, but I stayed with him for almost three years because he really cared about me a lot. He was very handsome, played water polo and was a total gentleman. He always waited for me in front of the school, either with an umbrella in his hand or sometimes with a rose or later with the small Fiat, in which he had welded large Peugeot seats. My passenger door only opened from the outside, so I could never get out of the car in a theatrical way during our discussions and slam the door behind me, – which would have been good from time to time. We never had enough gas because money was always tight, even with him. So he and his friend Slavko sometimes went "on tour" at night and the boys sucked the gasoline out of the parked cars with hoses. The next day he tasted like gasoline.

It was nice how Dino always picked me up from school, with his surfboard on the roof of the car, tied up with strings. I was the only one at my school who had such a guy and I was not the most beautiful one by far, but he always found something special in me. I felt safe with him. I was worth

something to him too. For my high school graduation ball we went to Trieste with friends and stolen gasoline just to buy me something to wear to the prom. At that time it was a miserable long drive of over ten hours, but in this constellation with four young people it was very funny. We only had a little money with us, but it was just enough for a simple but beautiful black dress. Dino used the rest of his savings for a dark blue lace body for me. Dino was cool but not too arrogant, he always took care of me and he often made me "pancakes in chateau" with walnuts to spoil me.

As long as I was with Dino, my mother left me alone for the most part. She didn't care when I came home and when I left again, my school was running on the side anyway. I got good grades without trying hard. I often skipped school to hang out with my friends in front of the school for coffee. During the time of the Croatian Civil War, we had many disturbing experiences, whether it was periods of blackout, snipers on the buildings of the city or suddenly wailing sirens. Once, when the sirens were wailing again, Dino ran from his school to mine so I wouldn't have to sit alone in the basement. It was dangerous, grand and endlessly romantic. Such cruel things alternated with the beautiful.

Dino never pushed me and so we never went beyond kissing until shortly before our relationship ended. I had actually left him three times in the course of our time together because he always restricted me too much with his way of living. He never took my attempts to break up seriously and so he was always standing outside the door or in front of my school waiting for me again, like a puppy.

Ivan ran into me at some point and we immediately hit it off. He did bodybuilding, surfed and drove a red Yugo. He was always talking about sailing. He was cool, his white teeth beautiful and his big smile contagious. His father was

a sailor, his mother the sweetest mother I have ever met. She always had a delicious noodle sauce on the stove at home in case anyone got hungry. His grandparents lived on the enchanting little island of Drvenik Mali and we could fortunately always go there to swim undisturbed.

Once Ivan met Dino unexpectedly in the city and a fight broke out between the two. I felt sorry for Dino, who eventually lost, but at that age I just wanted to get away from that restrictive relationship and experience something new. From then on I was together with Ivan. Dino had closed himself off for a year and I was worried about him. When he came out, he kept playing water polo and found a girl who looked a lot like me, with long brown straight hair and a straight pony. But she was rich, unlike me. Eventually he later became a pastry cook and not a professional athlete as we all had assumed. When we met ten years later, he told me that it was good how everything turned out, because "I would have been too poor for him". I got up and left. And I paid for my cappuccino myself, of course.

Dino was my first experience in relationship things, but Ivan was my first real young love. Ivan protected me from my mother and from everything else. I was his star. He did everything for me. For a while. In the summer of 1993 he took his father's sailboat, against his father's will, and we sailed it around the Adriatic Sea for almost three months. I couldn't make a really functional contribution on the boat except to be bella figura. One time we were really overwhelmed because we got caught in a storm. It was terrible. We screamed at each other. Once Ivan climbed up the mast and fixed something while the boat was tilting into a steep inclination. I almost fell into the sea. I was really scared. It got worse, because he fell into the water. He swam back and made it to the boat. It was an incredible experience. Like the one with the dolphins. Once, near the

island of Vis, we saw a few of them. It was simply indescribably romantic. Ivan then turned off the outboard engine and we kissed, somewhere in the middle of the ocean, next to the dolphins. We had only little money, often ate the baby porridge called in Croatian "Čokolino" or Ivan shot fish with the harpoon. We then grilled them on a stone and ate them with lemon and white bread. Sometimes Ivan pulled me behind him with his rubber boat on his surfboard. That was just so awesome.

We never argued. We simply harmonized well. He held me in high esteem. He was a little crazy and had to prove himself to the world. He had always felt pressure from his father to do something clever with himself and he hated school and learning. He said he never wanted to become a sailor like his father, but in the end he became just that. Today Ivan is always on the ship for half a year, usually for the whole summer. It's very difficult for him. I associate crazy things with Ivan. Once he drove his car right into the sea because he had made some bet with his friends and wanted to show that he could drive backwards on a pebble beach after all. They had to pull the car out of the water with a crane. So it is clear whether he won the bet...

Ivan protected me from my mother and in the end he got into a real fight with her. Once, because she wanted to hit me and he wouldn't let her do that, he took me to his house. My mother threatened with the police. He talked to her and said I would stay with him until she calmed down, otherwise he would be the one who will call the police. It was dramatic that both of them had just threatened each other with the police, but again and again in my life such bizarre or dramatic moments occurred. On the other hand, my friend Ami, for example, had more luck and harmony with her family and her boyfriend, at least what you could judge from the outside. Her mom was there for everyone. I loved

having plum dumplings for dinner with her. Ami was crazy and incredibly cool. She loved Cure, Depeche Mode and Sinead O'Connor and one day she shaved her head clean. She had a beautiful face, with her bald head and long black coat she looked cool and dangerous. Her appearance showed a clear attitude.

I graduated from high school with a perfect score. Because of such a good result I got the option to study in Germany. So I had the choice to go to Germany to study or not. I just knew that I had to get away from home. It was practically no matter whether I study in Croatia or abroad. I had no family or a financial support, with which I could have organized my study time. In post-war Croatia I could not earn any money. The country was completely broken, there were no jobs, nobody went to the restaurants or needed a waiter. Although I took and passed the entrance exams at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, I couldn't even afford to stay in a student home in Zagreb. Therefore, I tried the entrance examination in Germany. And somehow I passed it. So I went to Stuttgart and started to study any three subjects just to get a start. All three subjects were actually completely bizarre in their combination and also totally unsuitable for me (German studies, English studies and computer science). In retrospect, however, it was an important experience to deal with these subjects. I would never have chosen them voluntarily, but I learned a lot of new things during this time. I gave everything to learn German at the start of my studies and had to put up with a lot of harassment from the German studies professors at the beginning. They considered me a "foreigner who has no chance in this faculty". They were right. Because I had strengths in other areas, and this is where opportunities later arose for me. Especially because I spoke perfect German after a few years.

At the beginning of my studies I wrote Ivan a letter every week. For fun we sent each other perfumed underpants by mail with some nice sentences on them like "I could be loved by you" – the idea came from a movie we had seen together. However, I was fighting a fight for survival in Stuttgart because I was completely on my own at the age of eighteen. I worked at H&M five days a week during the vacations, and beyond that I served at the "Amadeus" pub in Stuttgart on Charlottenplatz until late at night to be able to afford the apartment and food. During the beginning in Stuttgart I had no accommodation at all and the student office couldn't help me at first. Out of necessity, one day I simply approached the cashier in the student cafeteria and asked her if she could take me in. Surprisingly she agreed, or to be more precise, her daughter took me in for a few weeks against payment until I found an apartment. I will never forget her for that but I will also not forget that without asking you never really know what the answer will be, because there are always surprises in life.

I loved Ivan very much. He always wanted to come and visit me in Germany. However, I asked him to wait until I was more or less set up, which made him very nervous. He was too impatient and at some point he even wanted to sell his surfboard to pay for the flight and come to see me. I had vehemently opposed this. The surfboard was the most important thing for him. I asked him to wait a few more months. Then he wrote me that he actually didn't believe that I would be loyal to him and that I wouldn't be able to resist the flirty offers of the Germans (if he only knew how they were...). However, that's why he broke up with me right away in this letter. I was infinitely sad, but my own struggle for survival was more important at that moment. So I went on – and at some point I forgot about him.

After a few years I invited Ivan for coffee in Split. Ivan came by motorcycle and asked me to get on it. He drove me out of Split into the countryside. Then he asked me to get off the motorcycle and suddenly drove away. He told me that he was leaving me there because I had left him when I went to Germany and I had betrayed him. What an insane claim and what a ridiculous punishment that went with it. Speechless and shocked I stood on this lonely road somewhere in the wilderness. It was a terrible moment in which I could have screamed with so much audacity and injustice. For me fidelity was always a value that could not be discussed and I felt very hurt that Ivan had doubted it at all. But now I had to somehow get back home and that was only possible by hitchhiking if a car passed by, which, however, was not the case for a while. In the meantime I was totally scared. Then, of all things, a meat transport truck came along. I stopped it for lack of alternatives. It was really bad, because behind the driver there were animal corpses hanging. But there was another surprise, because the driver was unexpectedly very nice and drove me comfortably and safely into the city, so that I could continue by bus from there. I did not call Ivan after that, but he did not call me either. What he had done to me was not only stupid, but also just sad.

After a few years the contact via Facebook was renewed. Half a year later we sat across from each other personally and I told him how much he had hurt me back then. On the one hand, because he accused me of infidelity and on the other hand, because he punished me so unfairly, just for trying to create a better future for myself in Germany. In retrospect he was incredibly sorry and we made peace with each other and with this story. Today there are no more problems between us. He is happy with his wife and three daughters and we are friends.

In many ways it was a wonderful youth after all. As I said, full of surprises. School was not exhausting, I was able to skive off class without any major remorse. There was the beach and all the excitement that goes with it, as well as summer discos and long walks home. After dancing the night away, we had hot doughnuts, which you could still get at the baker at three o'clock in the morning. We enjoyed them on the beach. We talked a lot and only went home in the early morning hours. There was also a store that still offered hot sandwiches at four o'clock in the morning and there were always long queues in front of it because nobody wanted to go back to their dreary homes. We had cold and also very windy winters, which were best survived with two down jackets on top of each other, but in addition we would wear big sunglasses. We always had an idea how to get the best out of yourself as a woman and look beautiful – fashion and personal style has always been important and we developed it over the years. We could always walk along the beach if we were in a bad mood or just wanted to relax. These long walks and the view into the blue cured us. We sat in cafes for a long time with just a coffee and a glass of tap water because we couldn't afford anything else. But instead we sat there for a long time in a good mood, laughed a lot and enjoyed our lives. It was beautiful. Many of my generation came from dysfunctional families. Maybe my generation was just a little too broken, but these experiences gave me the bite for life. I learned to get along with little, but to enjoy life to the fullest and to savor it. I have learned to envision better things, to survive and never give up. I have learned that life almost always goes on. I think I have learned to really love life. I love my life, even if it sometimes sucks. They say that you grow with your challenges and I really believe that too. Every teenager should have to go out into the great wide world at eighteen to discover themselves and develop a concept of survival. At eighteen, you still have the bite and the drive for it. If

these two qualities are not visible in some young people, I think you can finally wake them up when you put them in a situation where they have to take care of themselves. When they learn what it means to survive the month, to work in a pub, to walk home alone at night, to live in a basement apartment or to be on their feet for eight hours because they work in sales.

All of these things are important because that's where you mature. Unlike in freedom, they cannot be taught, but only when you jump out of your comfort zone. This jump was my survival and it has shaped me to who I am today. I had to shoulder a lot in my childhood. I believe that my basic pain of life, which had accompanied me for several years until I was able to clean it all up bit by bit, stems from this time. Many moves, never having money, various traumas, a dissatisfied mother who I had always been a burden to – all these were bad conditions for a happy being. Basically, I was predestined to fail in life because of the general conditions. But I developed into a very tough person and gradually learned to turn dung into something beautiful and sometimes even gold.

So when I think back on my young years like this, I don't think of all the bad things. I only see them vaguely. Rather, I see before me the images of the south, the sea, the sun, the green bathing suit, swimming or playing in the yard. Everywhere was my overdominant mother who wanted to be cared for, who actually pushed me away again and again and still needed me a lot. Nevertheless, my heart opens again when I think about how my first boyfriend drove his Fiat 500. How he made pancakes for me and so many other things I experienced with him. It was unique because the poverty we grew up in made us creative and strong. At that time there was a lot of "uncoordinated transfer of ownership" in Croatia because there was a lack everywhere.