

## **Montenegro - Crna Gora**

Montenegro, in the South of Balkan Peninsula with 600 000 people and 14 000 square kilometres is the smallest republic of former Yugoslavia.

Montenegro was an independent kingdom until Serbs annexed it after the WWI. Montenegro is the only republic still in a federation with Serbia although they too are seeking independence.

High Dinara mountains form the spectacular background to the sandy beaches on the Adriatic coast. Clear, deep rivers flow fast in their mountain canyons to water the fertile valleys below.

People of Montenegro accepted Christianity in the fifth century and chose their spiritual leader, Vladika, who was also their political leader. From 12<sup>th</sup> until 15<sup>th</sup> century Montenegro was ruled by Serbia and people accepted Serb orthodox religion. Serbia was under Turkish invasion from 15<sup>th</sup> until 19<sup>th</sup> century while Montenegro resisted invasion.

Cetinje is the historic centre of Montenegro and since 1991 it shares with Podgorica as the capital of Montenegro. The coast is very important to Montenegro as a tourist destination as well as the window to the world.

## Munira

I was born in Montenegro as one of seven children. My family had a large farm and we had a pleasant and comfortable life. I was always happy. People in Australia know me as Monika because that is easier for them to say. At the beginning of the Second World War my parents escaped to Albania but us children stayed home with our grandmother. Serb Cetniks shot our grandmother and burned her together with our house. Cetniks did not like us Muslims. I was three years old and my grandmother was holding my hand and in her arms was my younger brother as she died. They were going to kill us as well but my aunt came and begged them to let the children go. One of the men was her friend and he let my aunt take the children into the forest. It was winter and we went into the hill where we waited barefooted and half-naked all night in the snow. By the morning more refugees came and we walked towards Albania and stayed there until the end of the war. When we returned to Montenegro there was nothing left of our home. Dad made us a shelter and we picked greens in the paddocks so mum cooked soup out of them. When dad bought us a goat we were happy to have milk and later we had more goats so we had meat as well. Dad cut trees and made us a wooden house with the straw roof so we were comfortable in one big room with the open fire. Later dad built another story to the house so we had two more rooms upstairs. Dad was the only worker in the family because all the children were little. When we had new crops we were happy and had everything we wanted.

When I came from school I had to look after the goats and cows as well as help on the fields.

My aunt took me to Sarajevo when I was eight to help the family survive. When I was twelve I returned and finished school. Dad soon sold the property and bought a house and a smaller property in Sarajevo. He and my brother went to work there and the rest of the family worked on the land. We still have that home and my brother's family lives in it now. My brother was killed during the war with Serbs in 1995.

When I finished school I worked from home. We had sheep on our property and I cut the wool and spun it on the spinning wheel. I had a weaving loom and made carpet rugs on it. We sold them on the market to buy food for the family.

At the age of twenty-five I began work in the upholstery factory. I sewed covers for furniture factory.

At the age of 38 I visited my brother in Australia. My unhappiness began. My brother introduced me to my first husband. I married him to be able to remain in Australia. I worked in a Ford factory until we got married and later I began sewing at home for the factory. I earned good money. My husband was a good man and had a nice home but he wasn't interested in women. I left him and returned home to Yugoslavia.

After awhile I returned to Australia and took up sewing again. My brother brought many men who would have liked to marry me. I married again. People like my husband. He is a good honest man but I did not know that he was an alcoholic. He can not live without alcohol. He said that he would never

buy a house or anything else. We earned a lot of money but it all went into drinking. When he drinks he likes to pay drinks for everybody. When he has no more money he becomes nasty.

In 1981 we moved to Canberra and I began tiling with him. I never liked tiling. One year we went fruit picking in Shepparton and I loved the work in the fresh air. Fruit picking is the best job for me. From Shepparton we moved to Lightning Ridge . My husband received invalid pension because alcohol made him unable to work. I was given carer's pension. Whenever he wasn't happy he told me that I have to do everything he ordered because I received his pension. We returned to Shepparton every year and it was a happy time for me to pick fruit because I like hard work. For the last few years we went to pick fruit in Orange and the farmer really likes us. Now my husband can no longer work and he is too drunk most of the time. I go on my own and earn good money but he drinks most of it. While he drinks I like to play poker machines.

During the summer 2002 we earned a lot of money on fruit picking. We were going to finish our home on the opal field. One evening we went to Serbian club in Lightning Ridge because they had a band and singers from Yugoslavia. Serbs were at first unfriendly towards us but then my husband showed them his wallet where we had over eight thousand dollars from fruit picking. He just wanted to show off so he paid for the musicians to play his tunes and the singers to sing for him all night. He spent most of the money we had.

I left the club and asked a friend to take me in. When he sobered up he was very sorry. I wanted to leave him but he begged me to return. He promised that this would never happen again. He promised many times. He told people that he would sell the house we built and spend the money. The land is in his name because he does not allow my name to be on the title. He can sell when he wants. People told me that I better return so I don't lose my home. I am sixty-four years old and I love my home. I hope one day we will finish it.

My husband transferred our home in my name because he wanted me to return; now he is watching me even more. He believes that I will stay with him as long as he keeps all the money and as long as I am afraid of him.

My husband says that a man has to defend his country against enemies and his wife against his friends. He is a very jealous man.

## Sonja

I was born in Niksic, mountainous town of Montenegro in 1938 as a daughter to a small farmer.

Mum and her father were storing wheat one day at the beginning of the war.

Someone set the shed alight, my grandfather died but mum escaped.

She never recovered and she died when I was still a baby.

My two older brothers went to live with mum's sister but I stayed and was looked after by my grandmother.

Dad remarried when I was five and his new wife had two more children.

We were very poor and I was hungry most of the time. We gathered some sort of grass to eat but we had no salt. I had to look after my stepbrother and stepsister while my stepmother worked in the fields. My stepmother locked me in the room when she fed her children and gave me only if they left something. Sometimes during the night I stole a bit of bread and ate it quickly in the dark.

Once I told dad that my stepmother did not give me anything to eat so he hit her very hard. I was very scared and never told him again. I was always tired. One morning my stepmother woke me very early to look after the babies while she went to work. I sat with my baby brother near the fire. I fell asleep with my brother in my arms and we both ended on fire. I got burned on my arms but I covered up because I was scared to tell.

At the age of seven I started school. My teacher liked me because I was a good student and maybe because he knew how poor I was. He gave me a job sweeping the class every morning before the school started. He paid me a little and I used this money to buy myself a dress and other little things.

I loved school and have finished primary school as well as two years of nursing school. When I was fifteen Rudi came to buy honey from my father. Rudi was a mechanic sent from Zagreb to work on the hydro-electric station in Niksic. We fell in love and he asked my father if we could marry. It's up to Sonja, said dad and I said: Yes please.

He kissed me then and I told him: Your mouth is sweet, you have been eating lollies but did not give me any. I will marry you if you promise to share your lollies with me.

I was fifteen and just wanted to get away from my stepmother and from the poverty.

Rudi's work finished and my father came with us to Zagreb where we were married in the Catholic Church.

Rudi's parents were Austrian but his father had a property in Cakovec Croatia. Rudi's mother took their five children to Zagreb because his father had other women. Rudi was the second youngest and he was brought up in a Catholic orphanage. He did not like it there but he finished his school and after he finished mechanic apprenticeship he had to go to the army for three years.

Neither of us had a happy home so we tried to create a good home together. Our daughter Olga was born in 1954 but soon after that Rudi escaped to Austria. I was always scared because police kept interrogating me about his escape. I told them that I did not know where Rudi was but our three years old

Olga told them that daddy has a motor bike so they knew that we were in touch.

I was a cleaner in the hospital to provide for Olga and myself.

After three years Rudi arranged it with some Catholic organisation to invite me to Austria for a visit. I went and never returned home.

We went to Germany and Rudi found a good job. We lived in a small town but the firm sent Rudi to Stuttgart. I wanted to go with Rudi so he finally packed our daughter and me on his motor bike and we left for Stuttgart. We packed all our belongings and arranged to have them delivered by truck. We left the key with neighbours. The truck came but he took everything we had to France and sold it. We had nothing left.

Rudi heard that Australia would take him because he was a good mechanic so we applied and landed in Melbourne in 1959. On our way to Bonegilla I saw a huge goanna and I was scared that wild Australian animals would eat us alive. We spent a few days in Bonegilla migrant camp before they found a job for Rudi in Sydney. In Bonegilla I learned to count in English and I learned the word: job. It was always easy for me to find a job and my employers liked me. First I found a job for myself as help in the hospital kitchen. Olga started school.

I became pregnant again and we were very happy to have another child. We bought everything for the baby but the baby boy was born dead. I was in hospital for three months.

When I came home I looked for another job and soon began work in a Faigen handbag factory. I worked in Faigen for ten years.

A Croatian friend told Rudi that in Lightning Ridge you could get rich overnight digging opals. Everybody has an equal chance to find opal, all you need is luck. We believed that we were due for some luck so Rudi left for Lightning Ridge. I stayed in my job in Sydney so Olga could finish her schooling. She was a good student and has finished high school and a two-year secretarial course before we joined Rudi.

Rudi bought a bulldozer to open cut opal mines and I paid for it from my wages. Rudi worked as a mechanic for farmers and miners and in his spare time he looked for opal.

I came to Lightning Ridge in 1972 and got a job cooking breakfast in a motel and picking glasses and cleaning in a hotel. In my spare time I went mining with Rudi. We lived in a caravan and it was hot so being in the cool mine was very relaxing and pleasant for me.

We were digging in the mine one day when I called to Rudi: There is a puppy in the mine. What colour is it, he asked. Black, I said. Be careful, I am coming over to check it. He thought I said that there is a nobby in the wall and he came to dig it out. When he saw the puppy he took it out and we took him home and it became our good luck puppy.

The next day I called to Rudi again: I have colour and he came over and dug out some beautiful stones. We sold them, and used the money to start building our home. That was our biggest find. For the next three years we found smaller stones and finished our house with our savings.

Then someone poisoned our puppy and our luck ran out.

We came to Lightning Ridge all honest and inexperienced. We believed that everybody was honest and good. We broke many stones because we did not have experience but it broke our hearts when Rudi's partners cheated him. I also trusted the opal cutters and left with them whatever rough stones we found. They told me that nothing came out of them. We did not know that you have to stay with the cutter until he shapes the stone ready for sanding and Polishing so you know exactly what came out from the rough nobby.

People take advantage if you let them. Rudi and I let them so it's our fault.

Despite the disappointments our happiest times were in Lightning Ridge where nobody is rushing and we could walk everywhere. There was no pressure and we enjoyed fishing with new friends. We felt more at home in a small town.

My husband is not a perfect man but he means everything to me; we shared our whole lives, the good and the bad. We never cared for money much and we never had much. A few years ago Rudi started to forget things and the doctor diagnosed dementia. The sickness got worse every day, Rudi became annoyed with himself because he could not find things and because he forgot what he was doing. He was always working in the shed but now he could no longer remember what he wanted to do and how to do it. It was very frustrating for both of us but I knew that it was only the sickness and that it won't go away. I was very patient with him and looked after him at home. People told me to send him into the nursing home but I wanted him with me. At Christmas I realised that I would not be able to wash and feed and lift him any more so he was taken to Walgett nursing home. I went to see him at least twice a week. I stayed with him the whole day and feed him and helped washing him there.

I couldn't sleep because I missed Rudi. I was always anxious about him. I decided to bring Rudi home and get some help with looking after him at home. At least I would not feel guilty for being here on my own while he is in the home. Rudi died at home in September 2001.

Olga got married at the age of thirty and they moved to Canberra. They have three gorgeous children and I thank God for them. Unfortunately Olga's marriage did not work out and she returned home when children were still toddlers. She stayed with us for a few years and then moved to the coast. It is very hard for Olga to keep the three teenagers doing what she wants them to do. She is a wonderful mother to them but as they grow up they begin to join their friends and I am always afraid for them. I know Olga tries her best but it is hard these days to control teenagers. I invited my grand-daughters to stay with me for awhile. They loved Rudi and they helped me look after him. Rudi and Olga have a good heart and would help anybody. They are always ready

to give and people often take advantage. I can't really blame them because I am like that myself. It has been a year since I lost Rudi and I still miss him.