

Excerpt of Chapter 1 from Eva Edl's biography, *She Looks Like My Little Girl*

July 22, 1991
Wichita, Kansas

Someone behind me cries out in pain. I look back to see Randall getting fist-pummeled by a short-haired lady in a rainbow tie-dyed shirt.

Sprayed mace precedes the gasps and shrieks of those kneeling beside me. It turns my hair on end.

Nearby, a man in shorts and a tank top screams into Rusty's ear. "Leave! Now! You have no right to be here!" Rusty winces from the piercing pain and shuts his eyes tightly. His lips move in a silent prayer.

Others pray out loud, their words all but drowned out by a cacophony of voices yelling angry slogans and insulting epithets at us.

It's chaos! Our battle to save lives has just begun.

I kneel on the asphalt beside hundreds who've linked arms and sat or knelt on the property to block the doorway. We had arrived four hours before dawn to be sure we'd beat the officers' attempt to secure the entrance. Counter-protesters wallop us with their fists and spit on us. We do not strike back and do not give way. We came prepared to suffer abuse. Much of our suffering, however, comes from the heat as the temperature approaches one hundred degrees. The asphalt beneath us feels like a stove gradually being heated to cook us!

The police grow increasingly frustrated that their angry threats do not dissuade us. The officers stand in a line in front of us, grasping nunchucks and clubs and wearing grim smirks on their determined faces. Their uniforms are soaked with sweat, and they naturally blame us for their discomfort.

Finally, newscasters arrive to report the confrontation. We give a collective sigh of relief as the cameras begin to record the scene; in the past, we've noticed that police abuse seems to lessen when the media are present.

Jeff, our liaison with the police department, stands beside a blue cooler at the edge of the pavement across the street. He gives out instructions to the protesters as the cameras zoom in and handheld signs are raised with renewed enthusiasm. Sensing the heat of the hot summer day is taking its toll on our bodies, he begins to pull the wheeled cooler full of ice toward us.

Before he can make it across the street, however, he is cut off by several officers on horseback. Suddenly and without warning, they turn right into us, trying to penetrate the throng and press

toward the front door. They expect the horses will frighten us out of the way!

One horse is so close I can feel its hot breath on my head. I close my eyes tightly and turn away from the threat, determined not to yield. More screams around me warn of increasing violence, but I keep my eyes closed and pray against fear. Linda, who is kneeling to my left, clenches her jaw; she, too, is determined to hold her ground.

To my right, Shelley stretches out her hand toward the mounted officer and yells, "Back off!"

"It's okay," Sara Jo encourages us. "Keep your eyes on Jesus. Think of His sufferings..."

This is not a day to fight for our rights. This is a day to suffer for love and appeal to Heaven to intervene. Without God, we can't do anything; but if He is for us, who on earth or in hell can be against us?

I witness one officer kick his heels into his horse's ribs and yell something in a gravelly voice. My flesh wants to move, but I know if I move, they will exploit the breach and make it to the door. The horses inch closer, stamping their hooves against the hot asphalt.

"You're going to trample her!" Linda screams.

"Jesus," I pray under my breath, preparing my heart for whatever comes. "Jesus!"

In the flanks of the mounted officers, policemen on foot converge on us, swinging clubs at those at the front of the line. The nauseating thud of wooden batons striking shoulders and forearms, knees and shins causes me to gasp. Screams of horror and pain are all around! The hair on the back of my neck stands on end as I brace for the whack, but they bypass me. The officers are trying to press through to the door. They are not going to arrest us one by one and carry our limp bodies away, as is customary. No. They are resorting to violent aggression to thwart our efforts.

Jeff, standing frozen in the middle of the street, still grasps his cooler full of ice, a look of shock on his face. He begins to bark out orders to those standing on the sidewalk behind him. They instantly flood in behind the baton-wielding officers, trying to close the gap. They lie prostrate in the street on cue.

Jeff loudly scolds the police lieutenant and is suddenly sprayed with mace. Then he is struck violently on the shoulder with a club. He hits the ground hard but leaps back to his feet. With his eyes still burning from the mace, he watches officers arrest one of the blockaders and spread him belly-down on the blistering hot pavement. Jeff runs to the cooler, flings the lid open,

and begins to toss clumps of ice toward the rescuers. “Spread it around!” he shouts, tears streaming from his bloodshot eyes. The officers use liquid mace instead of the gas to prevent the horses from being disturbed by it. They pour it on the heads of those at the front of the line. People scream from the burns, which worsen in severity with every passing moment, especially as the mace drips down their sweaty faces.

Unable to access the entrance through sheer force, the police officers begin to clear the property of rescuers one by one. The police view their efforts to disburse the protesters as a dismal failure and are enraged. I am one of the first to be handcuffed with my hands behind my back. I, too, am pushed belly-down on the hot, black asphalt. It burns me. I don’t know how long I can take it.

Some are fortunate enough to be next to a clump of Jeff’s ice, which cools the asphalt a bit. Those who aren't arrested join Jeff in tossing clumps of ice toward those who are already handcuffed. As it melts, it eases our suffering.

The police tactics are arguably the cruelest we have ever encountered. This is the United States of America—the land of the free and home of the brave—but even here, the opportunity to suffer for righteousness’ sake abounds. We try to rejoice in it, as Jesus instructed His disciples.

When enough of us have been arrested to make the front door accessible, a red Pontiac brakes to a stop in the street. From my prostrate position on the pavement, I witness a pair of pink-sandaled feet step out of the car. My heart sinks, and my face

flushes with a mixture of grief and rage. I open my mouth and plead, “Please, listen to me, don’t do it. It’s not too late to—!”

Before I can finish my thought, an officer jerks my bound arms until I am upright. Oblivious to the pain in my shoulders and wrists, I search for a glimpse of the woman through the throng of officers but cannot see her.

I turn to the nation’s cameras as they focus on me. “I have been there, America! I have seen it! I know what it’s like to live in a nation that hurts the innocent. I know the terror that follows. I have seen it!”

As the officer leads me away, I fix my eyes on the black pistol in his holster, remembering...

April 20, 1941
Prigrevica St. John, Yugoslavia

Blam!

When I heard my first gunshot, I was nearly six years of age. It didn’t frighten me as you might expect. I was preoccupied with

more personal matters.

“Mami!” Tears flowed down my face as I tugged on her intricately embroidered and starched white apron. “Mami!”

“Shh.” Mother’s jaw was agape as she looked through the front window of our home, which faced the kiln of the brick factory my father managed. “Get under the table.”

“But I killed it”

“Eva! Now!” Her tone grew more urgent. “Under the table!” Following her anxious instructions, I ducked under the kitchen table. Then I heard it again, louder. The smacking of something sharp and hard against the brick wall of the kiln. Then again, several more, in rapid succession.

“Mami, I killed it.”

“Shh.”

Momentarily, the oncoming rumble of a low-flying biplane shook our dishes in the cupboards. The plane banked and took a sharp right turn over the kiln. Mami pushed my skinny, six-year-old frame back down.

Our capital city, Belgrade, had been bombed into submission two weeks ago, but until now the fight hadn’t come to our small village on Yugoslavia’s northern border next to Hungary.

Mother ducked under the table with me, breathing rapidly.

“Mami! I killed it!” I stretched my hands out to show her.

She glanced down at my hands, where I cradled a crushed chick. His mouth was frozen open, his eyes closed in death. One of my fingers had just a speck of blood on it.

Two chicks had hatched—little creatures I loved so dearly. I was trying my best to care for them, but a six-year-old’s foot is not so sure, and I accidentally stepped on one. I felt I would die from the guilt and self-revulsion.

Mother’s eyes softened toward me. “My little zookeeper.” Rapidly approaching footsteps startled us. My father rushed through the front door into the kitchen. “Stay here!” he ordered Mami.

“What is it? Are they shooting at us?”

He rushed into the bedroom, banging into things. Mami followed him. His voice shook as he explained, “A soldier, Barbara. One of ours.”

“This far north?” Mami sounded worried.

I approached to see him rummaging through his drawers, collecting some of his clothes. We called him “Tatti,” but his friends called him Bernard. As a young man, Tatti had served in the Yugoslavian army under King Alexander the First.

“In the rafters of one of the sheds,” Tatti explained. Scared witless. His whole company was mowed down by the German planes. He was the last one.”

“If you help him,” Mami warned him sternly, “they will come.”

Their eyes met. “They are coming anyway, Barbara.” Mami’s brow furrowed.

“He is our countryman, sweetheart, fighting for our freedom.” The rumbling of another speeding warplane sounded so close it could have scraped the clay tiles that covered our home. Through the window, I watched it pass, swift and low. It had the broken cross on it—the insignia Tatti had warned us about. “Please stay inside with us.”

Tatti defied Mami’s pleadings and darted through the back door and into the yard.

“Bernard! No!”

“Is Tatti going to help—?”

“Yes,” she responded before I could finish my question. “God help him,” she mumbled. “He never thinks of himself.”

She rested two hands gently on my shoulders as I cuddled the chick close to my chest. I heard more gunfire, and I stood on my tiptoes so I could watch Tatti as he bravely ran toward the brick factory. He kept close to cover, his eyes and ears intermittently searching the sky for the cacophonous thundering of our invaders’ war machines.

“Are they coming, Mami? The soldiers with the broken cross?”

She didn’t answer.

“Are they going to hurt Tatti because he’s helping the good soldier?”

She knelt to look me in the eye. “Your Tatti’s going to take care of us.” She gently poked my nose and smiled. But I could sense it. There was the gravest anxiety behind that forced smile.

She glanced down at my dead chick, still cradled in my dirty

hands. "Poor chick. Is that Peter or the other one?"

My eyes turned to it. Immediately, my heart went out to the other chick that was still alive in the barn. Under all that gunfire!
"Peter!"

I lurched out of Mami's grasp and darted out the front door. Peter was my favorite pet. I had named him after our king, Peter the Second of Yugoslavia. I had to protect this baby chick from the bad soldiers! From the bullets that sprayed from the broken-cross planes!

"Eva! Get back here!"

My feet leapt over every obstacle as I sprinted toward the barn, oblivious to my mother's threats. I could practically feel the switch against my bare legs, knowing what was coming, but I didn't care. I had to make this right.

The grinding sound of another approaching plane made my head rush. Loud bursts of gunfire sent bullets whistling past me. Were the planes firing at me?

I reached the barn at the very moment the biplane flew directly over me. Once inside, I gasped for air. I had always been amazed at the miracle of flight, but these planes were no longer contraptions of wonder but of terror.

I lovingly kissed the dead chick in my hands and set it carefully in the roost where it had hatched. I picked up the living sibling, which chirped anxiously and trembled as though the weather were frigid. Tears flooded down my cheeks as I lavished apologies upon the fragile little bird. "Oh, Peter! I am so sorry I killed your brother. I did not mean to. I will take care of you. You will not be alone."

"Eva!" Tatti's voice was firm from outside the coop. "Come here, Eva."

I set the bird down and ran to Tatti. I reached for his hand as he walked at a fast pace toward the house. "Did you save the good soldier?"

He halted, knelt down, and looked me sternly in the eye.

"Promise me you will say nothing of him."

"Okay."

"Not to anyone. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Tatti. Are they gone? The planes?"

I looked past him toward the towers of bricks behind him and

saw a dozen soldiers, toting rifles, walking toward us. My first thought was to run, but there was a burst of gunfire from behind us. It sounded like it was coming from the road leading to our neighbor's house. Tatti clamped down on my shoulder with one hand and waved Mami close with the other. The band of Hungarian soldiers, who were in league with the Nazis, walked right up to us, their fingers on their triggers.

"Are these good or bad ones?" I asked Tatti.

SNIP

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