Background

The events recorded in this diary take place between September 1991 and October 1993. The city of Sarajevo, once the gracious host of the winter Olympic games, but more recently a city torn by Serbian attacks of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which declared independence after the fall of Communism in the former Yugoslavia. The original language of the diary is Croat. The diary has been translated into many languages and published all over the world.

About the Author

Zlata Filipovic was born in 1980. Her first ten years were happy and carefree, typical of many children. Her diary, which she named Mimmy, related family and school events as well as her own thoughts. The shelling of Sarajevo, however, changes her life. No water, no electricity, no heat, no fresh food—the beauty of Sarajevo and the innocence of childhood disappear. First published in Sarajevo with the help of her teacher and UNICEF, Zlata’s diary served as a window for the world to see the horror and devastation of war.

Entries from Zlata’s Diary

Monday, September 2, 1991

Behind me—a long, hot summer and the happy days of summer holidays; ahead of me—a new school year. I’m starting fifth grade. I’m looking forward to seeing my friends at school, to being together again. Some of them I haven’t seen since the day the school bell rang, marking the end of term. I’m glad we’ll be together again, and share all the worries and joys of going to school.

Mirna, Bojana, Marijana, Ivana, Masa, Azra, Minela, Nadza—we’re all together again.

Saturday, October 19, 1991

Yesterday was really awful. We were ready to go to Jahorina (the most beautiful mountain in the world) for the weekend. But when I got home from school, I found my mother in tears and my father in uniform. I had a lump in my throat when Daddy said he had been called up by the police reserve. I hugged him, crying, and started begging him not to go, to stay home. He said he had to go. Daddy went, Mommy and I were left alone. Mommy cried and phoned friends and relatives.
Thursday, November 12, 1991

The situation in Dubrovnik is getting worse and worse. We managed to learn through the ham radio that Srdjan is alive and that he and his parents are all right. The pictures on TV are awful. People are starving. We’re wondering about how to send a package to Srdjan. It can be done somehow through Caritas. Daddy is still going to the reserves, he comes home tired. When will it stop? Daddy says maybe next week. Thank God.

March 5, 1992

Oh, God! Things are heating up in Sarajevo. On Sunday, (March 1), a small group of armed civilians (as they say on TV) killed a Serbian wedding guest and wounded the priest. On March 2 (Monday) the whole city was full of barricades. There were “1,000” barricades. We didn’t even have bread. At 6:00 people got fed up and went out into the streets. The procession set out from the cathedral. It went past the parliament building and made its way through the entire city. Several people were wounded at the Marshal Tito army barracks. People sang and cried “Bosnia, Bosnia”, “Saravejo, Saravejo.” “We’ll live together” and “Come outside.” Zdravki Grebo (President of the Soros Foundation in Sarajevo and editor-in-chief of ZID, the independent radio station) said on the radio that history was in the making.

Monday, March 30, 1992

Hey, Diary, You know what I think? Since Anne Frank called her diary Kitty, maybe I could give you a name too. What about”

ASFALTINA PIDZAMETA

SEFIKA HIKMETA

SEVALA MIMMY

Or something else???

I’m thinking, thinking........

I’ve decided! I’m going to call you MIMMY

All right, then, lets start.

Dear Mimmy,

It’s almost half-term. We’re all studying for our tests. Tomorrow, we’re supposed to go to a classical music concert at the Skenderja Hall. Our teacher says we shouldn’t go because there will be 10,000
people, pardon me, children, there, and somebody might take us hostages or plant a bomb in the concert hall. Mommy says I shouldn’t go. So I won’t.

Monday, April 6, 1992

Dear Mimmy.

Yesterday the people in front of the parliament tried peacefully to cross the Vrbanja bridge. But they were shot at. Who? How? Why? A girl, a medical student from Dubrovnik, was KILLED. Her blood spilled onto the bridge. In her final words all she said was: “Is this Sarajevo?” HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE, HORRIBLE!

Since yesterday people have been inside the B-H parliament. Some of them are standing outside, in front of it. We’ve moved my television set into the living room, so I watch Channel 1 on one TV and “Good Vibrations” on the other. Now they’re shooting from the Holiday Inn, killing people in front of the parliament. And Bokica is there with Vanja and Andrej. Oh, God!

Maybe we’ll go to the cellar. You, Mimmy, will go with me, of course. I’m desperate.

WHEW! It was tough. Oh God! They’re shooting again!!!

Thursday, May 7, 1992

I was almost positive the war would stop, but today.... Today a shell fell on the park in front of my house, the park where I used to play and sit with my girlfriends. A lot of people were hurt. AND NINA IS DEAD. A piece of shrapnel lodged in her brain and she died. She was such a sweet, nice girl. We went to kindergarten together, and we used to play together in the park. It is possible I’ll never see Nina again? Nina, an innocent 11-year old little girl-the victim of a stupid war. I feel sad. I cry and wonder why? She didn’t do anything. A disgusting war has destroyed a young child’s life. Nina, I’ll always remember you as a wonderful little girl.

Wednesday, May 27, 1992

Slaughter! Massacre! Horror! Crime! Blood! Screams! Tears! Despair!
That’s what Vaso Miskin Street looks like today. Two shells exploded in the street and one in the market. Mommy was nearby at the time. She ran to Grandma and Grandad’s. Daddy and I were beside ourselves because she hadn’t come home. I saw some of it on TV but I still can’t believe what I actually saw. It’s unbelievable, I’ve got a lump in my throat and a knot in my tummy. HORRIBLE. They’re taking the wounded to the hospital. It’s a madhouse. We kept going to the window hoping to see Mommy, but she wasn’t back…. Daddy and I were tearing our hair out…..I looked out the window one more time and.......I SAW MOMMY RUNNING ACROSS THE BRIDGE. As she came into the house she started shaking and crying. Through her tears, she told us how she had seen dismembered bodies.....

A HORRIBLE DAY! UNFORGETTABLE! HORRIBLE! HORRIBLE!

Monday, June 29, 1992

Boredom!! Shooting!! Shelling!! People being killed!! Despair!! Hunger!! Misery!! Fear!!

That’s my life! The life of an innocent 11-year old schoolgirl!! A schoolgirl without a school, without the fun and excitement of school. A child without games, without friends, without the sun, without the birds, without nature, without fruit, without chocolate sweets, with just a little powdered milk. In short, a child without a childhood.

Thursday, November 19, 1992

..... I keep wanting to explain these stupid politics to myself, because it seems to me that politics caused this war, making it our everyday reality. War has crossed out the day and replaced it with horror, and now horrors are unfolding instead of days. It looks to me as though these politics mean Serbs, Croats and Muslims. But they are all people. They are all the same. They all look like people, there’s no difference. They all have arms, legs and heads, they walk and talk, but now there’s “something” that wants to make them different.

Among my girlfriends, among our friends, in our family, there are Serbs and Croats and Muslims. It’s a mixed group and I never knew who was a Serb, a Croat or a Muslim. Now politics has started meddling around. It has put an “S” on Serbs, a “M” on Muslims and a “C” on Croats, it wants to separate them. And to do so it has chosen the worst, blackest pencil of all-the pencil of war which spells only misery and death.

Why is politics making us unhappy, separating us, when we ourselves know who is good and who isn’t? We mix with the good, not the bad. And among the good there are Serbs, Croats and Muslims, just as there are among the bad. I simply don’t understand it. Of course, I’m “young” and politics are conducted by “grow-ups”. But I think we “young” would do it better. We certainly wouldn’t have chosen war.............

A bit of philosophizing on my part, but I was alone and felt I could write this to you, Mimmy. You understand me. Fortunately, I’ve got you to talk to.
Saturday, July 17, 1993

DEAR MIMMY

Book Promotion Day.

Since I didn’t take you with me, (just a part of you was there) I have to tell you what it was like.

It was wonderful. The presenter was a girl who looked unbelievably like Linda Evangelista. She read parts of you, Mimmy, and was even accompanied on the piano. Auntie Irena was there. Warm and kind, as always, with warm words for children and adults alike....

At the end I read my message. This is what I said:

“Suddenly, unexpectedly, someone is using the ugly powers of war, which horrify me, to try to pull and drag me away from the shores of peace, from the happiness of wonderful friendships, playing and love. I feel like a swimmer who was made to enter the cold water, against her will. I feel shocked, sad, unhappy and frightened and I wonder where they are forcing me to go. I wonder why they have taken away (the) peaceful and lovely shores of my childhood. I used to rejoice at each new day. I used to rejoice at the sun, at playing, at songs. In short, I enjoyed my childhood. I had no need of a better one. I have less and less strength to keep swimming in these cold waters. So take me back to the shores of my childhood, where I was warm, happy and content, like all the children whose childhood and the right to enjoy it are now being destroyed....

“The only thing I want to say to everyone is PEACE”.

Sunday, October 17, 1993

Yesterday our friends in the hills reminded us of their presence and that they are now in control and can kill, wound, destroy..... yesterday was a truly horrible day.

Five hundred and ninety shells. From 4:30 in the morning on, throughout the day. Six dead and 50 wounded. That is yesterday’s toll. Souk-bunar fared the worst. I don’t know how Melica is. They say half the houses up there are gone.

We went down into the cellar. Into the cold, dark, stupid cellar which I hate. We were there for hours and hours. They kept pounding away. All the neighbors were with us......
Sometimes I think it would be better if they kept shooting, so that we wouldn’t find it so hard when it
starts up again. This way, just as you relax, it starts up AGAIN. I am convinced now that it will never
end. Because some people don’t want it to, some evil people who hate children and ordinary folk...

We haven’t done anything. We’re innocent. But helpless!!