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YUGOSLAVIA -- 1980

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Yugoslavia is divided into six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia. Light-heartedness turned into dismay shortly after we arrived in Serbia. In Belgrade we discovered that we had no guide, no hotel reservation, no visas and, apparently, no Fantastic Yugoslavia. Centro tourist Yugoslavia blamed loose connections on N. Y. Tamara's office which failed to notify us that we should have debarked at Zagreb. A UNESCO meeting was being held in Belgrade, hotels were overbooked. Eight of us discovered one another in the lobby and soon Hotel Inter Continental graciously accepted us overnight. Four of us set out to make the most of it. By taxi we crossed the Sava to Skarsdalena; we walked through the old town. By trolley we went to elegant old Metropole Hotel and had our first superb Yugoslavian dinner -- caviar, wine, beef "steck" garnished with a fried egg on top.

Profuse apologies from the Centro guide and a superb city tour next morning cleared up the misunderstanding and bruised feelings. A view of the confluence of the rivers Sava and Danube was fascinating. We saw the Baroque gate of Prince Eugene of Savoy who liberated the city from the Turks for a while in 1717. We saw the remains of a Roman bath and an octagonal tower known as Nebojsa ("fear nothing").

Across a draw-bridge is the lofty Kalemegdan Fortress and restaurant where we had thick Turkish coffee. Later at the hotel lunch consisted of cold sarmi stuffed with bits of potato and soaked in oil, fried brains in heavy batter topped with tartar sauce, and a kind of crepe called walnut Serbian pie.

Aboard the Olimpik Ekspres we set out at 4:30 P.M. for the 6-hour ride to Sarajevo to catch up with the rest of our group who were traveling from Zagreb to Sarajevo by bus. On board we were served a super box lunch which included native cheese.

Hotel Europa is central and old-fashioned. It is located quite near Old Square and shopping souks. Sarajevo (in Bosnia-Herzegovina) is an old town on the Neretva River and is known to everyone as the setting of the events that set the First World War in motion. Stretchco, our guide, wanted to be called Felix. Multi-lingual, blonde and blue-eyed he looked like a Swede but informed us that he was "pure Slav, had no other mixtures in his genes".

We strolled along the river to Princip Bridge. I took a neat picture of Clif on the corner near this bridge, where on June 28, 1914 a young Bosnian student Gavrilo Princip shot the Austrohungarian Archduke Ferdinand. On this corner a commemorative plaque on the wall of the Young Bosnia Museum marks the very spot where fateful shots sparked off World War I.

Still in the republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina we drove from Sarajevo through the valley of the Neretva and a town called Jablanica until we finally reached Mostar.

Mostar (most:bridge, and stari:old) is the provincial capital of Herzegovina. The town is backed by wild and rocky mountains and is decorated with countless minarets which look like thin pencils. It is an enchanting town.

Turks built the single-span, hump-backed bridge across the Neretva in 1556. After lunch at Hotel Ruza we toured the town. From the middle of the charming bridge we had a birdseye view of this Turkish gem of a town.

To southern Dalmatia and the Montenegrin Coast -- and the "pearl of the Adriatic", Dubrovnik. This city on the Adriatic Ocean was once a mighty maritime power known as Ragusa. From the terrace of Hotel Excelsior we had our first glimpse of walled-city Dubrovnik with a sunrise directly above. The "old town" is a stone's throw from the hotel and we were quickly oriented through a walking-tour. We roamed the narrow streets and lunched at Nada's, a small restaurant tucked in. After a swim in the cold, salty, blue Adriatic we relaxed on a gravel-beach near the hotel. Rocks are small and get progressively larger on the way to the edge of the sea. Over a Campari on the terrace that evening the day ended with a shocking pink sunset like a drawn curtain.

Next day we went from old town to new town and back again on bus #6 to get a new and different perspective of Dubrovnik. Hotel Dubravka in old town has a charming roof top restaurant where pigeons fly about vying for attention while diners eat stuffed paprikas.

Two gates provide entrance to the old town -- Ploce (with the drawbridge) on the east and Pile on the west. Along the Placa or main thoroughfare are the Sponza Palace, the Church of Sveti Vlaho, Onofrio's fountain, the Rector's Palace and the Dominican and Franciscan monasteries.

The air at the hotel was charged this afternoon. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, her husband and entourage of reporters and security people had docked at Hotel Excelsior and were at a private dining area built on a small promontory a discreet distance from the rest of the hotel.

Three pigeons perched on a huge rocky boulder and chirped like chattering housewives discussing the weather. The morning is cloudy and threatening and the view of old town is hazy. With or without a sun or a moon the scene is still romantic. A lone ship stealthily sails into harbor; a short distance away is the island of Lokrum. This day we skirted the Montenegrin coastline to the Bay of Kotor on the Atlas boat Ambassador.

It seems the elements contrived to give us special effects. Before we sailed from the harbor that morning we watched a monstrous storm complete with rain, thunder,

lightning and hail the size of diamonds. The scene from our window-seat was spectacular. We sipped strong Turkish coffee and listened to "Love Is a Many Splendored Thing" on the intercom.

We set sail to Perast and abruptly the tempo of the music changed to Yugoslav rhythms. I thought that surely bluing had been mixed in the lovely Adriatic to cause its incredible color! Perast is at the foot of Yugoslavia's high Dinaric Alps and here sea caresses stone. Seamen were once trained in Perast. A small solitary island in Kotor Bay is the site for Our Lady of the Rocks Church. A night on the town and a virtuoso performance in the old town of the Ensemble of Yugoslav Folk Dances and Songs topped our last evening in Dubrovnik.

To Split the next morning at 10:00 in time for a maraschino around 1:00 at Hotel Marjan. We walked along the palm-lined beach to locate the Sarajevo restaurant. A Split couple showed us the way. Delicious sarma, stuffed pimento, salata, wine, water and cherry compote! Our room at Hotel Marjan had a terrace with a sweeping view of the Adriatic. From here we saw a splendid rising sun next morning.

It took 10 years to finish the magnificent palace of Roman Emperor Aurelius Diocletian -- circa 305 A.D. The Eastern gate is known as the Silver Gate; the Northern gate as the Golden Gate. The Church of St. Dominic is opposite

the Eastern gate and there we attended Mass.

Plitvice in Croatia and across from Mt. Velebit was our next destination. The coast is stony and fierce and elemental. It is paralleled by the Dinaric chain of mountains, limestone, tree-covered (olives, figs, prunes, oaks, cedars, shrub trees). The Bay of Korcula is clear blue and filled with excellent seafood. The untouched terrain somewhat resembles fjords. Around Stolac there is a strip of Dalmatian coast which belongs to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Along the way there are small picturesque inlet villages with boats parked in front of the homes.

Along the coast we visited two old towns, Trogir and Zadar. Trogir is on a small island connected by bridge to the mainland. This uniquely beautiful little medieval town boasts of a fascinating history. It was originally founded by the Greeks in the 3rd century B.C. and called Tragurion because of the great herds of goats or tragoi. The most remarkable building in Trogir is the 13th century Cathedral of St. Lawrence with its perfect examples of medieval architecture. Enter by the Radovan portal which is flanked by two lions surmounted by statues of Adam and Eve (carved in 1240).

The character of the Adriatic Coast changes as we travel toward Zadar. Mountains recede and coastlands become flat and fertile plain. Zadar, the ancient capital of Dalmatia, is built on a small peninsula. This ancient

capital of Dalmatia was known in Roman times as Jadera. Its history was colorful: a Byzantine stronghold, occupied by Napoleon for 8 years, part of the Austrian Empire in 1814, handed over to Italy in 1920, and became part of Yugoslavia in 1944. We had lunch in Zadar in a pizzeria. A singing group (a capella) attracted our attention because they were spell-binding. The voices blended and resonated as though they were in St. Peter's Cathedral. We were spell-bound!

At Rejecka we left the southern Dalmatian Coast for central Dalmatia for 20 miles or so inland across Mt. Velebit to Plitvice. Plitvice Lakes is a national park and is a kind of fantasy land. It is a valley between high forested mountains in which lie, one below another, a string of sixteen beautiful lakes of crystal blue-green color. We walked down through the mountains to the lakes to board an electric boat for a spectacular view of mingled mountain, lakes, and waterfalls. Sated nature lovers returned to the small settlement to Jesero Hotel. Dinner was at the Licka Kuca restaurant, a typical Croatian house. Hearty fare: red bean soup, roast lamb, potatoes, salad, bread and sugared beignets for dessert.

Slovenia has a gem -- the Lake Bled area! Legend has it that Ziva, the Slav goddess of love and life, made the small island in Lake Bled her home. Bled is a must for visitors! It was founded at the time of Charlemagne;

it was nothing more than a feudal stronghold for nearly 1000 years. Over the years it became an internationally famous tourist resort. Marshal Tito kept a villa there. We were rowed across Lake Bled and followed by a long necked swan to Ziva's island. There is a small church, a rectory, a caretaker's house, beautiful baroque statues and Ziva in a glass-enclosed case.) Excavation site below shows early graves and original rocks upon which the church is built.

Although we stayed at the Hotel Golf (off the waterfront) our "special" time was spent at the Hotel Grand Toplice. The view from its terrace is breathtaking -- Lake Bled edged by the Julian Alps, a view of the castle, and the sight of the church on Ziva's island.

Our last day we went by cab to explore Kropa, a small town known for its iron works. We returned to Bled and had a swim. Later I went shopping and found my beautiful brown suede suit. At the Toplice we watched the sun set on Lake Bled and had dinner in the elegant dining-room. Chevelle a la meuniere, shredded cabbage, crepe with walnut cream filling and kaffa! That evening we left a few dinars at the casino for them to remember us by.

From Bled our next destination was Zagreb. Along the route we stopped in Ljubljana, the center and capital of Slovenia. The town was founded by the Romans with the name of Aemona Ljubljana, nearly 2000 years old, is one of the most ancient cities in Yugoslavia.) Another excursion

along the way was to see the Postojna Caves. Although we didn't walk the entire length -- 12 miles -- we saw a couple of miles of incredible stalactites and stalagmites. Lipica was another interesting stop. Here the Lipizzaner breed of white horses originated and were first trained for intricate, ballet-like maneuvers.

The main link between Slovenia and Croatia and Serbia is the 100 miles or so of road between Ljubljana and Zagreb. The city of Zagreb vies with Belgrade in its cultural life and is the capital of Croatia. In Zagreb (which means "behind the hill") we stayed at the Hotel Intercontinental. The lower town is centered around Ilica. It leads to the Old Republic Square. Beyond the Iverce Tower are two churches. St. Catherine was built in the 17th century as a monastery; the Church of St. Mark the Evangelist is in the center of Radic Square. St. Mark's has a roof brilliant with red, white and blue tiles depicting the emblems of Croatia and Zagreb. At the Gallery of Primitive Art we saw marvelous examples of Yugoslavian naive art including a retrospective of famous Ivan Generalic.

We flew from Zagreb to Belgrade in 45 minutes, where we then had a 6-hour wait for our flight to New York. It provided prime time to reminisce over our memories of fantastic Yugoslavia.