CRVENI KRST RUMA-**JELENA ŽARKOVIĆ:** VOLONTERSKA PRIČA COVID 19

As someone whose parents were refugees in time of civil war in former Yugoslavia, I grew up on stories full with real charachters, difficult resumes and incrediblly strong lessons. While I was little I used to listen to my parents, grandparents and their friends and I would admire them for their bravery and wisdom, which they paid with their youth and peace. It seems to me that anyone who wants to learn something big and important has to feel such weight on your own shoulders. Only thing I did not know was when and where such battle was waiting for me.

Its 2020, April. I'm talking to my friend from Poland's Red Cross, who I have meet 9 months before in Solferino. We are asking one another for our families, friends. We are comparing situations in Serbia and Poland concering the new virus pandemic. She tells me that she is fine, she is with her family and has online classes, she is only concerned about her brother, who has comuted to another city, but she says that he is strong and calm. I got messages from my friend from Armenia, who I have also meet in Solferino last year. He says that he is fine, he also says that he is volunteering in one hospital, where werent any infected patients-so he was not in direct danger.

By opening worldwide news site I saw a picture with deceased in Italy, with bodies of people who have lost this great battle, and have no where to be buried. I got creeps. What I see are the people who have hosted us last year in Italy last June, those people with big hearts and who took care to feel ourselves like home while we were there and to realise that Red Cross is home for everyone. I'm standing petrified in front of the picture with deceased-that was not the Italy I remember. Not so long ago everything there was fine-I saw it with my own eyes! I’m logging in to Facebook and reading a post which leaves me speechless. A fried from Republic of Serbia, who I’ve also met last Jun, is writing that secretary general of the Red Cross Republic of Serbia lost his battle against the virus. A man, who I personally didn’t know, whose death shook me a lot. Really, one of the humanitarians? Our role model...

Beginning of May two thousand twentieth. I’m meeting my friends from Red Cross, we summarize the last few weeks on the field-we notice that fewer and fewer people are calling for help with groceries and medicines and we suspect lifting of the state emergency in Serbia. I want to hug these people. We grew up together in Red Cross and this is one more activity which brought us closer.

I’m home now and I’m thinking about our activities so far. I remember the crisis in Serbia in two thousand fourteenth, when we were invited to volunteer in the reception center in our town which was organized for evacuated people from places affected by flood. I remember their faces, life stories and expressions of immeasurable gratefulness to the volunteers. I compare them to the users we’ve worked with this year. And I feel pleasure to be a part of realization of a wonderful humanity idea. Also, I’m pleasure to wear the sign of Red Cross. I’m going deeper into the past in my thoughts and I realize I saw that sign, for the first time, when it was life-saving for my family-in the nineties, after arriving in Serbia. I remember our gratitude for help which was given to us at that time and I realize that the decade of volunteering in Red Cross is in part an expression of that gratitude. In that moment, I’m coming to a conclusion-Red Cross is that field in which I learn important life lessons, ones I thought about as a kid. Red Cross is the only place where none difficult and terrible story has a sad ending, but a new chance for a fresh start.

The same is now, after the strongest wave of coronavirus. Tired, sad, worried, we close one chapter in life and open new one, richer for some new knowledge and experiences, thinking of each other and remembering deeds of those who unfortunately are no longer with us, we continue to work together to help as many people as possible to grow heroes from potential victims around the world who will wear the Red Cross sing today or tumorrow.