

Zvonko Springer

OUTCAST WITHOUT GUILT

Or

MY WAY OF THE CROSS

Four Months of a Young Home Guard
Alias Hrvatski Domobran



Croatian prisoners of war on the road from Dravograd to Maribor in May 1945.

In memoriam of all victims of the human insanity and
the cruelty on the Croatian Ways of the Cross in 1945.

Author (* 1925)

Only after surviving the darkest hours can we have
the premonition of what means the resurrection.

Ernst R. Hauschka (German Essayist, *1926)

*Žrtvama
za svu ljubav i podršku
Ernstko*

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### **Notes:**

1. *The original manuscript in English was composed during 1984 & 1985 and had the working title: "RE-EDUCATION or Four Months in the Life of a Young Man".*
2. *The composition of the translation into Croatian of the original manuscript was completed after 8 months of work by October 1998. Author added the Introduction chapter, made some minor grammatical changes and corrected the printing errors.*
3. *The script presented in this book complies with the English original except for the new Introduction chapter to comply with the book in Croatian titled "Moj križni put" published in June of 1999.*
4. *The 1st Edition in English has been checked for printing errors and the text of paragraphs 13. and 14. partly altered too for the not yet published 2nd Edition. The author composed this 3rd Web-edition to be presented on <http://www.croatia.ch> (Croatian Internet Portal in Switzerland).*
5. *Mr. Aleš Senica from Slovenj Gradec (Slovenija) contributed most of the original photographs for the not yet published 2nd Edition and that are presented in this 3rd Web-edition herein.*

# A: FOREWORD

My book resulted from a fulfilled vow made after I had a grave accident in January 1983. My bicycle slipped in a curve on "black ice" (frozen humidity in tarmac) when walking our dog, a Doberman bitch. In the fall I rolled over my right shoulder and hit with head a little on the floor. I probably lost my conscious for a moment as the next I remember a police officer from the nearby station stood near me to help getting up. I walked home with some funny sensations in my right arm. My wife drove me to the Distress Hospital instantly and the Principal surgeon performed a rather complicated surgery the next day. He firmly fixed the unbroken collar bone into the partly crushed joint cartilage and stitched ends of torn sinews together. I was unconscious for a while after the surgical procedure during that time out of nothing a sequence of motion pictures played before my 'inner eyes'. The scenes that came into sight out of my deepest subconscious showed certain incidents I have had during marching along my Way of the Cross.

Later wide awake I couldn't remember those motion scenes at first. Then learning about the seriousness and possible consequences of my injury I recollected that strange movie at once. I made a pledge to myself about writing down my experiences provided that I would use my right arm for typewriting again. The healing process went on well while the physical training was very painful that took more time to make the right arm functioning reasonably. In the meantime I wrote down a number of places that I definitely remembered passing through during the Croatian army's withdrawal westwards and the subsequent walk eastwards as a Prisoner of War. Familiar dates were entered linked to the activities that happened at a particular place. I made a sketch with my left hand of moving pathways but it became simpler to use a geographic map of pre-war Yugoslavia as my right hand got better. Thus the paths of withdrawal and of the march were put together like a puzzle that both ways fitted exactly regarding the dates, places and intimate reminiscence of events to be linked to.

A year later I bought the first semi-computerized typewriter with a light key touch so there wasn't any excuse for me not to start writing. At that time I was still working and had little time for typing that I did mostly on weekends or sometimes late into a night. I have put on earphones to listen classical music when I composed the text without any prepared notes or scheme except for the more detailed route description now. In the text I followed the current of thoughts coming out of the depth of my subconscious. There pictures and remembrances were buried deep for 40 years since they happened in reality. Although English is not my native tongue it helped me to express myself in simple terms that was in advantage of my efforts to describe things as they happened when I was a teenager. By end of 1985 the manuscript was completed consisting of 26 chapters. By 1986 the text had been spell checked and improved grammatically as far as possible.

For more than 55 years the massacre of Croats in 1945 was the top secret theme and strictly tabooed by the dictatorial regime in the former F.S.R. of Yugoslavia. The state's secret police followed up and silenced everybody who dared to mention Death Marches in 1945. Those who survived them kept quiet and talked about to most intimate persons only if at all as in most cases. I put the label "novel" on the title page of the manuscript then in 1984/5. This I did in the hopes that, if Tito's secret police got hold of it, they might not examine it further. Had they examined it I would have been in mortal danger as my writing was actually a memoir. The working title read "RE-EDUCATION or Four Months in the Life of a Young man" from obvious reasons not to endanger my family some of whom were still living in Yugoslavia. Now, after the danger diminished, I had changed the title to the one presented here.

My book is an account of personal and intimate experiences I have endured and written as accurately as I have been able to recall them. In some cases of course I was incapable to remember speeches or conversations verbatim, but I have recreated them as accurately as I can. I have not recreated any conversation or event at which I was not personally present.

I dedicate this piece of work to all known and unknown dead compatriots who lost their life on the many Croatian Ways of the Cross in 1945. They shall rest in Peace for ever! Also I want to console all those who survived them by assisting to reconcile with the destiny as they did not have the chance or the strength to share or to explain their story of sufferings to the most intimate ones or to others too. Finally this book shall acquaint the younger Croatian generations with the horrors and the tragic fate of their blood relations because could not or did not dare to disclose liberally about one's own survival. They also shall not forget some hundred thousand of Croatian men that were annihilated indiscriminately and buried at too many unknown places along Ways of the Cross in 1945. It addresses any person of good will too to beware of the human cruelty and wake up the alertness to any sign of the totalitarianism and of indiscriminate casting out as well as of any kind of brain washing.

**We should forgive but not forget the inflicted injustices  
and persecutions.**

**We shall learn from the history!**