



The Siege of Sarajevo: One Family's Story of Separation, Struggle, and Strength

Sanja Kulenovic

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Blending personal experiences, letters, and news stories, Sanja Kulenovic's memoir captures courage and resilience during the danger and displacement of Sarajevo in the 1990s.

While honeymooning in Southern California in 1992, Sanja and her husband Djeno became refugees when violence erupted in their beloved hometown. Over 1,425 days, "the longest siege of any city in modern history," shelling and sniper fire left 11,541 dead and 60% of the city's homes uninhabitable.

The couple had to start from scratch. They rebuilt their lives in an alien culture in a remarkable way, raising a family, undertaking graduate studies, starting careers. They realized early on, though, that they were the lucky ones. Within the memoir, their personal struggles take a backseat to events in Bosnia. Contact with loved ones is established; details of the madness heaped upon Sarajevo becomes known.

Of Muslim heritage but raised in a mixed Sarajevo culture that "perceived people as good or bad based on values other than ethnicity or religion," Kulenovic does not linger on factions, ethnic groups, or nationalistic movements, but rather focuses on the human toll of genocide and uricide.

Perhaps the most revealing bits of the book are contained in letters from Kulenovic's parents and siblings. As the bombs fall, her father reveals an ingenious recipe for making mayonnaise with powdered milk. Her mother writes of using hard, sour beans from a relief agency as fuel in the family stove—and also that she often hears herself saying, "Thank God." The family is captured as "composed, dignified, and proud human beings ... even with their lives reduced to bare survival."

The book ends with the Kulenovics' emotional return to Sarajevo, the once-cultured capital city rising from the rubble. The *Siege of Sarajevo* memorializes a time of suffering and survival and shines a light on immigration crises everywhere.

JOE TAYLOR (September / October 2019)

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