

Letter from Marta

I spent three weeks in Croatia and Bosnia in September. As always, it was wonderful to see the great work of Heart & Hand's partners. Unfortunately, our government's support of nationalist leaders and the erosion of human rights in the Balkans has made the work of our partners more difficult. Twenty-five years after the end of the civil war, they are still fighting the effects of nationalism, blurred walls between church and state, and corrupt political leadership.

My partner, Kerry Lobel, met me in Sarajevo two days before the first-ever Pride March in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). From the start, government officials and media had been calling for violence against the marchers. Organizers negotiated with the government for weeks so that the march could proceed safely. The government called in 1,300 police from across the country, including many snipers, to line the route of the march. One week before the scheduled date, the organizers were told that they had to pay for crowd barriers and to hire 300 more private security forces.

The organizers had hoped for 500 people to attend. To their surprise, more than 3,000 people showed up and the police turned another 200-300 people away. Kerry and I marched behind the drummers—three from Serbia and three from Croatia. Women in Black from Serbia had brought a busload of LGBTQ activists and allies. The gay American ambassador to BiH, Eric Nelson, joined the crowd. It was a joyful day, reminiscent of anti-fascist marches of the past: straight people, gay people, and parents of gays all hugged



Marta with drummers at Pride. The photo was included in numerous articles about ageism in the LGBTQ community.

sang and cried as they marched along the parade route. More than once I heard someone shout, "Now, this is MY Sarajevo!" Unlike past Pride marches in the region, there was no violence reported during the March or afterwards when people leave the big group and are most vulnerable to attack.

Each time I travel to the Balkans, I meet amazing women doing amazing work. I feel a responsibility to recognize their work and fund their organizations. CURE's annual PitchWise festival was in full swing when we were there, giving us a chance to see old friends and meet new activists. We added two new groups—Forgotten Children of the War in BiH and Bona Fide in Montenegro – to the Heart & Hand list of partners. I hope that after reading our report of the work these brilliant and brave activists are doing that, you, too, will be moved to support Heart & Hand Fund as fully as possible. Thank you. Marta Drury

100% of every contribution goes directly to fund the work of activists

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Counseling for Lesbians

Counseling for Lesbians has expanded their leadership team from five members to eight. Activities have included discussions of Joan Nestle's book, *Seizing the Freedom*, recently published in Serbian, eight full days of training for trainers in Peer Counseling on Feminist Principles in Support of LBQT Women Affected by Violence and Discrimination, regular dance parties, and communications through social media. The group cooperated with other Serbian NGO's to provide shelter, a computer, jobs in a hotel, and an introduction to Serbian social life to three Chechnyan applying for asylum from persecution.

Žene Ženama



Nuna Zvizdić, one of the founders of Žene Ženama.

One of our first partners, Žene Ženama has closed after nearly 25 years of work! Lacking unrestricted funding and a successor ready to replace the organization's founders, they were forced to close their doors. Happily, their legacy continues in the many women who got their first jobs at Žene Ženama and who are now leaders at our partner organizations.

Kontra

Kontra also is dealing with reduced finances. The Croatian national government will not fund lesbians, and the city of Zagreb has cut their funding to most NGOs. Unfortunately, small NGOs do not have the staff or expertise to complete the long and complex EU grant applications. It's said that one becomes a bureaucrat and not an activist with such a grant. Kontra hosts gatherings for lesbians, runs their extensive lesbian library, offers legal advice, and follows up on critical legal cases in the courts in Croatia and the EU.



Ajna Jusić, with her photo, at Breaking Free Exhibition.

Forgotten Children of War Association

A young woman arrived at our hotel to direct us to the one entryway to Sarajevo's Pride March. As we walked down the street, she told us about her work with children born out of the stress and chaos of war. I said that I had seen a movie a few years ago about a woman who was raped by a Serbian soldier during the siege of Sarajevo. She looked at me and said, "That was my story." The woman was Ajna Jusić, President of the Forgotten Children of War Association. Her "Breaking Free" exhibition, shown at PitchWise and now throughout the country, speaks about children born as a result of war. Out of 20,000 raped women, only 1,000 have received a symbolic compensation for what they had gone through. The group has 50 members, 15 who are public.

Center for Women War Victims



Daycare and Croatian lessons are provided at support group for refugee women and their children.

The Center continues to work on sex trafficking, domestic violence, refugee support and the support of women war survivors. It's an ambitious work plan for an organization with a reduced staff and reduced funding from the government. The Center runs a group for refugee women and their children. Most of the women are Syrian, Iraqi and Kurdish. The Center also helps members apply for asylum status. Once one achieves this status, the government will provide for an apartment for two years.

Seka House

This retreat center on the island of Brac is booked from May through September every year. Activists from across the region use it for recreation, strategic planning or seminars. Groups such as the Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian survivors of the war who testified in the Women's Court, women from the shelter in Zagreb, and Women In Black from Belgrade use the facility. Each August a group of activist lesbians from the region spend a week or two tending to the garden and sprucing up the facility with a fresh coat of paint. After mornings working on the facility, they are free to enjoy the beach. This is a rare treat for women who can't afford to take vacations. We encourage



Women war survivors take a break at Seka House.

our grantees to try to find time for fun and relaxation. Seka House is the perfect place to do it.

Bona Fide



Bona Fide has also been supporting over 4,000 refugees who have passed through their town.

I have known the director of Bona Fide, Sabina Talovic, since 2000. Heart & Hand helped her buy a computer in those early years. Besides offering shelter to the survivors of domestic violence, Bona Fide supports the economic empowerment of women in the northern part of Montenegro through entrepreneurship, crafts, and agricultural activities. In the past two years, Bona Fide has also been supporting over 4,000 refugees who have passed through their town when no one else in the area was offering support. On a panel in Sarajevo at PitchWise, Sabina had a great quote, "The streets are my parliament."

The weak economies in the region fuel nationalism and the scapegoating of immigrants. Many of Heart & Hand's partners work officially or unofficially with refugees these days. Refugees cannot be ignored as Europe and Turkey close their borders and thousands of people are caught in between.

Centre for Women's Studies

The Centre managed to have a full season of women's studies last year with 40 students, thanks to the lecturers who worked for free. Due to financial scarcity this year, the program will be reduced. As usual, the students (mostly under 30, 60% highly educated, 40% unemployed) raved about their experience and gave it the highest possible ratings. I met one enthusiastic graduate of the program, a Serbian, who is now volunteering in the office. She is also making a film that will look at the lives of three teenage girls through the intersectionality of class, gender and ethnicity. Without having gone through the women's studies program, she says she couldn't have begun to decipher the girls' lives.

Okvir

Okvir has produced a documentary, *Crveni vez* (Red Embroidery), about the intersection of gender, sexuality, war and security in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and BiH during and after the collapse of Yugoslavia. It presents a collection of personal testimonials and political accounts of 12 feminist, anti-war and LGBTIQA pioneer activists, who have shared their stories of solidarity and their contributions to feminist, anti-war and LGBTIQA movements in these countries.

Heart & Hand Partners

Bona Fide

Pljevlja, Montenegro
www.bona-fide.me

Center for Women War Victims

Zagreb, Croatia
www.czzzr.hr/
www.petra-nvo.net/

Centre for Women's Studies

Zagreb, Croatia
<http://zenstud.hr/english/>

Counseling for Lesbians

Belgrade, Serbia
www.facebook.com/LezbejskaSolidarnost/

Crvena

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.crvena.ba/

CURE

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.fondacijacure.org/

Forgotten Children of War Association

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.zdr.org.ba

KONTRA

Zagreb, Croatia
<http://www.kontra.hr>

Kosova Women's Network

Pristina, Kosovo
www.womensnetwork.org/

OKVIR

Sarajevo, Bosnia/Herzegovina
www.okvir.org/

♥sebna MaMa

Bosnia/Herzegovina

Seka House

Island of Brac, Croatia

Theatra

Skopje, Macedonia
www.youtube.com/user/TheTheatra

Women in Black

Belgrade, Serbia
zeneucnom.org/index.php?lang=en

Women's Group Brod

Slavonski Brod, Croatia
www.udruga-brod.hr

Theatra



Theatra is an independent feminist theater in Macedonia that strives to insure that magic is always present in its creative, innovative and original productions. Ivana Yvana embodies this approach. Two years ago, Ivana gave her first dramatic reading at Theatra. Now she is a famous feminist author who writes for international platforms. The photo shows a reading of her current work based on the true stories of six female characters that experienced horrific violence and femicide. The evening also included a promotion of a book from a girl with cerebral palsy; the funds for the evening went to the young girl.

Natalija Teodosieva reads Ivana Yvana, a young feminist author, in Macedonia.

Kosovo Women's Network

This past June, KWN had a three-day public exhibit in a public square in the capital, Pristina. Through multimedia and interactive materials, 665 people heard the real stories of women and men who have suffered domestic violence in Kosovo. The stories resonated with people in the audience who felt that the stories were also their stories. Many expressed their appreciation for the educational content of the stories, which offered tips on how to defend oneself against domestic violence, how to access institutions dealing with DV and where to report concerns.



Public exhibit displays the real stories of women and men who have suffered domestic violence in Kosovo.



The Center for Women War Victims, along with the Croatian Network of Women's Funds, organized a protest against anti-abortion demonstrators.

More than 3,000 people attend Bosnia's first LGBTQ Pride March in Sarajevo.



Marta with Jadranka Miličević (CURE) and Staša Zajović (Women in Black, Belgrade) at Sarajevo Pride.

An afternoon with Crvena included a visit to the Sarajevo Museum of History BH.



Special moms (moms with children with disabilities) gather to share challenges and triumphs.