

## **The King and I: Branka Kringas**

It was a very pleasant spring day in 1938. The ruins of Tsar Lazar's castle were basking in the sun. There were only a few walls left due to neglect during the 400 years of Turkish occupation of Serbia. Tsar Lazar was a very good ruler. Serbia in his time (14<sup>th</sup> century) was a very prosperous country. King Peter of Yugoslavia had come to see his ancestor's castle. King Peter was only 18 and became king after his father was assassinated in Paris by a Bulgarian. A result of a dispute between Serbia and Bulgaria.

There was electric excitement in Krushevac. The streets were full of people waving Serbian and Yugoslavian flags waiting for King Peter to come and visit the castle. My family was standing on the footpath opposite the gate leading to Lazarica which is the beautiful red brick church built as a tribute to Tsar Lazar.

My father was an officer in the Royal Yugoslav army. As the youngest child of an officer, I was chosen to present the bouquet to King Peter. Suddenly the car arrived. There were three people in the car. Two young ones in the front. One at the wheel had a white driving cap and at the back there was an older man in uniform. I stepped from the footpath walking to the car. None of them were wearing a crown. I panicked. Which one was the king? The two in the front were too young but the one in the back had a uniform and so I decided to walk towards him.

I curtsied and said, 'Your Highness.' He started to laugh. He said 'I will laugh for a hundred years. I am not 'your highness.' He stretched his arms to the young man in the driving seat and said, 'That is your highness.' I was hardly able to cope with the feeling of panic and embarrassment.

I turned to the driver and said, 'Your Highness.' He looked at me and gave me a huge smile. I turned around and ran to my mother. And said excitedly 'Mama the king has smiled at me.' 'Well done my dearest.' My father came closer and said, 'Good girl, my dear little one.' The king drove off and the visit was concluded. I had survived all the emotions and could not help repeating 'King Peter smiled at me.'