

Miro Gavran

# All Sorts of Things in My Head

(excerpt)

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I

This will be the story of my life. Lots of things have happened in it, in this life of mine, and it would be a pity not to write about it.

A lot of things have piled up, a lot of things have happened, so I have taken this large notebook, and I shall try to write it all down. But I don't know if I will succeed.

I read somewhere that great people, those who are very great, all write books which are called their memoirs.

And I am a hundred percent sure that I, too, am a great man, and I know that because there are all sorts of things in my head, all sorts of thoughts go through it, and that certainly doesn't happen in other heads, and I think about everything and about everything that happens and about people and about places I don't even know.

Apart from that, a large part of my life is already behind me and it will be better that I now write down the first chapter of the book which is called a memoir, instead of later, when it will all be mixed up with what's still going to happen. I am now a full nine years old and another four months and I have just started the third grade.

And there's another reason for me to write these memoirs, but I can't talk about it. I might reveal that important reason later, but maybe I shall never reveal it.

Now I should start if it's at all possible, if it can all be put into words, because it is complicated when you have to describe things, while is all so simple when it all just happening in life, while it's going on.

Perhaps I should start by saying what my name is. Zvonimir. My name is Zvonimir, I am in the third grade at elementary school, I live in a village called Omorina, and my mother is a teacher, and my father is a teacher and we live in a flat which is in the school building.

My father teaches the first and second grade, and my mother teaches the third and fourth.

What am I going to write about in this notebook which will become a book one day and be called memoirs? - I shall write about everything that has happened since my sixth birthday, right up until the present.

It was really interesting on that birthday. I really don't remember much before my sixth birthday. It's all in a haze somehow.

That sixth birthday was... just a second while I work it out... there, that's it: it was in May 1964. There was a birthday cake on the table and fruit juice and fruit brandy. I had never seen a real birthday cake before that.

My Uncle Philip was sick to his stomach, but that was at the end of the birthday party. And my Aunt Daisy, his wife, she said: "You just have to make a mess of everything that's lovely, why do you drink so much brandy when you can't hold your liquor, why do you get drunk when you know your stomach can't bear it and you just had to throw up all over the carpet."

My father said in a sad voice: "Come on, it's doesn't matter, even though that is our only carpet and we had to buy it on credit." And Uncle Philip said to his wife: "When I hear your voice, I feel like throwing up, even without the brandy."

And Slavko said to me: "Let's go out into the yard for a bit."

Slavko is my cousin, my uncle's son, and he is a year older than I am.

Out in the yard, Slavko put his hand into his pocket and took out a card which wasn't really a card, because there was a greasy photograph on the other side. Slavko turned the photograph towards me and said: "Look." I looked and saw a woman without any clothes on. It was a naked woman. I found it very interesting because I had never seen a naked woman before. Slavko said: "You are now six full years old, so I can show this to you." I said: "What's that wool?", and Slavko said: "That's not wool, that's hair, women have to have hair there", and I said: "What's it for?" and Slavko answered: "When you are as old as I am, it will all be clear to you".

Then I was very envious of Slavko because he was already seven years old and knew so much more than I did.

Aunt Daisy opened the window and shouted: "What are you two doing out there, back into the house now quickly, we are going to cut the cake."

My cousin Mirna came to the birthday party, too, she was fifteen then and had just come back from school. She was already going to school in Nova Gradiska.

My aunt said to Mirna: "You almost missed Zvonimir's birthday party, you could be a bit more responsible", and so on. And Mirna said: "It's not my fault the bus was late, and I'm pleased that I missed all that nonsense and got here just when the cake is being cut." At that my mother gave

a small cough and said: "What came before the cake was not nonsense, but breaded chicken with spinach and potatoes."

Then they all pushed the knife into my hands so I could cut the cake. Nobody had ever let me near a knife before that, and they had always said: "Knives are not for such small children." When Dad said: "Son, take the knife", I thought I had not heard him correctly, but then my mother really did hand me the knife. She said: "Come on, Zvonimir my dear, cut a slice of cake." I then thought that they were not normal, giving such a small child a knife.

Still, I did what I was told and cut into the cake, and the knife sank into the soft stuff and the cake almost slid off the table, but luckily my uncle was quick enough at the last minute to catch the tray holding the cake, but his thumb sank into the soft cream and made a big hole. My uncle looked into my mother's eyes and said: "Excuse me", and Mama said "It does matter" in a sad voice.

So then they took the knife away from me, and cut up the cake and everyone was given a small piece. Because it wasn't a big cake. It was only much later, when we bought a TV set, that I saw that a real birthday cake is really much bigger, but that cake made by my Mama was the first birthday cake in my life.

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