

Rado Antolović
THE DEEP BLUE

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I

Acknowledgments

To all the women who have loved me, supported me and believed in me and to my greatest love who has betrayed me,

To my mother Victoria, who perished too soon, and whose love I can still feel in my heart,

To my father Ivan, whose pursuit of justice left him disillusioned and shattered his will to live,

To my Austrian grandmother, my father's mother, whose name was Vittoria, who knew how to bring me up in a gentle way, while teaching me to respect nature and to never take **no** for an answer, and who instilled in me the idea of eternal youth,

To my grandfather, my father's dad whose name was Martin, of Serbian and Montenegrin origin, who was full of love and support,

To my grandfather, my mother's father, an Italian named Franco Gianluca, whose passion for the dark blue colour of sea and life instilled confidence in me and the guiding thought that only the sky is the limit,

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To my sons, Nikita and Aleksandar, who are my greatest love, inspiration and the light of my life,

To Captain Skansi for his firm but fair leadership, who taught me the most important lesson in my life, which is that I should accept hard work as a guiding formula for success,

To Sir Peter Abeles, whose strong business acumen helped me to develop good instincts and what we call emotional intelligence nowadays, and gave me a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop a successful business career and a rich personal life, and to believe in the importance of giving a second chance,

To Sir Robert Woods, a man who was firm and strict, and who taught me the skill of waging war in everyday business,

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To my friends: Branko, Igor, Maria Daniella, Uroš, Latifah, Capt. Denis, Shirrang, Vladimir, Imran, Gulia, Saleh, Aleksandra, Anil, John, Boris, Paris and many other people who inspired me to adopt my life motto:

To always embrace the unknown, to dare to dream big dreams and to question the status quo, to accept new challenges and never give up, to believe that courage is the key to big success and that the future belongs to those who dream big.

II
THE MESSAGE



Life is full of lessons, happiness, surprises, revelations, pain, disappointment. If I was to give one piece of advice to my loved ones, it would be the following:

To live does not mean only to strive towards achieving a goal, but to accept the journey and understand that time is the most valuable asset for all of us and that it goes by quickly, burns like a candle, and that the present is our only true treasure.



III

THE BEGINNING

How am I to describe all those experiences, smells, colours, feelings that I had as a child, a child whose mother was snatched away by death, the hand of my mother taken away from my small child's hand, and how my small hand had to become strong, powerful, mighty and capable of guiding my heirs? I will start from the very roots of my existence. . .

We are the product of our upbringing, education, society, environment we live in, people we meet and many other events. Recent scientific evidence has shown that our DNA is the root of how we will evolve as people and become what we are. Every DNA strain is like a song singing of love and loss, of fighting and surviving. In this interwovenness of life, man is not only an observer, but also a participant in the big game of creation. His consciousness, his ability to love, dream and think is only one note in this endless melody of existence.

DNA is the bridge between the past and the future, the thread that connects us with everything that was and everything that will be and I feel that all answers are already inside me, woven into my genes, into my essence.

If we want to know ourselves better, it is very important to know the history of one's own family and one's own origin.

I was born in the magical medieval coastal town of Piran on the Adriatic Sea, the name of which has its origins in the Greek word "pyr", which means fire. This would be the name probably

given because of the lighthouse located on the extreme cape of the peninsula. Some scientists, however, think that the town's name is of Celtic origin and comes from the word "bior-dun", which means settlement on a hill.

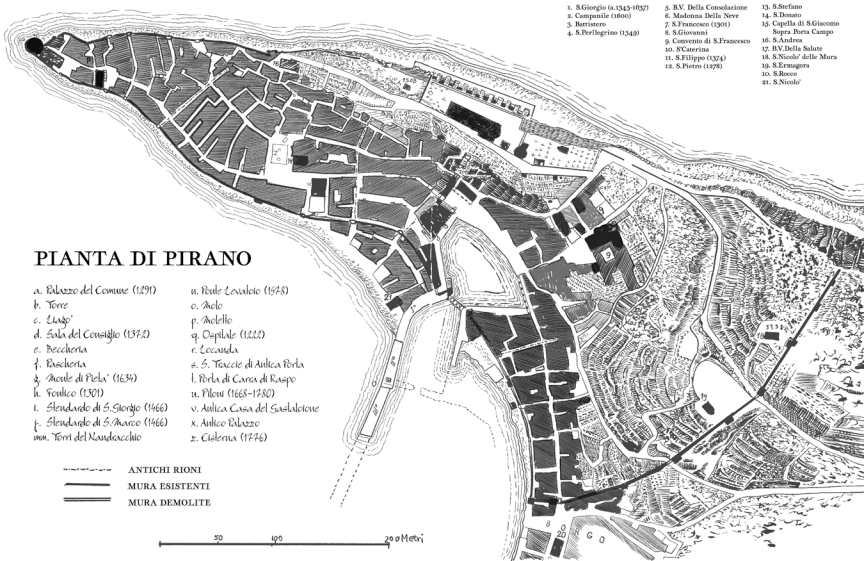
Although the town's history goes back more than two thousand years, from the Roman Empire to today's Slovenia, the Republic of Venice left the greatest impact in this region, which is why Piran reminds of a little Venice.

The town's history is rich, filled with progress and imbued with life, from sea explorers, pirates, traders to modern sailors, including shipbuilders, who have achieved excellent reputation all over the world.

While growing up in Piran, my childhood was abundant with events and fairytales about mermaids, monsters and various colours, the ocean's blue, the green of the hills, the light blue sky full of figures playing in the clouds, surrounded by mountains whose peaks were covered in snow. In short, a perfect postcard.

While walking through the town, I can smell the salt in the air, I hear the sound of the wind passing through the city walls and I see the blue of the sea stretching to the horizon. I feel the past pervading the present, and how the stories from my childhood still live in me, shaping every step that I take. Piran reminds me that the roots of my existence are not only part of the past, but they are also a bridge to the future that I am building for my children.

My town, surrounded by three fortification walls, has seen many battles that protected it from pirates, the Byzantines, the Republic of Genoa, the Turks, Napoleon and the Germans. The old city walls of Piran with a few of its remaining gates tell their own stories and legends, about how they once were the entrance to the town. The sound of the wind along the heavy walls and the sound of the old creaking staircase coloured my childhood with mysticism and magic and awakened in me the curiosity to discover all the secrets and mysteries of life.



While studying the rich history of Piran, I fell in love with this map, which I came across in the chorography of Bishop Paolo Naldini from 1700.

"...The holy fervour of Christian piety led to an increase in the number of churches in such a small area..." According to the data known so far, Piran had a monastery and more than 23 churches and numerous chapels, which changed or merged with the surrounding architecture over the centuries.

One thousand and one stories can be written about this town with its 23 different churches, inhabited by about 4,000 people, most of whom were male sailors, the town known for the celebrated violinist Tartini, famous captains, shipbuilders and global entrepreneurs.

One of the legends of my magical Piran is the legend of the Venetian House, with Venetian red facades, which was built by one of the most powerful Pirano families, Del Bello. Legend has it that a Venetian merchant fell in love with a girl from Piran and built her a beautiful house here. As the residents started increas-

ingly to spread stories and gossip about them, the merchant engraved an inscription on the facade that still stands today: "Let them talk". (Lassa pur dir.)

I loved the stories and legends of Piran. The story of how St. George saved Piran from a terrible strong sea storm and thus became the saint and protector of the settlement still resonates in my head. The walls of his church depict the Venetian charm, and 146 steps lead to a view of the beautiful Piran Bay. I often climb them in my mind and bathe my eyes in the blue of the sea and the sky which merge into the most beautiful lookout of the bay. Pure magic...

Although I was born in Piran, I actually come from so many places throughout the region, from my mother's Italian side and my father's mixed Serbian, Montenegrin and Austrian origins, which makes me a citizen of the Earth, actually a citizen of the ocean. The Italian charm and sense of beauty and elegance, the Austrian meticulousness and sense of organisation and value, the Serbian pride, stubbornness and the Montenegrin highlander energy flow through my veins and give me the wind at my back for the adventure called life.

Piran was part of the Republic of Venice from the 13th century until the end of the 18th century, when it came under the rule of Austria. It changed rulers during the next few centuries. Following the First World War, the territory was administered by Italy. Subsequently, after the Second World War, it became part of Yugoslavia.

My parents met in Trieste at the end of the Second World War during a review of Tito's army, where my father was a highly decorated senior officer. Later in life, his sympathies for the Soviet Union would deprive him of his freedom and lead to his complete ruin.

The fact that my father was a high-ranking officer in the Yugoslav navy, and my mother came from a distinguished and

traditional Italian family, created an unprecedented animosity, which resulted in the assassination of my mother by an extreme communist, while I was still a boy of six. That shot and my mother's death, her hand torn from my small hand, left me alone in the whole world. The memory of my mother still lives within me, sharp and clear, permeating all my senses, even though I was so young when her life was violently cut short. My mother Victoria was tall, slim, the very embodiment of elegance, with naturally long blonde hair that shone under the sun. She wore the scent of health and cleanliness, like fresh, beautiful soap, a true Italian woman from Florence, brought up in an educated and respected family. Her kindness and understanding touched everyone who was lucky enough to meet her.

Her face was beautiful, her eyes were as blue as the summer sky and she always smiled, even her eyes always wore a smile when they looked at me. With her I felt protected, safe, and we had an inextricably close bond. The energy she radiated was almost palpable – when touching her hands, I felt as if I was touching the very source of life. I remember our long walks by the sea, her calm voice that revealed the secrets of the sea and the history of Piran to me. She taught me that less is more.

When I imagine her in my thoughts, she floats when she walks, because her movements were so full of grace, like a ballerina who not only dances, but lives her life to the rhythm of that dance. Not a single morning or evening would pass without me being hugged and kissed. She shared a wisdom with me that has remained ingrained in me: that all people should be treated with respect, the way we would like to be treated, and that the value of a language lies in its beauty. She read me stories in Italian, which thanks to her became my favourite language, a language I speak without an accent.

My mother is not only in my DNA; she is in my heart, in every breath of my being. I miss her presence, her life was extin-

guished too soon, but her memory remains, bright and alive, to guide me through each new day.

The memory of my father Ivan is the memory of the superhero of my childhood. The sight before my eyes is that of a superhero dad in navy blue and white uniforms he wore in the summer, with stars on his shoulders and decorations on his chest. He was tall, and his face reflected his courage, discipline, with short-cut hair in the "Terminator" style and greenish-blue eyes. He was highly respected by everyone. Some were even a little afraid of him. He had the demeanour of a person you wouldn't want to resent and stand in his way. I felt his enormous love and this love prepared me for life. He taught me that a man must be ready to fight, that a man must protect his family and that a man should not be afraid of anything that life can throw at him. He never yelled at me. We had conflicts, and now I regret that I did not see and understand what happened to my father back then. As he had a high position in the Navy, I saw my father only once a week or once a month. What I loved most about my father was that he adored my mother.

My father suffered a lot when we lost mother, but he himself had to endure real torture because of his affinity towards the Soviet Union. I was seven years old when my father's suffering culminated, because he was accused of being a supporter of Stalinism. All his privileges were taken away, as was our house, the beautiful villa where we lived. We moved to a small apartment. There was a men's prison on the island of Goli Otok, and a women's prison on the island of Sveti Grgur. Unfortunately, my already broken and exhausted father was sent to Goli Otok where he spent seven sad years of his life. I can't even imagine the tortures, the humiliations he experienced there. That's why I did a lot of research about it. That bare island, the island of pain and silence, that stony oblivion in the heart of the Adriatic Sea became a dungeon for those who thought differently, for

those whose beliefs were condemned to death in the eyes of the regime. When Tito said “no” to Stalin, thousands of lives were broken. My father, one of them, was caught in the whirlpool of history. Goli Otok was not just a prison, it was a grave for human dignity, a place where souls were smashed like waves against rocks. They called them the *Informbiroists*, but they were nothing more than human beings, vulnerable and lost, thrown into endless labour camp days filled with pain, humiliation and fear. There, in that hell on earth, where the guards played games with human lives, where souls were bent to the breaking point, my father lost a part of himself. Loss of dignity, complete humiliation – these were the real punishments on Goli Otok. The years passed, but the wounds remained. My father carried severe psychological scars with him for the rest of his life. No one leaves Goli Otok unchanged. My father carried that burden, the stigma, the pain, but the hardest of all – he carried the sadness of what he was before he set foot on that cursed stone. Goli Otok left a mark on his soul, a mark that could not be erased or forgotten. That island became part of him, part of our family legacy, a silent shadow that follows us through life

Due to these circumstances, I was left in the whirlwind of life practically alone as a seven-year-old child. First, they placed me in an orphanage in Ljubljana where I stayed for about six months, but soon I continued my life with my wonderful grandmother, my father’s mother, whose name was Vittoria, Austrian by origin. Unfortunately, my grandfather Martin had died long before that, but I listened to stories about him and I am especially proud of his Serbian Montenegrin origin, from which I inherited courage and stubbornness.

I lived in a village in Austria, near Graz. It was truly an idyllic childhood thanks to the immense love, selflessly given to me by my father’s mother, but also by my mother’s father. My grandmother was a meticulous, strict, orderly and educated head-

mistress of an elementary school that I attended together with Austrian children. It seems to me that even today I can smell lavender in my nostrils from the starched clean sheets in my grandmother's house. My grandmother had a great influence on one part of my father's personality, in terms of upbringing, discipline and values. Grandma was a small woman, but full of strength and energy – like a small ball of fire. The word "volcano" would be best suited to describe her. The look coming from her dark eyes was such that no one would dare to oppose her. She had an uncanny ability to read my thoughts, feelings, fears and intentions. She was highly emotionally intelligent. She would complete all her duties quietly, unobtrusively, with deep calm. She had a huge influence on me - she taught me to appreciate minimalism and simplicity. Under her influence, I learned to live with little, without exaggeration, and this became my way of life. I learned that I don't need twenty shirts, five was enough. I don't need a lot of things, and when I have a lot of things, it suffocates me. I like everything to be well organised, clean, tidy. Someone would say that it's an obsession, but it's not, because I don't impose it on others. It's just the way I live. I am an organised person, who feels good in the environment he creates. I learned that from my grandmother.

We lived in a small alpine house in Austria. The walls were made of stone, and the floors and furniture smelled of wood, mixed with the scent of lavender. Every sheet, every towel smelled of cleanliness and lavender. There was a wood-burning stove in every room and in the first years of my life with my grandmother, we didn't have electricity, but we used kerosene lamps, which gave the whole house a fairy-tale look. Even though I was already older, my grandmother insisted that we read a few pages from a book every night before going to bed. I quickly mastered German, which became my fourth language. The first was Italian, then Slovenian, because I lived in Slovenia