

## **Outlander**

*Anonymous*

Once I was a child, playing and scurrying about innocently with other children in my neighborhood in former Yugoslavia. Unaware and incapable of imagining what was to come, this child could not foresee the many drastic turns her life would take and how much of an impact the experiences they triggered would have in shaping her views and perspectives of herself and the world. Now that I think about it, none of us who were children at the time could have understood what was happening in our country and probably were just as confused as I when families we grew up with were leaving everything behind to flee this wonderful place that was slowly becoming overshadowed by terror and confusion. One of those families, I found, was my own.

Barely readjusted from our life in Moscow, Russia, where my father's job was the reason my family and I were first introduced to a culture not far from our own, we were not prepared for what awaited upon our arrival. Yugoslavia as we knew it was disappearing. Turmoil had replaced its nature, calmness, and familiarity. Instead we found a society amongst chaos, speaking of unthinkable tragedies none could bear to imagine. In the hopes of establishing some form of security, my father had no choice but to leave for Germany, where the rest of us planned to join him. Little did we know it would be a year before either my mother, my brother, or I ever saw him again.

Instead of simply following my father to Germany as we had hoped, the three of us were forced to flee to another part of Yugoslavia, today known as Croatia. Leaving all of our belongings behind, we boarded a train that led us to a resort for refugees. Six months later, we made our way into Austria, where I first acquired a taste of the German language. Another six

months after that, we were finally reunited with my father in Munich, Germany, who had impatiently anticipated our arrival since the day of our separation. Our new life as a once again united family began here. Munich is the place I started school, the place I met childhood friends that I am closest to this day, and the place I will never forget as a piece of the world that I, for the first and last time, felt a part of.

Fifteen years later since our very first journey, feeling lost and misplaced in a small town of North Carolina, I begin to understand how many unintentional conclusions I have drawn from this international experience. An observer by nature, I believe this experience only intensified my way of looking at people, things, and situations from an outsider's perspective. One of the things I have found to be very distressing is how complicated human nature can be, particularly when it comes to matters of culture and mentality. It is amusing, yet at the same time extremely discouraging to see how difficult it is for individuals who come from different backgrounds to communicate with one another. It is not only a matter of agreeing or disagreeing; it is rather a matter of approach. Two people from opposing cultures may have more similarities than either would care to recognize, but would never be able to acknowledge this simply because they are blinded by each other's minor differences. In the end conclusions are drawn based on misinterpretation rather than each person's understanding and consideration of another's true intentions.

Throughout the past nine years, the hardest thing I was forced to come to terms with was the concept of feeling out of place, or simply not belonging. Coming from a large metropolitan area like Munich, a small southern town was not exactly something that was easy to cope with. Not only was it a foreign country to begin with, but unlike in Germany, my family and I did not have the privilege of being surrounded by people from parts of our own country. This only

added to the new isolation I was slowly learning to accept. In my early teenage years, it did not play an important role when it came to the concept of identity. I was mainly concerned with how bored I felt and longed for the once fast-paced lifestyle that I knew no longer existed. Yet this is gradually changing. The older I become, the more of a dilemma this is beginning to present itself. Instead of being more comfortable with my surroundings, I am realizing that as time goes by, I am feeling even less of a sense of belonging than I did as a child. As hard as this is, it is also beginning to make perfect sense. Unlike those around me, I do not share the same roots. I am mixed up. I am all and none of the places I have lived in. I am different. Wherever I go from here, it will always be unusual and I will always be the one who is out of place.

Now, at the age of twenty, I am gradually beginning to understand the value of having knowledge and pride in one's origins, nationality, religion, and family. Though I cannot say that I have achieved this, I firmly believe these are essentials for an individual to grow into an accepting, respectable, and understanding human being. I have drawn this conclusion from observing those around me who share my ethnicity as well as those who do not. It is clear to me that individuals who understand this exude a subconscious type of stability and self-assurance. True, we are separated by cultural barriers that appear strange and mysterious to all of us, yet being human, we ultimately seek the same by nature. This is what I believe it takes to *feel* human, to *feel alive*, to be aware of one's own existence.