

Letters from Belgrade, 1953 to 1954 by Gillian Mackie, sent to her future husband George. (mackie.geo\_at\_gmail.com). These and other family memoirs may be found at: <https://sites.google.com/view/mackiefamily/home>

In 1953, a new graduate in zoology from Oxford University, I was the recipient of a scholarship from the British Council to undertake some graduate-level research in Yugoslavia. My topic was in a far away corner of the country, Macedonia, where an “ancient” lake, Lake Ohrid, together with its neighbour, Lake Prespa, were the only two lakes in Europe to have escaped glaciation since the Pliocene era. Lake Ohrid was the bigger, and far the deeper at almost 950 feet, of the two lakes, and was renowned for its



fauna, which most famously included a unique species of trout, *Salmo letnica*, that occurred nowhere else in the world. The lake’s fauna also included many indigenous invertebrates, often as clusters of species that were diverse members of the same genus, and it was these that interested me.

My centre of study was to be the University of Belgrade, Yugoslavia’s capital city, I would also take field trips to Lake Ohrid. My studies would take place under the supervision

of Professor Siniša Stanković, the president of the Yugoslav Academy of Science. Red stars in the accompanying map show Belgrade and Lake Ohrid.

I had heard nothing from the Yugoslav equivalent of the British Council, the University of Belgrade, nor from Professor Stanković himself, I was planning to set off by train for Belgrade, but had no idea where to go when I arrived! I had been expecting to hear from them, but no letter arrived. As a result, a few days before my departure my mother insisted that I must have a letter from Belgrade telling me where to go on arrival, in case no one was there to meet me. This letter duly arrived, and surprised us both by ending with the words “Death to Fascism, Freedom to the People” in Serbian -- “*Smrt fašizmu, sloboda narodu*”! My mother was shocked at this greeting and thought I should not even consider going to a place with such a greeting! But I prevailed, for at least I had an address to go to when I arrived. The letter has not survived, along with all the letters I received during my Yugoslav adventures, but the extracts that follow are taken from letters I wrote to my boyfriend, whom I subsequently married, George Mackie. His mother had found them after we left for Canada, and years later sent them to us in a paper bag. I have edited them to form some sort of a narrative, using square brackets for comments dating from 2011 and 2012.

Sept 2, from my relatives' home in Bengoe, north of London.

I had quite a nice day in London on Monday. I went to see Miss Samuel at the British Council, & she told me lots of depressing things about Yugoslavia – apparently one doesn't get enough to eat and one must know German, if not Serbo-Croatian. I'm the only person going – apparently they had another selection board as I was the only person they gave one [a scholarship] to from the first round. The others [from the second round] are doing Balkan history and Archaeology respectively.

Apparently, they give out meal tickets and then one goes out to all meals including breakfast. Odd. [and not even true, GVM, 2011]

Sept. 30. Studentski Dom Vera Blagojević, Ulica 27 Marta, 48, Beograd, Yugoslavia.

This address means that Vera Blagojević did something heroic on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March and it should all be written on one line. [Actually, VB was a partisan heroine, but the 27 March refers to something different] Ulica means street, so the address is 48, 27<sup>th</sup> of March Street.

I have kept my stiff upper lip with great difficulty so far & nearly lost it about 10 times. If ever there was a place designed to make one tough this is it. When you were in the army at least you could speak English! I miss you and everyone else too. I miss breakfast – one doesn't eat breakfast here at all- + I don't like living on soup, potatoes and stale brown bread at all. (But the soup is good).

P.S. I have been learning some Serbian from my room mates! It's very difficult but often funny & everyone is so kind. My first sentence: "Ja jedem grožđe svaki dan" translates to "I eat grapes every day". [The abundance & cheapness of grapes at that season astonished me, I remember. They were rare & very expensive in post war England]

Oct. 1

[My arrival was pretty depressing] No-one knew I was coming here and no-one expected me. No-one met me at the station. They gave me a bed to sleep in which was something. Then I spent the afternoon looking for the "Council for Science and Culture" – now something to do with Foreign Cultural relations-- & for the British Consul. I found her this morning

Everything is very strange here and not at all like any other place I've ever been. Now that I've been here for a day it's rather better but yesterday was rather unpleasant. But even if I had learned some Serbian it wouldn't have stood me in good stead because spoken Serbian is quite different from the written language. I've learned about 6 words so far and hope to learn more soon. Lessons in this university start on 15<sup>th</sup> Oct. and until then as far as I can gather one does nothing! (but) tomorrow at 11 o'clock I have to go

and see Professor Stanković - & come to that the “goodly company of young girls” in his laboratory.

In this hostel there is also a goodly company of young girls. I will share a room with 11 of them and a cupboard with one other. It is very clean and has new great glass doors everywhere and high ceilings, and the sanitation is good with running water but a total absence of toilet paper. Meals are in the hostel with meal tickets. There is no breakfast, only lunch and supper. We eat much soup with noodles in, and many potatoes. They flavour everything well so one can eat [and enjoy] it. It's really more appetising than Somerville food, though I miss having occasional puddings. We drink lots of water. Presumably it comes from the Danube or the Sava. If I endure 10 months of this I shall be TOUGH! But so far I have not found the *conditions* unbearable and if I knew some Serbian it would be alright, & it will be OK in a few months. I think this will be quite as toughening as being in the army. My stipend has gone up to 5,000 dinars a month so I really am extraordinarily well off for here. 5000 works out to 6 pounds, 30/- a week and there's nothing here to spend money on [except Yugoslav products, soap, jewellery, weaving etc. And grapes!]

The best thing so far is that I have met 2 sisters who are charming & speak some English. Mira is 21 and dark with curly hair & a round face. Vera is 19 & looks like Aphrodite without really being beautiful at all. She has blond curly hair and a brown skin and wanders in a faded wrapper looking statuesque. Mira takes me round Belgrade out of the kindness of her heart. Belgrade is a nice city with a lot of plane trees & very little traffic. Except for embassy cars all the cars seem to be jeeps & older than the cobbles on which they stand.

There are no good picture postcards here, The only good things are the national (handmade) products.

I am smoking my first Yugoslav cigarette. They cost about 1 shilling for 20 and (taste) rather like Quentin's black ones. I bought 50 Players on the boat but am saving them for an auspicious occasion & also until I'm homesick enough to need them. Everything would be splendid if it wasn't for the language. Strangely enough, I'm looking forward to the zoology and to Lake Ohrid. At least animals don't speak Serbian. They'll make a zoologist of me at this rate.



Mira and Vera Kostić

At present I would rather be a cat than a mouse. I would like to be a flycatcher even better. The room is full of flies & I am covered with bites acquired last night. I don't know whether to suspect fleas or bedbugs or mosquitoes. I hope its mosquitoes. I wonder what Naples will be like for you. I think it should be more civilized than this.

The weather here is beautiful- hot but not too hot. Sunny. The noises though are odd. Many roads are cobbled, among them Ulica 27 Marta. And there are many horse wagons and oxen carts. They make a characteristic noise in complete contrast to the trams which pass outside the window. I don't think there are any dogs in Yugoslavia and I've seen only one cat. That one lives here in the hostel and is grey and white. I think you could put toast between its ribs. That's what I shall be like in 10 months unless the potatoes have the opposite effect. Tomorrow I shall move to my permanent home upstairs, a dormitory for 12.

October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

I am lying in bed smoking a cigarette which one of my roommates gave me & I could not refuse. The only trouble here is that everyone does everything in bed. There are not enough chairs and tables so people lie abed for much of the day, & read, sleep, work, smoke, recite stuff aloud & so on. Each bed has 2 blankets, a good bottle green one, and a thick, hairy army blanket.

Since I got here I have not tasted milk, butter, real tea or any fruit except grapes provided by myself. I don't expect to either until I get back to England. I gather that such things are not economical & party spirited. I did however have some coffee with Prof Stanković yesterday together with a very sweet delicious wine in long stemmed cut crystal glasses.

Did I tell you that every evening after dark everyone in Belgrade walks up & down a street they call Terasije, round the park Kalemegdan while loud speakers blare radio programmes into the noisy night air. There's a loud speaker between every 2 trees. From the park you can see the junction of the Danube (Dunav) & Sava, & on your left all the lights of Belgrade climbing the hill. Ahead is Novi-Beograd, a depressed place which is not to be completed because the land is unstable on the river banks. The walk is extraordinary, everyone seems so full of purpose, yet they are all doing nothing at all.



The Zindan Gate of the citadel in Kalemegdan Park

I horrified a woman yesterday by asking "Gde je Maršala Tito" "where is Marshall Tito? Should have said Ulica Maršala Tito. She thought I was looking for the leader himself, not the street. She looked terrified, said she didn't understand, and looked as if she thought Tito was the devil.

It's extraordinary you haven't gone back to Oxford yet. Here it's a hive of activity though the semester hasn't yet started. There are 30,000 students here, 4.5 times as many as at Oxford. The medical school alone holds several thousand —7 or 8 thousand, I think. I shudder to think what sort of doctors they turn out. All I hope is that I'm not ill here!

When you consider that Oxford turns out 70 doctors a year & with all its wealth & resources cannot cater for more this set up is incredible [NB. Think though of the huge need, looking back at the situation in Yugoslavia back then, from the viewpoint of 2011].

October 3<sup>rd</sup>

Again its early morning—10 minutes to 7 to be exact, but now I'm in my permanent place- in a dormitory 3 floors up. It is *very* nice up here, the sun is shining in through the enormous, wide open windows. I have unpacked and washed my hair and it's much more pleasant. The girls in here (there are only 7 others so far, though I think more will come soon) do not speak English, but 2 speak French and last night we had a long conversation about the wives of the Marshall (Tito) and the children of Queen Elizabeth! Its surprising what one's French will rise to if one disregards grammar. Also of course one has to get used to their accents, e.g. *comprend* is *comprang* with the accent on the last syllable. They are all gloriously brown with wonderful bodies that make me feel quite nakedly white, and they sleep in their underclothes, petticoats, bras and pants.

A young man told me yesterday that if you stand on a pumpkin in one city in Serbia you can see the next one, the countryside is so flat.

October 7<sup>th</sup>, from Zoološki Zavod, Studentski trg 3, Beograd.

This address means Zoology Institute, 3, Students' Square, Belgrade. I leave the dorm at 7.30 in order to be here in time for work at 8am. I will stop for a coffee on the way.

This morning I spent 8-11 am reading Mayr on ecological speciation, then one hour talking to Frida and one hour shopping. Yesterday I spent 4 hours reading in French and one in German (I page!). The plan is that I should read first and then decide between the following subjects:

1. The Aselluses and their speciation
2. The rhabdocoels of the profound depths – so far unknown
3. Speciation in Stankovic's planarians
4. Other crustaceans – perhaps Daphnes or something.

I favour 2 or 3. It's really interesting because unlike more recent & less deep lakes, Ohrid has an abyssal fauna – often eyeless & so on, just as in the sea. All over the Balkans & to a lesser extent further east there are subterranean lakes, caves, streams & so on with their own archaic relic faunas. Ohrid is part of the western system and has kept its fauna because of its isolation, and the fact that it's fed entirely by springs. Or so I gather. If I choose no. 3 (which I shall) it will include distribution and ecology. The trouble is I can't see myself finishing it in less than a year. Can you? But maybe I could come back here sometime later while you are still in Naples.

You see, I told you that they'd make a zoologist of me yet. I have bought some bread, butter and salami for breakfast, as today I had none & was very hungry by

lunchtime. Lunch consisted of bean soup with pickled cabbage. I solemnly swear that if I ever have to cook for you ... I will not feed you as they feed me here.

I had a half-hour Serbian lesson on Monday, but to my horror it was conducted in French! It's like learning 2 languages at once. Our teacher doesn't speak a word of English. I have a (further) 2 hour lesson this evening and must learn some words before then. Tomorrow afternoon I'm going to see the French tapestries in the museum here with Ivica, a Serb student of chemical engineering. He is charming & speaks good English with an American accent.

October 8<sup>th</sup>, Thursday.

The Prof. and Frida Gerl Nikolić, with whom I share my room in the department, are moving heaven and earth to get me out of here (the dorm) and into somewhere where I can have a room to myself. Strangely enough, though, I'm quite happy here – completely happy -- & all that is really necessary here is for someone to be installed here to supply hot water, clean the wash-house and even more, mend the lavatory seats and clean the lavatories themselves. [Country girls from beyond the iron curtain stand on the seats to pee & poop, naturally the wood splits down the middle, front to back.] And there should be toilet paper. But that's too much to hope for. But at least Frida & I can use the prof's private washroom at work, he has told us where to find the hidden key.



Frida

As you will have gathered from my last letter, I am now quite settled down. Above all, I'm busy. It's becoming increasingly difficult to get any time to myself at all, what with 5 hours at the lab every morning and 2 hrs of Serbian every afternoon, and prep for that too. I am resisting the extra potato, and breakfast on salami and grapes, which is a healthy diet. In winter we live on haricot beans and soup, as the potatoes don't last for ever. Beans have the advantage of being nutritious. The Danube tastes very good, and it's all the liquid I've drunk here except some vile stuff called something like BHOPA. Its made of fermented wheat & tastes of the ferment rather than the wheat.

I can't talk (fluently) yet but can ask for kilo or half-kilo of grapes, a bus ticket, the way, the time, etc. It's a hellish language and Frida says "why learn it – it's no use to anyone". She's a Slovene, and Slovenian is her first language. She has invited me to spend next August at their house at Makarska on the Dalmatian coast. Her husband is Dalmatian and has a summer house there. He's a doctor & lives at Ljubljana most of the time and she here at Beograd. I like her a lot. You must meet her.

Today is the first day of Autumn – cold and with a nip in the air. We don't get central heating until November.

Saturday, October 10<sup>th</sup>.

I'm in the Zoološki Zavod. My work is done as I've read everything in English & French and the German is purely systematic so I can leave it till later. On Monday I'm to see a live platyhelminth, & it'll be easier to understand what it's all about. To tell you the truth, I'm rather bored. Here the rain rains all day and it's extremely cold. In one week we seem to have gone from full summer to mid-winter, though I believe worse is to come.

No doubt you will have read in the papers about the demonstrations here. It's all because England and America decided the Trieste question without consulting Yugoslavia. The demonstrators have demolished the British and American libraries where I would go to read the paper. They have broken windows at both embassies. In fact, they've been having a thorough night out. Now the city is bursting at its seams with policemen armed to the teeth & many seated on motor bikes, or astride the first well-fed & glossy horses that I've seen here. I saw a demonstration last night from the window where I have my Serbian lessons. It was held in check by the police but the crowd was trying to get at the American embassy. I've never seen such an angry crowd before. They shouted rhythmically & rather menacingly in very low voices. It was quite frightening even though I knew quite well that it had nothing to do with me.

Yesterday morning I was taken to a demonstration of the university staff here. They sat in this lecture theatre and shouted – one person shouted from the back and then they all took it up, in deep bass and angry voices, and everyone clapped very slowly in time. It's impossible to convey the impression in words. They demanded guns. They demanded that Tito lead the army against the Italians. Even the Prof here clapped, and spoke amid wild cheers. Really I've never seen anything like it. We would hardly dignify it by the word "demonstration" we would call it "rioting".

[In actual fact, my friends did take me to the demonstration outside the British Council, where we threw stones and chanted "Trst je naš" "Trieste is ours" over and over again].

Sunday, 11 October.

I'm absolutely frozen. This is partly my fault because I spent half an hour this morning scrubbing myself all over with cold water and soap. I couldn't stand being dirty a moment longer. Then some people lit a copper on the roof & I did my washing & washed my hair up there, with the result that I am frozen and miserable now. The heating isn't on & won't be for 4 weeks. It's horribly cold both here and in the department. [The roof of the Studentski Dom was surrounded by taller buildings, so we showered in our swimsuits in the cold water up there. On Saturdays there was hot water in one place only, in the basement behind the furnace, and you could take a hot shower there]

Most of the girls are out at a demonstration to which they were summoned. Others wash and scrub. I can hear the shouts in the distance.

Monday 12 October.

Someone is looking over my shoulder to see if I'm writing to the newspapers. ... my evil-tempered (depressed) state of mind was caused by my inborn love of comfort, the (filthy) sanitation here, and these ghastly riots. The girls in my room are mostly charming, but there's at least one who's a party member. Luckily she speaks no English, but it was she who looked over my shoulder & suggested that my long letters to you, Pat and Mummy were articles about the riots for the English newspapers. (I suspected she was getting my letters intercepted and read).

Professor Stanković is very kind & fatherly. He's short & bumbly with glasses and short grey hair streaked with white. He speaks no English but excellent and very intelligible French and I can understand everything he says. My French is not on the same level as his. He can understand everything I say, but I'm embarrassed that my French isn't better so I don't say much. By the way, I've landed up doing the ecology of the rhabdocoels, I'm surprised, but I expect I'll enjoy it. I'm reading Kuchenthal with difficulty. Imagine me sitting there in front of enormous open German volumes. (In actual fact I look at the pictures most of the time).



Tomorrow I start practical things: collecting, fixing, embedding, cutting etc.

[Last night Frida took me to the theatre, King Lear in Serbian.] It was a magnificent performance, even though I could only understand a few words. Their Lear was marvellous, but what I mainly admired was what I could appreciate: the noises off, the costumes (imitations of English medieval + cossack boots?). The theatre is the finest in Yugoslavia, pre-war, very modern & beautiful to look at, but with extremely uncomfortable seats. Frida had bought marvellous seats in the middle of the second row of the stalls [where it should have been comfortable] I enjoyed it just as a spectacle more than anything else. I was almost on the stage. Shakespeare sounds odd in Serbian, with even the names' endings declined in their grammatical forms - Cordelia, Cordelio, (vocative) for example.

More now on my friends Vera and Mira). Mira's the eldest of 10, Vera the third. Most of the siblings were born in March in consecutive years. Their mother is German. The youngest is a boy of 5 who is the child of a school friend of Mira's, a child of sin, as they say here. Mira's mother said they'd take the baby in, so they did. From that, and the fact that their mother likes them to go to church, you can guess that they come from a very good home. Their father is a retired lawyer. I think both girls are very brave to be so openly friendly with me in the present circumstances, especially as there's been trouble here with an American girl. [I obviously didn't want to say more on this topic right then]. Mira used to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> tennis player of Yugoslavia [in her junior age group?], but gave it up to study medicine, and has not picked up a tennis racket for 3 years.



There's no music here, no private wirellesses that I can see, and all the time there's propaganda & national music not only in the whole downstairs floor here, but from every second lamp post along the Trg Republica (Republic Square) which I cross every morning on the way to work. In addition, the skyscraper at their "Piccadilly" is topped with a red star beneath which at night the illuminated news passes word by word slowly across the night sky, taking about a half-hour for each repeat.

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October.

Yesterday I bought 2 goldfinches and set them free. They flew away – one went very strongly & disappeared quickly, the other sat in its paper bag, wings down, head back, eyes shut and then in my hand, & when I let it go it flew into a nearby tree and sang a beautiful song. I shall buy some more and some larks – I can't bear to see them caged. I will say one thing, though, the man who sold them to me was kind & well disposed to them. He was an aged, crusty man with drab brown clothes & drab green cages with 6 goldfinches and 4 larks. He kissed them goodbye and put them in paper bags with diamond shaped holes cut in the sides. He showered me with seeds & grit for them, and gave me lengthy directions for their care, which of course I didn't understand. I'm sure he was a kind jailor. But letting them out was really a pleasure, the nicest thing I've done here. Each bird cost 50 dinars, ie 1 shilling & three pence.

This week I've been having a revolt against the impossibility of being quiet, by oneself, to read or write letters or even think. [I don't think I mentioned that the beds in my dorm were pushed together in threes, and mine was a middle bed of three, meaning that I had to climb in & out over the foot of the bed]. Everyone here learns by rote, so they are all reading their texts over and over, aloud. There was a table with about 3 chairs, as I remember long afterwards, for writing notes, if you were lucky]. My revolt about this arrangement has borne some fruit as I've been moved into a room for 5 which is much quieter & more civilised. My 4 roommates are older, perhaps nearing their last year, and none of them speak English or French, so we say nothing, so far. Perhaps I will get to try Serbian soon.

At Ohrid I shall have a room & a study (Lab?) to myself. I will have to walk 5km to town for meals, which may not be pleasant in the bitter cold. But it's difficult to think of winter here today: its hot and sunny, children are screaming under the open window, a dog barks, carts rattle over the cobbles and the horses hooves make a much higher clip clop sound because they have anti-slip shoes that raise the hooves high off the ground. [Later... wintry conditions & ice on the roads allowed great moving vans pulled by eight horses shod with high pronged shoes to pull heavy loads round the steep icy hills of the city]

On Tuesday we went to Avala to collect planarians. We, being Frida, another girl, and Buda, who squashed a long hairy caterpillar. Avala, 20 km from here, consists of a vast, imposing and very ugly black marble war memorial for the 1914-18 war. Its situated on top of a hill, & consists of 8 huge female figures representing the provinces of Jugoslavia. It's the equivalent of the unknown soldier's grave in Westminster Abbey. The

setting of small hills is very pretty, with oak and beech trees and I saw 2 snakes, one a long tree snake & the other a blind worm. The tree snake climbed a tree and sat among the twigs. I also found some wild colchicums, pink & like crocuses in form

20<sup>th</sup> October, Tuesday.

Frida is the girl I share my room with at the Zoološki Zavod. She likes cats and children, and doesn't like to see horses beaten. I like her very much. She comes from a Slovene background, more European, is what I meant, less Balkan.

Today I met Richard, a fellow [British Council] scholar, one of the other 3 & the only one to have arrived so far. He is a nephew or cousin of Janet Vaughn [Principal of Somerville] who told him to look me up so he did. The relief of meeting someone young (under 30) ie about 22 or 23, straight from Cambridge & not stuffy like the diplomats was considerable, though should not be overestimated, since he's spectacled, blond and vague. He talks English! We went out yesterday to drink in small cafes in the evening & listen to the music. It's odd, but no-one in these cafes looks really happy – music or not—the music is a dirge & they sit around the tables in stag or hen parties downing šljivovic. We also downed šljivovic. I now know exactly how much of the stuff I can't drink [14 small glasses if I remember right]— I've never been so knocked out. I came back here, went to bed, then had to get up and be sick. Not a situation I mean to repeat. Strangely enough I didn't have a headache today but just felt sick—got up and had a cold shower on the roof, very spartan & made me feel a fraction better. What people in the surroundings think when they view distantly naked nymphs among the chimney stacks I can't imagine. You might say that they immediately wished that they were satyrs.

I staggered off to work and embedded my planarians in a huge flat block then at lunchtime staggered to the Excelsior hotel and consumed a large bowl of soup and some grapes. No breakfast. I couldn't face any of the alternatives. I wanted coffee, but had nowhere to cook it. No milk, you get yoghurt if you ask for milk, & I don't much like the latter in coffee, I hate it.

I'm going out with 4 Serbian youths tonight to eat Serbian food, notably something called ćevapčići, pronounced tchevaapchitchi roughly. They are small sausages of beef & pork roasted over an open fire, they taste really good and you eat them with garlic. I'm not sure I'm up to it, would rather have hot bovril, a hot bath & go to bed. Šljivovic seems to have a more lethal effect than wine.

Everyone continues to be very kind, & often even much too kind. They will do my work for me. Stanković is a poppet and knows what he's about, the others may or may not, but their methodology seems rather slipshod by Dr Baker's standards. I had to fight for 2 days to get some absolute alcohol, they wanted to pass the planarians from 96% to 96% mixed with xylol. Maybe it's alright, but I don't want to risk it.

My copy of Hyman, vol II, arrived this morning & I started to read it a little. Stanković still insists on Kükenthal but is obviously impressed by Hyman which he hasn't seen before.

October 28<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday.

Life has suddenly got very busy & only by cutting my hours at the lab this morning can I see any chance of getting everything done. First of all, suddenly all the English colony ie the diplomats and the British Council are having lunch parties, picnics and offering hot baths etc. Secondly, life has been returned to a more Oxford /Cambridge like atmosphere by the arrival of the other British Council scholar, Dick. I think he's highly congenial, & funny & amusing. {Janet Vaughan (his relative, my college principal) thinks he's intolerably dull}.

My most interesting social event was the Serbian "Slava" [or name-day festival] that I was invited to. It was glorious to be at such a party ... and the cakes were heaven & so was the wine and as for the roast suckling pig – words fail me. [I remember also my friend's father pulling out a large photo album full of horrible photos of the Serbian's terrible journey over the Albanian mountains in the winter of 1916: horrible pictures of the dead & wounded. Was my friend's grandfather perhaps one of those killed or wounded. I did not discover].

The greasy marks on this paper are kajmak, a sort of cream cheese which I'm eating in my fingers like a young piglet.

[Another social event was lunch with Sutcliffe, the British Council Representative]. This turned out to be lunch and then a visit to the park at Topčider, outside Belgrade. He has been to see the committee for Foreign Cultural relations about us [Dick and me] & said how disgraceful the whole set-up was & they agreed and said they might move us somewhere better this weekend ..... (but it may be a dingy hotel or a room in a family). They say we might have to share a room with one other person, presumably not each other.

The day before, we went to lunch with the Assistant Representative, Middleton. He is divine, 38-ish, with greying hair, very good-looking, very smooth and very cynical. I think Richard and I amuse him & we may get more lunches! The food was very good indeed – chicken soup, lots of delicious wine, gin, šljivovic etc. Not only that and not in that order. These people are remarkably hospitable, I think Embassy and British Council life should be applauded because though its stiff & dull they do eat extremely well. I had lunch on Monday with the Vice-Consul, a Canadian called Frances Fraser from the Pacific Coast, very charming and she lent me her flat, bathroom, fire etc for the afternoon so I got really clean and my morale became one up and hasn't gone down again yet, & I don't think it will do down again if they move us from the studentski domovi.

Life is bounded by šljivovic, Serbian cigarettes and garlic. When I was at lunch with Sutcliffe yesterday I couldn't think why they [the Brits] looked so embarrassed

when they said they hated these 3 famous smells. Then, putting 2 & 2 together Dick surmised that it was because we smelt like that. Certainly they threw open all the windows at our approach. Its impossible to sit in the Studentski Domovi in the evening, they all go to bed so early, so we go to cafes & listen to Serbian music and drink šljivovic, which is the only cheap thing to drink. (no repetition of that first occasion. We added that up and decided that we drank 11 glasses each, though Dick drank a good deal of mine). 1 glass is about a triple nip whatever that is. But now we have become more temperate. You would love the music here, it's all very much in the minor key and they sing in strange eastern nasal voices and look most happy when they are singing something really sad and depressed. I sit in cafes listening -- and my face gets more and more sad and melancholy too

On Sunday I went for a heavenly all day picnic to a place called Rudnik, southwest of here, in the hills about 50 miles away, or perhaps not quite so far. I went in the car with three girls from the embassy. Very nice girls, one was Frances Fraser, the vice-consul, and another was also quite old. The third was the youngest embassy typist, just 21, & thrilled with everything. She's large, pink and white and her name is Valerie. She "loved, my dear, simply adored, being at school". She's dying to find a nice cosy man though she's only been here for 2 weeks, She is also debbish, and wants her Daddy to send her a nice cosy MG or a Landrover ("My dear, we have so many Landrovers on the farm that Daddy just wouldn't miss one").

So these are the sort of people I am getting to know around here. As for the city itself, imagine a windy, sunny city sprawling on its hillocks around the Danube and the Sava and looking across the plains to Romania, and peopled with serious, plaintive Serbs with their dirge-like music who almost never sing & sound happy. There are many jeeps & very few cars. All the cars belong to one of 3 categories: CD for corps diplomatique, D for semi-diplomatic, and C apparently for Communist. There are twice as many D and CD cars as there are C-plate ones. Only 3 categories of number-plates seems odd in a capital city.

[Long discussion about where to go in our January 15-February 15<sup>th</sup> holiday follows. Dick wanted to go to Sarajevo or maybe Greece. I wanted to go to Greece with George, or to have G come to Beograd. I finally decided to go to Naples and read in the library there. But that's later. The problem in Belgrade was complete lack of books because of destruction of the University library by the departing Germans].

Tuesday 3 November

I'm sitting in the sunlight in the British Council library [not as destroyed as I implied above, at least the windows had been mended]. Work is forgotten, Vol II of Hyman is open but not attended to, I find it's not a comfortable book to read though its better than Kükenthal.

I'm writing during lunch. The soup has parsnips in it and what appears to be *Spongilla lacustris* and tastes like it too. But it's hot & it's the first food to pass my lips

today so it's welcome. One really gets surprisingly hungry in this place, it's partly the terrible wind (the Košava) which bears down from Russia! & even though the weather is sunny and bright & [looks as if it] could be warm, it's icy cold. The Košava whips round corners ferociously, tries to tear the trees apart, pushes off the tiles etc & it strikes through the warmest clothes and chills one's skin. It's strange though because the feet and hands don't get cold in the same way as they do in a damp, English coldness. This cold is brisk and dry. In midwinter apparently it's impossible to keep on your feet in the streets [it knocks you over with its force]. [People were also sliding down the icy, hilly pavements on great sheets of cardboard, looking strange in their business suits, but it was a great way to go as otherwise the wind would knock you over & it saved a lot of time too].

And while we're on the wind I must mention that it (the Košava) has put an end to my baths on the roof. No one could bathe in this icy coldness it's like the North Pole. The economic situation that doesn't permit frequent hot water doesn't permit telescopes either, luckily.

Ah, lunch continues with the arrival of delicious rissoles and fried potato. So nourishing and appetising. Better than usual anyway. You'd be surprised if you could see me sitting in these little cafes with dirge music listening & reminiscing with Janet Vaughan's nephew Dick, here on a British Council scholarship just like me.[ A good way to spend the evening & I grew to love that sad & melancholy Balkan music].

I've been here for 5 weeks now which is over one tenth of my time here. I'm rather hoping to get turned out as a political prisoner before serving the rest of the time [bizarre idea, I guess I was very homesick]. I'm moving to another room with 3 beds and a washbasin – much better than the present set up and much cleaner. My room mates are both multilingual, with 5 or six languages each but not English. French, though. [There were bedbugs in our beds there, the legs of the beds had to stand in cans of water when they were eliminated]

Dick and I start new Serbian lessons this afternoon with a professor who speaks English. Dick already speaks fluent Serbian. [He did his national service in Trieste]. Then we are going to supper with someone called Dragan who's a film producer. He is also going to teach us Serbian. I'm afraid my Serbian doesn't progress much. I can say "zima mi je" which means "winter to me it is" ie "I am cold", or "Hladno je" which means "it's cold". I learned how to say "go to hell" the other day, but have since forgotten it. Apparently very coarse but not blasphemous swearing is the rule.

Tuesday 10 November 1963

You ask if the facilities for research are good here. Very briefly:

1. There is no such thing as a hotplate here, I have to flatten & dry off each slide individually over a spirit lamp which takes 5 minutes a slide.

2. There are no long cover glasses, only 22mm square ones so one has to put 2 on each slide, and the second invariably dries up while the first is fiddled with, or else both are swimming in a sea of xylene.
3. My ex-assistant puts too many sections on each slide, net result need 2, 1/2 covers per slide.
4. We ran out of DISTILLED WATER for 2 days last week!
5. The haemotoxylin was past its best, bad in fact, & I wasted a week's work before I discovered this. They never throw anything away. [Actually there were no other stains than haemotoxylin. & eosin]

On the credit side I have a half share of a superb Zeiss microscope covered with gadgets and splendid in every way & also a very new microtome covered with shiny knobs, it's a Reichert from Vienna. [No microscope lamps existed in the department though, I still remember this almost 60 years later, it was so frustrating. The microscope (without lamp) was part of reparations paid for war damage: the Germans wrecked the university, & burned its library as well as the Serbian Archives before they left in defeat]. Frustration also lies in lacking basics, as above. But the frustration of lacking these cheap, simple, labour saving devices is wearing me slowly away. If they bought slightly less expensive microscopes for junior students like me, & a hot plate or 2 and some large cover slips, and a diamond pencil for numbering slides we'd get on much better! Have you ever tried washing say 16 slides in running water when each has a number stuck onto the end? I need hardly tell you that (a) the numbers come off and (b) you've forgotten which was which as a result.

George, I think you'd like it here. You'd certainly like the music and dancing. Last night I went to see the National dancers, the Serbian section. They were superb. The costumes need to be seen, can't be described but all were different red & black with white blouses encrusted with embroidery & over that velvet jackets woven with gold. They were wonderful dances, as controlled in their way as ballet. [re the costumes: these were the 'real thing' later, patterned cloth took the place of these wonderful embroideries, which are now conserved in the National Museum in Belgrade]. One dance that I remember shocked the nice 30-year old English woman I went with to her core. A little, black-eyed woman seduced her partner by dancing around him, gesturing with her bosom or her bottom, or both together ... it sounds crude, but it wasn't at all. It was actually sublime!

Speaking of seductive dancing, I also went to a Yugoslav film Ciganka (pronounced Tsiganka) about a gypsy singing girl who is so fatally attractive that 2 brothers and the son of one of them all fall madly in love with her. In the end the father shoots his son and then himself in remorse. Very explicitly sexy scenes are deleted in the version seen in England, while here its scenes of violence that are cut. The dance has the gypsy girl in Turkish trousers, blouse & jerkin, she unhooks the jerkin & flings it from her. The blouse isn't opaque. The music is wild, the dance is Turkish [That's the part that the English aren't permitted to see]

I'm going to Ohrid for 2 weeks on November 18<sup>th</sup>.

Monday, Nov. 16

I'm trying to deal with 32 slides 2 by 2 while writing this letter. What will happen when they get to the Canada balsam stage is anybody's guess, as I want to understain them so that I can look at the chromosomes, & what's nice and pink & blue for gross microanatomy is mud for chromosomes. In due course I hope to make some crystal violet preparations. I seem to have branched off at a tangent to see if Prof. Stanković's species flock (if it is one) of *Neodendrocoelum coelium* can be explained genetically in any simple manner, such as by polyploidy. Sounds like straight genetics, but is really about speciation,, which is more within my field of expertise, [I hope].

Later. Its 11pm . My room mates Rada and Živka are out. They are sweet, both are rather plain and are in their 5<sup>th</sup> year reading Medicine. Živka speaks French. [actually, each of them spoke about 6 languages, but no English]. I've been out eating razniči in a folkore café, they are pieces of meat (lamb?) roasted on a skewer over a charcoal fire ... it is roast meat but the whole outside of each piece is like the outside of the joint, [delicious]. We've found a wonderful song, a Macedonian lament called something like Teška bešni, which means "Difficult was our parting". It's very sad and beautiful, and brings tears to the eyes.

Yesterday evening I went to a ballet with Frida, it's called Ohridska Legenda, a ballet with wonderful Macedonian music and a curious mix of national and classical dance. I enjoyed it enormously. A simple story of a girl & a boy, not allowed to marry but then carried off into slavery by the Turks. The plot elaborates into pure magic and fantasy, with magic flowers, sounds and so on, and it ends happily with the marriage of the lovers.

[No letter describes the journey to Ohrid, on the Orient Express as far as Skopje, then by narrow gauge railway to Ohrid through the mountains: 12 hours to go 75 miles! The train was a real museum piece, the journey amazingly scenic, the number of tight curves traversed countless: each could be shortcut by walking and re-boarding the train! And when it arrived at last at its destination we were greeted by the inhabitants of the nearest village clad in beautiful richly embroidered clothes. Best clothes certainly, all using an identical palette of rose reds and pinks in the deep bands of embroidery, which suggested that the colours were traditional to that village. A train's arrival was obviously a major event, requiring that one dressed in one's best clothes.]

Friday, November 27<sup>th</sup>. Hidrobiološki zavod, Ohrid, Macedonia.

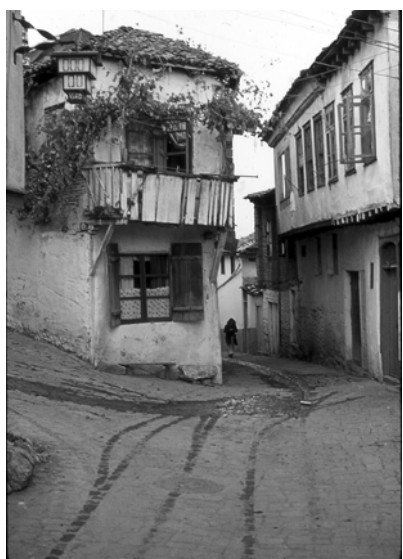
Have you ever noticed how white poplars look in the winter when bare of leaves? The branches are the colour of lime flowers and the trunks silver and smooth. They grow here against the bare orange hills and are reflected in the still, deep-blue lake. The beauty of this place is unbelievable and the more striking because it isn't composed of the usual ingredients: it is strange and savage and yet so quiet and peaceful. I'm sitting in the Hidrobiološki Zavod looking out across the lake at the black and menacing mountains of

Albania, which actually look rather attractively blue & shrouded in mist. How can the Iron Curtain keep up its reputation unless it looks like one? In actual fact, contrary to all current opinion it seems to me that the Iron Curtain is a very beautiful thing, even if that's only true just here.

Ohrid in fact is startlingly beautiful. The lake is blue-green like the Mediterranean and very, very clear, and the town is tiny and built on a little hill which falls by a steep cliff into the lake. The houses are Turkish, old and



Hidrobiološki Zavod, Ohrid



crumbling, white with dull red scaly tile roofs, and often with vines clambering up their sides.. There are almost as many churches as houses, built of faded red brick, squat & flat with central stubby towers & roofs sloping almost down to the ground.. They look unbearably old and are mostly 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century. [Frida took me on a tour of the two churches that were open. One, the Cathedral of St. Sophia, was one of the most important early churches in the Balkans. Later, when it was restored, rich frescoes that had been hidden by the soot from generations of votive candles were discovered. At the other, Sveti Kliment, I was fortunate enough to see its wonderful early icons hanging in the narthex, while in the interior itself a team of

Italian restorers were carefully removing the layers, not just soot, but layer upon layer of repainting jobs, which were to be sent to the museum in Belgrade, leaving only the oldest layer in place. Frida translated for me, and I often returned to watch the experts at work.] The smaller churches also have frescoes and icons, but most are shut except by special arrangement, since it is not the season. Ohrid's hill is crowned by the ruins of an old Turkish [Bulgarian?] fort. It's all very brown & dingy except the red & white of the old town, & even these reds and whites are muted.



Sv Kliment, Ohrid

Then the lake is covered with birds: grebes & coots mainly in flocks; white herons in the marshes outside my window, and kingfishers on the canal that leads to the lake. There are fat white and brown ducks too. There are donkeys and cows, small cows with surprised eyes, and black animals like buffalo crossed with wart-hog, ugly with ringed horns that droop back over their necks. I don't know what they are. [water-buffalo?]



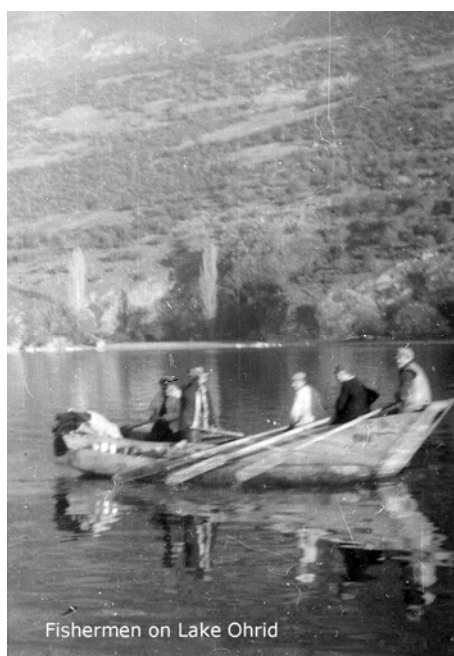
The people look depressed and prematurely aged, the children bedraggled and grimy. Most people seem to be tubercular & are spitting blood all the time. There is none of the gaiety that is supposed to come from living close to nature, but rather an



Pepper sellers in the market

acceptance of nature not as a beautiful lake and old, historic town but as cold water, hunger and The Turk (always present in these peoples minds after 500 years of domination). I can understand now why Macedonian songs are so much the saddest of all the Yugoslav songs, when you see how bare the earth is from which they scrape an existence. I wonder whether some rise above hunger and cold to appreciate this paradisaical place. I suppose so, though to see the women washing their feet [and clothes] in the ice-cold lake you would hardly think it possible.

This morning Frida and I went out on the boat while they dredged for us, and used their splendid, Hardy-beloved Petersen Grab. Luckily there are students from Skopje University here so we didn't have to put our hands into the cold, cold water. The sun was shining and it was very pleasant to sit on the rail and look at the scenery and the birds, and the ancient fish which live in this lake. They're wonderful, these trout, they look like something out of Romer clothed in dark grey suede & painted improbably with black spots ringed with whitish grey on back and upper sides, and red spots ringed with pink on their lower sides. They are huge: 1-2 ft long when full grown, with Miocene expressions and an Eocene calm which would have got them eliminated in the struggle for existence in any sensible place [I must have meant anywhere that got glaciated in the Pleistocene, ie every other lake in Europe!]. We are going to have some for supper tonight. And serve them right for not bothering to struggle for existence! [Silly remark: they struggled and survived unlike all their contemporaries in those other lakes. This species even survived being carried on ice by runners for hundreds of miles along the old Roman highway, the Via Egnatia, for the tables of the Byzantine emperors].



Fishermen on Lake Ohrid

It's much more comfortable here than in Belgrade & more free and adult as an experience but its COLD in this institute, so cold one has 5 thick blankets on the bed, and wonders if one is sleeping in a pile of half-dry laundry. We have a wood stove in our room & it's just getting going so it'll be better soon. I'm sitting here in every garment [I possess]: snow boots, stockings, woolen socks, trousers, pants, roll on, bra, vest, your old check shirt, my blue ski sweater & greenish overcoat so except for my hands I can hardly say I am cold. [I remember the hot water tank in the bathroom: fired up by wood in a small bottom section below the water tank.at the tap end of the bath. Ingenious, and it worked!]

Tuesday 15 December, Zoološki Zavod, Studentski trg 3, Belgrade.

Your letter of December 10 has arrived. I am so very sorry about the car, what a horrible disappointment for it to go wrong so quickly after you got it though I suppose it was better that that happened in England than when you were actually on your way, in France for example. I think you are right to wait to get it fixed, but I'm very sorry that it's so expensive.

I may be going to England for Christmas. I am negotiating for a lift on a flying pigsty (yes, literally!) which will be returning to London after bringing some pedigree pigs to Yugoslavia. I shall know this afternoon. It would be a free non-stop flight to Blackheath airport near Camberley. The sad thing is that you may well have gone by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> unless the car is unbelievably long in repair and I shall miss you. Perhaps, though, I could return by train via Milan & we could meet somewhere. Perhaps I could even come to Naples if I promised not to disturb you if you were working very hard. I've asked the British Council representative who asked the Air attache who will ask the pilot today.

Later still: In a cake shop. I'm eating krompeta, a delicious concoction of custard, raw egg [?] & pastry, before lunch, not good for my figure. I got very thin in Ohrid so they say & certainly in bed all my bones stuck into the mattress. Its good for one to have a fever & a temperature of 102 certainly sweated off my fat [then why I ask 60 years later was I so casual about putting it back on?] Perhaps I never told you that I was ill? Stomach upset – gastroenteritis? [Perhaps, Frida thought, from eating locally made baklava.] Two days of bed rest & fever & then happy convalescence by the stove, flatworms forgotten. It seems the rhabdocoeles of Lake Ohrid are summer forms only, I didn't find even one, though I found quite a lot of flatworms & am going to look at their chromosomes.

Ohrid was very beautiful, but it was also very depressing as I am not ethereal enough to live on beauty alone. There wasn't enough to eat, and the staff of the Institute were dismal. I was glad to get back here to comparative civilisation I can tell you. Even the 24 hour journey back was no joke, but I liked Bitolj which is nearly on the Greek frontier. I'd like to go to Greece sometime.

On the way back (if I come) I'm having to take care of a cargo of *Proteus* for someone called Newsh in London, they are from Hadži & I believe that some will be for me to give to Prof. Hardy, but if he's still away, what then? [As it happened the whole idea fell through, as I did not get a seat on the pig-plane].

This Ohrid trout might have interesting nerves to its air-bladder, but I doubt it. [I don't have any background to this section]. Surely no teleosts are really archaic, or what is the position of the Salmoniids. I have a vague idea that they are near the bottom somewhere, but this trout is only another species of *Salmo*, not even another genus. It is *Salmo letnica*. There is, though, another salmonid (I can't remember its name) which lives in the profound depths of the lake & is probably more interesting. I haven't seen it.

A Professor Radovanović here who does zoogeography of reptiles has promised to take me collecting on the Dalmatian coast and Islands with him in the summer. Would this be fun? I think so! He looks a bit like William but is not cynical like him.

Thursday Dec. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

I waited to discover whether I could go to England. Hoping wistfully that I might get on the plane yesterday & be in time to see you [before you left for Naples] but I went to see the dogsbody to the Air Attache ... and he led me to believe there was no hope at all. Consequently I'm feeling a trifle depressed, though there was no earthly reason why they should take me [to England] for free.

[ Personal stuff generated by approach of Christmas away from home].

I found out why Ivica is so intense. Its because he heard the rumours of my sinful life from the Ivo Lola Riba [Studentski Dom] hostel where Dick lives, and felt obliged to tell me by simple parables, complex allusions with many blushes that I spent my evenings in Kalemagdan park indulging in licentious activity. This was a new one on me I've only once been there with Dick & this in broad daylight. No one but an arctic explorer would think of such a thing in this weather.

However, I was rather irritated to have such a reputation when I spend my waking & sleeping hours pining for you. I do. And I'm happy to. But I want to see you soon!

20<sup>th</sup> December, 1953, Studentski Dom Vera Blagojević.

I'm sitting up in bed writing this, its 9.30 pm and the central heating is *kaput* like everything else that might lead to soft capitalist comfort. There is a mighty *košava* blowing outside, whistling around the chimneys, tearing the trees savagely and battering at the double windows. But I'm snug in bed in my green & grey dressing gown, knees tucked up to chin, book-on-knees, paper-on-book, sneeze in head—it's the *košava*'s fault.

I feel very cut off from you not knowing where you are. I imagine you in warm sunny Naples. ....

[I enlarge on my problems with my amorous friend Dick, saying he can be fended off in cold weather but I'll have to spend all my time in Ohrid when it gets warmer] I'm trying to reform my schedule after being unable to get into the Studentski Dom last night [after an evening in the café] until 4 am when I was almost perished by cold. I've decided long evenings drinking šljivovic in cafés with Dick are counter-productive, a waste of time and money, and creating problems with his affections..

Today, after that late night, I slept until 1.30 in the afternoon, & then did Susan Hope-Jones' packing for her. She's flying home on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. She has jaundice, which is why I was packing for her. It was an awful job, 5 suitcases to be filled with more pairs of woolly pants & woolly vests than I've ever seen before. She's 30 but her underwear is very middle-aged. She's the daughter of an ex-Eton school-master, & very much influenced by it, she's obviously her parents' darling & has the sort of attitude to life that comes from being sent to "talk to Lady Blonsonop in the drawing room for five minutes darling while I powder my nose".

Monday, 21st December, Ul. 27 Marta, 48.

Just a scribble to include with this vague diatribe that I wrote you last night. I have a foul cold, and a headache, so I am a bit gloomy. I swore in English [of course] very vigorously at all those who pushed me on and off the trolleybus this morning, this was letting down the side I suppose & was also odd because on the whole I love travelling on the trolleybuses, crowd and all. So it was quite a symptom of inner discontent. Added to this, Prof. Stanković came back & asked me questions about Planaria which I could only answer very inefficiently with my head aching so much.

I wish it were last Christmas, or at any rate to be at home. Here, you can't even buy Christmas cards in the shops [maybe because the Orthodox Christmas Day is later, January 6<sup>th</sup>]. You can only get New Year cards, very ugly and costly too. [But] I'm going to spend Christmas day with the Allens, some British Council people who are very nice. They are having a big party and all the people who don't have families here have been invited. They have 2 children & I expect it will be a delightful family Christmas. But I would like to plant apple trees in your ex-orchard much better, to throw cameras over cliffs and to cut coelacanths out of silver paper and stick them on mantelpieces. I feel sorry for your mother having Christmas without either without you or Richard there.

December 28<sup>th</sup>, Monday, Ulica 27 Marta, 48

Your letter of December 19<sup>th</sup> has just arrived, after a nine day record time en route. Perhaps they were having photocopies made for future reference. Here was I dashing over by foot and trolleybus to the Zoološki Zavod looking for mail only to be met by those frustrating words, "nema ništa", which is a sort of double negation – both forceful and mournful. Not that I've been weeping in a solitary corner all over Christmas, quite the reverse. I've been almost as highly organised as I suspect you have

been by Mama. And I've thoroughly enjoyed it all: so nice to escape being Yugoslav for a few days.

I don't seem to have written to you since before Christmas when if I remember I wrote you a manic-depressive letter about Dick, who was on my nerves. I hope it was not a very depressive letter. One should keep copies of what one writes, but that would prevent one from ever writing at all, I think.

This morning I talked about Bouin and Crystal Violet with Prof. Stanković with great energy. Only I fixed my hands by mistake, by identifying an unlabelled jar containing Beauchamp's fixative for a simple jar of alcohol. Ugh. The smell –though the internal structure of my fingers may have been left as in life, the external structure is withered and dessicated. How long does it take to get a second skin? Seven years?

[Much drivel about various parties, for example "I met the Ambassador's son Louis Mallet who seems to have been up at Balliol since 1949, and to be hand in glove with [our friends Tony Smith and Tom".] One page describes me, as well as the clothes I wore at a party given by one of the embassy typists. The guests were, in her words, "my dear, all the nicest people in Belgrade: all eyes, my dear" she said "were for those *divine* characters" I wore "my red dress, blue shoes, hair in *very* elegant pony tail, fringe brushed, face painted, earrings". [2012. That red dress is in the upstairs closet by the long bedroom at Tryon Road. It needs a button]. But even with that dress Louis Mallet would have been unable to tell you much about me except that I was vivacious and that I sent my love to Tom.

Yesterday out to Breakfast (with Cornflakes! 1st time for 3 months) then on to a rum punch party given by some diplomats where I talked to a dear old man called Sir Francis Mudie who used to be in India, I think & is now returning home.. I've a feeling he is famous for something but I don't know what. [2011. I googled him: he was born in 1890 so was only 64 or so in 1953. "a dear old man" only possible from the viewpoint of a 23 year old! He had been the last governor of Sind, in present day Pakistan, and then Governor of West Punjab after Partition]. After this I went to a buffet lunch, then out to tea, then to this other party. Rum punch, gin & Dubonnet etc a welcome change from šljivovica and ljut (angry, ie stronger) šljivovica.

The snow here is melting today, but right over Christmas it was beautiful – the air was so cold & still that the snow stayed thick on every twig. All the children were skating & tobogganing on the pavements. Belgrade is so hilly that it's made for tobogganing. It's been 15 below zero for a week now, & more at night. And without that terrible wind the košava. On Christmas day I went to the embassy service, - frosty, it was, with carols played on the piano by the air attaché's stooge. So many people rushed over to me to offer me a bath that I got quite embarrassed! I'm famous, apparently, as the girl who doesn't bath. However, an army officer I'd never met before told me how clean I looked so it seems the offering-baths mania is not due to the way I look but to knowledge about the lack of facilities at the Studentski Dom. Its surprising how one gets used to this way of life. I can't really imagine living a comfortable existence any longer. I must beware

lest I lose all standards of comfort in the home, forget what a bath looks like, and feed on bean soup all the time.

[Terribly sorry about your car which had broken down for good.]

Dick and I went to the cinema to see an American film which I didn't appreciate at all, because it was a very worn copy and the sound track was also very worn, like an aged gramophone record. Apart from that it was a very good film, about 3 men prospecting for gold in Mexico, and their reactions to each other. 2 [of them] were good, the other bad. In addition there were bad bandits and a good little boy who recognised stolen donkeys, as well as some good Indians who cured Our Hero's wound. It wasn't as simple as that, though. Each side had its shortcomings and Our Hero took a long time to emerge as Hero, appearing to be a wicked villain for a long time. It was called something like *Blagu Sierra Magda*. [Evidently from the plot this was the famous film *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*, with Humphrey Bogart].

Its 9.30 am & I'm lying in bed writing though I should be at work. Outside the snow falls and stops and falls again. The roofs are just touched with white again after yesterday's thaw – I can't see anything but roofs from where I am....

This time last year I was staying with you in Mark. I wish we could go back. I've been thinking of it a lot – it was such a happy week. Apple trees and sawing up posts for them, entangling them in barbed wire (Actually, it was a little fir tree, wasn't it). Do you remember Mary Champeney's party where everyone fought for everyone else's shoes? .... Do you remember Mama thinking me very *mal elevee* for allowing you into my room before I was up?

Susan is marrying John on August 28<sup>th</sup> in Glasgow and has asked me to be bridesmaid so there's every likelihood that I'll be back in England by then as I should like to see Susan married.

January 2, 1954, Ul. 27 Marta, Studentski Dom VB

Here it's a holiday with no post & so on so I'm writing to take advantage of the cessation of activities, as after this I shan't have time for weeks. The New Year here has been very hectic but not altogether enjoyable. I spent New Year's Eve at the Club, - I went there with Dick, since one more or less had to go with someone – but he had drunk one & a half bottles of šljivovica before hand, & though he didn't appear drunk to begin with by the time we got out to the suburbs where the club is he was obviously smashed.. He goes from bad to worse, I don't like him at all. Anyway he got very drunk & at intervals from 11 to 1 he kept coming over & ordering me to go back to the Studentski Dom with him to party there, I refused. Eventually he trailed off through the snow, leaving me at the party. The rest of it was quite enjoyable, 1-4 am, dancing, games, punch & everyone being so much more British than anyone in England. [Sounds totally nauseating from the perspective of 2011]. Then 6 of us went to the American club where we drank Slovene champagne & an American air-force colonel kept telling me to smile (I

was too tired to oblige). A British diplomat kept telling me about Prof. Wace's excavations at Mycenae & the Illustrated London News. A Canadian student kept telling me how he was converted to Unitarianism at the University of Toronto. I dozed. Then we all nine piled into a fast car to go back into town. I sat on the lap of a lieutenant of artillery who reminded me of you, & went to sleep. The evening ended with Breakfast at 8 am at the Hotel Moskva. [Interesting there's all this detail: I justify it by saying how curiously dependent one is for enjoyment on having the right company, which I evidently didn't].

I feel so sleepy – It's all these festivities – now I can see why we have 3 days holiday for the New Year.

I'm writing this sitting in my dressing gown by the table. Rada and Živka are away and I have the room to myself – the first time I've slept in a room by myself for 3 months. It's very nice to get up in the morning and be able to take all one's clothes off & wash instead of having to respect R. & Z's modesty, which is considerable. It's also nice to have no-one snoring, no-one getting up at 6am & no visitors. In fact, it's quite civilised.

Tues 5 January, Zoološki Zavod.

I'm writing again to Bitton because although I hope you've managed to get away from there at last I've no idea where you'll be when. Also your car does seem to be behaving atrociously badly and I shall be relieved when you arrive in Naples with it all in one piece. I dreamt of it last night – you were saying how dismal it was that for that price you could have got a complete new car. Wishful thinking on my dreaming part I think!

It's been a leisurely sort of Christmas here in comparison with the usual rush at home, & it isn't finished yet as we still have the orthodox Christmas on the 7<sup>th</sup>, when there promise to be several festivities ending with an English party in the evening. I've been fed up with Serbians lately, especially the ones that come up to you in the street and say they will love you for all your life & will you go to the Majestic with them as at the moment they are "sans femme".

I have spent today in glorious idleness. A lazy morning having a shower and recovering from it. This one wasn't very pleasant, as the showers themselves smelt and their walls were covered with yellow-brown slime, as were the duck-boards. On the whole, though, I think I came out cleaner than I went in, but only just. [These showers must have been the ones behind the furnace where there was hot water on Saturdays and holidays] Life in the raw! A filthy, dirty shower is one of the rawest, most primitive things in life.

Now it's lunch time, & I'm at work in the lab, which rarely figures in my letters. I can't do my work right now as Marija is just at the moment guarding the thermostat in hopes of helping me which she can't – (because I won't let her) and I'm not good at rejecting her & hurting her feelings. So I told her I was going off for some lunch. The

košava has started up and is blowing outside, flinging the dirty snow and the people about on the icy streets. So I'm going to finish embedding those planarians if it kills me today & then go home. I want to embed each specimen in a solo watch glass, as here they use a flat tray & make a big block, which often spoils many of the specimens as you carve up the paraffin wax and it splits. I need to know if Newton's Crystal violet "takes" after Bouin, which is meant to be good for nuclei? The Prof says he'll try to get some crystal violet, but whether he'll also be able to get some DPX Clove oil, etc, as well is problematic. It's really very difficult to work here.

The real purpose of this letter is to send one to you in Naples. I had a pc from Miss Scott saying you had started out & presume it's true. I am so very glad to hear that you are on your way at last after all those mechanical setbacks.

Later. The first good day's work I've done, though half of it was occupied by looking for some solid watch glasses, which I eventually found & annexed. Planarian corpses should be embalmed separately! You just try to get a dozen or so orientated correctly in one container, it's well nigh impossible. Not that anyone here bothers much about orientation: Marija cut some extraordinary lopsided things last time. They are odd in their methods. [Schooled in methods by Baker at Oxford, I was].

[The trouble with the University of Belgrade Zoology department & labs was that it was extremely badly equipped: the war had been very destructive, money was short, and the Germans had destroyed the University library before leaving. The reparations gave some beautiful microscopes, but no lamps for them. That's just one example].

How is Richard getting on in Africa? It must be rather strange for him. Do you think he'll stay there all his life like Schweitzer?

This is a nice evening, like the civilised Oxford life I miss, with the gramophone, coffee and a warm stove, letters, a lamp shedding a bright pool of light. A room of ones own, even if not for many days.

This also is bad for my nerves, the sooner I can get away from this atmosphere the better. I'd like to come to Naples, but first I might be going to Constantinople with a group of people on the railway, if we can get a discount by travelling 5 together. [This didn't come off, but I did go to Naples for a month of reading and research. There are no letters from this wonderful period, when we stayed at the Pensione Fatti, and walked down to the aquarium every morning through crowded streets bordered by stalls heaped with delicious tangerines and other citrus fruits. But more of that later, perhaps]

January 9<sup>th</sup>, Saturday, as from Ul. 27 Marta, Beograd, Jugoslavija.

What a spate of letters, 2 in 2 days, both from France, both I presume delayed by the strikes of the post office there. Anyway, the one from Sezanne arrived yesterday and one from Agay today. I'm relieved to hear from today that your car is at last doing a little better. After all the fierce things you called it, such as chienne, I feared the reverse.



[I also had nice letters from both G's mother and mine. Mine was worrying about whether I had my warm winter vests].

My letter to G's mother, Mary Mackie, has survived, I will excerpt its description of Christmas in Belgrade, also written on January 9<sup>th</sup>:

"Christmas here was rather amazing, as was the New Year. Part of the strangeness is that here one celebrates it 3 times. First the Catholic and English Christmas (I took 3 days holiday!). Then the Communist Christmas, ie the New Year, when, as a worker in a government institution I was obliged to take 3 days holiday – and finally the Orthodox Christmas on the 7<sup>th</sup>, for 3 more days. So it is still Christmas here – the last day! Each Christmas has its own Christmas trees, its own festivities and its own Father Christmas. (The Orthodox one on St Nicholas day and the Communist one on New Year's Eve disguised as Father Frost!). So here it's just as exhausting as the advertising racket before Christmas in England".

The next letter is dated Friday, 29 February, evidently 1954 was a Leap Year.



With George's Fiat *topolino*. Last day in Naples

[The atmosphere has altogether changed after my happy and productive time in Italy, with lots of work, the company of George & of his friends at the Stazione Zoologica and even a couple of wonderful day-trips to Paestum and Salerno in George's car]

There's only time to start a letter now as I'm off to Radio Belgrade in half an hour.

[I had a job reading one of the parts on the weekly English course on the radio, for my wonderful English accent of course] I'm eating breakfast – a mug of tea with lemon in it, Neapolitan bread (the last piece) and kajmak (a sort of clotted cheese). I couldn't face Serbian butter after the delicious Naples variety, but I'm eating off Salerno plates, & nearby is a large steak for lunch. What I really want to say is that this bread, these plates make me wonder what you are doing and I'm feeling very nostalgic. It's 20 to 9 am, maybe you are already at work. Are there any siphonophores? Is the coffee machine on the bunsen burner? Is it sunny? And you, how are you?

Here it is snowy but also sunny. They have had the most awful month. Belgrade was cut off completely for several days without even the Orient Express getting through. There were no trams for 2 days and no electricity either. The whole Danube valley is going to be disastrously flooded as the Iron Gates are so thickly iced up that not even dynamite has any effect. (The iron gates of the Danube are on the Yugoslav/Rumanian border just south of here). People are probably unduly pessimistic – but who knows. Anyway I miss the sunshine & blue sea and orange groves like anything.

All this is most misleading. It looks as if it's only the weather and the butter that I'm missing. Well, it's not. I keep trying to tell myself how good it is for my character to be here, and succeeding quite well – otherwise I think I should be in tears, as I was on the Naples/Rome Express with remarkable effect—they put me in a 1<sup>st</sup> class carriage. [what a miserable little creature I must have been in those days] A very pleasant army officer then detailed a soldier to carry my bag at Rome and at Venice. I arrived back here exhausted but since then have slept for 13 hours and listened to some of the gramophone records.

I must continue later as I have to be organised for the Radio with all my plates & so on clean!

Later. 7pm. Zoološki Zavod.

I'm trying to organise my life better and this morning demanded 10 bottles, 20 staining jars, balsam pot, absolute alcohol etc. clove oil, Orange G, alum etc. So far the Orange G and the bottles have arrived, all 500 cc I hope they also give me enough chemicals to put in them. Since then I've read part of those Gelei notes & cut some beautiful sections on this beautiful new microtome. A binocular microscope has also arrived for Frida and me, it cost a half-million dinars (I million lire) and is from Reicherts. I'm just going to cook myself a lovely steak for supper, the hot-plate works well & I use it very slightly warmed as a hot-plate [for cooking on] for which it's ideal though rather small.

I had lunch with Hester, & yesterday with both Hester and Dick – by mistake, I ran into them. Dick hated Sarajevo and wants to go to Ohrid. This is impossible because of the weather. A wolf or wolves have killed & eaten a woman and a child at Vosdovac – a suburb of Belgrade. Now I know what it is almost literally to have the wolf howling at the door. And now today its thawing, thank God, perhaps this will continue and end this “worst Belgrade winter for 80 years”.

I shan't write a thank-you letter but I did have a lovely, lovely time & even to think of it makes me feel very happy. My outlook on life is quite changed & I'm far more cheerful and working harder too. Radio Belgrade didn't happen after all this am and isn't till Tuesday. They still have 2 lessons in hand so there's no need to worry about my getting back late. Mr Allen wasn't cross as he realised I'd be back within the month. Everyone was surprised, though, that I came back at all. What romantic minds people have!

Wednesday March 3<sup>rd</sup>

How nice to get your first letter since I got back to Belgrade. It came yesterday & I found it here when I arrived very late for work after recording 8 of those wretched lessons.

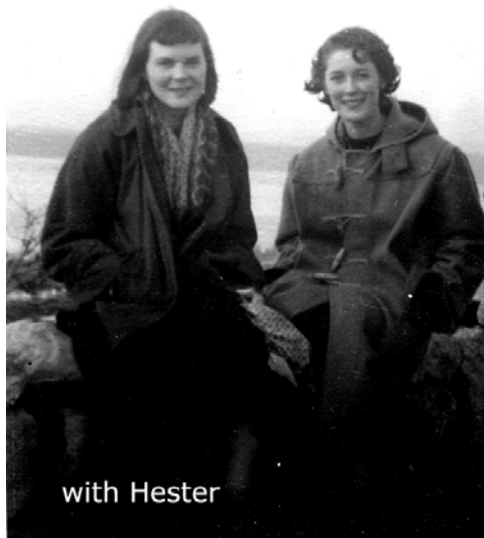
Fancy having 6 *Amphioxus*. What have you done with them? Put them in the bottom tank? From your account of *Forskalia*, *Hippopodius*, etc., I gather the weather is nice, and I can picture the sunshine, warmth and cheerfulness in Naples. Here it really is thawing & the town is unbelievably filthy and dirty water is running everywhere. Snow is still piled in dirty heaps on each side of the road.

I haven't done much except work since I got back, & I've been successful in getting some supplies: a gallon jug of 99% alcohol + some absolute alcohol. So I've been busy cutting & staining and reading books on cytology. Also of course making interminable solutions and blocks.

I shall always look back on the time in Naples as one of the happiest times of my life ..... it made up fully & completely for all that 4 & a half months in the autumn here. They might never have happened, & I have a different attitude to life now – much more hardworking. There seems suddenly to be a point to life. I've been serial sectioning a lot of planarians fixed in Champy, for a change. I don't know what this will do to the chromosomes.

Thursday, March 4.

I was overcome with languor and so this didn't get finished when it should've. Now I'm sitting in a café eating a sickly custard /pastry concoction called *krempeta* which is delicious. The sun is out & shining brightly. The snow has almost completely gone & it looks as if summer's here.



with Hester

Yesterday evening, I went with Hester and Valerie to a concert with Leon Goossens. He gave a lot of time to British composers. I liked the first half of the programme, when he played Bach and some obscure English things better than the second half, which was modern all noise with no form to it [or so I thought then]. Hindemith & York Bowen etc. Probably conveys more to you than to me. He was a chunky little man and had such a lovely oboe. It's funny to think of going with such enthusiasm to a solo oboe concert when in London one might not stir half a mile (though one might in Oxford).

I found some good prophase nuclei this morning in a section I had left in xylene before I went away, and stained in Heidenheim after I got back. Pity I can't find any metaphase nuclei yet. My crystal violet works very patchily, I think the clove oil might be contaminated. When I get live *Planaria* I'll try anaesthetising it, as you suggest. It sounds very slow which would be an advantage as the gut would be cleared of food.

March 5, Sunday.

I have been having an enormous letter writing day, 8 letters in all. But now it is evening and the gramophone is playing Schubert's quartet for flute, guitar, viola and cello the evening is quiet the music's very peaceful and I feel like writing to you.

There's a picture this week in the Illustrated London News of an inn in Tewkesbury. Black & white & I think I recognise it. Tewkesbury is a charming place. [Later, we went there on the first day of our honeymoon] Even when the weather here is behaving very well I can hardly suppress a faint nostalgia for green fields luscious with meadowsweet and cuckoo-flowers through which droves of mild bovine Herefords browse, for elm hedges with magpies; alder catkins rusty red hanging over the dirty Cherwell, etc.[So, I was plainly homesick!].

And now too for the Aquarium at Naples. Papa Dohrn has an article in [the current] Endeavour & there are colour pictures of squids, Beroe etc, they are very clear & faithfully coloured, surely Jane could emulate (them). It surprises me to see how badly qualified and educated for this job other people than me are. Perhaps education is what leads one to realise this.

When I get live Planaria I'll try anaesthetising it, as you suggest. It sounds very slow which would be an advantage as the gut would be cleared of food. I've made some very nice Borax carmine whole mounts – 2 species—in one the gut is grey, the other yellow, which is odd.

16 March Tuesday.

I've found the metaphase chromosomes very clearly in *Neodendrocoelum maculatum* and there are almost certainly 7, though in some cells it looks like 6 and others, 8, but this is in Heidenhein preparations, & in the crystal Violet ones there are always 7 if one can count them at all. This is what Gelei found in *Dendrocoelum*. The interesting thing is that *N. svetinaumi* seems to have 14 in its metaphase. Is it possible that the 7 in *maculatum* is the result of a reduction division which I haven't found yet in *svetinaumi*? But all the cells have 14. I'm trying to find the metaphase in *N. nausicaae*, but so far my preparations haven't been good enough. I shall also devote my one immature specimen of *N. ohridensis* to this. I'm expecting *N. nausicaae* to have a high polyploid number as it's a vast animal, about 5 cm when fully grown.

I don't know whether to believe what I've found, and am sure that with reasonable luck I might find that all of them have 7 chromosomes, as what I'm finding seems almost too good to be true.

I'm going down to Ohrid in April with Prof. Stanković & Frida for 15 days. I aim to catch lots of *Ohridospongia* and set up aquaria & if they work stay there for longer & look at the embryology. I only wish I had Dubosq and Tuzet here to read.

How are the siphonophores?

I wonder when we'll be able to meet again.

Aside. Those among Dick's acquaintance who thought I was The Worst Woman in Belgrade have now alleged that I wasn't in Naples but in Prison!!

21 March, Sunday.

I seem to have written you complaining that you hadn't written, but of course the letter arrived the next morning, having been for some unknown reason to Zagreb – Zagreb was stamped all over the back & the letter was open down the side. However, your letter and Andrew's & the negatives were intact & 7 of a possible 8 prints. Anyway, if I'd waited one day longer I could have answered your letter ages ago.

The wolves have stopped howling up & down the Ulica 27 Marta. Now we have windy sunshine which may herald better things to come. How was the expedition on the fishing boat? I envy you enormously & wish I were still in Naples. I don't see why you shouldn't make a thesis out of Siphonophore nervous systems, but if not, why not try some other coelenterate of a colonial nature such as a pennatulid – or have they been done?

Planarians prosper. I've satisfied myself that there are 14 chromosomes in *N. svetinaumi* though there seem to be only 7 in *N. maculatum* and *N. nausicaae*. Perhaps an error of identification, if I confused them with 2 other quite ordinary flatworms in the lake: *Dendrocoelum lacteum*, looking v. like *N. nausicaae*, and *Planaria montenigrina*, very like *N. maculatum*. I collected lots of these on Frida's advice so that I could identify them later if I preserved them & took them back to Belgrade. Problems arose: Prof. S. is almost blind & couldn't help identify them, and now I'm going back to Ohrid forewarned & prepared by reading his paper on the systematics of the group (in German, but I'm struggling along with aid of De Vries). I hope to obtain some identified specimens from him & try haemotoxylin on them, crystal violet wouldn't work as they are preserved in an alcoholic fixative, like Beauchamp). So we shall see. There are 7 spp altogether I think. Isn't the situation odd with all these spp & several others – unrelated --, all living around or in one (relatively) small lake. I wish I could find out more about its geology. [The situation was that each spring feeding the lake had a different species of *Neodendrocoelum*, and also probably each layer in depth of the extremely deep lake had one as well quite apart from the totally unknown species in the springs on the Albanian side. [Did I ever write and tell you how I was followed around by an Albanian soldier with a machine gun at the ready at the monastery and springs of Sveti Naum on the Albanian border?]



The 10th century monastery church of Sv Naum, Ohrid. The much later tower at the back has since been demolished.

[The situation was obviously a result of the lake's sources being the springs that flowed out of the limestone karst individually, rather than a river]

April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1954, St. Dom Vera Blagojević, Ul. 27 Marta, 48, Beograd

I was awfully pleased to hear from you [time seemed to go very slowly when I was looking at the mail each day].

I think it's most remarkable that you have found a nervous system in the bell of Hippopodius. I remember that you had found one isolated nerve cell before. I wonder how they all managed to overlook it. How did the Heidenhein affect it? By staining the nucleus or the whole cell in presumably, an overstained preparation? [details follow of my own results with staining preparations, and of plans to go to Ohrid for more specimens after Easter]

PS. I have seen quite a lot of Divna lately, do tell Mrs Zuccari if you write that I saw her play Portia & she was very good.

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1954, Ul. 27 Marta, 48, Beograd

What a pity the siphonophore nervous system isn't more promising. What you need is hundreds a day to give electric stimuli to, & so forth, if necessary killing them off. Why not come here to Split or Dubrovnik and see if there are more there?

I don't know when I'm going to Ohrid, though probably in May & June, & I want to get down to the coast here for a week or so around Easter. I wish you could get away. Bear it in mind when those siphonophores finally realise that the Bay of Naples is not a healthy location and that they are likely to be foully done to death by chloroform, electricity or noxious fixatives and stop haunting your shores.

Why not come to Ohrid sometime? I think you could get a free bed in the Hidrobiološki Zavod and we could swim all day and go out in the boat and then work late at night and so on.

April 11, Sunday, Hotel Turist, Ljubljana

The sun is pouring in through the window and the ancient town of Leibach stretches below, with the castle perched on a crag above. I arrived here this morning from Belgrade. Pat is arriving this evening and we are off to the coast tomorrow. She is suddenly able to come & it's very delightful here, the hotel is so clean and comfortable and the town so quiet and the weather is glorious. We should be at the Hotel Dubravka in Dubrovnik until the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>. Why don't you come, if you can get away, do come!



meeting Pat in Slovenia

The Simplon (Express) failed to connect with the Tauern this morning (the slip coach from Athens is always late) and I have a middle-aged Greek lady on my hands. She is rather sweet, from Salonika, and is going to England to visit her daughter who married an English officer and lives in Norfolk. She speaks no English at all. We are going out for a picnic lunch on the castle hill.

This room has running h & c, 2 beds for Pat & me, modern furniture & is spotlessly clean. It makes the Studentski Dom seem like a pigsty in comparison.

Later. I have spent a day hanging about waiting for Pat to arrive. The Greek lady & I went up the hill to the castle for our picnic. Exhausted her, I'm afraid, but it's nice up there with cafes on the ramparts and a superb view of the Julian Alps.

Tomorrow we will go down to Rijeka and take the night boat to Dubrovnik, with berths, arriving late Tuesday afternoon. I think we'll stay at least till next weekend, making day trips. Gosh, it's all very exciting. I wish you were here, it is so sad to be doing nice things without you.

I shall try to visit the aquarium at Dubrovnik to see if they ever have siphonophores.

With all love from Me.

April 14th, Wednesday, Hotel Dubravka, Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia.

Dubrovnik is all they ever say about it. Imagine a small Venice with marble streets instead of canals and you have a very good idea of it. We arrived last night after a 25 hour journey by boat from Fiume. This sitting up and very tiring it was too, after the whole of the previous day in the train from Ljubljana to Rijeka (Fiume). The Dalmatian coast is extraordinarily bare, not like Italy at all, great bare white rocks rise sheer out of a blue sea, and the islands are long and low and sparsely wooded with little terraced vineyards. [The trees were all cut during the days of Venetian rule in Dalmatia, and used in boat-building, they say]. We called in at Split for 2 hours at dawn yesterday & looked at Diocletian's palace, which is just as he left it except for being filled in with streets and houses and having the cathedral made from the old temple of Venus or someone. [2011: it's a conversion of Diocletian's own mausoleum]. Split is charming but



Dubrovnik is better. There are palm trees and flowers everywhere. Our room looks out over the market place where they are selling flowers and vegetables and decorated Easter eggs, which are dark red with white patterns.

This hotel is extremely nice and the only one in the old town. We have a private shower & a washbasin and pay only about 550 lire ie 285 dinars a night, though we are getting most of our meals here too. Pat is much better from her jaundice, though she still can't eat much fat or drink much wine. She is much thinner. It is so nice here, I do wish we had more than a week here, though even that can seem quite a long time.

The boat trip though we got very tired was fine, we got first class tickets for the cost of tourist class, so there was a fine big dining room, very comfortable, and we sat out on deck and looked at scenery. Only trouble: the funnel smoked. Otherwise, the boat was spotlessly clean & comfortable. We had a long talk with one of the officers, who had had an English wife. He had tried to stay in England with her in 1939 but hadn't been allowed to (the Woman married to Alien Act hadn't then allowed his wife her British nationality), so they came out here together & his wife learned Serbo-Croat and so on. Then the Germans came & imprisoned them, & just before the end of the war his wife died. Now he feels he has nothing to live for and is very melancholy. It was a very touching story and it was all I could do not to burst into tears.

From our window as well as the market we can see a small trio of bells in an open bell tower with the ropes going down outside. I think they are attached to the cathedral.

I can't get over my surprise at the un-Yugoslav atmosphere of this place. It well might be a cleaner, less slummy Italy. Its architecture I suppose and the smell. Below me in the market they are selling great bunches of stocks and the smell is wafting up to the windows.

Later. This morning we went out on the cliffs and enjoyed the sunshine, though bathing is what we are really looking forward to. Dubrovnik smells lovely, of wisteria and irises and night-scented stocks, which are growing everywhere. It's very, very clean, no slummy smells which is odd. You'd love it!

Mummy may be coming to Yugoslavia in May when I will be in Ohrid, & she will come down there for a quiet holiday while I work & collect fishes and worms and sponges.

I'm off to look for the aquarium now, [it's the actual excuse for being here!]



With Pat near Dubrovnik

Saturday, 24 April, 32 Bled Grad, Bled, Slovenia.

The snatched holiday is almost at an end, we leave on Monday, I for Belgrade and Pat for Malvern. Tomorrow we are going for an expedition to Lake Bohinj, even further into the heart of the Alps than this, & maybe even to see the source of the Sava which



they say springs from a fine waterfall. The journey up here we did in one 27-hr stretch the night on deck chairs on the boat, not as bad as we feared, and we got a fast train from Rijeka to Ljubljana, followed by a slow, stopping train to Bled, 65 km took just under 5 hours, it felt just like being in a cattle truck! But Lake Bled is nice, & pretty like any other small alpine lake. It has an island in the centre, with a church on the summit, and 99 wide, crumbling, medieval stone steps down to the water.

We left Dubrovnik on Wednesday & sailed for an island opposite Split called Hvar. Very quiet and calm with lovely Renaissance architecture ornamented with the Lion of Venice. In addition there's a Franciscan monastery with the strangest treasures ranging from a Titian and a Raphael to a stuffed jackal from the Island of Korcula nearby and a moth-eaten seagull all together in one room under the care of an aged & benign monk. [On a later visit, 1977, Tina and I were shown the spreading yellow-flowered rose tree in the centre of the main courtyard of this monastery, said to have been brought from China by Marco Polo, a native of Hvar].

Hvar itself is so quiet and pleasant in the heart of a valley on the seashore with vineyards & terracing around and fig trees. No wonder the men in the Old Testament sat each under his fig tree – I would myself if I had one, they are the most attractive shape and colour, especially colour. The sea at Hvar was that odd, unbelievable blue green with chalky undertones that you sometimes see on cheap postcards. Rather a shock to see that such colours can be real in nature.

I hate the idea of getting back to Belgrade but duty calls & so does Ohrid and its Jezero, the lake and its springs and flatworms.

28 April, Wednesday, Zoolozki Zavod, Studentski trg 3, Beograd.

I got back yesterday after seeing Pat off from Bled for England, and almost missing my own night train. I spent yesterday sleeping it off & today washing clothes, hair etc.

[I describe the Zoology department kittens fighting on my lap] They're ugly brutes already at 2 months or so & I dread to think what sort of cats they'll make. Why they have to live in my room, using the floor as a public convenience, & my lap as a playpen and boxing ring, I haven't discovered. But they're quite sweet really and would delight all your cat-loving instincts, though I doubt whether you could call them superior cats. Both are tabby & white, one mainly tabby, the other mainly white. Their eyes are changing from blue to yellow-grey.

As I look from my window the horizon is lost in a haze of yellow-grey mist and rain. It's been raining for days here and the temperature is wintry. They say it snowed at Easter & all the diplomats who set bravely off in their cars for Easter had to return, daunted by the foul weather. Ohrid was foul too, they said. Very cold and the food and hotels were beastly. [Even so, I was planning to go down there, possibly from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>. But I'm not sure that I did go then, though I did later, in July]. I shall have to

stay in Ohrid sometime (I write) but could do so on the way back [from Greece, where I thought G & I might squeeze in a visit!!] and you could probably stay in the Biological Institute too. The worms have disappeared from Ohrid itself, or so it seems. none are to be found in their usual haunts in the lake itself, only in the springs, according to Prof. Stanković,. This may or may not be permanent, but if it is it puts paid to my plans. [The fact that Prof. Stanković had this up to date information implies that they had indeed gone down to Ohrid while I was holidaying with Pat. I am shocked that I did not put that first and either taken Pat to Ohrid with me, or postponed her trip].

[This is followed by stuff about dates for applying for support for next year's doctoral work: DSIR, college scholarship, or whatever. Most deadlines in danger of being already passed. Necessity of a trip to England in May to sort all this out or I'll land up as a biology teacher in a girl's public school, not my idea of heaven. I did land up with a college scholarship, the Shaw Lefevre scholarship for Graduate Studies from Somerville College, Oxford, where I had completed my BA in 1953. So, I could look forward to continuing my research for the next year, now as a graduate student at Oxford]

Thursday 6 May, Zoološki Zavod, St. Trg 3, Beograd.

[I had heard from Mrs Buchatsch that she "despaired of my ever getting a grant" & suggested that I try to get a job.] I feel impelled to go to England for 2-3 weeks and try to get something for next year. [I will approach Prof. Hardy, first, then see if I can get a Somerville scholarship, then investigate anything else that crops up, & finally apply for a teaching job, there are 6 posts for Biology mistresses in the Times today] I should arrive back here around the 28<sup>th</sup>. ... I may bring Mummy with me as she wants to come and so rarely gets a holiday. .... I should be in Ohrid by June 1<sup>st</sup>.

June 1<sup>st</sup>, Tuesday, 250 West Malvern Rd, Malvern, Worcs.

I leave tomorrow + baggage + Mummy first for Salzburg (Thursday to Sunday), then Belgrade Monday-Wednesday and finally to Ohrid.

June 4<sup>th</sup>, Long letter from Salzburg, describing touristic sights. Ends by declaring will go to Ohrid on June 9<sup>th</sup> arriving 10<sup>th</sup>. Mentions a Committee for Foreign Cultural Cousins that I was scheduled to meet, and that I had talked to Dr Fischberg in Oxford about.

12<sup>th</sup> June 1954, Hotel Miramar, Rab, Dalmatia

Again, I'm at the coast. Mummy had come to visit, but she was scared to stay in Belgrade's Hotel Moskva (not surprising) and I decided, rather reluctantly from the point of view of my work, to take her to the Adriatic, so she could have a real holiday.

Dubrovnik, June 18, 1954

Again, to George: "The boat has just left Dubrovnik, I'm writing at 8.20 am. The weather is of course unbelievably beautiful and sunny, not too hot yet, and the awnings

and deckchairs are out. The boat isn't too crowded, plenty of room to move around, and Mummy is writing letters too. You should be here! This coast is as beautiful as the Italian one, in a stranger, more bleached way. We are on our way to Rab, where we are going to spend one day and pick up our letters.

We must do this trip together sometime and you can go to Split and look for siphonophores. They have an aquarium at Dubrovnik where there's a very characterful octopus .... And among other things a huge and miserable turtle, *Thalassochelys*.

I've also revisited Postojna & seen fascinating *Proteus anguillis*. They keep some in a pond for the tourists. Amazing caves! Miles of them & so cold and damp.

Except for the horrid idea of being alone in Ohrid I'm really looking forward to some work now. If they let me do any there, and if they let me go down to Ohrid quickly. All this waiting around burns up any enthusiasm I may muster from time to time. Only 6 weeks remain, of which 1 or 2 will be in Belgrade. I'm planning to go home on August 1.



Vera Aske in Diocletian's Palace, Split

20<sup>th</sup> June, SS *Partizanka*, between Rab and Fiume (Rijeka).

This is a lovely boat, bristling with cabins and dining rooms and it goes round to Venice. We had a nice day in Rab, bathed for the last time and then ate, slept and rose at 4 am to catch this boat. [The boat stopped at Split and we went ashore and visited Diocletian's palace.] We shall spend the night at Ljubljana, then on Monday M goes back to England and I down to Belgrade, arriving Tuesday morning. We are almost at Rijeka, which is clearly visible...



On the boat to Rab

June 23<sup>rd</sup>, Zoolooski Zavod, Studentski trg 3, Beograd

How lovely to come back to Belgrade to find a quite unexpected & perfect birthday present. I love the necklace. It is Venetian glass isn't it. Anyway, it's a delicious row of baubles and I can think of nothing I would like better. It's certainly the nicest necklace I have & I especially love the gold sparkles in it. I'm wearing it now with my old mauvy-green stripey dress.

I saw Mummy off on Monday morning from Ljubljana & she should be home by now. It was wonderful to see the change in her & in her character too. She must have needed a holiday desperately. She seems so much happier.

I earned 12 pounds for that radio work I did, a rate of 12 shillings an hour. It's my first "earned money"- fancy not earning anything until one is 23. Shocking, & I may have to use it for my fare home!

I don't know when I shall go to Ohrid but I should think sometime next week. If so I should stay until the end of July

July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1954, Hidrobiološki Zavod, Ohrid, Makedonia.

[So, I got there in the end, several months late].



Ohrid across the flats from the lab

My mind is full of superlatives because the sun is shining and the maize and the bogs are green in front of the blue lake and there are yellow strips of hay and blunt-topped poplar trees and donkeys with haystacks on their backs and I have a great bowl of apricots in front of me which is steadily diminishing. Have you ever admired the colour of the inside of an apricot, if you break it open and don't bite it? Next time you eat one, look and see.

Letter affirms that I will be home on Aug.

2<sup>nd</sup>.my scholarship ends on July 31<sup>st</sup>.

### *Retrospect*

Looking back after almost sixty years, these letters are revealing. First, about my attitude to work, my preparation for this research scholarship, so that I really would learn how to do research and get results. My summer should have been spent immersing myself in the languages I would need to function in a strange land. I should certainly have made a serious effort to acquire some Serbo-Croat, beyond my basic buying of a small grammar book and dictionary. Then, I could certainly have tried to find out what Eastern Europe was really like, after years at war and recently under the Russians: especially the shortages, both of food and of conveniences. I would then have better appreciated the opportunity of sharing the best they had to offer: the chance to obtain an education under Yugoslavia's leading scientist, the president of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences, Dr Siniša Stanković, my supervisor. He was unfailingly kind and helpful to me, despite the language barrier. I should have prepared myself to work hard & to research what equipment and materials like stains for preparations I should take with me. I had no idea of the shortages of equipment, chemicals, & library materials that the University of Belgrade had suffered as the Germans retreated. I should also have located Stanković's publications, though some of the most relevant ones do date from later on: the 1955 one on speciation in Lake Ohrid (my topic!) and the 1969 paper, on a new endemic group of Turbellarians from the lake.

Part of the problem, I think, was that I had not found myself a supervisor for graduate studies at Oxford, nor had I applied there as a grad student. It had not occurred to me that someone might have taken me on *in absentia* or at the very least have given me some good advice. Of course, I might then have had to pay fees at Oxford, and I didn't have any money to speak of. But, such a connection, formal or informal, would have enabled me to prepare better for my studies in Belgrade.

I think, too, that the very relaxed attitude at Oxford about graduate studies in those days did not help: sink or swim summed it up, we were truly expected to find everything out for ourselves. Looking back now, I cannot remember even talking to my tutor, Wilma Buchatsch of St Anne's, or to my moral tutor at Somerville, Dorothy Hodgkin, about the Belgrade plans.

On the positive side, I had amazing opportunities to discover the Balkans, its people, its topography, the cities, the countryside and the coast and above all, Macedonia, with Ohrid and its lake. I developed an interest in Yugoslav history, once as a medieval great power, Raška, and then under Turkish rule for many centuries. My chance to



investigate the churches of Ohrid inspired me to return to Yugoslavia with the family many years later, and eventually to travel to see the other great medieval sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church, their architecture, frescoes and icons. I studied Serbo-Croatian at the University of Victoria with Dr Juričić, enrolled as a student of medieval art history with John Osborne, and eventually obtained my PhD in art history in 1991, almost 40 years after my interest had first been aroused by the medieval art and architecture of Yugoslavia on my very first visit, as a new graduate studying biological science.

*The End*

November 2012

## Appendix

Gillians article in the Edmonton Journal, December 14, 1960

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1960 -

### The Third Column

#### Christmas In Serbia

By Gillian Mackie

It was two days before Christmas. The harsh wind which blows so vigorously on and off all the winter at Belgrade dropped suddenly. The first large snowflakes fell and with them came a rise in the temperature. Nothing was too small to hold its load of snow. The little twigs of the wayside trees, the intricate wrought-iron gates of a Turkish garden, the dessicated sticks—last reminders of summer's flowers—all bore a load of thick white snow. The upright branches of the poplars outside the window held snow masses shaped like wishbones. Behind them the lines of the steep red roofs were softened.

\* \* \*

It was not my first Christmas away from home but it was the strangest. I was the only foreigner in a hostel for students of Belgrade University and I was known by name to only a few. The hostel itself had been built before the war and was now housing many more than twice the intended number of students. Most of the Yugoslav students only knew me as *Engleskinja*—the English girl. On the lists among innumerable Veras and Olgas with surnames ending in *vic* I alone was not dignified by a name. Only my friends and those who had shared dormitories with me knew even my Christian name. So it was that I was absorbed and yet not absorbed,

a student and yet a foreigner, not a Communist nor a Roman Catholic nor yet Orthodox; and so it was that I could stand outside my own customs and celebrate Christmas three times: once for myself on December 25th with my English, Slovene and Croatian friends, once on New Year's Day, the official holiday for the people, and a third time on January 7th, the Orthodox, Old Calendar Christmas.

When the snow had settled more thickly the wheels on the carts were replaced by ski-runners, silent and smooth. The trams still ran, bells tinkling above their din. People hurried to work at 7 or 8 o'clock in the morning. Some of the few Roman Catholics took an unofficial holiday and perhaps their children even stayed away from school, though I heard this was punishable by a year's remove. Foreigners went to embassy services to sing carols nostalgically accompanied by a piano. I, a foreigner working in a government institution, said "Engleski bozic" firmly, and took two days' holiday. But the shops remained open, the drabness of a few of them lightened by Christmas decorations. There were colored birds with glass tails, round glass balls of every color from utility grey to sparkling silver and crimson and of every size from thumb-nail to clenched fist, and twisted red candles in cardboard holders, New Year cards, and of course Christmas trees for the New Year.

This is the new, the Communist holiday with all the outer symbols of Christmas intact but stripped of inner meaning. Children put out their shoes for St. Nicholas and families decorate their houses for New Year's Day in spite of the fact that the Orthodox Christmas falls in the same week and that St. Nicholas, the filler of shoes and stockings, has his own day barely a fortnight before.

Even so, I found that tradition could not be so lightly swept away. The Orthodox Christmas retains its importance in the eyes of many who, though forced by the regime to work on Christmas Day, prepare their trees, invite their friends and visit the incense-laden churches where the Christ child can be found in the Byzantine mask of a tired but wise old man.

I did not manage to get a complete holiday for the Serbian festival. But, late in the evening, I walked through the snow-piled streets to visit a Christmas party in the old style. Earlier in the day my hosts had spread straw on the floor and burned honeysmeared logs on the fire. When I arrived they were having a quiet family gathering, eating sweet jam and cakes and drinking wine and slivovic, while Father Christmas, St. Nicholas, or whatever you like to call him, wandered back to Greenland with his reindeer after the most protracted Christmas in Europe.