

What We Leave We Carry

Mira Eredvicki

Mira Eredvicki: My name is Mira Eredvicki. I'm a film director and scriptwriter and director of the company, Arcimboldo Productions Ltd. I live in UK almost 30 years, and when I feel at home, probably I feel at home in London. My story is really outsider story. It happened that I am born in Yugoslavia. I will spend childhood in Slovenia, and when my parents split up, I will spend with my grandmother in Serbia. And then I will go to Belgrade to study, and from Belgrade, I will go to Prague to study Film Academy. To come to London, I never really planned, and it's happened by accident.

[Music]

We live in Prague, and in that time, I was really with my partner, David Charap. He is the film editor. He came to Prague before the Velvet Revolution to make a program

about Kafka. My husband said, 'We need to go to do a wedding for my best friend. We are going to be best man and best woman on that wedding.' So we went to London. It was the summertime. We have a beautiful week of organising wedding, having party with all David's friends. We did a wedding, they went to honeymoon, and we went back to Czech Republic.

[Music]

Then it was the two o'clock in the morning telephone call. Father of Mark, his best friend, said, 'Look, they died in a plane crash in Peru on the way back from the honeymoon.' So David and I flew back to London. Ten days after the wedding, we need to organise funeral, but there is no body. So there needs to be some kind of memorial, and we decide to make a film. And we record the wedding, record the house with all these presents. It was really extreme sadness in our life. For us, it was a life-changing experience. For that moment, all the close friends around decided we are going to live life extra for them. It was ten people who help us that week become our friends. This tragedy connect us, and David and I decided we are going to marry as soon as possible. Year after, we had the wedding. When you're married, you're suddenly married not just to your partner, you're learning to have this new family.

[Music]

Year after wedding, I become pregnant. And it was clear that we are two immigrants who live in Prague. And David says, 'So let's go to London, let's have a baby there, spend six months really in peace, and then we come back so that we be one family in one place.' And that moment, actually, make me a Londoner. My first daughter was born in London. We came, I was eight months pregnant, and I couldn't fly anymore, so we go up to Germany by train and eight suitcases we had. We came to London, and I give a birth. And when my daughter was months old, we get American rights, and we really need to go to promote the film. So I go and live in America for three months, travelling in art cinema in this time, and come back. And David said, 'Let's try to make New York our base.' So we was in New York, and it's turned out that instead of for three months, it's nine months. And when she start walking, we said, 'Look, we need to settle. We can't really live like that anymore.' So then we came to London. And the question was, where are we going to live? And I had an Italian friend. She was a photographer. She had a one-bedroom flat in Little Venice. And she said, 'Look, before you find some flats, you can stay in my flat.' And we start living in Little Venice. Nobody knows me. I have complete privacy; first time in my life. They have communal garden what fascinate me. With the gardener who really do all these plants, they look gorgeous, but there's nobody there. Just really—they

will come for weekends, everybody's working. And when I'm there, I am from East Europe, with my accent, they will think that I'm au pair.

[Music]

I am really curious. I really read a lot, I really engage with the local people, and because I'm a filmmaker, this is part of my job. Of course, in a year's time, I met a lot of lovely people and we become friends and all this. Of course, I speak really bad English because I speak six languages, but the only language I never learn is English. I always want to learn, but it's happened in my life that in the school, the first language was Russian in the school where I was, then Slovenian, Italian, then Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenian. And then, my love of my life is English. I never really have time to go and study that language. It's the only language I never study. When I was young, I really liked music and I liked books. I read a lot. So I really grow up with this kind of knowledge, but never really being here. I like multi-culture and the celebration of any point for you, if you like, in London.

What really, really annoyed me, and what was the moment in my life when I was feeling—only time I think, *I am going to go out from this country*—our daughter was five years old. Tony Blair was in that time, and it was before the Iraq war. And we went to the protest against the war. And first time I feel, *wait a minute. So he's*

ignoring one million and a half people who came to say that it's really wrong to do war in Iraq. And ignoring a million and a half people in this democratic society, this is really not good. I'm really pacifist, and I'm really social justice human being. That's how I'm raised, and I really believe in democracy and freedom of speech. I was really, really deeply depressed.

[Music]

The same level what shocked me, maybe even worse, it was that night when we wake up in six o'clock in the morning and we saw that people vote to go out from the European Union, that you go out from the free market. And [laughs] I came from country that is really applying to get into the European Union for 30 years, and from my point of view, you are shooting yourself in the leg. And why are you doing that? I really didn't get it.

[Music]

We need a bigger space, so we sell our little one-bedroom flat, and we bought two-bedroom flat, so our mortgage become bigger. So then we have another kid, so we need another room. So we constantly didn't go anywhere else, just we stayed Westminster. Then we moved from Westminster to Camden. So suddenly, we

learned that the Camden Council [laughs], it's a country on their own. And it was so annoying that we decided, after five years being there, that we are going to move from Camden to other borough. And David's mum passed away, and David's dad was on his own. And I came with the idea that really silly that he is in his home lonely. Let's find a big house that he have his own apartment and he stay with us. My husband absolutely freak out. He said, 'Look, I left my family when I was 16, and I'm not planning to live with my father.' And I said, 'Look, you know what? You married me. I'm really East European woman, and I really think that there's really many good things about this, that it means that your father will have a decent life after your mother's passed away, and also means that your kids will have a connection with your father, and also means that you will have a different responsibility. And it's a worse thing than be ill when you're old that you'll be lonely.' He lived now with us 10 years.

So the Tufnell Park, we find this location because we want to be near the Hampstead Heath because we fall in love with the wood and the community what you have and the concept of living in a big city with the green and you go to the lake and swim. And the Tufnell Park become actually first area when we feel really that is really home because around us are really mix, less rich people like the [inaudible] Little Venice when you have huge contrast. Here, you have a really, really—this suits us much more. We feel really at home. And two o'clock in the morning, I don't think

about this that there is some drug addict there. But in Tufnell Park, it's somehow you feel safe, you feel local. We really campaign to put a new tree on the street and do really a lot of volunteering work to other people. And when it was COVID, we really helped a lot between each other. We drive food, we bring the stuff to all the people who can't go out. But not just us, it's our kids and grandpa, everybody will do something and contribute and become really like a community. And then people will come and have a meal with you and a little party. And it's really—Tufnell Park, it's our location.

[Music]

I miss my family in Serbia more than Serbia because when I left, that was Yugoslavia. And what I really miss is Yugoslavia. I really feel I am Yugoslav-born, and that's how I'm going to feel until I die. And now I have two countries: I have Serbia and Slovenia. I feel really at home in any of them. When I go to Prague, I feel at home as well. I was the generation who did revolution in Prague, and I can see the one society changing from communism to capitalism and having free market and free media. It was beautiful.

[Music]

England really is independent country. It doesn't really have any story what I have experienced. Have a really long, long Magna Carta democracy and live independent life. So I like that here, that you have this multi-ethnic city and you can find it in any corner. If you have time and you have curiosity, you can really go and dig and learn really all around this world in this one city. And for me, I am Londoner.

[Music]

But I feel at home in London, I feel at home in this little town—a little house in the village where my dad left, and I also feel at home when I go to Trieste or I can go Portorož in Slovenia.

[Music]

I have a Serbian passport, and I can't have Slovenian because you can have one or other. And the reason I have Serbian because my dad left this house, and I really spent a beautiful part of my life there. And because he's not on this planet, I really have roots—my belong in this garden, and I can't give up that. And I have English passport. And that's it, really.

[Music]

I have many objects that I carry with me. And when I go with one location to other, I'm really collecting things, collecting stories, collecting photo archive, and all my life I do. But if I need to choose one thing, I will choose my grandmother present. She died when I was 15, and she raised me. My parents split up, and I was growing up with my grandmother. And she gave me a little wooden stamp what you can put when you make a Slavski kolač. A Slavski kolač is a bread what you do once a year. You invite your friends and family, and you have a big meal, and you celebrate. I have St. John's Day, and it's my family tradition. And she said to me, 'I love you to travel. I love you to study, to do whatever I didn't. My family didn't really allow me to go to study.' So my grandmother didn't know to write. And she was such a beautiful, clever woman. She said, 'This is I bring when I was 18, when they really married me against my will. And I give it now to you. And you go and travel with this any place when you choose, and be yourself.' So that piece of wood, I carry with me all my life. And it's go with me to Prague and now in London and travel all these houses. I'm now in Tufnell Park, and I will do every year since she died, I will do little celebration. When I was a student, I didn't have money to make a really big meal, but I will go and buy some drink and some tapas, and we will celebrate. But needs to be candle and this bread what will make by my hand, and I will put in the middle that stamp. And for me, that's really, really important. And for me, somehow my grandmum lived through this.

[Music]

So I bring to this country my contribution with my profession, but I live a European life. I really don't live English life because I'm not English. I married my English husband. I really celebrate English culture. I love being a part of this, but I'm aware that I'm not. And I know who I am, and I know that my happiness is coming inside me. And it's a big mix of many things. But if I need to be one thing, and I need to choose, I am definitely a white privileged European.

A recording of this interview can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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