

# “I am a Liberation Child”

## Growing up in Austria as a child with a foreign military father

by Haris Huremagić

“I was always proud to have a Russian father“- Born in 1946 in the Austrian city of St.Pölten, Eleonore Dupuis had a normal childhood until 1955. In that year the last occupying forces left Austria and her mother revealed to her that her father was a Russian soldier.

“My mother told me that his name was Michail and that he was from the city of Tver. She could not exactly remember his surname, but something like Groman or Grossman.”

### “My silent hero”

Contrary to many other occupation children, Eleonore Dupuis was never the victim of any discrimination or bullying and never felt different in any way. That is why she refuses to be called “occupation-child” and prefers the term “liberation-child”.

“I think the main reason for that was my mother. She was always friendly towards our neighbours and treated them with the utmost respect. In return they supported us and did not let us feel the stigma of me being an occupation-child.”

Her mother Stefanie Novy was a single parent of two children. When her first child, Erni, was born before the war, her husband died in a traffic accident. As a single parent after the end of the war and without proper access to food, she was glad about any little help she received. Once a Soviet soldier came to her and brought some bread. After some time they fell in love and Stefanie became pregnant. Shortly afterwards, he had to leave for a medical treatment, because his leg was wounded and eventually never came back. Despite all these circumstances Eleonore’s mother was looking forward to having the second child.

“My sister recently told me a little story: once she and my pregnant mother had a walk



Eleonore Dupuis, August 2015. Source: Haris Huremagić

in winter on an icy street. My mother slipped and fell and when she got up again her first reaction was: `I hope nothing happened to the baby.` She would not have said this if she did not love me.”

### The search begins...

40 years after the moment she was told who her father is, Eleonore began to search him.

As she got married in Australia, lived in Argentina and France with her three children, she had a fulfilled and busy life. In 1996, one year after her mother died, she coincidentally listened to a BBC radio broadcast called “Children of Liberation” on the topic of occupation children. After so many years this was the first time she was confronted with her own story.

As a result she took the decision to finally search for her father. She immediately began to learn Russian and to contact a variety of institutions, such as the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Research into the Consequences of War, which became an important partner in finding her roots.

In 2002/2003 Eleonore came in contact with the Russian broadcast “Ždi Menja” (transl. “Wait for me”), which aim it is to search publicly for missing people in almost every country of the former Soviet Union. This broadcast soon became a very important platform for Austrian occupation children in order to find their father’s family in the former Soviet Union.

Concerning the case of Eleonore, unfortunately no serious traces were found in the course of the broadcast, but some years ago a Russian woman, Valentina, contacted her. She stated that she had seen the photo of Eleonore’s mother, which was made public by the broadcast “Ždi Menja” in 2003, in her father’s stuff ten years ago and hence she believed that Eleonore might be her half-sister. Although Eleonore had been rather skeptical about this trace, she nevertheless decided to visit Valentina in Russia to perform a DNA-test.

“When I arrived in Valentina’s home town and got off the train a crowd of people including Russian TV reporters were waiting to welcome me (click [here](#) to see the TV-coverage from 9:18 min.). It was a complete surprise. I spend a marvelous week with Valentina and her family – a unique experience.”

Eventually the DNA-test turned out to be negative but both still feel very connected to each other and communicate on a regularly basis.



Eleonore’s mother Stefanie Novy, while she was pregnant with her. Courtesy of Eleonore Dupuis

## Building bridges

Eleonore Dupuis still has not ascertained who her father is. However, over the years she has broadened her horizon tremendously through the searching process and hence regards it as a success. Almost every year she travels to Russia in order to visit beloved friends and to discover new aspects of the Russian culture, which she admires so greatly.

“Since I have been travelling to Russia I see myself as bridge-builder between Austria and Russia. I always tell my Austrian friends and families about how warmly I was welcomed and how unbelievable polite and helpful the Russians are.”

In 2015 Eleonore published her book [“Liberation Child”](#) about her ongoing search. In the last years more and more occupation children go public with their stories. Since they have been meeting each other on a regularly basis, they experience a sort of a self-empowerment process and develop a sense of belonging. In addition, Eleonore is still full of hope, as many “occupation-grandchildren” are more and more interested in ascertaining who their grandfather is.

“It is very delighting to know that once we – the occupation children – are gone that there are still some left who will continue to search. I am convinced that it is immensely important to know his own roots.”