

2018 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 2nd Prize]

Sweet Duels

(Original)

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Almost all that strangers know about the Balkans are wars. This European peninsula – a place of death - is where I live. All countries have turbulent past here. Their people show hatred, anger and sorrow and it makes the world think that here is still no chance for a real peace. The truth is that even if twenty-three years of the last war have past, there is still a hard situation in my country.

A lot of people lost members of their family or a part of the body. Unfortunately, my father lost both. During the last months of the 3-years' long war, in a couple of days, he lost his brother and his right leg. He was trying to pick up a pear for his little hungry daughter, but he step on an anti-personnel mine. Before the war, he was a football player with a great potential. One Italian football club wanted him to play for them at that time. He's still known as one of the most talented football players ever in this region. So, instead of playing football in Italy, he remained in a wheelchair, as disabled.

There are thousands of people on the streets who have a similar situation. That's why you can see a lot of blind, deaf, disabled and mentally unstable people outside. Generally, they're all with the same diagnosis – War disease.

When I was thinking what I should do to change something in my community, I didn't have a right plan. So, I studied hard and got excellent marks in Elementary and High School. I enrolled Medicine successfully, realizing that it's the best way to help people in my country. Now, I'm in 5th year of my Medicine studies at the university. It's a trend for doctors here to go to other richer European countries to work for better salaries. I decided to stay, because the only change I want to make is to teach myself to help these people. Leaving them would be surrender – not a change for me.

I also knew that health isn't just a physical condition, so I used my talent for writing and my popularity in the community to teach my people how to look forward with all their damages, disadvantages and weaknesses which are permanent and indelible. As a well-known young artist here, I decided to do something new in my community, so I could

improve the bad relation between the Balkan nations. It was hard, because they're from different cultures, have different points of view towards life and the most important thing – different side of the war. For some of them, one participant of the war was a hero, for others - a killer. But I realized, they all have the same thing – a big heart. Actually, I knew that only artists could make the change I wanted to see in this region.

It was a big decision, but I founded the first online poetry contest on the Balkans, called "Sweet Duels". Instead of comments of hatred on social networks, I started a competition, which prolongs words of peace in verses. Six years later, we have grown to a group with over one thousand Balkan poets. It becomes very popular here and every year, I proudly organize it, because there are more and more poets, who want to join us. We already have one common collection of poems and we sell the book here.

I wanted to share this to the world, as an example to others, because the art always wins. Now, it looks like culture differences between us are an advantage.

In a future, I would like to read world newspapers writing about "Sweet Duels" as a project which helps the Balkan people to show their talents, exchange their knowledge and experience with each other. If we cannot change our past, we really can change our future! As a poet, I want to make my people stop suffering of War disease. As a future doctor of medicine, I know that real emotion, knowledge and empathy can heal every other disease. I am sure that my way can make a change in the Balkans – from a place of death to a place of Sweet Duels!