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### **Finding Riches in the Rubble!**

It was my 8th birthday, only no one seemed to care. It wasn't the first time that my birthday came and went without acknowledgement. I actually didn't even know when my birthday was or what it meant to celebrate one's birthday.

When I think back, it was perfectly normal for the time and the place. It was 1970, in Montenegro (a state of former communist Yugoslavia), we lived in a small village with no electricity or running water. Our house was 2 rooms, about 300 SF with dirt floors and no heat. It seemed so big to me at the time even though there were 5 of us living in it. I remember when my father built it (I was 5), before that we lived in a barn. Food was scarce, stores were far, transportation non-existent. It didn't matter though, there was no money anyway. So under those circumstances, birthdays were just as ordinary as any other days.



Well, on my 8th birthday things would be different. We were immigrating to "America". As we were climbing up the boarding stairs I looked at the plane in amazement and read the letters B-O-E-I-N-G. I recognized each letter but had no idea what the word meant. I didn't know how to speak a word of English. It didn't matter because those letters stayed imprinted in my mind. Later in life, I learned what those letters spelled; only they had a different meaning for me. The word spelled BOEING, but the meaning was "America, the land of opportunity". It gave me a sense of purpose, we weren't just moving, we were looking for opportunity.

Growing up in "America" (actually the Bronx:-), was very difficult. My parents, uneducated and unskilled, struggled to provide for us. For me and my 2 brothers, I can't say it was too difficult, but there were negative influences all around us. We continued to grow up poor, struggled with the rough environment of the Bronx, yet managed to stay focused enough with our education to broaden our options.

We've all since grown, worked hard for the opportunities and are all living in our own suburban homes, with our own families. As each day passes, and my own children are growing (ages 11, 15 & 16), I continually remind them with each of their passing birthdays, how great this country is and how we struggled to get where we are. Many times they say, "yes, we know" and they act like they don't really care. But I know that at some point in their lives it will all make sense.

Last summer we took our first family trip back to Montenegro. My children needed to see where I was born so that my stories would have relevance. It was a long time, things changed, even in Montenegro. Our house had fallen in a major earthquake (luckily we were in NY), neighboring houses now had electricity, running water and most people even have cars.



Montenegro itself was now separated from Yugoslavia (as communism fell) and has become the newest country in the world under a new democracy. As a result this undeveloped land seems to be a diamond in the rough and although our house now is just a "pile of rubble", our land seems to have great value.

Even though things changed in Montenegro, I knew that I had to take my children there because growing up in the suburbs of NY, I could no longer impress them with Disney World, I had to find another way. When I came to America, I was impressed with things I had never seen, they needed to be impressed with things they had never seen. This was the trip, they saw the fallen

house, the "rubble" that will forever be imprinted in their minds.

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