

A Tale of Two Ševalas

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This story was inspired by the biography of Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović, the first woman Muslim doctor in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as written in the book #WomenOfBiH (2019), published by Amila Hrustić Batovanja, Hatidža Gušić and Masha Durkalić.

“**T**his is my street!” cried little Ševala. She squeezed her mother’s hand, pointing to the street sign. ‘Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović’, read the sign.

“Your namesake,” said her mother. “A street for you and for another Ševala.”

“Is the other Ševala like me?” asked the girl.

“I hope you’ll be like her,” said her mother. “Do you want to hear her story?”

Little Ševala and her mother sat on a nearby bench, under the shadow of the sign that bore the little girl’s name.



“There was a time when girls were not as lucky as boys.” Little Ševala’s mother began telling the story of her daughter’s namesake. “Many girls couldn’t go to school, and many of them didn’t know how to read or write. Ševala wanted to go to school more than anything, and she was one persistent little girl. ‘I will not’, ‘I cannot’ and ‘I don’t know’ were not in her vocabulary.”

“Like me!” said little Ševala.

“Like you,” smiled her mother. “And like you, she wanted to be a doctor. Lucky for Ševala, her parents supported her. She went to an all-girls school. She finished high school. At the time, girls were not allowed to study more to become doctors. Remember, ‘I will not’ was not in Ševala’s vocabulary. She found a way to continue studying. She became the first girl to go to school with boys.”

“Did the boys like her?” asked little Ševala.

“People weren’t happy about a girl studying with boys. Some threw rocks at her, others were mean to her mother. Like I said, she was one persistent little girl. After high school, Ševala studied even more for her childhood dream to come true. Finally, she finished university and became the first woman doctor.”

“What kind of doctor was she?”

“People weren’t happy about a woman becoming a doctor. She couldn’t find a job as a doctor at first. Still, some people were impressed. Many read the incredible story of the first woman doctor in newspapers. Remember, ‘I cannot’ was not in Ševala’s vocabulary. She began helping people, especially women and children.”

“Did she find a job being a doctor?”

“She became a very successful doctor. She treated children, she helped women in villages, she helped men wounded in battles. Ševala told

everyone who'd listen that the best thing for a woman to be happy was for her to study, study and study.”

“Didn't she have any fun?” little Ševala asked.

“She had lots of fun. Like you, Ševala loved getting together with her girlfriends. She loved the theatre. She loved travelling. And like you, she loved going to the beach.”

“Maybe I'll be a doctor!” said little Ševala. “Or a traveller. Or both.”

“Or both,” said her mother. “Remember...”

Little Ševala held her mother's hand, looked up at the sign that read Ševala Zildžić-Iblizović and finished her mother's words.

“I cannot' was not in Ševala's vocabulary.”