

Breda Rus, angel of Monigo

Dr. Boccazzi, who treated prisoners in the hospital, wrote he had met there not only engineer Lenarčič, but also a beautiful blonde girl, who spoke Slovenian.

Her name was Breda Rus, daughter of Hela Stare (sister of Ninka)¹ and Mavricij Rus². The latter, born in 1879 in a village near Postumia (Matenja vas), graduated in medicine in Vienna and alternated the hospital activity with rich scientific production. He was also head of the health department of the Rdeči križ, of the Fire Brigade and president of the Medical Society of Ljubljana (from 1927 to 1934), and, from 1920 to 1945, Medical Director of the city. These numerous tasks made him irreplaceable. For this reason, perhaps, he remained in Ljubljana without fearing the dangers of a civil war.

Breda, born on 10th July 1916, is a particularly fascinating character, both for her beauty, immortalized in pictorial and photographic portraits, and for her complex personality. She studied gardening in Prague, and learnt to speak four languages fluently: she was several times in Austria, England, Italy, in the principality of Monaco, where she lived for a certain period, and in Prague, of course.

We find Breda in Preganziol in 1943, when she joined aunt Ninka and uncle Milan and had to deal with the reality of the concentration camp. It is possible that Breda Rus was a kind of special correspondent, or a Red Cross relay, in charge of carrying out a rescue mission. It should be emphasized that, although Breda was well off, she did not hesitate to expose herself and risk personally.

We heard from the voice of a witness, Ivan Gulič³, that Breda was in the field every week and that she delivered medicines to the military chaplain. These journeys from Villa Pace to Monigo, had two more stops: first, the parish of Monigo, where Breda left money so that the chaplain Antonio Serafin would provide food for the prisoners (the book explains how a humanitarian organization was created that involved the peasants of the surroundings area); secondly the hospital. Dr. Boccazzi had in fact taught Breda a secret passageway to get to the wards (from an internal stairway), and through this route food, money, letters came and some patients even escaped.

We do not know how long Breda stayed in Villa Pace. Probability, she was present in May 1945, when Milan's residence became a small hotel for Slovenian refugees. And perhaps this turned her into a political suspect in the eyes of Tito's Yugoslavia: in fact, Breda was included, like her uncle, in the lists of the CAE (Centralna Aktivna Evidenca) of the Secret Police (Uprava državne varnost)⁴.

¹ <https://www.geni.com/people/Emilijan-Milan-Lenarčič..>

² *Idem*. Moreover see https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mavricij_Rus; Anton Prijatelj, *Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon*, file 13, Goriška Mohorjeva družba, Gorizia 1987, p. 240.

³ Ivan Gulič, *Številka 141451*, SKD Tabor-ANPI, Opčine-Trst 2010.

⁴ We found this information on the website <http://cae.udba.net>, active at the time of the first edition of our book (2012), now gone.

Breda almost certainly participated at Milan's funeral in October 1949. At that time, she had already been married once with engineer Vinko Zalokar, widower of Ana Maria Tenkrátova from Prague, owner or manager of a renowned Domžale hat factory⁵, but Zalokar died in 1950. Breda was then a widow, albeit for a short time, and this condition of solitude brought her closer to her aunt Ninka, with whom she lived for some time in Italy. In Trst Breda met a lawyer named Branko Mikuletič,⁶ born on 19th March 1915, who became her second husband.

Breda and Branko were married on 27th December 1952 in Preganziol by proxy: none of them resided there, and Breda was just a guest at her aunt's. Best men at the wedding were Ilario Van Den Borre, owner of an important nursery-gardening company, and Milan Bielika. Immediately afterwards the bride and the groom moved to Trst, in Viale Miramare, 269. The residence was elegant: it was a liberty villa, on the promenade of Barcola. Here Breda undertook an import-export economic activity together with a partner, as shown by several advertisements published in 1953 in the Slovenian-language newspaper "Demokracija" of Trst and Gorica⁷. In 1954, Aunt Ninka Stare joined them and left Treviso after selling Villa Pace.

Later, the couple moved to Milan, which was Breda's residence for twenty years, until 29 December 1978, a few months after the death of her husband. However, Breda's hectic life took her also to Ljubljana (where she kept the Yugoslav residence for practical and bureaucratic reasons), Trst (where she was repatriated on 15th July 1981 until her final emigration in 1999) and Opatija (it. Abbazia), where her father lived after retirement (1950).

She travelled a lot throughout her life. She probably went on holiday in Velden, where she met dr. Cino Boccazzi (and his wife Gianna), perhaps to remember the gloomy times of the early months of 1943. Breda returned to Ljubljana to die on 14th February 2008. She was buried in the tomb of the Stare family, in the church cemetery of St. Catherine of Rova, a village seventeen kilometers from Ljubljana (near the place where Kolovec villa it stood until 1943), together with her father, her mother, her beloved aunt Ninka, and her grandparents Josipina and Feliks Stare.

We have talked about Breda as "The Angel of Monigo" but it is possible that there were two more Slovenian women who helped the prisoners, namely Maria Kamnikar and Vera Magušar, the latter known for her generosity⁸ (the Franciscan father Engelhard Štucin states that she sent 1000 packages to Monigo for the internees).⁹

⁵ www.genealogy.si/marriages; [http://www.visitdomzale.si/dozivetja/tematska-dozivetja/univerzale-\(nekdanja-oberwalderjeva-tovarna](http://www.visitdomzale.si/dozivetja/tematska-dozivetja/univerzale-(nekdanja-oberwalderjeva-tovarna) (April 2019).

⁶ Branko was son of Fortunant (Trst, 26th July 1896 – Ljubljana, 17th September 1965), who was also a lawyer.

⁷ <http://www.dlib.si>: "Demokracija" (2nd October 1953), year VII, number 39.

⁸ Vera's son Dušan, born in 1922, student in Venice during the war years, lived in Treviso.

⁹ We got this piece of information from Ivo Jevnikar: e-mail of 4th January 2011 and 28th August 2019. The statements are based on documents preserved in the provincial archive of the Slovenian friars in Ljubljana.