

# WHAT MY GRANDPARENTS TOLD ME

Children stories



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# Foreword

When was the last time you heard a story that really stayed with you? Perhaps something you read, something you watched or something passed down through generations. . . . While some of us learn best through numbers and facts, most of us connect through experiences and emotions. Each of us can recall sweet memories of stories told by our grandparents; sometimes at the dinner table or by the fire in a cold winter night. Passed on from generation to generation for decades, and sometimes for centuries, each story is told so many different ways, keeping its essence but adding a different flavor each time.

Storytelling has been an important part of humanity since our earliest times, when people told their stories over and over again, imparting on future generations messages of values, identity and belonging. Age plays an essential role on how we perceive heritage. Children have been seen to associate heritage with something “old” or historical, where adults may associate heritage with identity. More senior persons might associate heritage with a “golden past” and a perceived “loss” of values. But the importance of heritage is valued across generations (published in September 2012). Transmitting heritage values to younger generations has been known to hold particular importance for the elderly, in order to ensure cultural survival.

In spite of the digital age and social media increasingly playing a dominant role in sharing stories and emotions, direct human experience still remains very effective, particularly for children.

At the PCDK project, we pay particular attention to the inclusion of elderly and work to ensure their rightful place in the development process as part of our democratic participation principle. *Venerable Voices* (published in September 2012) was a PCDK publication that gave a platform to the elderly to bring their stories to the general public. The publication, 'What My Grandparents Told Me', draws linkages between generations through stories which present another heritage resource of Kosovo's communities.

Collecting these stories has been an organic educational process involving teachers, pupils, parents and grandparents from numerous schools across Kosovo. This publication aims to increase awareness of local cultures and traditions, and emphasises the importance of acknowledging the role of the elderly who have an important place in community life, its heritage and diversity. Each short and meaningful story in this publication provides lessons and a snapshot of life in a distinct community in Kosovo.

This publication is an educational tool to remind younger generations that there is much to learn from the stories of the past, and shape the future in order not to repeat the mistakes. As times pass, values are redefined and the world around us is transformed.

'What my Grandparents Told Me' is a good reminder of intergenerational connection, allowing elderly community members to tell their stories and life lessons to younger generations. The PCDK, with its sensitivity to issues around diversity, has successfully put forward a collection of stories that have been told in Kosovo for generations. Ultimately, everyone has a story to tell and the practice of telling and listening to these stories constitute an important part of our common heritage. We would like to thank all teachers, students and grandparents who have actively been involved in identifying and sharing these stories, which we hope will inspire further initiatives.

**Claudia Luciani**

*Director of Democratic Governance Directorate  
Council of Europe  
Strasbourg*

# Introduction

## *Storytelling keeps us all alive*

Some books speak by their content, others tell you interesting stories also by the conditions they were created in. When we read the stories in the three booklets you are holding in your hands right now, two things immediately catch our attention and even admiration.

First, contrary to some common beliefs, stories are here not to divide – languages, communities, nations, genders – but to unite: to show the profound equality of our values, to knit sometimes lost human relations between all of us. Simply told, we are all children of the same civilisation.

Second, while reading these stories, we can not but imagine the fundamental situation in which each of them was born: it was *told*, by a grandparent to the grandchild. So, in order for these three booklets to exist, an individual from the 20th century, often born between two great wars, was telling his or her favourite story to another individual, born in 21st century. A very particular memory was transferred, word by word, from the generation of oral history to the generation of visual century – with the instrument of written language.

This is a great story that overpasses every individual story in the book, a lesson that makes this book a *survival manual*: you have to experience your century, you have to be able to form your own memory of it – but it makes sense and history only if you transform it into a *story* that you are sharing with the other! By transforming individual history into stories, shared with others, we all create *collective history*. Thus, we not only respect and cherish the heritage, but also make it lively and inspirational.

We often say that the process matters as much as the final product and we often claim that we all need some new narrative. I sincerely admire the attempt of our colleagues from this joint project of Council of Europe and European Union to insist on difficult work of *making people speak to each other*, because it is exactly through this *process* that an incredible collection of strong *narratives* was born. They call for our attention, they talk to each of us – and they speak about all of us! Like Scheherazade from *One Thousand and One night*, they keep us alive.

**Samuel Žbogar**

*Head of the European Union Office in Kosovo and EU Special Representative*

# Children stories

- 08-12** Yll Morina Lower High School, Gjakovë/Đakovica
- 13-16** Zekeria Rexha Lower High School, Gjakovë/Đakovica
- 17** Isa Boletini Lower High School, Isniq/Isnić
- 18** Zenel Hajdini Lower High School, Piranë/Pirana village, Prizren
- 19-21** Abdyl Frashëri Lower High School, Prizren
- 22-24** Mustafa Bakija Lower High School, Prizren
- 25-26** Andon Zako Çajupi Lower High School , Vushtrri/Vučitrn
- 27-30** Bedri Gjinaj Lower High School, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica
- 31-32** Abaz Ajeti Lower High School, Gjilan/ Gnjilane
- 33-36** Dardania Lower High School, Prishtinë/Priština
- 37** Fazli Grajçevci Lower High School, Hade, Obiliq/Obilić
- 38-40** Selman Riza Lower High School, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje



ERINA ARLLATI 8TH GRADE

## *Kaçamusa in the Kachamak*

Once upon a time there lived a small boy named Kaçamusa. One day Kaçamusa's mother decided to make kachamak<sup>1</sup> for lunch. Although Kaçamusa was tiny, he wanted to help. His mother refused, saying that he was too small to be of use but he insisted, saying that he could at least mix the kachamak.

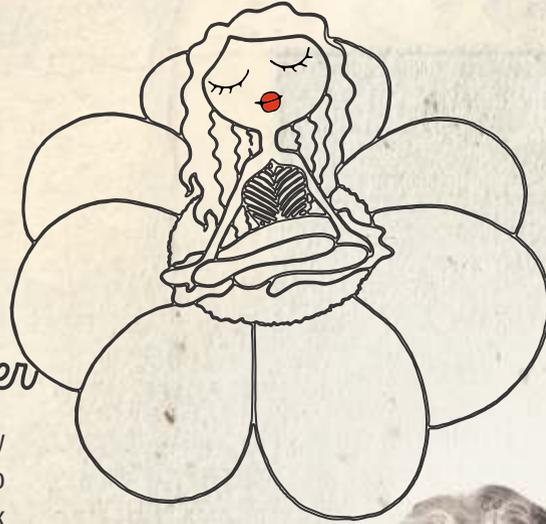
Kaçamusa grabbed the spoon and started to mix. All of a sudden, he fell into the pot of kachamak and, as the temperature was very high, his hair, his eyebrows and his eyelashes were burnt right off. Kaçamusa was left with no hair on his head or his face! To replace his hair, eyebrows and eyelashes, his family stuck feathers of different birds on him. After a week, Kaçamusa went out to play with the other children in the neighbourhood but they all started to tease him: "Look at Kaçamusa! He has bird feathers instead of eyelashes! Instead of hair, rooster feathers! And instead of eyebrows, chicken feathers!"

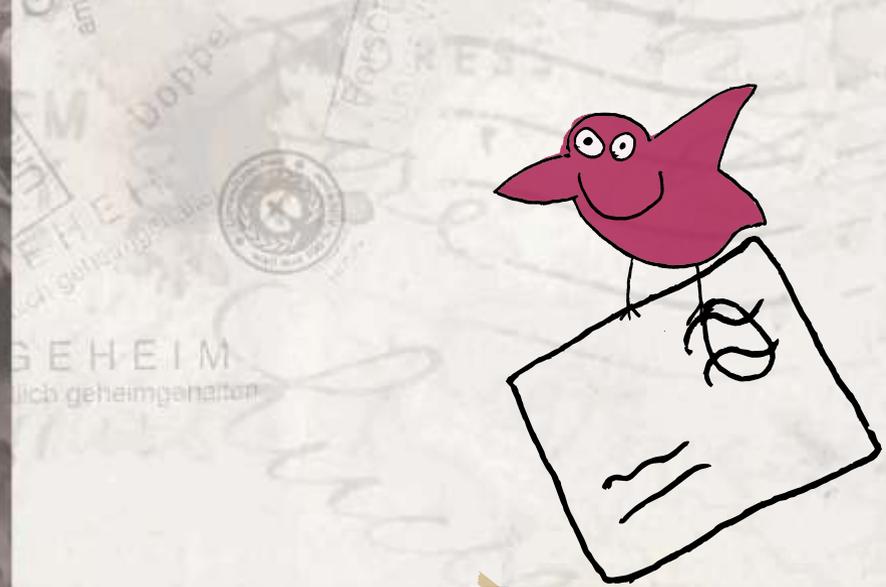
1. Kachamak: A dish made of corn flour and cheese

ALBANA PULANI 7TH GRADE

## The Woman Who Became a Mother

A young woman lived alone in the middle of a forest. She had no family and no children, and was very lonely as nobody would ever come to visit her. One day, someone knocked on her door but she did not think anything of it. She even thought she was imagining it. When she heard the knock again, she went to open the door and saw an old woman holding a seed in her hand. She welcomed the old woman and they went inside. The old woman asked her hostess if she had any children. The lonely young woman answered that she very much wanted to have children. Then the old woman said "If you give me a bit of bread and a bit of water, I will see that you have children". Surprised, the young woman immediately brought her bread and water. The old woman ate and drank until she was full. Then she gave the young woman a seed and instructed her to water it every day. "At night," she said, "put it next to the window and the stars will grant your wish." After saying this, the old woman left and the lonely young woman did as she was instructed. After several days, a flower started to blossom and a small and beautiful girl emerged from within it. When the woman saw this, she burst into tears of joy, unable to believe she had become a mother. The girl was as small as a finger and the mother decided to call her Thumbelina. She cared for her little girl, feeding her, making her dresses, and she lived her life happily ever after.

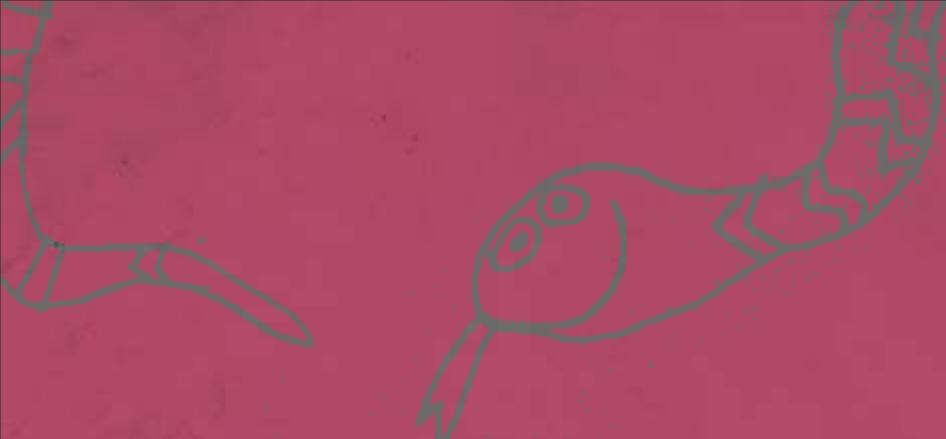




## JETA KRASNIQI 8TH GRADE

### *Nostalgia*

**A** long time ago, life was very different from today and people lived in very basic conditions. My grandfather's family had around eighty people in one household. At that time, the majority of the population was involved in agriculture. Girls and women had to do housework, look after the livestock and do other things around the house. My grandparents told me how marriages were arranged. The family elders would decide the fate of their children. The couple would not see each other until the wedding day. Grandmother says it was very exciting, because she didn't know who her husband would be until the wedding day. Also, in those days, they had few means of communication. They communicated through letters, bottles, carrier pigeons and so on. My grandparents and many others have told me how things were many years back. I saw how difficult life was many years ago. So we have to be happy with what we have now because one day we might be left without anything.



ELDA SHEHU 7TH GRADE

## *The House Snake*

**M**any years back, people believed that there was a snake inside every house. They were thought to be usually quiet and up to two metres long. They would call them the House Snakes.

A house snake would move freely around the house and no one would think of hurting them. The snake would often be found with the laundry, on the tablecloth, inside the baby's cradle, under the pillow, curled up and asleep. People would put a bucket of milk where the snake was found and, after a while, the snake would go away. If a family member annoyed or killed the snake, the family would suffer a misfortune: the house could burn down, the roof could fall apart, someone in the family would die and so on. This is what people believed, my great-grandmother told me, and it was true.





PATRICIA KITAJ - 9TH GRADE

## *The Orphaned Girl*

Once upon a time there lived a small girl named Lule. She was good and went to school. One day, all of the girls in the school were telling a fairytale. When it was Lule's turn, she did not tell a fairytale as she didn't know any. Her friends said that her mother would turn into a cow. When Lule went home, the strangest thing had happened. Her mother had indeed turned into a cow. Her father then married another woman who was very evil and did not like Lule at all. She made her do all the hard work around the house. She asked Lule to make her a sweater and do other difficult things which Lule could not do. Her mother, who had turned into a cow, did them for her. The stepmother found out and asked the cow to be slaughtered. When Lule heard this she ran to tell her mother. Her mother said "Don't worry my girl, just make sure you don't eat my bones but gather them all and put them in a hole". Lule did as her mother had asked, but nothing happened. A long time passed and one day, Lule went to the place where she had buried her mother's bones. She was crying over the hole when a beautiful fairy came and said: "Open the hole and see what you find". She started to dig and she found a pair of beautiful shoes. As she dug deeper, she found more things, including a very pretty dress. She put these clothes on and went to a ball organised by the prince. The prince liked Lule very much and decided to marry her, and they lived happily ever after.

ARMELIND HALILI - 9TH GRADE

## Welcoming guests

There were many customs and rites which are very different to the ones we have today. After hearing many different stories from the elderly, I was impressed by the way they welcomed and respected the guests.

Everything started with the guest's arrival. The guest would be welcomed by the head of the household and accompanied to the men's room. The house elder would try to make the guest feel as comfortable as possible. The guest room was beautifully decorated with kilim<sup>2</sup> and minder<sup>3</sup> decorated by the young wives of the household. They sat on a sheep skin that served as a cover. The hearth was at the front of the room. It was always lit in cold days and the elderly usually sat around it. Rifles and different instruments were displayed on the walls. To begin with, the guest would be offered tobacco cultivated by the people themselves and it was accompanied by coffee. Then they started discussions about different topics of the time until it was time for supper. Supper was first served in the guest room and then in the women's and children's rooms. Before they started with supper they washed their hands with water poured by the young men. Various dishes were served, prepared by the *baçica*, the most experienced women of the household, and served by the youngest. Then the guests would spend several days there or stay until late at night, discussing, singing and playing different games.



2. Kilim: Rugs made of wool  
3. Minder: A traditional sofa

ALBINA VESELI - 8TH GRADE

## The Ways of my Grandmother

I was only three months old when my father died. I was the fortieth member of my family. Others too felt his absence, not because they had loved him but because he had worked hard and now the others had to work hard to replace him. They did not know of the word 'love' as they were insensitive people. It was only the customs that they needed to follow and cared about. Even the softest of words failed to reach the hearts of those people, because they had stones instead of hearts. Who were those people? My relatives, my family.

When I turned seven, they made me do the hardest jobs. I would never walk away from the dining table full. I would have liked to get educated and become a writer, but it was simply a dream which would never come true. If I were to mention the word 'school', I would be made to suffer because my family considered it a luxury, a mistake. I turned 15 with the same hardship. One

day I noticed some unknown people entering our yard. They stayed in for some half an hour. During that time I was out working in our farm. I used to work hard until my arms could take no more. Then my uncle approached and, smiling, said to me: "Work hard, because from now on you will be working in your very own house, at your husband's." I remember tears flowing down my cheeks. But I did not want my uncle to see my tears. I was not allowed to cry. My uncle told me that the guests had come there to ask for my hand. I stood there silent, I felt nothing, and it was as if my heart had stopped. I was alive in body but dead in soul. How could I even get married? I still had a dream to make true, so I hoped I would manage to see myself as a writer in the future. But not any more. My uncle smiled the whole time. Initially I did not know why, but later I found out. The people who wanted me to become the bride of their family had paid him

good money. We are people and not things you can sell or buy. So the damned day dawned, they dressed me up with a white dress, they put a red headscarf on my hair. The wedding reception lasted for 30 days, but to me it never ended, I still feel the same about it. You never forget the unpleasant things in your life. They made me a bride, I was 15 and the groom was 35. Many years went by, the same life, the same hardship. The only things which made me feel a bit better were my writings. Though they never schooled me I was happy that at least I managed to read and write. My dream was to write.

After some years in marriage, God showed mercy and made me happy by giving me the best present in my life, my angel. It was such a blessing to become a mother.

This is how I spent my life. I experienced the harshest things in the world. I often felt disgraced, insulted. I experienced a lot of





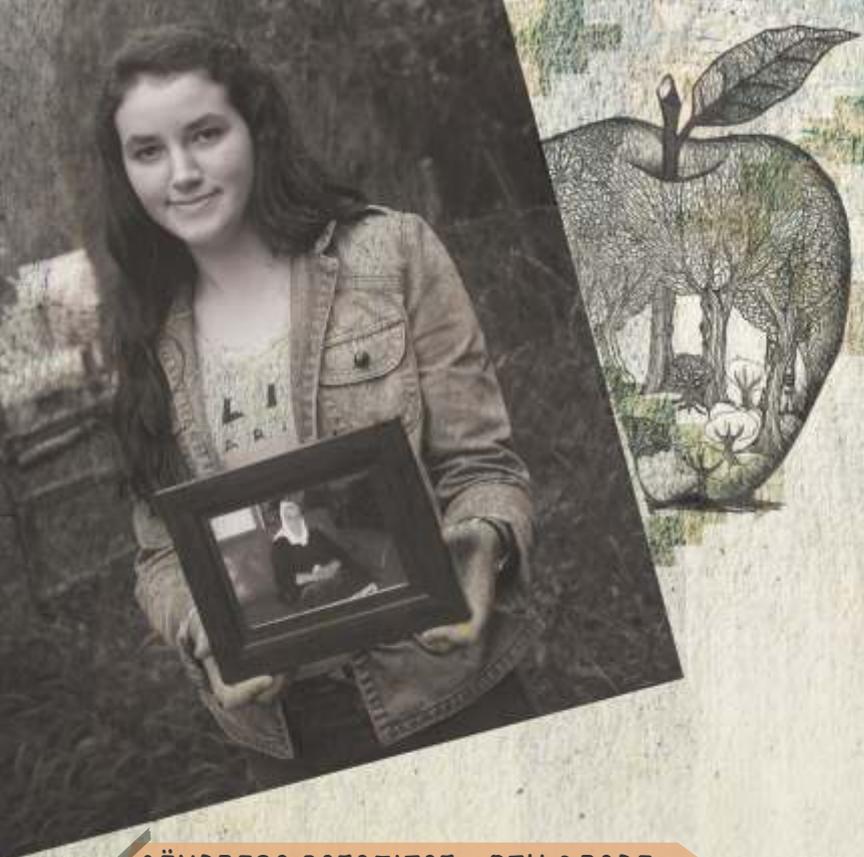
ARTA KIROLLI - 8TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER SOFIJE KIROLLI

## *Saint George's Day*

Saint George is a holiday celebrated to mark the coming of spring. It was believed that bringing flowers into the house before Saint George's Day was not good. Saint George's festival lasts for nine days and during those days people go to the turbe<sup>4</sup>. Every turbe has a special day when it is open for people to enter. On the night of Saint George, people would go to the fields and woods to get willow branches, flowers and water. That night, the whole family would stay awake, waiting for the dawn, singing, dancing and making fli, a traditional pastry dish. On the first day, the grandmothers would light a fire in the yard and wake up the members of the family by touching their feet with nettle leaves. When they got up, they had to jump over the fire and be sprayed with the water from the dish where Easter eggs and the willows and flowers they had collected have been put on the night of Saint George. They bought a lamb and slaughtered it that day. They ate breakfast with pita bread, milk and cheese. They would not eat any meat until nightfall, and most of the meat would be given away to other families.





## QËNDRESA PAJAZITAJ - 9TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDFATHER JAHË BERISHA

### *Three Girls*

Once upon a time, a man lived with three daughters. The daughter he loved most was the youngest one because she was very innocent whereas the other two were always thinking about some wickedness. One day, the father went to the city and asked each daughter what they wanted him to bring them back. The oldest daughter said she wanted a diamond necklace, the most expensive one he could find. The second daughter asked for a marvellous dress, the best in the city. The third daughter asked for

an apple she could use to see the whole world from. The other daughters started to mock the little one for her request, saying it was simply impossible to see the whole world inside an apple. The father went to the city and bought each daughter the gift they had asked for. He also found an apple from which one could see the entire world. The two older daughters were soon bored with their gifts, while the youngest one was happy with her apple which she used to see the whole world. The two older daughters resented the youngest one. One day, they decided to go to the woods for berries and asked the youngest sister to go with them. Innocent as she was, she agreed. When they were deep into the forest, they killed their younger sister. They took the apple from her pocket and buried their sister in a hole they dug in the woods, believing nobody would ever discover the body as no one would pass that way. Once they returned home, they told their father that their sister had been eaten by the wolves. The father was saddened by the news and never smiled after that day. Days passed, then weeks and months and a small tree grew above the little girl's grave. One day, a shepherd passed by and sat nearby to rest. He took a branch from the tree and made a flute out of it. When he started to play the flute, the strangest thing happened. The flute itself sang a sad song, which said: "My evil sisters killed me and buried me here. The only cure for me is to pour water over my grave". So the shepherd went to the prince and told him what happened. The prince ordered that water be poured over the grave. When this was done, the young girl emerged from it. The prince ordered the shepherd to bring the girl to the palace. She was very beautiful and the prince asked her to marry him. He also ordered that her father and the two daughters be brought to the palace. He ordered that the two evil girls be punished and from that day they became the servants of their sister. The father was given a house close to the palace so he could see his daughter as often as he wanted to. The prince married the young girl and they had a big wedding, one that had not been seen or heard of in the kingdom before, and they lived happily ever after in the royal palace.



BLERTA BEKTESHI - 6TH GRADE

## *Life in the Village*

In the old days, everyday life was difficult, but people had a lot of love for each other. They dealt with agriculture and farming, helped each other a lot and all ate from the same pot, not separately as they do today. The city was too far away and people needed to walk a long distances to go there for trade, even having to spend the night in the villages they came across on their way.

In the old days, weddings lasted for a week and started four days before the day of marriage. People had fun and played different games, such as the Game of Hats, teasing the groom, with women wearing men's clothing and men wearing women's clothing, imitating each other. They danced and had a lot of fun.

The weddings were marked by the carrying of flags, held by the grandson of the family. The bride's carriage was made of wood and covered with rugs. Wedding guests from different parties who met each other on the road to get different brides would have to fight each other in order to pass by first. It is wonderful to listen to stories about the old times.

EDINA HOXHA - 9TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDFATHER TAFIL XHEMALLARI

## The Sack with Gold

There once were three friends who were running away from the authorities. But they got bored hiding in the woods and they decided to surrender to the Pasha<sup>5</sup>. They went to the Pasha and said: "Pasha! Here we are, do whatever you want with us". As they had surrendered themselves, he forgave them and asked what they wished for. One said to the Pasha: "I would like to marry your daughter". The other asked for a sack full of gold coins. The third one said: "I want nothing from you, and I am pleased with what God has given me". The Pasha saw the thieves off and gave to each one what they wanted; he gave his daughter's hand to the first one, a sack of gold to the second, and nothing to the third one.

But the Pasha was really upset that one of the thieves had not asked him for anything. He ordered two soldiers to follow the thieves and kill the one they saw on his own. The two soldiers set an ambush by the bridge. On the way back, the one with the sack of gold coins asked the one who had taken

nothing: "Can you help me because I am tired?" His friend felt sorry as the sack was really heavy so he helped him. When they arrived at the bridge, the soldiers fired their guns and killed the one who was with the Pasha's daughter and the one without a sack. And so, the one who had asked for nothing was left with the Pasha's daughter and the sack of gold. He took the bride and went to the woods where he built a hut for the two of them. Some years later he built a bigger house and became known as a rich man. The Pasha had become King in the meantime. When he heard of him, he asked to see him. The Pasha's daughter, who was now the thief's wife, prepared food she knew her father liked. When the Pasha tasted the food the thief brought him, he was surprised, knowing only his daughter could make it. Then she also came to him and told him the story. When the King heard the story, he took the couple back to his kingdom. He built them a large house and made his son-in-law a Pasha of that region.



5. Pasha was a senior military rank in the Ottoman Empire.



ELIZA ELSHANI - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER FETIJE KOLGECI

## *A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed*

**T**here was a young man whose mother was sick. Her treatment was very expensive and the boy was really poor. One day, he was arguing with himself: to let his mother die, or to do hard work and start making money. The pay for hard work was low and he did not know how much time his mother had left, so he abandoned the jobs he found. He had a friend who was rich but miserly. The boy knew his only option left was to steal his friend's money late at night. When everyone was asleep, the boy slipped into his friend's house and stole some money, just enough for his mother's treatment. The mother got better, but the boy felt really terrible for having stolen from his friend. So he started to work hard to collect the money he had stolen and return it to his friend. When he finally paid his friend back, the friend was so upset that he had the boy imprisoned for theft. After a while the rich friend started having second thoughts for having had the boy jailed. So he asked for the boy's forgiveness and paid to have him set free. The poor boy also forgave him for putting him in jail and thus they continued their friendship, helping each other and understanding each other.



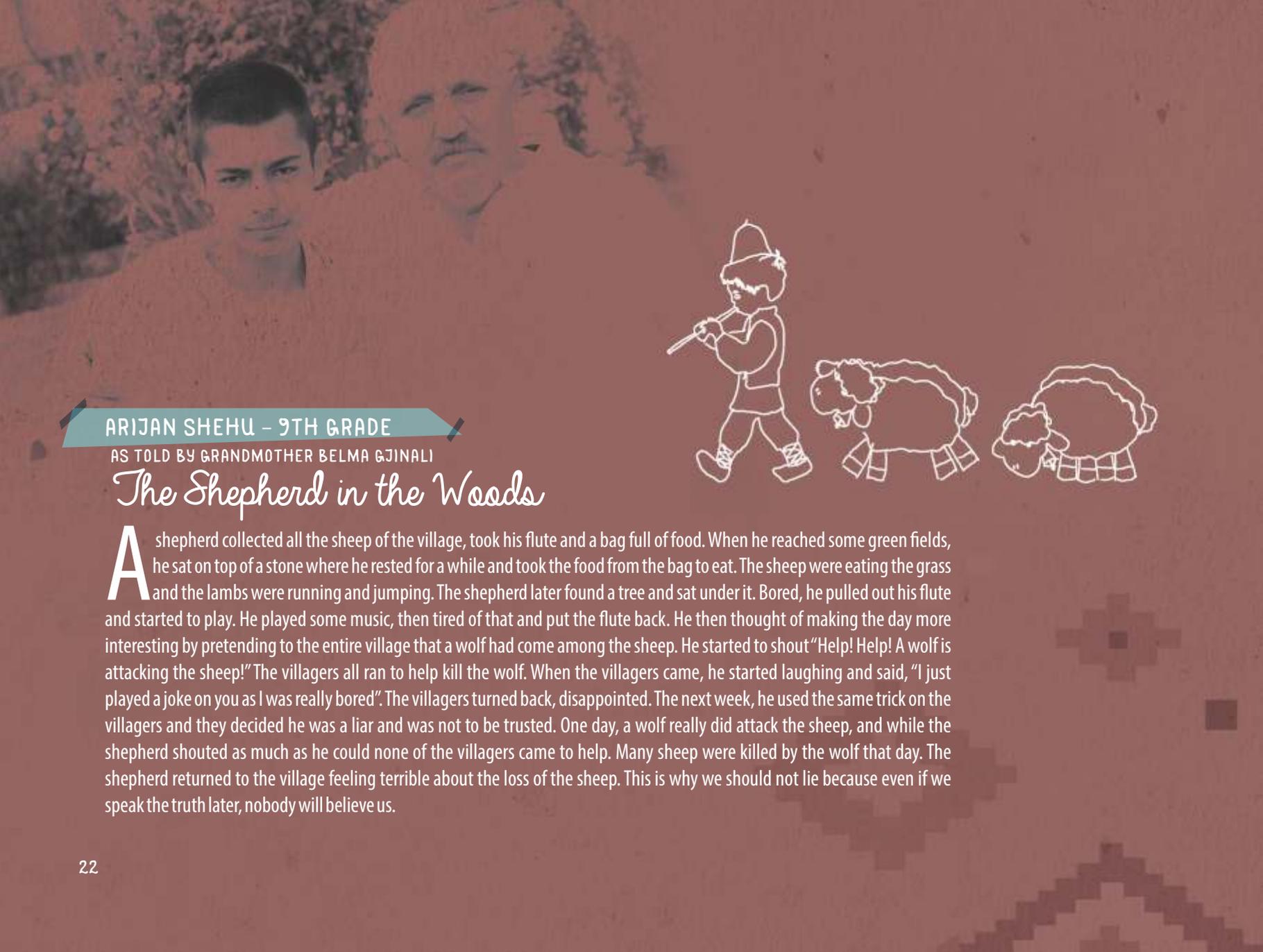
## ARLIND TELAKU - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDFATHER AGIM TELAKU

### *Nasradin Hoxha*

**N**asradin Hoxha lived in a city ruled by a king. The word spread that Nasradin was lying to people. The King had also heard of this. One day, he asked a servant to go and fetch Nasradin to learn why he lied and cheated so much. The messenger went to Nasradin's house and told him that the King wanted to understand what it was that made him lie and cheat others. Nasradin took his donkey and went to the King. As Nasradin was arriving, the King saw him from the window and swore to himself to make Nasradin feel sorry for his misdeeds. As soon as Nasradin entered the King's palace, he asked the King: "O Majesty, why have you called me here?" The King explained that it was because he lied and cheate people. Nasradin answered: "That is not true". The King then said, "If you cannot answer three questions I ask you, I will punish you very hard. If you can, I will let you walk a free man".

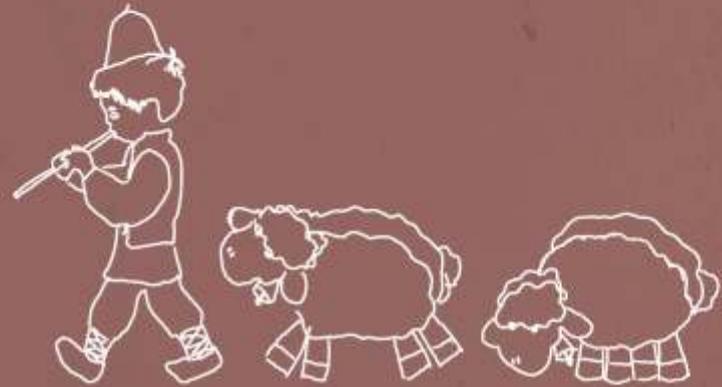
The first question the King asked was "How many stars are there in the sky?" Nasradin thought for a while and said "There are as many stars in the sky as there are hairs on my donkey's body". Surprised with the answer, the King said, "All right, now listen to the second question: where is the centre of the Earth?" Nasradin thought for a while and said: "Where I stand is the centre of the Earth". The King was very upset with this answer and asked, "How is that possible?" Nasradin answered: "If you do not believe it, get a measuring tape and do the measurements." The King then said: "Now I will ask you the third question. How many hairs are there in my beard?" Nasradin replied: "You have as many hairs in your beard as my donkey has in his tail." The King saw he could not get a straight answer out of Nasradin and had to let him return home.



ARIJAN SHEHU - 9TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER BELMA GJINALI

## *The Shepherd in the Woods*



A shepherd collected all the sheep of the village, took his flute and a bag full of food. When he reached some green fields, he sat on top of a stone where he rested for a while and took the food from the bag to eat. The sheep were eating the grass and the lambs were running and jumping. The shepherd later found a tree and sat under it. Bored, he pulled out his flute and started to play. He played some music, then tired of that and put the flute back. He then thought of making the day more interesting by pretending to the entire village that a wolf had come among the sheep. He started to shout "Help! Help! A wolf is attacking the sheep!" The villagers all ran to help kill the wolf. When the villagers came, he started laughing and said, "I just played a joke on you as I was really bored". The villagers turned back, disappointed. The next week, he used the same trick on the villagers and they decided he was a liar and was not to be trusted. One day, a wolf really did attack the sheep, and while the shepherd shouted as much as he could none of the villagers came to help. Many sheep were killed by the wolf that day. The shepherd returned to the village feeling terrible about the loss of the sheep. This is why we should not lie because even if we speak the truth later, nobody will believe us.



ANDRRA GJINALI - 9TH GRADE

## *The Father and His Sons*

A father had three sons, each one lazier than the other. When he felt he was coming to the end of his life, he called his three sons together and told them: "My sons, I am about to depart from this world, but before I close my eyes for the last time I want to tell you that I have hidden a pot full of golden coins under the vineyard. I do not recall the exact spot though". Shortly after that, the old man passed away. The boys, being without work, did not know how to manage through life without any income. One of them remembered the pot with golden coins, hidden in the vineyard, that their father had told them about. They started searching everywhere but could not find it. They searched for a day, then two, then for many days, but found nothing. After they had checked every corner of the vineyard, they lost hope and were really saddened. Months passed, and autumn came. The vineyard was full of grapes, as it had never been before. The three boys collected the grapes and sent it to the market every day to sell. Their empty pot in the house filled with money every day. The three boys learned that their father had not lied to them. Labour is golden.



BARDHA ELEZKURTAJ - 8TH GRADE

## *The Naked King*

There once lived the king of a big realm. He was a good ruler and his people liked him well. One day he thought of changing his tailor, and announced that the one who would make him the best garments would be paid good money. The thread to be used should be golden. Two tailors responded to the announcement. They said they could make magical garments that the kingdom had never seen before. They were in fact crooks. The King gave them separate facilities in which they could spend a week to produce the garments the kingdom had never seen. They only pretended to work but actually made nothing. The day came when the King was supposed to put on his new clothes. When the King came before his people, everyone went silent. No one dared utter a word because only the stupid ones were said to be unable to see these magical garments. So nobody dared to say that the King was indeed naked. Only a small girl was brave enough, the niece of the King's old tailor. Everyone started laughing. The king was embarrassed and ran back to the castle, as he realised he was totally naked. The two crooks ran away, stealing all of the golden thread, and the King took back his old tailor.

## ARTA RASHICA - 7TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER NEFISE RASHICA

### Old Women's Days

In the old days (as the elders tell us) the months were numbered differently. The shortest month then was March, the first month in spring. March had 28 days, and February had 31. If you want to find out how they changed the days, listen to this story from my grandmother.

In a small farmhouse an old man and his wife lived on their own, without any children. They only had some goats. In springtime, they would leave their house, take the goats and go to the mountains. They would stay in a house made of stone and spend the entire summer there until early autumn with their animals. When the cold days approached again, they would go back to their farmhouse and spend the winter there, waiting for spring to come back again. They would usually go to the mountains towards mid-April and stay there until the end of September. One year though, the end of March was very warm. The snow had melted away, there were no cold winds blowing and the spring flowers had already appeared in the fields. The birds were heard singing everywhere; it was a really pleasant March. When the old woman observed the nice weather, she said to the old man "We seem to be lucky, let us take the goats to the mountains". Without thinking twice, they gathered their goats and set off that night. It was the last night of March and only a few hours remained before it turned to April. It was nice all the way up. Once in the mountains, the old woman started to tease her husband: "Why are you so upset my man? Why are you not smiling?" The old man said he was afraid because they had rushed to climb the mountains and he feared that the snow and the cold winds might return. The woman said he had no reason to fear as April was coming, and she even cursed March saying "May you break your neck, you wretched March! Goodbye, goodbye, wicked March, here in April I'm at large!" March heard this and got really angry. He asked February to lend him three days: "Brother February, give me two days plus one more, to freeze the old woman like never before". Then a strong, cold wind blew bringing a snowstorm, freezing the old couple and the goats in the mountains. Ever since that day, the last days of March are known as "The old woman's days". The moral of this story is that when we are about to start a job we have to think well and we should not rush or use swearwords.



KALTRINA RASHICA - 9TH GRADE

## *The Snake Boy*

There was an old couple without any children. One day they prayed to God to give them a child. "Even if it is a snake, we only want our own offspring!" they said. So God gave the old couple a snake child, which the old woman breastfed for 15 years. After 15 years, the boy said to his parents "Marry me off or I will bite you both". The old man got on his horse and went to seek a shepherdess. He met a girl looking after the sheep. She asked the old man what his troubles were and he told her that he was seeking a bride for his snake-son, because otherwise he and his wife would be bitten and killed. The girl knew that the snake was a saint and told the old man to go to a house where she knew there were many daughters. In fact, it was the house of her own father. The old man went to the house, where he was invited for lunch. After lunch, he told the head of the household that he had come to ask for his daughter's hand. The father said he would ask if his daughter would accept the proposal., which she did.

They agreed to hold the wedding fifteen days later. It was a big wedding. The snake-boy went to get his bride, and led the wedding guests to her house. On the way back they met some children looking after cows. The children started to shout to the bride: "Poor girl, you are marrying a snake, he will bite you and kill you!" The bride gave them candies and wished them to grow up happy. The bride was taken to her new house. It was the night before Eid and the next day would be a holiday. The parents were happy to have their son married. The morning of Eid, the snake-boy woke up, took off his snake skin and a handsome young man emerged. His father said: "Come let us pray for Eid, but don't tell anyone that you are my son". When the boy arrived in town, everyone was astonished by his beautiful appearance and he entered the mosque to pray. His mother was also overwhelmed and said: "Lucky me, what a beautiful son God has given me. I will never let him put the snakeskin back on because he is radiant with beauty!" She took the skin and threw it in the fire, and the boy immediately died while praying.



RAID LATIFI - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER ZEJNEPE RRUSTEMI

## *My Grandmother's Story about my Uncle's Birth*

**M**y grandmother had problems with giving birth. She gave birth to seven children, who each only lived one day and died. One day a female neighbour came up to my pregnant grandmother and said to her: "When you are giving birth, go with your child immediately out onto the street. Whoever comes across you should be the one to cut the baby's umbilical cord". My grandmother told this to my grandfather and they agreed to test it with the baby that was about to arrive. The time of labour came and she gave birth to a baby boy. They instantly went into the street with the baby and, as instructed, waited to see which passerby would approach. A woman came. They stopped her and told her the story. She was a Roma woman and she agreed to cut the cord. They brought the boy inside the house and the Roma woman cut his cord. They called him Enver. The woman became the baby's godmother and was accepted as a member of the family. My uncle grew up and became a teacher of physical education. After my uncle, my grandmother had a daughter, who is my mother, and after that another boy. All three survived and lived to establish their own families. My grandmother was happy to have had her three children.



## VJOSA ZAITI - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDFATHER ZAITI ZAITI

### *Memories of my Grandfather*

**M**y grandfather was born in a neighbourhood next to the River Ibër/Ibar, where there used to be an old mill built many years before. A man worked in that mill and everyone called him Babo. Babo had been a very good man. As my grandfather tells me: "When Babo was in good mood, he would let us play hide and seek in the mill, or we would jump from one place to the other, or he gave us paper to make aeroplanes, which we then threw over the river. The mill had a wheel which we would climb on. There were buckets on the wheel hauling the water. They were very old and poured water on us. When we went home, our clothes were soaked. My mother used to yell at us for playing in the mill. When Babo was not in good mood, he would chase us and not let us play in the mill".

The neighbourhood where my grandfather lived also had a kayak club (a kayak is a boat about 4 metres long in which two people could sit in and row). The kayaks were very beautiful and were different colours. They moved easily and quickly. The rowers would race to see who came first. Sometimes they turned over and fell in the water. While they raced, people came out on both sides of the river and watched the games. Among the viewers was my grandfather, who cheered and had fun. Opposite my grandfather's house was a big park. My grandfather would often go to the park for picnics with his family but also to play with other children.

ENIS ČOLAKOVIĆ - 8TH GRADE

## *The childhood of my grandfather*

I'm Enis Čolaković, eighth grade student in primary school "Bedri Gjinaj". I will tell you about my grandfather's life. When I asked him to tell me some beautiful story from his life, he began: "I remember those days when I met your grandmother. She was very beautiful and at that time it was not like today when people show off about their wealth and cars. Back then people had more respect for each other. Nowadays even a child can openly offend everyone.

I've had a very difficult childhood. We were very poor and my father hardly earned any money to feed us and our mother had huge difficulties while raising us as she worked too hard. But she did her best to educate us. We were many, six children, five brothers and a sister. My father forced me to work and I worked from my 6th year until I was 19 or 20 years old. He forced not only me to work but also the others. Whenever I think back to my childhood years my tears start flowing in my old face. I met your grandmother when I was 20 years old. I was with her during studies. I liked her very much. I liked her thick braids. When I realized that my father and her father were close friends we became even closer and when my father understood that we liked each other he agreed to our engagement".

My grandfather was happy with his life even though he had great hardships during his childhood. When he met my grandmother, everything was going in the right way for him. I really enjoy hearing stories and anecdotes from the life of my grandfather.



AMINA JUKOVIĆ - 8TH GRADE

## My Grandma

**M**y name is Amina Juković, eighth grade student in primary school "Bedri Gjinaj". I will tell you about my grandmother and about a very interesting story from her youth, but in the beginning I would describe her to you. My grandmother is a very good and very interesting person. She is like a second mother to me. She is called Remza and is 72 years old. My grandmother is slightly build, green-eyed and has a white soft silk face. Since her youth and until today she has been wearing a head scarf and although in her youth she had long, black hair, the headscarf was not removed.

She lives in Sjenica and I feel very sorry that I can not see her every day so I can hug and kiss her. Despite the distance between us, I love her very much and when I hug my mother I feel the scent of my Grandma.

My mother told me that my Grandmother has been very beautiful when she was young but she was also a strict mother. My Grandmother had three children and seven grandchildren. She has only one niece, me, and that is why she loves me like her own daughter. She rarely comes to visit us since she is very old.

When I was little, whenever I went to Sjenica I went to sleep with my Grandmother and before going to bed she always told me a tale or story from her youth but tales were not as interesting as her stories.

My grandmother mostly talked about the time when she was young and in these stories she compared that time with today's lifestyle. Of course, we both agreed that there is a drastic change. I was very interested about how girls lived at that time. My grandmother told me that back then girls didn't go to school but only boys as education was allowed only for them. Girls stayed at home and dealt with household and handicraft works. They had to listen to their fathers, mothers and brothers and had to do whatever they said.

Girls were not allowed to express their opinions nor was it important what they wanted. They could go to fairs and various celebrations but of course accompanied by a family member.

Parents decided to whom the girls were to be married, and the girls had to listen without expressing themselves. One of these girls was also my Grandma.

30 After this story, my grandmother said: "Thanks God, that time is over". Now girls are equal to boys in every field of life.

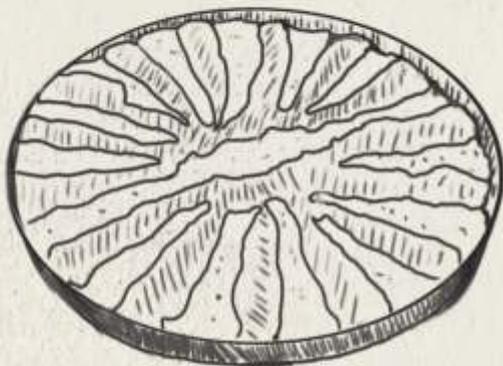


FJOLLA DAKU - 6TH GRADE

## *The rite of marriage*

**A**lbanian weddings were very interesting. They lasted for at least four days. After four days, the groom's family would fetch the bride on horses from her family. When brides entered their new husband's house, they would dip their finger in honey or sugar water (sherbet) and apply it three times to the door. They would put a purse with money on the doorstep, to guarantee they would always have money in the household. When the bride entered the new house, she would step with the right foot first, so that everything goes the right way. Three pieces of bread would be put on the bride's head and she would be asked to sit on top of three hats. The brides would wear traditional dresses. The fabric was known as kumash, and the headscarves they wore were known as hotos. The old women wore some sort of wide dresses which they called pshtillak and on their heads they wore decorated scarves. It was the custom for the bride to sit on a chair covered with a white sheet. When the brides came to their husband's house, they brought their own paja, consisting of things they had made with their own hands. After the wedding, the women's day took place. Only women would come, and they would sing different folk songs to congratulate the bride. After the wedding, the new wife would do housework, wash and clean in and around the house. The new wife also knitted while the old women made socks, waistcoats and other garments. It was the custom for the new wife to listen to her husband and not argue with him, because the man was always the head of the house. New wives very seldom went to visit their own parents because sometimes they were very far away and could not go. But when they did, they went by horse and usually stayed up to two weeks, because there were no cars and travelling was not an easy thing.





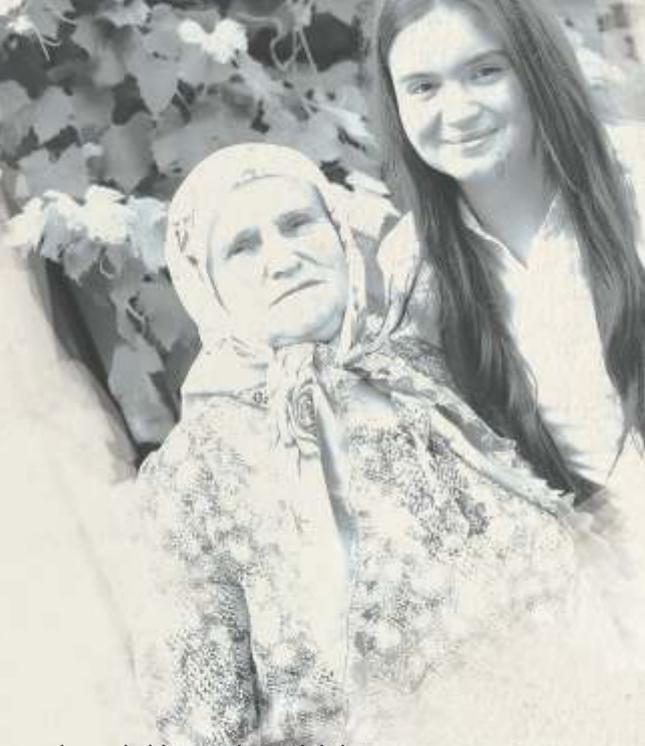
ALTINA KORÇA - 8TH GRADE

## Traditional baking

One day I sat next to my grandmother and we started to talk. She told me about one of the most popular and oldest traditional dishes among Albanians: fli. Fli is a traditional pastry made with flour, water, butter, and cream cheese. My grandmother said: "My dearest, fli was among the most liked dishes on our family table. It needed skilled people to prepare it, because not everyone could make it properly. Before the dough is made you need to light the fire. Then you prepare the dough adding each ingredient in the right measure. Then you put together the layers of fli, layering dough with a spoon in the pan, starting first in the middle and spreading it to the edges and then repeating in layers from the centre. After each layer, you cover the pan with a saç<sup>6</sup>, which needs to be covered with hot coals so that the hot saç bakes the layer of fli in the pan. Then you continue more layers in the same way. This layering, initially in the middle and then around, meant that first you serve your own family and then the others".

This way of preparing fli was passed on from one generation to the next, and my grandmother learned it from her mother, and so on. My grandmother had always been very close to her family and for every dish she would start from the centre, catering to her own family first. According to her everything starts with the family. Family is the source of joy, family is the home as well. She transmitted this belief to her children, especially the girls, and I like it too. I like her sayings, which she learned from her mother and from her grandmother, and she teaches them to me. I will then pass them on to the generations that will come after me. Today, I get pleasure from telling her stories, because I feel closer to her, and grateful for her within my family.

32 6. Saç – a big metal lid, resembling a satellite dish, used to bake pastry by covering the pan with it and covering the whole dish with the embers of wood or coal.





## DEA FETIU - 6TH GRADE

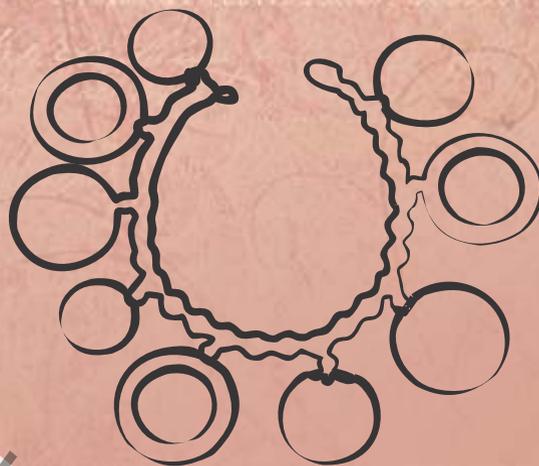
AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER NESRETE SADA

### *First tooth*

I went to visit my grandmother the other day and asked her to tell me about some customs related to their life years ago. She said: "I will tell you about the tradition we had when children got their first tooth. The custom was that the person who noticed the baby's first tooth would buy the baby a gift. To celebrate the joy, we would invite guests to lunch and celebrate the first tooth. Those invited were the grandmothers, the aunts, and other relatives from our family circle. Apart from the main dishes, it was customary to prepare a specialty made of pastry called kryelan, which was baked and cut into small pieces. After the lunch or dinner was eaten, we cleaned the dishes and sat the child at the centre of the table. Someone would carry the pan with kryelan over the baby's head and all of the guests would take a piece to eat. After they removed the pan from baby's head the rest of the kryelan was served to the guests. Then we would put tools and things like scissors, pencils, combs, rings, or chains on a plate and offer the child to pick one of the tools that attracted it most. After the child had made its selection, the women would say what profession the child would choose in the future. So, for example, if the child took the pencil they would become a learned person; if the scissors were chosen, the child would become a hairdresser or a tailor; and if it was the ring or the golden chain, he or she would be a goldsmith or a rich person, and so on.

After this ceremony, the party continued until late at night serving tea, coffee and cakes to the guests. Each of the guests present there would bring a gift to the child.





BESARTA IDRIZI - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDMOTHER MEJREME IDRIZI

## *The Henna bride ceremony*

**M**y grandmother told me that weddings usually started on Thursdays. In the bride's family it would run for one night only, to say goodbye to the girl that was getting married. This night is called kanagjeq, and it was called so because that day the girl would put on kana (henna) to decorate her skin. The bride-to-be was surrounded by her female friends and relatives, both married and unmarried. That night the bride-to-be sang and danced, put on solemn dresses and welcomed the women from her husband's family. Depending on the wealth of the girl's family, a dinner was served for the guests. At the end of the ceremony, the girl would put on the dimi dress and a red headscarf. She would sit on a chair and several girls would sit around her singing songs that made the bride-to-be cry. Her sister-in-law would then take a gold coin, dip it in henna and put it on the bride's hand. The hand was then tied with a red handkerchief. They invited the bride to join the dance and the remaining henna would be given to the other girls, who argued over who would get it, hoping it would determine their fate.



## 27. ANITA PAGI - 6TH GRADE

AS TOLD BY GRANDFATHER RIFAT PAGI

### *Shepherds' Lunch*

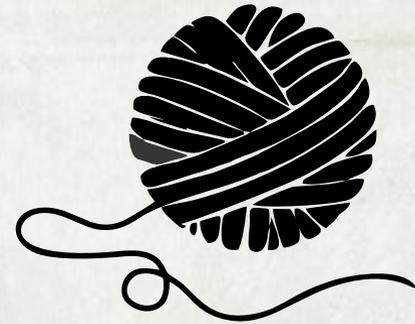
I learnt from my grandfathers that many different events, including many traditional ones, were held in the village in his early youth. One famous event was the “Shepherds' Lunch”. It was usually organised in July or August, because these are also the last months of summer. This event does not have a particular order, but usually starts with the oldest shepherd. The lunch he organised had to be bountiful with traditional food such as burek, fli, përqep and even tespishte<sup>7</sup>. After lunch, one of the shepherds would spin the burek pan. If the pan fell upwards, it meant prosperity and wealth, and an abundance of livestock and crops. If the pan fell upside down, people were not pleased because this meant the opposite. Then the festivities continued from one farmhouse to the next, throughout the neighbourhoods of the village. This was only one of the many folk traditions.

7. Tespishte: a dessert made of wheat flour and nuts.

ERI BERISHA - 6TH GRADE

## Topokol

My grandmother told me that her days were different to ours. The friends of the neighbourhood would gather and play a ball game in a circle. They did not have balls like we do today, but made them themselves by putting together many socks inside each other until they formed a hard ball. Ten girls gathered and entered the first circle, and the others made a circle around them. The girls in the inner circle had to throw the ball at the girls in the outer circle. The girls in the outer circle that were touched by the ball had to move to the inner circle. My grandmother says the game was called topokol. It is like the game we call In between the fires which we play today. This is what I learned from my grandmother.



RITA DUBOVA - 9TH GRADE

## *Life in the Village*

This is the story my grandmother told me: "I lived in a village with my parents, sisters and brothers. I was the youngest of the children. We lived under very harsh conditions. I wanted to get an education but it was impossible. Our youth was very difficult. My parents married me off at a very young age into a family of four members. Life was difficult in the village I went to and we had to work hard in order to survive. From the early morning onwards, we had to milk the cows, prepare the food, do housework and work the land, because that's where the food came from. We also worked other people's lands to make some money because we had no other income to buy things like the tea and sugar we needed.

The holiday we celebrated was Eid. We prepared for it by cleaning the house and preparing food, the most favorite of which was baklava. In those days the women wore dimi dresses with waistcoats to look more beautiful. They twisted their hair about heated metal nails to get curl it. The young brides waited for the girls of the village to come and visit, serving them sweets. Life became more difficult after children were born. There was more work and the obligations with children grew. There was not enough time to take care of the children and to work in the field at the same time. I had to prepare food, do the housework and leave the children to sleep in the house while I walked an hour to the fields to bring food to the men. I seldom went to visit my parents, but when I did I stayed for two to three weeks. This was only possible when children were on school holiday. We would have many guests and had to work hard. Sometimes we would even forget the children. This was our life - hard but beautiful".



KALTRINA LANI - 9TH GRADE

## *My Grandmother's Brave Dogs*

In the depths of my mind and heart I keep many stories and memories which my grandparents used to tell me. Sometimes, when I feel their absence, I recall those memories one by one. I would sit by the window of my room every night and, under the shining crystal moonlight, I eagerly listened to these stories my grandmother used to tell me every night. My favourite stories were the ones she told me about her when she was a young shepherdess. The best and most interesting story was the one my grandmother told me when I was little. She told me her family kept sheep, a big cow and nine dogs. They all had strange names I do not remember, but what I do remember is that each time my grandmother told me their names, I would laugh. She said that people paid more attention to her as she was the smallest in the family and her mother gave her the best bread and milk when she went to the fields with the cow and the sheep. My grandmother told me that the dogs not only looked after the sheep but also kept her company. She told me that one day a wolf had attacked the sheep and, frightened, she had run to hide behind a bush. One of the dogs had gone with her while the others fought the wolf. While my grandmother told me this story, I imagined her as a little, unprotected bird, and her dogs like heroes from fairytales. And they were heroes, because it was thanks to them that the wolf died and my grandmother had managed to return home. I always asked my grandmother to tell me this story again and again because I could not hear it enough. She told it with such emotion each time, and in her eyes I saw a nostalgia she had for the past, which to me was so full of adventures.



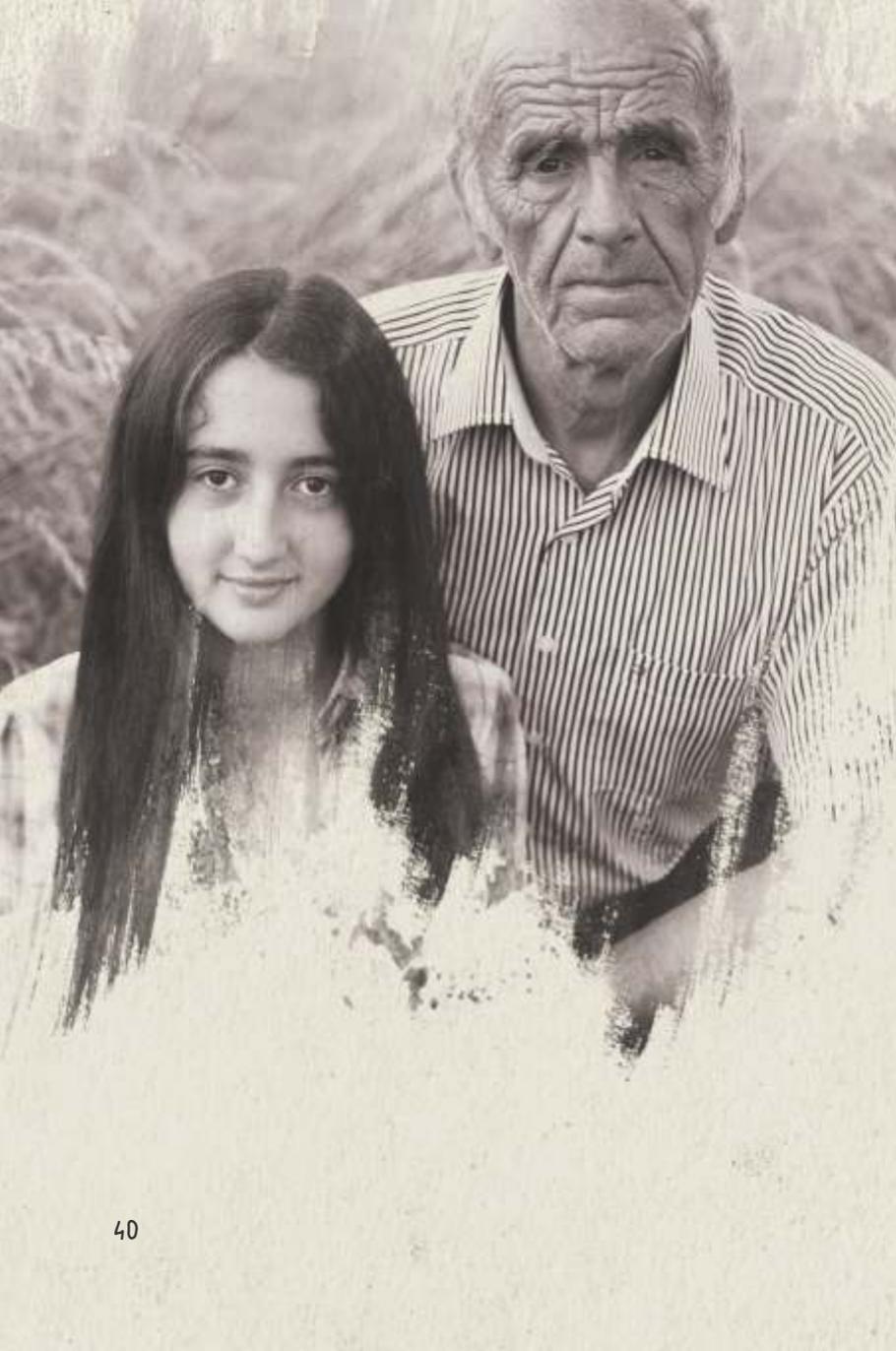
LENDITA NAMANI - 9TH GRADE

## *A Mistake Made Twice is the Choice the Next Time*

I remember many of the stories from my grandparents, although I was little when they told them to me. All of the stories compared times now with times past, and had one purpose: to make us learn lessons from the past. As we were many people in the room, and there were some apples in front of us, my grandfather was reminded of something so he started to tell us:

“There were about fifteen or sixteen of us men and a young boy, a cousin of ours, was serving tea. The boy had stolen some apples from the neighbour's yard and each time apples were mentioned he cried because he felt bad. While he was serving us tea, the old head of the house asked for some apples from the boy, and started to laugh. The boy lowered his head, started to cry and left the room. When he came back into the room, the old man told a joke and everybody laughed. He told it again and only two or three people laughed. He told it a third time and nobody laughed any more. The old man turned to the boy and said: My boy, you cannot even laugh three times at the same joke, and therefore you should not cry more than once for the same thing.”





ANTIGONA DEMIRI - 7TH GRADE

## *Uncle Mehmet and his Kuqo*

Uncle Mehmet was a generous worker from a village. He had two bulls, one of which was called Kuqo. Uncle Mehmet helped the entire neighbourhood with his bulls whenever it was needed. Uncle Mehmet helped some twenty houses in the village. One day, Uncle Mehmet needed to carry a thousand bricks to his house and he asked the people he had helped, but nobody came to help him. It took him ten days to carry the bricks with his bulls. He felt sorry for overworking his bulls and comforted them saying: "Well, Kuqo, this is a lesson for next time"!

After a while a neighbour asked Uncle Mehmet to help him carry some bricks with his bulls. He said to the neighbour: "Ask Kuqo! If he agrees, I will come too." "But the bull cannot talk", answered the neighbour. Then Uncle Mehmet said: "When I needed you, nobody came and it took me ten days to carry the bricks alone with my bulls. Now that you need them, ask Kuqo, because I certainly will not come".



Within the framework of the European Union and the Council of Europe Joint Programme “Support to the Promotion of Cultural Diversity”, this publication contains a selection of memorable stories told to children by their grandparents. These stories, which have been told for centuries and connect generations, offer lessons from the past and exhibit the power of oral history and storytelling in the lives of diverse communities. Stories and oral history play an essential role in shaping our common heritage today.

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### Support to the Promotion of Cultural Diversity

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