

CIA  
SST  
IME  
PTT



# I'M NO ONE

and everyone

each person lives  
things that help write  
the story of who they  
are.

our stories aren't  
exactly the same. no.

the trick is to find  
eachother within them.

# MY FAMILY'S STORY

is like many other  
immigrant stories.

My father immigrated to  
the US from  
Yugoslavia in the 1970s  
and brought my mother  
and my brother. I was  
the anchor baby.

As new immigrants  
without a community or  
much of an education, my  
father, an inventor, and  
my mother, an artist --

found blue collar jobs.

We were poor. But, what we saved allowed us small pleasures.

Sometimes, we would go back to the old country. Something kept drawing my parents back there.

I think the soil that your people are from - speaks to you.

# FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

is in a region called  
the Balkans.

The word "Balkan"  
translates to "bloody  
forehead."

My maiden name,  
Turudic,  
translates to "Turk-  
ish-limb-chopper."

I come from a fighting  
people, who no longer  
have a war to fight.

My rhythm shaped and  
formed by childhood  
visits to socialist  
Yugoslavia. My  
internal DNA screams  
Balkan, brutalism,  
avant garde, savage  
feral fire. Untamable.

The word  
"Unconventional" is  
written on my forehead  
in letters I cannot  
see. I was born  
American, yet my  
ancestors and  
countrymen  
remind me -- I am  
still an immigrant.

# WHO AM I SPEAKING TO?

Myself?

My mother?

My ancestors?

I don't know anymore.

Then i remember

When i walk inside the  
local hardware store  
in Long Beach and the  
young girl behind the  
counter who has been



working at the store  
for the past decade (i  
know because she told  
me) - cools to me the  
second I enter.

"What am *I* doing  
*there*", her face says.

But when I open my  
mouth, and we speak to  
each other,  
her shoulders drop,  
her face relaxes, we  
laugh.

We recognize something  
of ourselves in the  
other.

It feels familiar.

Growing up poor /  
immigrant / first gen-  
eration, we try to  
cover it, we try and  
hide it.

But there is always a  
common language.  
Something that is  
learned in our bones  
that stays with you.

a secret code that  
allows comfort, and  
an ease when we find  
each other.

# MY FIRST LANGUAGE

was not English.

I learned that quickly as I tried to make friends with the little girl who lived down the street.

When I started school, I never said a word. my teachers, used to dealing with my parent's heavy accents and limited vocabulary

- thought I couldn't  
speak the language.

Turns out I was just  
mute.

As an adult,  
I trained to make  
speeches.

I've spoken in front  
of thousands,

But still

To find the words is  
difficult..

I joke often that I  
am still learning the  
English language,  
because I am.

# I GREW UP

inside a mechanic's shop that my father had when i was little.

I can still remember pink gritty wash soap and blue

coveralls...and the smell of grease and metal and heaving red tool chests.

An under car roller cart and a manual hydraulic jack were my first skateboards.

God, i loved those things.

# MY MOTHER

used to cut my hair  
very short.

it was chic in eastern  
european yugoslavia!

I looked like a boy  
and was often mistaken  
for one.

she dressed me in the  
most itchy, scratchy  
brown velour clothing  
that we found at choc.  
thinking about it  
still gives me hives

The girls,  
my classmates,  
had pink gossamer  
dresses with bells  
sewn into them.

every time they sat  
down for storytime,  
they filled the room  
with a rush of  
delicate fluttery  
jingles amid joyous,  
pleased glances from  
the teacher.

I would have done  
anything for a pink  
dress with bells.

# I REMEMBER

my mother used to take me with her to her job at kmart.

Without family or community in the area I would spend hours. 8 exactly, or was it 9, roaming the aisles and watching.

busyng myself organizing shelves and putting clothing back on racks -- because the highest compliment in yugoslav culture was to be "useful."



but... the  
majority of the time  
was spent memorizing  
the prices of toys and  
playing with the ones  
that "just happened"  
to be unpackaged.

and watching other  
little girls fill their  
shopping carts with  
barbies and nail  
polish

sometimes we'd have  
jello at the  
cafeteria.

# OTHER KIDS

had jungle gyms in  
their backyards.

I had a vw bug on  
blocks.

i loved that car /  
clubhouse.

I knew every button,  
every crack and split  
in the leather seats.

Every catch in the  
window crank

or turn of the radio  
dial while imagining  
adventures.

I cried the day my  
father sold it.

# WHEN WE WOULD

go to the old country, everyone thought we were rich because we were arriving from "america." They had no idea we lived on liverwurst and chef boyardee.

whole pigs were slaughtered and entire villages were called for celebratory feasts.

often,  
i would beg to stay  
--- wanting to  
continue feeling what  
i was feeling, but  
didn't have a name  
for.

The outhouses  
The wash basins  
The lack of running  
water and electricity  
The freshly made  
apricot jam on warm  
bread

Being barefoot in the  
corn fields

The simple joy of  
being among people,  
with very little  
money, who saw  
value in a child's  
muddy feet and playing  
cards.

Those village days did  
something to me.  
Educated me. Freed me.  
Touched something that  
i had forgotten.

that we as a species,  
can be so so simple -  
and happy.

**I USED TO  
HIDE MY  
HANDS,** until  
i realized i had the  
hands of a sculptor

A worker

A peasant full of fire

A continuation of my  
people.

# SUMMERS IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

with my  
grandparents who were  
both part of the WWII  
guerilla resistance  
army of the Serbian  
communist partisans  
(similar to  
Bolsheviks) --

informed  
my vocabulary,  
my aesthetic, and  
my world view.

Bold, fearless forms,  
active, unapologetic,  
expressive detail,  
being of the people,  
for the people, and  
with the people --  
that is my work space.

We may be peasants,  
but we're very clever  
ones.



# MY GRAND- FATHER WAS A ROBBER.

He  
want to jail for it  
and subsequently  
escaped.

Did you know that a  
high percentage of  
inmates have  
undiagnosed  
learning disabilities  
-- and are ...

categorically gifted  
with high IQ's?

I asked one of the  
local school districts  
what percentage of  
the children they had  
flagged as  
"behavioral problems"  
received  
individualized testing  
for giftedness.

Their answer? ZERO.

**CAREFUL**  
**NOW,** that piece  
of you

That wild piece  
That hidden piece  
Where your body  
remembers  
you are still animal  
Still untamed, full of  
fire

That's the piece to  
cherish  
That's the kindling  
That's the human part  
And it's terrifying



# INVITED:

the untamables,  
the outsiders,  
the rebels,  
the disrupters,  
the inventors, the  
dissenters,  
the exiled geniuses

i've been looking for  
you.

come join my crew.



