

**DANICA
OLEXOVÁ
STORIES
FROM BENEATH
THE ACACIA**







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Danica Olexová
STORIES FROM BENEATH
THE ACACIA

Spolok svätého Vojtecha
Trnava 2024



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To Anna Olexová





A Woman of Stories

In my imagination, the whole life of Danica Olexová was built of a great many stories in a great variety of forms which she'd been intensely absorbing. The person behind the idea of publishing her photographs and sketches is Juraj Vontorčík, a graphic designer working for the Pergamen Visual Communication Studio in Trnava, who, as a constant admirer of Danica's photographic work, had suggested it earlier. Later, there came up an idea to issue a book of 25 stories for the 25th anniversary of the carolling campaign Dobrá novina (Good News) with which Olexová had cooperated for 25 years. Although the idea was not greenlighted, Danica took her first tentative steps to write her stories, or, should I say, to gather material for her book. After all, the great majority of her stories had already been living in her heart, having been born during the quarter of a century she spent working for Dobrá novina. Some of her pictures and texts had already been published, but, in book form, they were supposed to get a whole new dimension.

Danica submitted the first set of her photographs and texts a month before she tragically lost her life in an airplane accident on March 10, 2019. The rest of the pictures and stories were discovered in her computer and correspondence later.

Since, in some cases, the pictures (and the pictures are key here) accompanying certain stories weren't of sufficient quality, we had to use photographs originally intended for different texts which Danica couldn't finish. It was sometimes problematic to identify the subject matter of some pictures, the time and names of people in them remain unknown. If you recognize them, feel free to let us know, we will gladly add the information to the second impression of the book.

We want this book to be published in Danica's memory, to commemorate her extraordinary talent, creativity and art of striking up unique friendships and genuine relations with people. We are thankful for the opportunity to have been part of her life-story.

Martina Grochálová, editor

Baboon – Danica Olexová Foundation

Danica Olexová and Simon Kasirivu, who is in charge of a workshop at the Providence Home in the town of Nkokonjeru, Uganda, where the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi take care of disabled children and adults. Photo: Jozef Magda, Nkokonjeru, Uganda, 2018





A Scandalous Story from Beneath the Acacia

The umbrella-shaped acacia trees, with their wide dome-like crowns, are typical of African savannahs. The crown provides abundant shade and thus helps to retain moisture in the soil beneath the tree. Acacia is considered a symbol of stories, since groups of people often sit under these trees and tell one another stories from everyday life. Monika and Thembi also became protagonists of one of the numerous stories told at the St. John's Care Centre in Barberton.

A woman in her thirties, Monika was one of the patients suffering from AIDS whom the mission sisters had pulled through when she had found herself near death's door. The story dates back to the time when Monika was about to go home to see her children her sister had taken care of. Thembi was in his twenties and his family had rejected him. All family ties had been cut off by the AIDS stigma. He and Monika were very close. They were often seen talking to each other, laughing, or simply sitting quietly on the porch. Even that, though, was enough for rumours to start circulating.

The night after Monika came back to the centre, a young Indian nun working her night shift ran to her mother superior, saying there was a scandal looming on the horizon. Thembi was sharing Monika's bed!

The pair of "sinners" were indeed caught together, both were hidden under Monika's sheet... eating the chicken Monika had cooked according to a traditional Swazi recipe, having been aware that Thembi had been missing native cuisine. Even though the nuns cooked very well, their meals were still food of "the white".

Two weeks later, Thembi passed away. Despite breaking several rules, Monika felt she'd done something important for him. And the others had to admit that sometimes they judged too quickly, jumping to hasty conclusions.

The umbrella-shaped acacia as a symbol of African natural scenery and culture. Waso Rongai, Kenya, 2018



