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Dubrovčanka, majka i medicinska sestra
Dubrovnik native, mother and nurse

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Uvod

Izložba je posvećena medicinskoj sestri Nikici Bovolini Blagojević – skrivenom biseru sestrinske povijesti na našim prostorima. Njezin život i rad otvara prostor za razmišljanje o profesiji koja je često ostajala nevidljiva, a duboko je oblikovala društvo – profesiji medicinskih sestara. Podaci i materijali korišteni u izradi izložbe prikupljeni su zahvaljujući suradnji s njezinim sinom Vukom i unukom Nicolasom Blagojevićem iz Francuske. Njihova dobra volja i obiteljska sjećanja bila su temelj za rekonstruiranje jednog bogatog, ali nedovoljno poznatog životnog puta. Proces analize i oblikovanja izložbenog narativa spojio je osobno i digitalno, prošlost i sadašnjost – u svrhu očuvanja i predstavljanja važnog dijela kulturne i profesionalne baštine. Nikica Bovolini Blagojević bila je mnogo više od medicinske sestre: bila je čuvarica znanja, suputnica u boli i oporavku, tih, ali postojan oslonac mnogima. Ovom izložbom ne govorimo samo o njoj – već i o desecima tisuća žena koje su svoj život posvetile skrbi za druge. Često zaboravljamo da na ovim prostorima imamo dugu, bogatu – i još uvijek nedovoljno istraženu – povijest sestrinstva. Izložba je pokušaj da se to ispravi: da se svjetlo usmjeri prema onima koje su bile tu kada je najviše trebalo – tiho, vješto, s empatijom koja se ne zaboravlja.

Introduction

The exhibition is dedicated to nurse Nikica Bovolini Blagojević, a remarkable yet often overlooked figure in our region's nursing history. Her life and work invite us to reflect on a profession that, despite often being unnoticed, has profoundly impacted society—nursing profession. The data and materials used to create this exhibition were gathered through collaboration with her son, Vuk, and grandson, Nicolas Blagojević, who reside in France. Their generosity and family memories provided the foundation for reconstructing her rich yet underappreciated life story. In analysing and shaping the exhibition's narrative, we connected the personal and digital realms, as well as the past and present, with the aim of preserving and presenting a vital part of our cultural and professional heritage. Nikica Bovolini Blagojević was much more than just a nurse; she was a custodian of knowledge, a companion in times of pain and recovery, and a quiet but steadfast support for many. Through this exhibition, we not only honour her life but also acknowledge the contributions of tens of thousands of women who have devoted their lives to caring for others. We often forget that there is a long, rich, and still under-researched history of nursing in our region. This exhibition aims to rectify that by shining a light on those who were there when it was needed most—silently, skilfully, and with an empathy that endures.

1. Djetinjstvo

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević rođena je 25. kolovoza 1899. u Dubrovniku, u obitelji dubokih jadranskih i mediteranskih korijena. Bila je kći Josipa Bovolinija, porijeklom iz talijanske Genove i Ane rođene Skurić, podrijetlom iz Čilipa, konavoskog sela južno od Grada. Njih su se dvoje vjenčali 15. siječnja iste godine u Dubrovniku. Nikica je prvo dijete svojih roditelja, krštena samo nekoliko dana nakon rođenja, 3. rujna 1899.¹ u jednoj od dubrovačkih župa, čime je zauvijek upisana u kamenu knjigu Grada pod Srđem. Odrastala je uz trojicu braće: Antuna, Pera i Đilda,² u okruženju u kojem su se ispreplitale gradska kultura, talijanski duh oca i duboka ukorijenjenost majčine konavoske loze. Takva mješavina podrijetla vjerojatno je doprinijela njezinoj osobnosti – smirenoj, intuitivnoj, a opet čvrstoj i odlučnoj. Već od najranijih dana pokazivala je sklonost brizi za druge, empatiji i odgovornosti, što će kasnije postati temelji njezina profesionalnog poziva. Prezime Bovolini u Hrvatskoj ima jasnu geografsko-povijesnu prisutnost na području Dubrovnika. Prema podacima portala Acta Croatica, riječ je o prezimenu koje pripada hrvatskoj populaciji, prvenstveno povezanom s gradom Dubrovnikom. Sredinom 20. stoljeća bilo je zabilježeno desetak nositelja prezimena, koji su živjeli u svega nekoliko domaćinstava, ponajviše u samom Dubrovniku, ali i u okolnim naseljima poput Nove Mokošice i Mokošice.³ Grad Dubrovnik je krajem 19. stoljeća bio grad raskrižja – između austro-ugarske discipline i mediteranske slobode, između narodnih običaja i građanske kulture. U tom suživotu tradicije i moderne Nikica je oblikovala svoju snagu – tihu, ali postojanu. Djetinjstvo provedeno u tom prostoru bogate povijesti i složenih identiteta, oblikovalo je njezinu svijest o važnosti skrbi, dužnosti i ljudske bliskosti.

1. Childhood

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević was born on August 25, 1899, in Dubrovnik, into a family with deep Adriatic and Mediterranean roots. She was the daughter of Josip Bovolini, who originally came from Genoa, Italy, and Ana née Skurić, who hailed from Čilipi, a village in Konavle, south of the city. The couple married on January 15 of the same year in Dubrovnik, and Nikica was their first child, baptized just a few days after her birth, on September 3, 1899,¹ in one of the Dubrovnik parishes, thus forever inscribed in the city's historical records. Nikica grew up with three brothers: Antun, Pero, and Đildo,² in an environment where the city's culture, her father's Italian spirit, and her mother's deep-rooted Konavle lineage intertwined. This mixture of backgrounds likely contributed to her personality—calm and intuitive, yet firm and decisive. From an early age, she demonstrated a tendency to care for others, showcasing empathy and a sense of responsibility, which later became the foundations of her professional calling. The surname Bovolini has a notable geographical and historical presence in the Dubrovnik area. According to the Acta Croatica portal, it belongs to the Croatian population, primarily associated with the city of Dubrovnik. In the mid-20th century, there were about ten bearers of the surname, mostly residing in a few households in Dubrovnik and surrounding areas such as Nova Mokošica and Mokošica.³ At the end of the 19th century, Dubrovnik was a crossroads of cultures—a blend of Austro-Hungarian discipline and Mediterranean freedom, along with folk customs and civic culture. In this coexistence of tradition and modernity, Nikica found her strength—quiet but steadfast. Her childhood, spent amidst rich history and complex identities, shaped her understanding of the importance of care, duty, and human closeness.

1 Arhiv Biskupije dubrovačke, Matična knjiga rođenih župe Dubrovnik (Lapad) 1885.-1902., str. 80

2 Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

3 Acta croatica – Prezime Bovolini: <https://actacroatica.com/hr/surname/Bovolini/>

1 Archives of the Diocese of Dubrovnik, Birth Register of the Dubrovnik (Lapad) Parish 1885-1902, p. 80

2 Interview Vuk Blagojević, October 5, 2022

3 Acta croatica – Surname Bovolini: <https://actacroatica.com/hr/surname/Bovolini/>

2. Zbirka pripovijedaka „Izmegju svijetla i tmine“ (1921.)

Godine 1921. u Dubrovniku je objavljena publikacija naslova „Izmegju svijetla i tmine“, zbirka kratkih pripovijedaka autorice Nikice Bovolini. Djelo, koje je tiskala „Srpska štamparija“ iz Dubrovnika, već svojim naslovom najavljuje osnovni motiv – napetost između svijetlih i tamnih strana života, između nade i tjeskobe, radosti i boli. Kratke pripovijetke okupljene u zbirci odražavaju duh vremena neposredno nakon Prvog svjetskog rata kada je društvo tražilo ravnotežu između sjećanja na tragedije i težnje prema novom početku.⁴ Nikica Bovolini u svojim tekstovima pokazuje osjećaj za svakodnevicu malog čovjeka, ali i za šire društvene i moralne dileme. Svojim prvim književnim radom Bovolini se upisala u kulturnu baštinu Dubrovnika dajući glas generaciji koja je živjela „između svijetla i tmine“, u vremenu previranja, ali i trajne nade. Danas se ova zbirka pripovijedaka može pronaći u Nacionalnoj i sveučilišnoj knjižnici u Zagrebu, Narodnoj biblioteci Srbije te Univerzitetској biblioteci „Svetozar Marković“ u Beogradu.

2. Collection of short stories „Izmegju svijetla i tmine“ (Between Light and Darkness)(1921)

In 1921, a publication titled „Izmegju svijetla i tmine“ (Between Light and Darkness) was released in Dubrovnik. This collection of short stories was written by Nikica Bovolini and printed by „Srpska štamparija“. The title reflects the central theme of the work—the tension between the bright and dark sides of life, encompassing hope and anxiety, joy and pain. The stories in this collection capture the spirit of the period immediately following the First World War, when society sought to find a balance between the memories of past tragedies and the desire for a fresh start.⁴ Nikica Bovolini's writing demonstrates a deep understanding of everyday life for ordinary people, as well as broader social and moral dilemmas. With her debut literary work, Bovolini entered the cultural heritage of Dubrovnik, giving voice to a generation that existed „between light and darkness“ during a time of upheaval yet also filled with enduring hope. Today, this collection can be found in the National and University Library in Zagreb, the National Library of Serbia, and the „Svetozar Marković“ University Library in Belgrade.

⁴ Digitalna kopija dobivena od Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu, rujan. 2022. u svrhu istraživanja

⁴ Digital copy obtained from the National and University Library in Zagreb, Sept. 2022 for research purposes

3. Beograd – Škola za nudilje

Povijest Beogradske škole za medicinske sestre započela je 1921. u zemlji koja dotad nije imala tradiciju sestrinstva. Prvi pokušaji obuke medicinskih sestara sežu od 1908., ali su bili kratkotrajni i ograničeni. Nakon Prvog svjetskog rata, zahvaljujući podršci Crvenog križa Kraljevine SHS i Američke misije dr. Reedera za pomoć djeci, odlučeno je osnovati pravu školu za obrazovanje medicinskih sestara. Direktorica je postala Amerikanka Miss Fitzgerald, koja je uz brojne poteškoće organizirala nastavu i praktični rad u teškim uvjetima. U početku je škola imala 18 učenica, a uvjeti su bili vrlo skromni – nedostatak vode, posteljine i opreme bio je svakodnevica. Do 1923. godine škola je dobila novu, moderno opremljenu zgradu za 150 učenica, s knjižnicom i ambulantama za praktičnu nastavu. Unatoč početnim teškoćama i društvenoj apatiji prema sestrinstvu, škola je postavila temelje suvremenog obrazovanja medicinskih sestara u Srbiji.⁵ Nikica Bovolini Blagojević seli se u Beograd, tamo započinje njezin profesionalni put – onaj koji će oblikovati ne samo njezin život, već i njezin identitet. Godine 1921. Nikica postaje učenica prve generacije nudilja, kako su se tada zvale medicinske sestre u srpskohrvatskom jeziku. Sam naziv „nudilja“ dolazi od engleske riječi nurse.⁶ Školu za sestre-nudilje u Beogradu pohađala je od 1921. do 1924. godine, a završila ju je s odličnim uspjehom.⁷ Prva generacija od 18 učenica započela je obrazovanje u studenom 1921. godine. Do 1924. direktorica škole bila engleska sestra Enid B. Newton, kada napušta Beograd, a njezino mjesto zauzima Ruža Helih.⁸

5 Enid M. Newton, History of a training school for nurses, The I.C.N., Bulletin, No. III, 06/1924., str. 19-23

6 Snježana Grković-Janović, Sestra Lujza, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 123

7 Arhiv Jugoslavije Beograd: Fond Ministarstvo socijalne politike i narodnog zdravlja Kraljevine Jugoslavije (personalije) dosje Nikice Blagojević, signatura: AJ 39, F-12

8 Enid M. Newton, History of a training school for nurses, The I.C.N., Bulletin, No. III, 06/1924., str. 22-23

3. Belgrade – School for Nurses

The history of the Belgrade School of Nursing began in 1921 in a country that previously had no tradition of nursing. Although there were early attempts to train nurses as far back as 1908, these efforts were short-lived and limited. After World War I, with support from the Red Cross of the Kingdom of SHS and Dr. Reeder's American Mission for Aid to Children, the decision was made to establish a formal school for nursing education. The first director was Miss Fitzgerald, an American who, despite many challenges, organised classes and practical training under difficult conditions. Initially, the school had 18 students, and the circumstances were very modest, often lacking essentials like water, bedding, and equipment. By 1923, the school had a new, modern building equipped to accommodate 150 students, complete with a library and clinics for practical classes. Despite initial challenges and social indifference towards nursing, the school established the foundations of modern nursing education in Serbia.⁵ Nikica Bovolini Blagojević moved to Belgrade, marking the beginning of her professional journey, which would profoundly impact her life and identity. In 1921, she became a student in the first generation of nudilja, the term used in Serbo-Croatian for nurses. The name „nudilja“ is derived from the English word „nurse”.⁶ Nikica attended the School for Nurses-Nudilja in Belgrade from 1921 to 1924, graduating with honors.⁷ The first cohort of 18 students began their education in November 1921. Until 1924, the school was directed by English nurse Enid B. Newton, who left Belgrade that year, after which Ruža Helih⁸ assumed her position.

5 Enid M. Newton, History of a training school for nurses, The I.C.N., Bulletin, No. III, 06/1924., p. 19-23

6 Snježana Grković-Janović, Sestra Lujza, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 123

7 Archives of Yugoslavia Belgrade: Fonds Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (personnel) file of Nikica Blagojević, reference: AJ 39, F-12

8 Enid M. Newton, History of a training school for nurses, The I.C.N., Bulletin, No. III, 06/1924., str. 22-23



Škola za nudiđe u Beogradu.

Izvor: Internacionalni arhiv Crvenog Križa Ženava, signatura V-P-HIST-E-04588



Učenice i ravnateljica Ruža Helih u učionici.

Izvor: Internacionalni arhiv Crvenog Križa Ženava, signatura: V-P-HIST-E-04589



Ravnateljica Ruža Helihova i učenice. Izvor: Internacionalni arhiv Crvenog Križa Ženava, signatura V-P-HIST-E-04590



Praktična nastava u kabinetu za njegu. Izvor: Škola narodnog zdravlja Andrija Štampar, Odjel za vode, Arhiva fotografija, signatura 7. medicinske sestre, kutija 2



Učenica Škole za nudiđe. Izvor: privatna zbirka Tomislav Kovačević

4. Medicinsk sestra Marija König (Kenig)

Između redaka lokalne povijesti krije se tihi trag jedne iznimne Đakovčanke – žene koja je svoj put započela u Školi za sestre nudilje u Beogradu. Marija Kenig (König) rođena je 1911. u Đakovu kao jedanaesto dijete u obitelji s dvanaestero braće i sestara. U rodnom gradu završila je četiri razreda osnovne škole. Nakon toga je pomagala kod kuće, vodila domaćinstvo te obavljala poslove telegrafistice na željezničkoj stanici.⁹ Imala je veliku želju za školovanjem u sestrijskom pozivu. Poslala je molbe za upis u škole u Zagrebu i Beogradu. Molba u Zagrebu bila je odbijena, no u Beogradu je primljena te je 1931. započela školovanje. Školu za sestre nudilje u Beogradu završila je 1934. godine,¹⁰ nakon trogodišnjeg programa. Marija je bila izrazito pobožna osoba, s dubokom i živom vjerom. Njena nećakinja svjedoči da je Marija čak željela postati redovnica.¹¹ Prvo zaposlenje našla je u Novom Sadu, u Državnom higijenskom zavodu. Zbog skromnih primanja i drugih životnih okolnosti za vrijeme Drugoga svjetskog rata podnijela je molbu za prijem u službu u novoosnovanoj Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj.¹² Od 1947. zaposlena je u Domu zdravlja u Đakovu, gdje je radila sve do umirovljenja, premda godina njezina odlaska u mirovinu nije točno poznata.¹³ Sama je isticala kako je najprimjereniji naziv za sestre „zdravstvene učiteljice”.¹⁴ Bila je aktivna i u stručnim krugovima, a u sestrijskim časopisima objavljivala je svoje članke. Posljednje godine života, u starosti i bolesti, provela je u Osijeku kod svoje nećakinje. Imala je snažnu vjeru do samoga kraja – zamolila je nećakinju da, ako više ne bude pri svijesti, pozove svećenika radi primanja sakramenta bolesničkog pomazanja. Kada je svećenik došao, posvjedočio je da je Marija potpuno pri svijesti i da nije na samrti.¹⁵ Primila je sakrament bolesničkog pomazanja te ostala prisebna do posljednjih trenutaka. Marija Kenig preminula je 2000. u Osijeku. Pokopana je na gradskom groblju u Đakovu.¹⁶

4. Nurse Marija König (Kenig)

Between the lines of local history lies the quiet trace of an exceptional woman from Đakovo – a woman whose journey began at the School for Nursing in Belgrade. Marija Kenig (König) was born in 1911 in Đakovo as the eleventh child in a family of twelve siblings. She completed four grades of elementary school in her hometown. Afterwards, she helped at home, managed the household, and worked as a telegraph operator at the railway station.⁹ Marija had a strong desire to pursue a career in nursing, so she applied to nursing schools in Zagreb and Belgrade. Her application to the school in Zagreb was rejected, but she was accepted in Belgrade, where she began her studies in 1931. She graduated from the school for nursing assistants in Belgrade in 1934¹⁰ after completing a three-year program. Marija was an extremely devout person with a deep and living faith. Marija's niece testified that Marija had once considered becoming a nun.¹¹ She found her first job in Novi Sad at the State Hygiene Institute. Due to modest income and other life circumstances, during the Second World War she submitted an application for employment in the newly established Independent State of Croatia.¹² From 1947, Marija worked at the Health Centre in Đakovo until her retirement, although the exact year of her retirement is unknown.¹³ She believed that the most appropriate title for nurses was "health teachers".¹⁴ Marija was also active in professional circles and published articles in nursing magazines. In her later years, while dealing with health issues, she lived in Osijek with her niece. Throughout her life, she maintained a strong faith and requested that her niece call a priest for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick if she became unconscious. When the priest arrived, he found that Marija was fully conscious and not dying.¹⁵ She received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and remained alert until her last moments. Marija Kenig passed away in 2000 in Osijek. She was buried at the city cemetery in Đakovo.¹⁶

9 HR-DAZG 237 Središnji ured sestra pomoćnica, sig. 14, Osobni podatci sestara pomoćnica Marije König

10 HR-DAZG-755 Društvo diplomiranih sestra pomoćnica, sig. 15, anketa Marije König

11 Intervju Đurđica Vačora- Sapanjoš, 09/2025.

12 HR-DAZG-755 Društvo diplomiranih sestra pomoćnica, sig. 15, pisma Marije König

13 Upit Dom zdravlja Đakovo – Arhiva podatci o medicinskoj sestri Mariji Kenig, 07/2019.

14 Intervju Katica Lapenda, Đakovo, 2013.

15 Informacije dobivene od nećakinje Marije Kenig – Đurđice Vačora-Sapanjoš

16 Informacija s nadgrobnog spomenika obitelji Kenig na đakovačkom groblju

9 HR-DAZG 237 Central Office Assistant Nurse, sig. 14, Personal data of Assistant Nurses Marija König

10 HR-DAZG-755 Society of Graduate Assistant Nurses, sig. 15, Survey of Marija König

11 Interview Đurđica Vačora- Sapanjoš, 09/2025.

12 HR-DAZG-755 Society of Graduate Assistant Nurses, sig. 15, Letters of Marija König

13 Inquiry Health Center Đakovo – Archive data on nurse Marija König, 07/2019.

14 Interview Katica Lapenda, Đakovo, 2013.

15 Information received from niece Marija Kenig – Đurđice Vačora-Sapanjoš

16 Information from the tombstone of the Kenig family at the Đakovo cemetery



Nudilje učenice XIII klase 1934. godine. Izvor: Muzej nauke i tehnike – Beograd, Zbirka Muzeja Srpskog lekarskog društva.



Marija Kenig i pioniri u posjetu Doma zdravlja, Đakovo. Izvor: Facebook grupa Đakovačke šetnje, objava Dubravko Ferger, 23. 01. 2014. godine.



Katica Lapenda i Marija König, Osijek 24. 05. 1964. Izvor: privatna zbirka Katice Lapenda.

5. Boravak u Engleskoj i Americi

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević imala je rijetku priliku za međunarodno stručno usavršavanje, što je ostavilo dubok trag na njezinu profesionalnu formaciju. Godine 1924.-1925. boravila je u Londonu i Bristolu, gdje se usavršavala u administraciji škola za sestre i organizaciji za zaštitu djece.¹⁷ Tijekom tog boravka upoznala se s britanskim modelom javnog zdravlja i patronažnog rada, koji se snažno razvijao nakon Prvog svjetskog rata. To iskustvo oblikovalo je njezino razumijevanje uloge sestre ne samo u bolničkoj, nego i u društvenoj zajednici. Godine 1928. otputovala je u Sjedinjene Američke Države kao stipendistica Rockefellerove fondacije. Prvo se usavršavala u njujorškom East Harlem Health Centru, a zatim je radila u različitim institucijama: Johns Hopkins bolnici u Baltimoru, bolnicama u Philadelphiji i New Havenu te na Yale School of Nursing. Poseban naglasak bio je na javnom zdravlju, kontroli tuberkuloze i veneričnih bolesti te organizaciji patronažnog rada. Boravila je i u Torontu gdje je upoznala kanadski sustav školovanja medicinskih sestara i sudjelovala na Međunarodnom kongresu sestara u Montrealu 1929. godine.¹⁸ Ova iskustva donijela su joj široku perspektivu o ulozi medicinskih sestara u javnom zdravstvu te viziju koju je kasnije primijenila pri organizaciji patronažnog rada i stvaranju temelja socijalne zaštite u Jugoslaviji.

5. Time spent in England and America

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević had a remarkable opportunity for international professional training, which significantly impacted her career development. From 1924 to 1925, she lived in London and Bristol, where she trained in the administration of nursing schools and the organisation of child protection services.¹⁷ During her time there, she became familiar with the British model of public health and community nursing, which had developed substantially after the First World War. This experience shaped her understanding of the nurse's role not only in hospitals but also within the broader social community. In 1928, she travelled to the United States as a scholarship recipient of the Rockefeller Foundation. Initially, she trained at the East Harlem Health Centre in New York, later working at various institutions, including Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, hospitals in Philadelphia and New Haven, and at the Yale School of Nursing. Her training focused particularly on public health, control of tuberculosis and venereal diseases, and community organisation. Additionally, she spent time in Toronto, where she learned about the Canadian nursing education system and participated in the International Congress of Nurses in Montreal in 1929.¹⁸ These experiences provided her with a comprehensive perspective on the role of nurses in public health, which she later applied to organising community care and establishing the foundations of social protection in Yugoslavia.

17 Arhiv Jugoslavije Beograd: Fond Ministarstvo socijalne politike i narodnog zdravlja Kraljevine Jugoslavije (personalije) dosje Nikice Blagojević, signatura: AJ 39, F-12

18 Arhiv Rockefeller fondacije, SAD, Signatur RF RG 10.2 Series 24-IHB-DS-DME Nursing-YUGOSLAVIA Box 18 Bovolini-N

17 Archives of Yugoslavia Belgrade: Fonds Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (personnel) file of Nikica Blagojević, reference: AJ 39, F-12

18 Rockefeller Foundation Archives, USA, ref. RF RG 10.2 Series 24-IHB-DS-DME Nursing-YUGOSLAVIA Box 18 Bovolini-N



Nikica Bovolini u sestrinskoj uniformi.
Izvor: privatno Vuk Blagjević.



Značka sestra nudilja u
Beogradu. Izvor: privatna
zbirka Tomislav Kovačević.

**JUGO-SLAVIAN NURSE
ON FURLOUGH HERE**

**Nikica Bovolini Studies Health
Methods at University of
Toronto**

ARRIVED YESTERDAY

The University of Toronto, has a distinguished visitor in the person of Miss Nikica Bovolini, formerly superintendent of public health nurses in Yugoslavia.

Miss Bovolini was a member of the first group to graduate in her profession. Through the Rockefeller Foundation, health stations were established throughout her land to co-operate with the mothers, to teach nurses, and to improve sanitary conditions.

Asked about industrial conditions, she said: "Our country is mainly agricultural, but our factories are becoming busier. Belgrade has modern ideas and is advancing rapidly. Its population has increased to 350,000."

Miss Bovolini, who arrived in Toronto Sunday, is on furlough in this city for the next five months, and will study health methods at the University of Toronto, after which she will return home to become a member of the state board of health.

Članak iz lokalne štampe o dolasku
Nikice Bovolini u Kanadu.
Izvor: The Yugoslavian nurse on
furlough here, The Varsity,
19. 02. 1929., str. 1

6. Obitelj Blagojević i djeca

Nikica je preko zajedničkih prijatelja upoznala Radisava Blagojevića, rodom iz Zaglavka u južnoj Srbiji. Radisav je u Beogradu radio kao nosač na lađama, a uz posao je pohađao večernju školu i marljivim radom napredovao do položaja višeg revizora.¹⁹ Njihova se bliskost brzo pretvorila u ljubav te su se 28. veljače 1932. vjenčali u Beogradu.²⁰ U braku su dobili troje djece – sinove Miloša (1933.), Vuka (1937.) i kćer Gordanu (1939.).²¹ Obitelj Blagojević stanovala je u Travničkoj ulici u Beogradu u zgradi u kojoj se d Općina Savski venac, Beograd, Matična služba, izvod iz matice vjenčanih, 10/2022. god anas nalazi Uprava projekta „Beograd na vodi“. Nikica je s obitelji živjela mirnim i skladnim životom sve do početka Drugog svjetskog rata 1941., kada su ratna zbivanja prekinula njihovu svakodnevnicu i unijela nesigurnost u živote mnogih beogradskih obitelji. Za vrijeme okupacije Beograda u Drugom svjetskom ratu, obitelj Blagojević stanovala je u Travničkoj ulici u palači Beogradske zadruge u kojoj je Radislav bio zaposlen.²²

6. The Blagojević family and children

Through mutual friends, Nikica met Radisav Blagojević, who was originally from Zaglavak in southern Serbia. Radisav worked as a porter on ships in Belgrade. While holding this job, he attended night school and eventually advanced to the position of senior auditor.¹⁹ Their close friendship quickly blossomed into love, and they got married in Belgrade²⁰ on February 28, 1932. The couple had three children: a sons Miloš, (1933), Vuk (1937) and daughter Gordana (1939).²¹ The Blagojević family lived on Travnička Street in Belgrade, in a building that now houses the “Belgrade on Water” Project Administration. They enjoyed a peaceful and harmonious life until the outbreak of World War II in 1941, which disrupted their daily lives and brought uncertainty to many families in Belgrade. During the occupation of Belgrade in the Second World War, the family lived on Travnička Street, in the Palace of the Belgrade Cooperative, where Radisav was employed.²²



*Nikica i sin Vuk u
Francuskoj.
Izvor: privatno
Vuk Blagojević.*

¹⁹ Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

²⁰ Općina Savski venac, Beograd, Matična služba, izvod iz matice vjenčanih, 10/2022. god.

²¹ Arhiv Jugoslavije Beograd: Fond Ministarstvo socijalne politike i narodnog zdravlja Kraljevine Jugoslavije (personalije) dosje Nikice Blagojević, signatura: AJ 39, F-12

²² Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

¹⁹ Interview Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

²⁰ Municipality of Savski Venac, Belgrade, Civil Registry Office, Extract from the Register of Marriages, 10/2022

²¹ Archives of Yugoslavia Belgrade: Fonds Ministry of Social Policy and Public Health of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (personnel) file of Nikica Blagojević, reference: AJ 39, F-12

²² Interview Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

7. Nastajanje sestrinske udruge i ućlanjenje u I.C.N.²³

Tijekom 1927. i 1928. godine medicinske sestre Zagrebaćke škole na inicijativu sestre Ane Papalilopulos, počele su se redovito sastajati s ciljem osnivanja udruženja diplomiranih sestara. Njihova nastojanja ubrzo su dovela do stvaranja prvog organiziranog društva sestara na današnjem području Republike Hrvatske. Godine 1929. održan je u Montrealu međunarodni kongres sestara na kojem je sestra Nikica Bovolini predstavljala naše udruženje i uspostavila kontakte s Međunarodnim vijećem sestara (I.C.N.). Uz pomoć Miss Jean Gunn i drugih kolegica iz Toronta, Jugoslavensko udruženje sestara primljeno je u I.C.N., što je bio veliki uspjeh za domaće sestrinstvo. U Beogradu i Ljubljani osnovane su sekcije, a 1930. održan je prvi kongres sestara Kraljevine Jugoslavije. Ubrzo su osnovane i druge sekcije, njih sedam, od kojih su četiri aktivno djelovale. Uprava društva nalazila se u Beogradu, a prva predsjednica je bila Nikica Bovolini.²⁴

7. Establishment of a nursing association and membership in the I.C.N.²³

Between 1927 and 1928, nurses from the Zagreb School, under the initiative of Sister Ana Papalilopulos, began to meet regularly with the goal of establishing an association for graduate nurses. Their efforts quickly resulted in the formation of the first organised nursing society in what is now the Republic of Croatia. In 1929, an international nursing congress was held in Montreal, where Sister Nikica Bovolini represented our association and made important connections with the International Council of Nurses (ICN). With the support of Miss Jean Gunn and other colleagues from Toronto, the Yugoslav Nursing Association was admitted to the ICN, marking a significant achievement for nursing in the region. Following this, sections were established in Belgrade and Ljubljana, and in 1930, the first congress of nurses from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia took place. Soon, additional sections were established, totalling seven, of which four were active. The association's management was based in Belgrade, and Nikica Bovolini served as the first president.²⁴

23 Međunarodno vijeće medicinskih sestara- International Council of Nurses

24 HR-DAZG-755 Društvo diplomiranih sestra pomoćnica, sig. 15, Nastanak sestrinskog udruženja, kratka povijest, autor Lujza Wagner, 08/1939.

23 International Council of Nurses

24 HR-DAZG-755 Society of Graduated Nurse Assistants, sig. 15, The Origin of the Nursing Association, Short History, by Lujza Wagner, 08/1939



Primanje sestara Kraljevine Jugoslavije u ICN, 1929. god. Izvor: *The reception of new countries, The British journal of nursing*, 08. 1929., str. 219



Predsjednica sestrinskog udruženja Nikica Bovolini (u sredini) sa sestrama delegatima iz Kraljevine Jugoslavije oko 1930. godine. Izvor: privatno Nicolas Blagojević.



Prvi stručni kongres sestara nudilja Kraljevine Jugoslavije u Beogradu 1930. godine. Izvor: Muzej Štip, Sjeverna Makedonija - signatura ZZSKMSH-I-3905.

8. Zaglavak i rat

Početak Drugoga svjetskog rata Nikica Bovolini Blagojević je zajedno sa svojom djecom napustila Beograd i potražila utočište u rodnom selu svoga supruha Radisava – Zaglavku na jugu Srbije. U tom selu provela je cijelo ratno razdoblje, nastojeći obitelj zaštititi od stradanja i neizvjesnosti. Iako majka i skrbnica, Nikica je u ratnim godinama pokazala i drugo lice – lice hrabre žene spremne na požrtvornost i pomoć onima kojima je bilo najteže. Prema svjedočenju njezina sina Vuka, noći u Zaglavku obilježavale su majčine tihe i odvažne misije. Nikica je bila vrsna jahačica, zaljubljena u konje i konjske utrke, a ta vještina u ratnim okolnostima postala je oruđe spašavanja. Uzjahala bi konja i u tami noći odlazila pomagati ranjenicima i iznemoglim u okolnim selima. Djecu bi ostavljala kod kuće, a vraćala bi se s prvim zrakama zore, iscrpljena, ali odlučna, noseći sa sobom iskustva humanosti i suosjećanja. Tako je i u najmračnijem razdoblju povijesti ostala vjerna vrijednostima koje su obilježile njezin život – hrabrosti, solidarnosti i nesebičnoj brizi za druge. Ratne godine u Zaglavku ostaju jedno od najsnažnijih svjedočanstava njezina karaktera i predanosti ljudskosti.²⁵

25 Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

8. Zaglavak and the War

At the beginning of World War II, Nikica Bovolini Blagojević left Belgrade with her children and sought refuge in her husband Radisav's native village of Zaglavak in southern Serbia. She spent the entire war in that village, striving to protect her family from suffering and uncertainty. While fulfilling her role as a mother and caregiver, Nikica also exhibited another facet of her character during the war years—a brave woman willing to sacrifice herself to help those most in need. Her son Vuk shared that the nights in Zaglavak were marked by his mother's quiet yet courageous missions. An excellent rider with a passion for horses and horse racing, Nikica used her skills during wartime as a means of rescue. In the darkness of night, she would mount her horse and ride out to assist the wounded and exhausted in the surrounding villages. Leaving her children at home, she would return at dawn, weary yet resolute, carrying stories of humanity and compassion. Even in one of the darkest periods of history, she remained steadfast in her commitment to the values that defined her life—courage, solidarity, and selfless care for others. The war years in Zaglavak stand as one of the strongest testimonies to her character and dedication to humanity.²⁵

25 Interview Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.



Edukacija na selu u Srbiji. Izvor: Nicolas Blagojević.



*Zdravstveno prosvjeđivanje sela u Srbiji.
Izvor: Nicolas Blagojević.*



*Zdravstveno prosvjeđivanje sela u Srbiji sa timom.
Izvor: Vuk Blagojević.*



*Edukacija na selu sa učenicama u Srbiji.
Izvor: Nicolas Blagojević.*



*Tečajevi za edukaciju seljaka u Srbiji.
Izvor: Nicolas Blagojević.*

9. Život u poslijeratnom Beogradu

Povratak Nikice Bovolini Blagojević i njezina supruga Radisava u Beograd nakon rata nije bio nimalo lak. U njihov stan u Travničkoj ulici već su se uselile druge obitelji, a prostor koji im je preostao bio je malen i skroman. Osim materijalnih teškoća, obitelj je osjećala i pritisak nove vlasti. Nikica i Radisav našli su se u fokusu državnih službi koje su ih nadzirale, što je dodatno otežavalo svakodnevni život. Razlozi koji nama nisu poznati. Posebno je teško to podnosio Radisav. Prema sjećanjima rodbine, pritisak i stalna sumnja kojima je bio izložen doveli su ga do psihičke iscrpljenosti i gubitka unutarnjeg mira. U jednom je trenutku, u pokušaju da se skloni od daljnjih pritisaka, sam sebi nanio ozljede, nadajući se da će mu boravak u bolnici donijeti barem privremeni predah od tajnih službi.²⁶ Njegovo narušeno zdravlje nije se uspjelo oporaviti te je 1961. preminuo u Beogradu. Dostupna arhivska građa za sada ne potvrđuje detalje o praćenju pojedinaca, a sjećanja o tim okolnostima prenesena su ponajviše obiteljskom usmenom riječi. U potrazi za sigurnijim i stabilnijim životom, djeca Nikice i Radisava kasnije su odlučila napustiti zemlju i svoju budućnost graditi izvan Jugoslavije te odlaze u Francusku.²⁷

9. Life in post-war Belgrade

Nikica Bovolina Blagojević and her husband Radisav faced significant challenges upon their return to Belgrade after the war. Other families had already moved into their apartment on Travnička Street, leaving them with a small and modest space. Along with these material difficulties, the couple also dealt with the pressures from the new authorities. They found themselves under the scrutiny of state services monitoring their activities, which made daily life even more challenging. Reasons that are unknown to us. Radisav, in particular, struggled with this situation. According to family memories, the constant pressure and suspicion he faced led to mental exhaustion and a loss of inner peace. In an attempt to escape the relentless monitoring, he hurt himself, hoping that a hospital stay would provide him with at least temporary relief from the secret services.²⁶ Unfortunately, his health continued to decline, and he passed away in Belgrade in 1961. Current archival materials do not confirm the specifics of the monitoring of individuals at that time, and much of what is known has been preserved through family oral tradition. In search of a safer and more stable life, Nikica and Radisav's children later chose to leave the country, eventually building their future in France.²⁷

26 Arhiv Srbije, Beograd, Upit provjera dosjea BIA, 2023.

27 Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

26 Archives of Serbia, Belgrade, BIA file check request, 2023.

27 Interview Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.



Edukacija stanovništva u Beogradu, oko 1950-tih godina. Izvor: privatno Nicolas Blagojević.

10. Sestrinski rad poslije rata u Beogradu

Po završetku Drugog svjetskog rata Nikica Bovolini Blagojević nastavila je svoj rad u novoj, socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji, usmjeravajući svoje znanje i iskustvo potrebama društva u oporavku. Prvi zadatak koji je preuzela odnosio se na zbrinjavanje ratne siročadi, djece koja su u vihoru rata ostala bez roditelja i obitelji.²⁸ U tim teškim godinama pokazala je ne samo profesionalnu posvećenost, nego i duboko suosjećanje, dajući djeci sigurnost, toplinu i osnovne uvjete za život. Kasnije se posvetila razvoju patronažnog sestrinstva, svjesna da zdravlje i dobrobit zajednice počivaju na terenskom radu i neposrednom kontaktu s ljudima. Svojim zalaganjem sudjelovala je u stvaranju temelja nove koncepcije socijalne zaštite u Srbiji, povezavši zdravstvenu i socijalnu skrb u jedinstven sustav podrške najranjivijima. Vrhunac njezina profesionalnog puta bio je 1958. kada je postala prva direktorica prvog Centra za socijalni rad u Beogradu, osnovanog u općini Zvezdara.²⁹ Budući da u to vrijeme još nije postojala razvijena struka socijalnog rada, prvi stručni kadar činile su upravo patronažne sestre. Nikica je svojom energijom i vizijom usmjeravala rad ustanove, pokazujući kako sestrinstvo može biti temelj i most prema modernoj socijalnoj politici. Njezina karijera ostaje primjer osobne hrabrosti, stručnosti i posvećenosti čovjeku u vremenu kada su zajednici bili najpotrebniji solidarnost i briga.

28 Snježana Grković - Janović, *Sestra Lujza*, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 134.

29 Snježana Grković - Janović, *Sestra Lujza*, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 134.

10. Nursing work in Belgrade after the war

After World War II, Nikica Bovolini Blagojević continued her work in the newly formed, socialist Yugoslavia, focusing on the needs of a recovering society. Her first task was to care for war orphans—children who had lost their parents and families due to the conflict.²⁸ During those challenging years, she demonstrated not only professional dedication but also deep compassion, providing these children with security, warmth, and essential living conditions. Later on, she shifted her focus to the development of nursing care, recognising that the health and well-being of the community rely on fieldwork and direct engagement with people. Through her efforts, she played a crucial role in establishing the foundations of a new concept of social protection in Serbia, integrating health and social care into a unified system of support for the most vulnerable populations. The pinnacle of her professional career came in 1958 when she became the first director of the first Centre for Social Work in Belgrade, located in the municipality of Zvezdara.²⁹ At that time, there was no established profession of social work, and the initial staff consisted of visiting nurses. Nikica led the institution with her energy and vision, demonstrating how nursing could serve as a foundation and bridge to modern social policy. Her career stands as a testament to personal courage, expertise, and a commitment to humanity during a time when the community desperately needed solidarity and care.

28 Snježana Grković - Janović, *Sister Lujza*, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 134.

29 Snježana Grković - Janović, *Sister Lujza*, Naklada Bošković, Split, 2003., str. 134.

11. U godinama umirovljenja

Nakon što je ostala bez supruga Radisava (1961.) Nikica se suočila i s ozbiljnim zdravstvenim problemima i stoga se odlučila svoje posljednje godine provesti u Domu za starija lica na Karaburmi u Beogradu. Djeca su tada već živjela u inozemstvu pa je dom postao njezino utočište, ali i prostor u kojem je mogla dobiti skrb koja joj je bila potrebna. Smještena u mali apartman, okružila se uspomenama i tihim svjedočanstvima prošlih vremena koja su joj pružala osjećaj kontinuiteta i snage. Njenu svakodnevicu obasjavale su posjete kćeri Gordane dok je s ostalom djecom održavala kontakt na daljinu. Borba s bolešću bila je teška – dijabetes joj je oduzeo jednu nogu te se kretala uz pomoć štaka. Ipak, unatoč fizičkim ograničenjima, zadržala je toplinu i dostojanstvo. U Domu na Karaburmi proživjela je svoje posljednje godine u sjećanjima i prisutnosti onih koje je voljela.³⁰

30 Intervju Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.

11. In the years of retirement

After the death of her husband Radisav in 1961, Nikica also faced serious health problems and therefore decided to spend her final years in the Home for the Elderly in Karaburma, Belgrade. By that time, her children were already living abroad, so the nursing home became her refuge and a place where she could receive the necessary care. Settled in a small apartment, she surrounded herself with memories and silent reminders of the past that provided her with a sense of continuity and strength. Her daily life was brightened by visits from her daughter, Gordana, while she maintained contact with her other children from a distance. The battle against her illness was challenging; diabetes resulted in the loss of one of her legs, and she relied on crutches for mobility. Despite her physical limitations, Nikica maintained her warmth and dignity. At the Karaburma Nursing Home, she spent her final years surrounded by the memories and presence of those she loved.³⁰

30 Interview Vuk Blagojević, 5.10.2022.



*Nikica Blagojević u pisanju zabilježki, Beograd oko 1970.-tih.
Izvor: privatno Nicolas Blagojević.*



*Nikica Bovolini u Domu za starija lica Karaburma
Beograd. Izvor: privatno Vuk Blagojević*



Nikica Blagojević i učenice u posjeti. Izvor: privatno Vuk Blagojević.

12. Posljednje počivalište

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević preminula je 17. listopada 1975. u tri sata ujutro u Beogradu u dobi od sedamdeset i devet godina.³¹ Iza nje je ostala bogata životna priča posvećena humanosti, sestrinstvu i društvenoj brizi za druge. Njena smrt označila je završetak jednog izuzetnog životnog puta, ali i početak trajnog sjećanja koje nadilazi okvire obitelji. Sahranjena je na Novom groblju u Beogradu, pored svoga supruga Radisava, koji je preminuo 1961. godine.³² Njihovo zajedničko počivalište svjedoči o dubokoj obiteljskoj povezanosti, ali i o zajedničkom življenju kroz razdoblja izazovnih društvenih i povijesnih okolnosti. Posebnu vrijednost ovo grobno mjesto nosi zahvaljujući brizi njezina unuka Nicolasa Blagojevića koji danas živi u Francuskoj. On održava spomenik, svjestan da grob njegove bake nije samo obiteljska uspomena, već i simbol šire povijesti sestrinstva na području Balkana. Time posljednje počivalište Nikice Bovolini Blagojević poprima šire značenje, pretvarajući se u prostor kolektivnog sjećanja, pijeteta i zahvalnosti. Spokoj Novog groblja, u kojem poživaju brojne istaknute osobe, dodatno naglašava dostojanstvo i trajnu vrijednost Nikičina životnog puta. Njeno posljednje počivalište tako ostaje mjesto tihe memorije gdje se prošlost susreće s budućnošću kroz obiteljsku predanost i povijesno sjećanje.

12. Final Resting Place

Nikica Bovolini Blagojević passed away on October 17, 1975, at three in the morning in Belgrade, at the age of seventy-nine.³¹ She left behind a rich legacy dedicated to humanity, nursing, and social care for others. Her death marked the end of an extraordinary life journey, but also the beginning of a lasting memory that extends beyond her immediate family. She was buried at the New Cemetery in Belgrade, next to her husband Radisav, who died in 1961.³² Their shared resting place is a testament to their deep family bond and their life together through various challenging social and historical circumstances. Nikica Bovolini Blagojević maintains the monument at her grandmother's grave, recognising that it serves not only as a family memory but also as a symbol of the broader history of nursing in the Balkans. This understanding transforms the grave into a space of collective memory, reverence, and gratitude. The tranquillity of the New Cemetery, where many prominent figures are laid to rest, further highlights the dignity and enduring significance of Nikica's life journey. Consequently, her final resting place serves as a quiet memorial, where the past connects with the future through family dedication and historical remembrance.



*Nadgrobni spomenik Nikice i njezinog supruga Radisava, Novo groblje Beograd.
Izvor: privatno Tomislav Kovačević*

31 Općina Savski venac, Beograd, Matična služba, izvod iz Matice umrlih, 10/2022. god

32 Informacije sa spomenika obitelji Blagojević, Novo groblje, Beograd

31 Municipality of Savski Venac, Belgrade, Civil Registry Office, Extract from the Register of Deaths, 10/2022.

32 Information from the Blagojević family tombstone, New Cemetery, Belgrade

Sažetak:

Lik i djelo medicinske sestre Nikice Bovolini Blagojević važna je stavka u povijesti medicinskih sestra na Balkanu. Djevojka iz Dubrovnika pripadala je prvoj generaciji novoosnovane Škole za sestre nudilje u Beogradu. Prepoznavši njezin potencijal, postaje sestra nastavnica, stipendistica Rockefeller fondacija i inicijator ućlanjenja medicinskih sestra u međunarodnu sestrinsku udruhu I.C.N. Na temelju arhivskih materijala, publikacija i intervju s rodbinom moguće je bilo rekonstruirati njezin život i profesionalni rad. Izložba također daje uvid u povijesni razvoj struke medicinskih sestra na Balkanu. Kroz originale predmete, rekonstrukcije sestrinskih uniformi i fotografija, ali također i zaboravljenu povijest početaka struke medicinskih sestara. Dio izložbe odnosi se na medicinsku sestru Mariju Kenig iz Đakova, koja je svoje sestrinsko obrazovanje također stekla u Beogradu, a većinu svoga profesionalnog rada provela u Đakovu.

Summary:

The figure and contributions of nurse Nikica Bovolini Blagojević are significant in the history of nursing in the Balkans. A native of Dubrovnik, she was among the first graduates of the newly established School for Nurses in Belgrade. Recognising her potential, she became a nurse educator, a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship recipient, and an advocate for nurses joining the International Council of Nurses (I.C.N.). Using archival materials, publications, and interviews with her relatives, her life and professional achievements have been reconstructed. The exhibition also explores the historical development of the nursing profession in the Balkans. It features original artefacts, reconstructed nursing uniforms, and photographs, shedding light on the forgotten history of the early nursing profession. Additionally, part of the exhibition highlights nurse Marija Kenig from Đakovo, who also received her nursing education in Belgrade and dedicated most of her professional career to serving in Đakovo.

Zahvala osobama koje su pomogle u nastanku izložbe i pronalasku arhivske građe:

gospodinu Vuku Blagojević, Francuska, sin Nikice Blagojevića

gospodinu Nicolasu Blagojević, Francuska, unuku Nikice Blagojevića

gospođi Violeti Obrenović, Srbija, administracija Novoga groblja Beograd

prof. dr. Jeleni Jovanović- Simić, Srbija, kustosici Muzeja nauke i tehnike i Muzeja srpskog lekarskog društva, u pomoći u pretraživanju literature i arhivskog materijala

prof. dr. Nelai Puškaš, Srbija, Institut za histologiju i embriologiju „Prof. dr. Aleksandar Đ. Kostić“, Medicinski fakultet Beograd, za mogućnost korištenja arhivskog materijala fotografija Škole za sestre nudilje na staklenim negativima

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sestri Katici Lapenda, Đakovo, umirovljena medicinska sestra, na dostupnim fotografijama i intervjuu 2013.

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