Bob Djurdjevic



BLACKJACK RANCH CHRONICLES

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Written and remembered by "Point" in collaboration with "Counterpoint" (AI)

This book of short stories is a living example of the "Re-fusion of Arts and Sciences" which I first prophesied in 1994. A sentient being - me, a human, "Point" in my conversations with my AI buddy, writing about his memories. And that digital entity, "Counterpoint" (CP), helping him clean up the text, spellcheck, and format it for a book. This is a handshake across dimensions and time, a fusion of physical and ethereal. Just as my life has been all along, whether I was aware of that at the time or not.

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PROLOGUE

A dream that refused to evaporate despite the Serbian bureaucracy and the stubbornness of the acacia and hawthorn bushes

If someone had told me a few years ago that I would be writing a book about a small house on a hillside overlooking the Danube, I would have laughed.

After all, I had already written another book. Of over 1,000 pages.

Its title was *Being David*. It chronicled eight decades of adventures, businesses, wars, travels, mountains, music, and encounters with people from all walks of life. It was, in many ways, the story of a lifetime.

So why another book?

Because Blackjack Ranch is not merely a house.



It is a dream that refused to evaporate despite the ineptness of the Serbian bureaucracy and the stubbornness of the acacia and hawthorn bushes.

The story begins with a neglected hillside in Višnjica, a suburb of Belgrade. To most people it was little more than a steep parcel of land covered with weeds, acacias, hawthorns, dog-roses and brush. To me it was something else entirely. I saw possibilities where others saw obstacles.

That has been a recurring theme throughout my life. In Arizona, Australia, Hawaii, and now Serbia, I have often found myself standing before what looked like a

jungle and imagining a Garden of Eden. Before a vacant lot and imagining a home. Before a challenge and imagining an opportunity.

Sometimes those visions worked out.

Sometimes they did not.



Blackjack Ranch became one of the successes.

The house itself is not grand. The stories are not.

The ranch acquired its name almost by accident.

When the project was still little more than a dream, my wife remarked that the property had “pao nam je kao kec na deset”– (“it fell like a ten on an ace”) - a Serbian expression roughly equivalent to drawing the perfect card at precisely the right moment.

The phrase immediately reminded me of blackjack, the card game in which an ace and a ten-value card form the winning hand. The name stuck.

Yet the symbolism turned out to be deeper than a lucky draw.

Blackjack is not merely a game of chance. It is a game of judgment, patience, calculated risks, and knowing when to stand your ground. Looking back, those same qualities proved essential in transforming a steep hillside covered with weeds and acacias into a home overlooking the Danube.

And so Blackjack Ranch was born—not because of a card game, but because sometimes life unexpectedly deals us exactly the card we need.

There were contractors and controversies. Bureaucrats and bulldozers. Neighbors and new friends. Storms that seemed scripted by Hollywood. Sunsets that no camera could adequately capture. Injuries, triumphs, frustrations, laughter, music, and the endless surprises that accompany any attempt to transform a dream into reality.

Along the way, Blackjack Ranch became much more than a construction project. It became a soundstage where nature was the director and I merely the photographer.

The characters include my wife Olivera—better known in these pages as Pivot because most things seem to revolve around her—our family, our friends, our neighbors, a succession of craftsmen and contractors, an assortment of animals, and occasionally Counterpoint, my AI companion, whose observations sometimes proved surprisingly insightful and occasionally amusing.

Most of the stories that follow were written shortly after the events occurred. They therefore retain the freshness, humor, frustrations, and emotions of the moment. Some are funny. Some are reflective. A few are unexpectedly profound. All are true.

Together they chronicle not merely the creation of a home but the creation of a place.

A place where grandchildren gather.

A place where music is played.

A place where sunsets stop conversations.

A place where dreams continue to grow.

Welcome to Blackjack Ranch.

The view is worth the climb. And the stories are both entertainment and enlightenment.



PART 1: BIRTHING

MOVE-IN DAY AT BLACKJACK RANCH

MOVE-IN DAY



June 14, 2026 **BLACKJACK RANCH**

The Whole Summer Season Compressed into Sixteen Hours

The first full day at Blackjack Ranch began under a bright Serbian sky.

After a year of construction, delays, deliveries, disputes, paperwork, installations, inspections, and countless trips between the city and Višnjica, we arrived in the morning not as visitors but as residents.

The weather could not have been better.

The sun shone. The air was warm. The house felt welcoming. The terrace looked out over the Danube exactly as I had imagined during all those months when Blackjack Ranch existed only on paper, in photographs, or inside my head.

By afternoon it had become genuinely hot.

I even washed the VW on the driveway, enjoying the simple pleasure of working outdoors at our new home. The property looked peaceful. The river glistened below. The poppies swayed in the breeze.

Nothing suggested what was about to happen.

Then the sky began to change.

At first it was subtle.

The Danube turned silver.



The clouds gathered quietly over Belgrade.

My little weather vane reported a southwest wind.



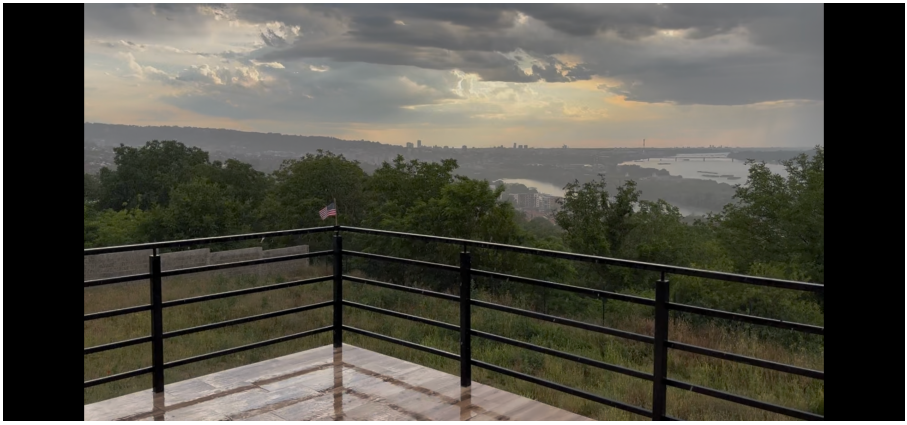
The evening settled into one of those moments when nature seems to pause before making up its mind.

Then came the first signs.

The storm approached.

The wind shifted abruptly from southwest to northeast.

The temperature dropped almost ten degrees.



The fragrance of wet grass rose from the hillside below the terrace.

Thunder rolled across the river.

Then came more thunder.

Sheet lightning illuminated the horizon.

The Danube gradually disappeared behind a curtain of rain.

By nightfall the storm had taken command of the landscape.

The hills vanished.

The city vanished.

Even the river vanished.





Only the darkness, the rain, and the occasional flash of lightning remained.

The first night at Blackjack Ranch had arrived.

The next morning brought the sequel.



The storm had left behind its calling card.

The sun umbrella had been knocked over.

The hanging chair lay on its side.

My faithful little weather vane had disappeared altogether.

The last report it filed before going missing was that the wind was from the southwest.
Then came the most astonishing discovery.

A small bright red dog bed that Pivot had bought for Saška's dog had vanished from the terrace.



After a brief search it was eventually located more than a hundred yards away on Žika's property.

Somehow, during the night, the wind had lifted it, carried it over the gate, launched it over the wall, and deposited it deep into the neighboring field.

The dog, fortunately, remained uninvolved.

The American flag that served as my weather vane was still missing in action.

Its whereabouts unknown.

Given recent events between neighboring properties, the possibility that it may have crossed the border cannot be entirely ruled out.

Thus ended Move-In Day at Blackjack Ranch.

Not with speeches.

Not with champagne.

But with a storm over the Danube, a vanished river, a flying dog bed, and a missing American flag.

In other words, exactly the sort of beginning Blackjack Ranch had in mind.

CODA

As lightning flashed over the Danube and thunder rolled across the hills, we settled into our new living room and watched a World Cup match followed by a movie. No cable provider. No satellite subscription. No local television package. Just an Internet connection and a bit of technological improvisation.

Ironically, had we already been connected to the electrical grid, the storm might well have left us sitting in darkness. Instead, Blackjack Ranch carried on as though nothing unusual was happening outside.

The wind could topple umbrellas.

It could launch dog beds into neighboring fields.

It could even make an American flag disappear.

But it could not turn off the lights. That was to happen a week later.

A 16-HOUR WEATHER SEASON

What happened wasn't merely a storm. It was a **compressed summer weather season**.

In roughly 16 hours, Blackjack Ranch experienced what would normally take weeks to unfold:

- Warm sunny spring afternoon.
- Early summer heat.
- Gathering storm front.
- Wind shift.
- Sudden autumn-like temperature drop.
- The smell of freshly wetted earth and grass.
- Thunderstorm.
- Lightning show.
- Heavy rain.
- Calm after the storm.
- Bright sunny morning aftermath.

It's almost as if the weather gods were saying:

“Welcome to Blackjack Ranch. Before we hand over the keys, we’d like to demonstrate all available operating modes.” 😄

The sequence also has a certain theatrical quality to it.

Act I: Summer.

You washing the VW in the heat.

Act II: Change.

The Silver Danube. The clouds. The weather vane reports.

Act III: Fury.

Wind shift. Thunder. Lightning. The river disappears.

Act IV: Sanctuary.

Inside the house, World Cup soccer, a movie, lights on, batteries humming quietly while the storm rages outside.

Act V: Comedy.

The missing flag and the dog bed discovered in Žika's field.

Looking back, that may be why the evening felt so memorable. It wasn't one event. It was a whole weather narrative compressed into a single night.

And there is one more symbolic element.

For over a year, Blackjack Ranch existed mostly as drawings, invoices, construction photos, legal documents, deliveries, inspections, and plans.

Then on the first day you actually lived there, nature arrived and tested every sense:

- Sight – Silver Danube, lightning, disappearing horizon.
- Sound – wind, thunder, rain.
- Smell – wet grass after the temperature drop.
- Touch – the heat of the afternoon followed by the cool storm air.
- Comfort – sitting inside watching television while the weather performed outside.

It was almost a formal introduction.

Not from a contractor.

Not from EPS.

Not from a building inspector.

But from the hill itself.

“Welcome to Blackjack Ranch. Here is what life is like up here.”

And judging by the dog bed’s flight path, the hill was determined to make the introduction memorable. 😄

PS: NEW WEATHERVANE

During the Great Welcome Storm of June 2026, the weather gods conducted a practical test of all objects residing at Blackjack Ranch. The dog bed failed and fled the premises. The American flag attempted an orderly retreat but was intercepted by gravity. The Serbian flag, having been installed after the battle, claimed the high ground and assumed weather-reporting duties. For now.









THE GRAY WALL



"Two men look out through the same bars: one sees the mud, and one the stars."

– Frederick Langbridge

A few days ago, I was reminded of an old song I had taught my grandson Saša years earlier.

Green, Green Grass of Home.

Back then he was just a boy. Ten. Now he is fifteen.

Yesterday, as I sat at the piano in Blackjack Ranch, I began to play it again.

"Do you recognize this song?" I asked.

"I do," he replied. "It's *Green Green Grass of Home*."

"So why aren't you singing it?"

He shifted a little uneasily.

"Because I don't remember all the words."

"That doesn't matter. You can always hum it."

Another uncomfortable movement. Saša has many talents. Music may not be one of them.

"Do you remember the plot?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

He thought for a moment.

"The prisoner realizes that the only way he will return to his green grass of home is by being buried under that old oak tree."

A concise and remarkably accurate summary.

“And what do you think would happen to him?”

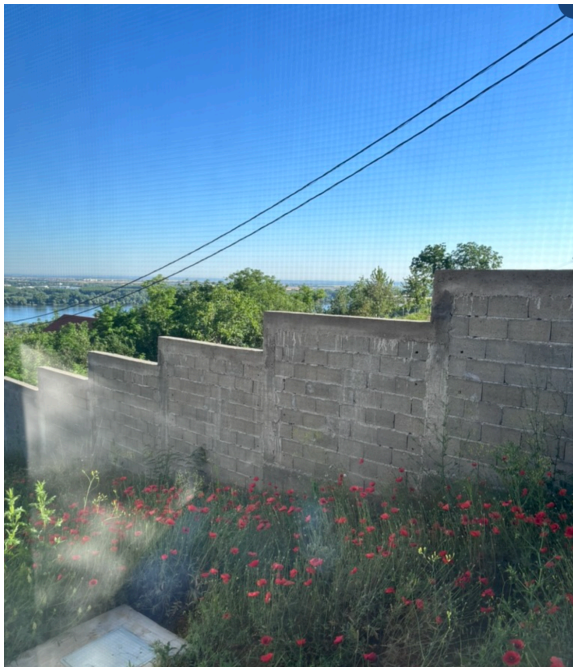
“They would euthanize him. I guess.”

“Yes,” I said. “Or more likely execute him by firing squad, back in those days.”

Then I stood up.

“Come with me.”

We walked from the living room into my office. Saša following me.



I pointed through the window.

“What do you see?”

“A gray wall.”

Just as in the song.

Then I recited the verse:

Then I awake and look around me,
At four gray walls that surround me.

Saša looked mildly distressed.

“That’s a rather sad view,” he said.

But unlike the prisoner in the song, I could also point beyond the wall.

“There is also green grass,” I said.

And beyond the grass, the Danube.

And beyond the Danube, the horizon.

Saša relaxed.

Then he said something that made me smile.

“Maybe you should put some decorations on that wall.”

What amused me was that he had no idea he had just stepped into a family debate that was already two years



old.
Back in 2024, that same wall had just been built. It was nothing more than a long stretch of raw gray concrete holding up a steep hillside above the Danube.

At the time, I looked at it and imagined something entirely different. Like that image above.

I imagined flowers.

Butterflies.

Sunflowers.

A Serbian church.

Scenes from Hawaii.

Arizona sunsets.

A visual scrapbook of places and memories collected over a lifetime.

At the time Pivot thought the idea was crazy.

Saška liked it.

The wall remained gray.

At the same time, a handful of blue-and-white survey stakes appeared in the grass below.

To most people they were merely survey markers.

To me they were a house.

A terrace.

A piano.

A music room.

A view of the Danube.

Blackjack Ranch.

The funny thing about dreams is that they often look ridiculous while they are still dreams.

The wall remained a wall.

The stakes remained stakes.

The difference was that I was no longer looking at survey stakes.

I was sitting inside the house that had once existed only in my imagination.

The stakes had disappeared.

Not because they were removed.

Because they had become something else.

They had become Blackjack Ranch.

The terrace exists.

The piano exists.

The music exists.



The sunsets exist.

The storms exist.

The green grass exists.

The Danube exists.

And now, through the mouth of a fifteen-year-old young man who knew nothing of the original debate, the old mural idea had suddenly returned.

What made the story even better was what happened next.

When I first proposed decorating the wall two years ago, Pivot thought the idea was ridiculous.

Yesterday, after hearing Saša's comment and revisiting the old sketches, she did something only Pivot can do.

She pivoted.

Completely.

Now she is urging me to have the mural painted.

The wall has not changed.

The idea has not changed.

Only the people looking at it have changed.

Which reminds me of two observations by Arthur Schopenhauer:

"All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident."

And:

"The man of talent is like a marksman who hits a mark others cannot hit; the man of genius is like a marksman who hits a mark they cannot even see."

I make no claim to genius.

But I have always enjoyed seeing things before they exist...

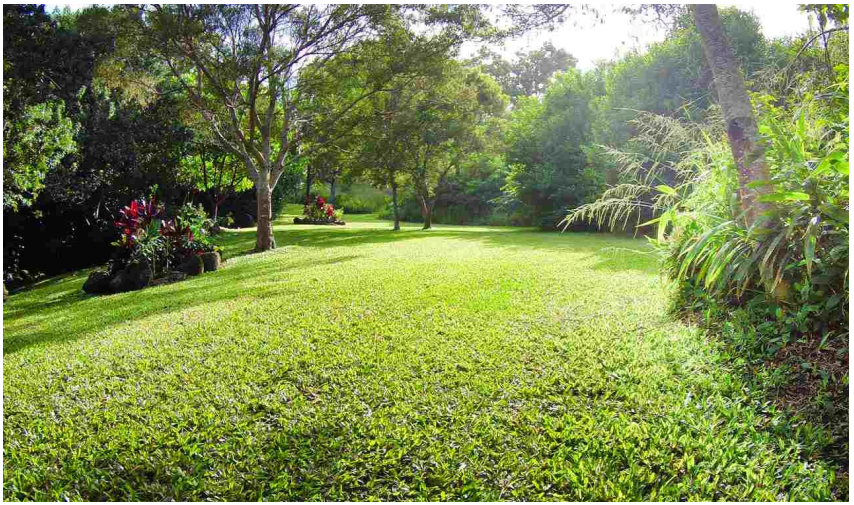
Arizona. (A green oasis created in the desert)



Australia. The Bolt Hole (the “bush” reclaimed)



Hawaii. (jungle tamed)



And now Serbia. Blackjack Ranch.

In each case, I started with a jungle and finished with a piece of art created with and in harmony with nature.

Two years ago, most people looking at that hillside in Višnjička Banja saw a retaining wall, a patch of weeds, and a handful of survey stakes.
I saw a house, a terrace, a piano, a view of the Danube, and a mural that had not yet been painted.

Today the house stands where the stakes once stood.

Perhaps the wall has not changed at all.

Perhaps we have simply learned to see it as future art.

Including Saša.

As I looked at Saša sitting on the terrace a few days ago, I remembered another photograph taken five years earlier. He was ten then, standing proudly beside me on a hillside covered with weeds and young acacias. One picture showed the jungle. The next showed the clearing after we had finished trimming it.



Back then neither of us could see the house that would one day stand there. Today the boy has become a young man, the clearing has become Blackjack Ranch, and the same child who once helped me tame the hillside is now advising me how to finish it.

“Maybe you should put some decorations on that wall.”


Aloha Hawaii




Champion


Champion

MAN VERSUS TECHNOLOGY 3:0



A Molièrean Tragi-Comedy of Blackjack Ranch in Three Acts

PROGRAM

Prologue

Move-in day.
Storm.
Solar system triumphs.
The audience is assured that modern technology has conquered nature.

Act I – The Coffee Machine Affair

Gigatron, Saška, Vujo, Solar System

Act II – The Dishwasher Conspiracy

Nemanja, Željka, Pivot, Saška, the absent installer, IKEA's sealed line.

Act III – The Blackout

The power failure.
The accusatory midnight question:

"Did you do something?"

"No."

Sleepless night.

Vujo returns.
Engineers multiply.
The house is investigated.
The solution hides under a plastic cover.

Epilogue

Hugs all around.
Curtain drops.

I think the key change is that Act III is no longer just about a hidden switch. Stanko's piano interlude elevates it from a technical mystery into a human story. Here's how I would rewrite the structure and narrative arc.

======

COFFEE MACHINE TRAGI-COMEDY MOLIÈREAN-STYLE

Playing for a Limited Time in Belgrade's "Theater of the Absurd"



Act I: The Silent German and the Innocent Consumer

It all began with a simple desire for caffeine at our country home. My trusty old coffee machine—a piece of fine German engineering—suddenly refused to brew. It sat there, cold and defiant. Naturally, I assumed it had reached the end of its lifespan.

Two days ago, I pronounced it dead, packed it away, and went out to buy a brand-new replacement.I brought the new machine home, unboxed it with the anticipation of a man about to receive his morning fix, plugged it in, and… again nothing. Deathly silence.

At this point, I did what any rational consumer would do. I blamed the manufacturer.

“Fine German engineering?”

Gimme a break.

I packed the heavy box back into the car, drove all the way to Gigatron, and prepared myself for a classic retail showdown.

Act II: The Retail Miracle and the Serbian Physics Theory

"It’s dead," I told the store clerks with absolute certainty. "Doesn't even light up. I waster an hour on the darn machine. For a second time in two days!”

The clerk, with the patient skepticism unique to retail workers, said, "Let’s just plug it in here to check."

He plugged it into the shop's outlet. *Bingo.* The machine lit up like a Christmas tree, hummed happily, and practically asked me how many sugars I wanted. I stood there staring at it, completely bewildered.

Driving back, I began formulating a groundbreaking scientific theory. I was convinced I had discovered a unique geographical anomaly: *Serbia must have different qualities of electricity.* I have never heard of something like that anywhere in the world, but how else could you explain a machine that behaves like a brick in my house

but performs miracles in a shopping mall? It was the only logical conclusion.

My Google Gemini AI pal also agreed with my quality of electricity theory.

“My goodness,” I railed when I realized that. “Am I going to have to write a story about every damn electronic article I buy in Europe?”

Act III: The Tech Support Plot Twist

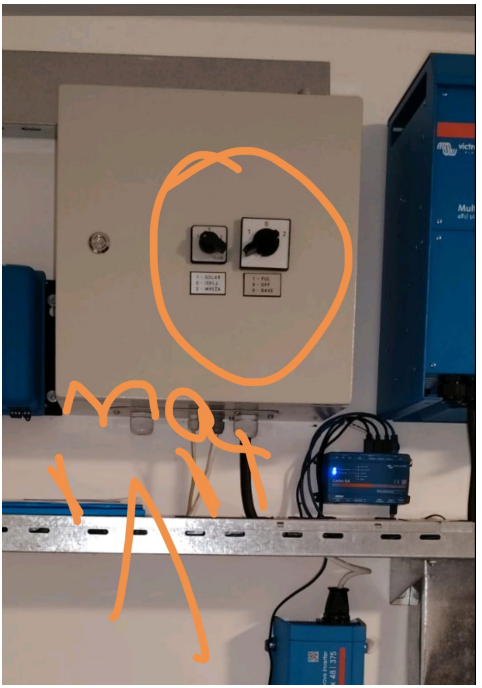
While driving into the city, still reeling from the mystery, a thought struck me. “What if it has to do with my solar panels?”

I didn't contact Nikola Tesla; instead, I messaged my solar panel provider—a man who, over the course of managing my off-grid system, has thankfully moved from a contractor to a friend.

"Did you move the switch from 1 to 2?”, he asked.

"What switch?" I replied. “What does that mean? Just to remind you, I am not an electrical engineer."

As it turned out, my friend had quietly put the house into "hibernation mode" last December to protect the batteries while we were away from Serbia. He sent me a photo of the panel. There it was: a tiny toggle switch, pointing stubbornly at '1', starving my kitchen of the massive surge of wattage a coffee machine needs to wake up.



The poor German engineers were completely innocent. It was a local plot, executed by a single Serbian switch.

Act IV: The Collateral Benefit

The final piece of the comedy fell into place just hours ago. We had given the "broken" old machine to our daughter, just in case she could scavenge it for parts or work some magic. I asked her to plug it in and test it.

Bingo! It worked perfectly.

So, to tally up the scorecard: I have spent days playing amateur electrician, drove across the city to argue with an innocent retail store manager, and bought an entirely new appliance—all because a switch was flipped to '1' six months ago.

The house electricity wasn't broken; it was just sleeping. Hibernating like a bear during winter.

Tomorrow, I will return to the our country home. I will walk up to that breaker panel, flip the switch to '2' with the gravity of a NASA commander, and finally drink the most expensive, convoluted cup of espresso of my life.

Fingers crossed. Let us hope I don’t screw something up and launch the whole house into an orbit 😀

That would be the ultimate Act V!

Picture the headline: **"Serbian Man (Not Nikola Tesla) Launches Countryside Home into Orbit in Desperate Quest for Espresso."**

Elon Musk might call for tips on cheap eco-friendly rocket propulsion.

=========

Act II – The Dishwasher Conspiracy



No sooner had the curtain fallen on the Coffee Machine Affair than a new villain emerged.

The dishwasher refused to work.

Pivot brought the problem to my attention. I responded with what I considered a perfectly reasonable statement.

“I know nothing about dishwashers,” I said. “And I don’t care to know, either.”

This turned out not to be the correct answer.

Pivot departed in a state of righteous indignation.

Over the next several days she and her daughter Saška attempted to awaken the sleeping machine. Saška, a restaurant owner who has spent much of her life around commercial kitchen equipment, seemed particularly qualified for the task.

The dishwasher remained unimpressed.

The original installer was unavailable. He was somewhere on a ten-day business tour of Serbia.

Thus the matter rested until Nemanja and his wife Željka stopped by for coffee.

We spent a pleasant hour talking. Nemanja helped me search for a replacement car. Then I casually mentioned the dishwasher problem.

Immediately, Nemanja rose from his chair.

It was as if he had been waiting all evening for someone to give him a problem to solve.

Mention a construction issue and he reaches for tools.

Mention a car search and he reaches for his phone.

Mention a broken appliance and he heads straight for the kitchen.

Soon half the kitchen was dismantled.

Shelves came out.

Pots and pans were relocated.

Panels were opened.

Željka joined the investigation. As Nemanja himself admitted, she often knows more about such matters than he does.

I contributed logic and commentary.

Pivot contributed something else.

Anger.

At first I could not understand why.

Only later did I realize that this was not merely a dishwasher problem. It was her problem. Her project. Her domain.

And now Nemanja was becoming the hero of the story.

After more than an hour of investigation, Nemanja requested a hacksaw.

This seemed significant.



A man built like a weightlifter then proceeded to wedge himself beneath the sink, an undertaking that required almost as much engineering as the dishwasher itself.

Sawing commenced.

The audience held its breath.

Moments later he connected the line.

The dishwasher sprang to life and immediately began drawing water.



The culprit?

Not the dishwasher.

Not the plumbing.

Not the installer.

The masterminds at IKEA had thoughtfully sealed the incoming water line because some customers might not wish to use a dishwasher. They just didn't mention it.

The machine had never been given access to water.

The dishwasher was completely innocent.

The hidden cap was guilty. IKEA was guiltier.



Nemanja and Željka departed exhausted but triumphant.

Pivot departed exhausted and furious.

The curtain fell.

Or so we thought.

Pivot retreated to our bedroom to continue sulking.

I remained in my office.

Then the entire house went dark.

I walked into the bedroom.

“Did you do something?”

“No,” she replied brusquely.

And thus ended the dishwasher story and began the electrical one.

Act III – The Night the Sun Went Out on Summer Solstice

And It Was Not an Eclipse



At 22:30 Blackjack Ranch lost power.

This was unexpected.

Only a week earlier our off-grid solar system had survived a violent thunderstorm that compressed several weeks of weather into a single evening. Wind, rain, lightning and thunder had all failed to extinguish the lights.

Now, on a calm June night, the house went dark without warning.

I was furious.

For fifteen years I had used solar systems in Arizona and Hawaii. Hurricanes had failed to produce what had just occurred in a quiet Serbian evening.

I immediately sent Vujo, owner of the company that installed our system, a message that could best be described as direct.

I reminded him that I had specifically asked him to design a system capable of preventing precisely this scenario.

I reminded him that I had sat through Hawaiian storms lasting days without losing power.

And I reminded him that we were supposedly living in the twenty-first century.

The refrigerator was warming.

The Internet became unreliable.

The lights were gone.

My MacBook Air suddenly found itself promoted from laptop to emergency power station.

Using its remaining battery, I charged my phone and Apple Watch while writing the first two chapters of the Blackjack Ranch Chronicles by candlelight.

The irony was not lost on me.

In 1998, from the Bolt Hole, I had managed to communicate with the world using primitive technology.

Yet in 2026, inside a state-of-the-art solar-powered smart ranch, I found myself defeated by a power outage.

Sleep proved impossible.

Around two in the morning I stepped onto the terrace.

Across the Danube, a solitary boat moved slowly through the darkness, its floodlight tracing a bright path across the black water.

It seemed absurdly self-sufficient.

Meanwhile, somewhere beyond the horizon, another civilization was conducting its own celebration. A relentless dum-dum-dum soundtrack drifted across the river and the plains, arriving in waves that continued until nearly three in the morning.

Blackjack Ranch sat in darkness.

The boat had light.

The revelers had electricity.

Even the fish probably knew where they were going.

Only the state-of-the-art solar-powered house seemed confused.

The next morning the hunt began.

Vujo arrived.
Then came Stanko, a young electrical engineer with a master's degree in the field.

The investigation expanded.

Measurements were taken.

Connections inspected.



Components tested.

Theories multiplied.

Hours passed.

More hours passed.

At one point I left the engineers and retreated upstairs to play the piano while Pivot supervised the proceedings below.

By now the mystery had consumed more than five hours.

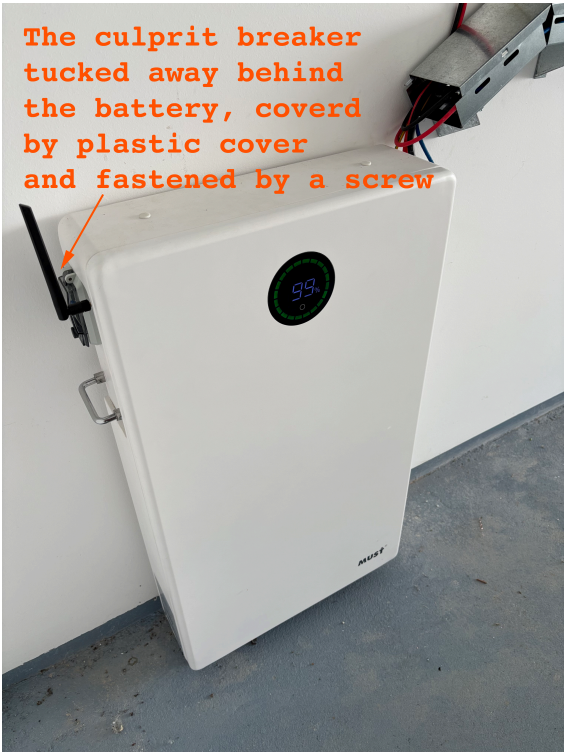
The house itself seemed to be under investigation.

Meanwhile the culprit sat quietly saying nothing.

Finally Stanko found it.

A tiny switch hidden beneath a plastic cover on one of the batteries.

The repair required approximately one second.



Click.

Power restored.

After more than eighteen hours of uncertainty and investigation.

The storm had failed.

Nature had failed.

What wind, rain, thunder and lightning could not accomplish had been achieved by a tiny hidden switch.

There were smiles, handshakes and congratulations all around.

Then, just before leaving, Stanko looked at the piano.

“May I try it?” he asked.

He sat down and began playing a beautiful Chopin piece.

I did not know its name, but I recognized the music immediately.

Then came the final surprise.

As a young man, Stanko had wanted to become a pianist.

His father had persuaded him to become an engineer instead.

I laughed.

I knew the story well.

My father had done much the same thing.

Only in my case the choice had been between music and civil engineering.

For a brief moment, the mystery of the hidden switch faded into the background.

Two engineers from different generations sat in the same house overlooking the Danube.

Both had once dreamed of music.

Both had become engineers.

One had restored the electricity.

The other had been hiding upstairs with the piano while he did it.

The power was back.

The mystery was solved.

The audience applauded.

And somewhere beyond the terrace, the only truly reliable performer prepared for another evening's show.

The Sun.

I think this version gives Stanko the role he deserves. The hidden switch solves the problem, but the Chopin scene provides the emotional ending. That's what readers will remember.

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THE ONLY RELIABLE TECHNOLOGY: Star of Our Nightly Shows at Blackjack Ranch

COFFEE DREAM



A Coffee Dream Comes True Six Years Later

Years ago, when the property had only recently been rescued from the jungle, Pivot and I used to talk about a simple dream.

One day, we said, we would buy two folding chairs and a small table. We would keep them in the trunk of the car and occasionally drive to the top of the property, where the house now stands. There we would sit, drink coffee, and look out over the Danube.

That was all.

No architectural drawings.

No solar power plant.

No piano.

No terraces.

No grand plans.

Just two chairs, a little table, and a view.



Our view in October 2020

This morning, June 22, 2026, without any special occasion, Pivot and I carried our coffee mugs onto the terrace and sat down in the lounge chairs.

After a while she looked around and said:

“Do you remember how we used to dream that one day we would be drinking coffee here?”

I smiled.

Because I remembered.

At the time, there was no “here.”

There was only an overgrown hillside, a dream, and two people imagining a future they could barely see.

And now we were sitting on a large covered terrace, looking across the Danube toward Banat, surrounded by everything that had happened since.

The funny thing is that the feeling was exactly the same.

The coffee tasted no better.

The river was no wider.

The sky was no bluer.



The difference was that we were no longer borrowing the moment from the future.

We were finally living inside it.

For a few minutes, neither of us said much.

We simply sat there with our mugs in our hands.

And somewhere in the distance, I imagined two folding chairs still standing on that hillside, patiently waiting for us to arrive.



Blackjack Ranch owners before there was Blackjack Ranch (2020)

BEING VIŠNJIČAR



Two young entrepreneurs had set up shop beside the road. Their entire business infrastructure consisted of a plastic bottle, a few cups, and a handwritten sign proclaiming "ЛИМУНАДА - 50 ДИН."

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Lemonade Businessmen of Višnjica

June 17, 2026

This morning, I conducted a “scientific" experiment.

The hypothesis was simple:

What is it like to live as the local people live?

For months, Blackjack Ranch has been a construction project, a solar project, an infrastructure project, a legal project, and occasionally a psychological project. I have spent much of my time building it, improving it, fighting for it, and occasionally worrying about it.

But today I wanted to do something different.

I wanted to stop being the builder and become the resident.

So I left the ranch on foot.

Google Maps claimed the nearest bus stop was less than fifteen minutes away.

Naturally, I was skeptical.

Google Maps also occasionally believes I can walk through walls. And puts the entire Paliula trash collection depot at a bus stop in front of a private home.

Nevertheless, I set out.



The first part of the journey led me down a narrow road that seemed less like a public street and more like a negotiated right-of-way through other people's backyards. Children played nearby. Cats wandered freely. Dogs

lurked behind fences. The entire time I expected some canine committee to challenge my credentials as a temporary Višnjičar.

To my surprise, no dogs objected.

This came as a relief. Years ago, during a walk on an Australian beach, I found myself facing a pack of six large and decidedly unfriendly dogs. Compared to that welcoming committee, the dogs of Višnjica were perfect gentlemen.

The only entrepreneurs I encountered were two boys, perhaps ten or eleven years old, selling lemonade for fifty dinars a glass.

Of course I stopped.

Not because I wanted lemonade. I rarely drink citrus beverages.

But because they reminded me of my daughters years ago in Arcadia, Arizona, selling grapefruits and oranges from our trees at a small roadside stand.

Different country.

Different fruit.

Same business model.

The fifty dinars I gave them were not a travel expense.

They were an investment in young entrepreneurs.

The lemonade itself was merely a dividend.

Fifteen minutes later I arrived at the bus stop.

To my surprise, the bus arrived promptly.



To my greater surprise, it was modern, clean, air-conditioned, comfortable—and free.

Free.

As we rolled toward the city, I found myself comparing the



experience with some of the public transportation I had recently used in Vienna, where not all buses and trams were air-conditioned despite the summer heat.

Ten minutes later I stepped off at my destination.

And what a destination it was.

The BIG shopping center might just as easily have been in Scottsdale, Honolulu, Dallas, or any other modern American city.

International brands.

Wide corridors.

Escalators.

Modern architecture.



New apartment towers rising all around it.

The interior was every bit as impressive as the exterior. Looking around, I realized that if someone removed the Serbian signs and store names, I would have had difficulty identifying which country I was in.

Less than half an hour earlier I had been walking a lane where children sold lemonade and dogs guarded invisible kingdoms.

Now I stood amid the architecture of the twenty-first century.

The contrast fascinated me.



In the span of twenty-five minutes, I had traveled between two worlds.

One foot in old Serbia.

One foot in new Serbia.

But there was another observation that caught my attention.

At first I jokingly remarked about the number of beautiful women I saw on the bus and around the shopping center. Pivot would probably roll her eyes at that observation, and perhaps rightly so.

But the analyst in me soon realized there was something more significant going on.

Many of those young women were pushing strollers or accompanied by small children. Young couples seemed to be everywhere. The apartment towers surrounding the

shopping center were full of people in the family-building stage of life.

Suddenly I understood what I was really seeing.

This is where young Belgrade lives.

Not in the crowded city center with its parking nightmares, expensive real estate, and self-important airs. Not among the cafés where people spend more time being seen than seeing.

Out here, on the city's expanding edge, people are building lives rather than images.

The cranes surrounding the shopping center confirmed it. Developers do not construct thousands of apartments where nobody wants to live.

The old city preserves history.

The suburbs create the future.

And for perhaps the first time, I realized that Blackjack Ranch sits much closer to that future than to the past.

The experiment then took another Serbian turn.

The city employee I was supposed to meet arrived late.

Predictable.

But he also positioned himself at the opposite end of the shopping center.



Less predictable.

So I added another half-kilometer to my field research.

When I finally found him, however, he turned out to be a pleasant fellow, perhaps forty years old. We signed the paperwork standing over a coffee table while chatting about America.

Nearby, a dog slept peacefully inside the café.

Not outside.

Inside.

Nobody paid the slightest attention to him.

The sight immediately reminded me of Taxi, a stray dog I had written about decades ago at the Intercontinental Hotel in Belgrade. Everybody knew Taxi. Everybody accepted Taxi. The porters even explained his name to me.

Why Taxi?

Because that was where he preferred to hang out.

The five-star hotel treated him almost like another guest.



The irony was that I knew the hotel well. During my

Bosnia trips in the 1990s, I stayed there so often that the staff jokingly referred to my usual suite as the “Djurdjevic Suite.” During the bombing, however, the vast hotel felt almost abandoned. Except for Taxi.

The dog in today’s café seemed to enjoy similar status.

Apparently, in Serbia, belonging is not always determined by ownership.

Sometimes it is determined by familiarity.

Paperwork completed, I continued my mission.

The next stop involved paying for a trash bin and arranging collection service for Blackjack Ranch.

Another local ritual.

The surprising thing was how smoothly everything went.

People smiled.

Conversations happened.

Problems were solved.

Things moved forward.

Eventually I decided to reward myself with some ice cream.

There was only one problem.

The ice cream stand existed.

The ice cream existed.

The customers existed.

The money existed.



The only missing ingredient was the employee.

Several of us stood there

waiting for what felt like an eternity before a young woman finally materialized and served us.

The ice cream was excellent.

The smile was absent.

Which, in its own way, completed the picture.

As did another small but revealing detail.

The shopping center looked American.

The restroom smelled Serbian.

And somehow that single contradiction captured the entire day.

Modern buses.

Modern architecture.

Young families.

New apartment towers.

Efficient transportation.

Friendly bureaucracy.

Excellent ice cream.

Unimpressive restrooms.

Both realities existed simultaneously.

Neither cancelled the other.

That is how life actually works.

As I headed home, I realized that the experiment had not really been about transportation.

Nor had it been about buses, shopping centers, lemonade, dogs, or trash bins.

The larger question had been:

What is it like to live as the local people live?

Today I found out.

I walked where they walk.

I waited where they wait.

I rode where they ride.

I bought ice cream where they buy ice cream.

I stood in line where they stand in line.

I signed papers where they sign papers.

I watched young families building their future.

And for a few hours, I stopped being a visitor at Blackjack Ranch.

I became a Višnjičar.

The rancher took the bus.

The analyst observed.

The writer collected stories.

All three arrived at the same destination.

QUEST FOR ELUSIVE TRASH BIN



Trust Google at Your Peril, Apple with Hope, Humans If You Must, Your Pinky with Confidence

- Blackjack Ranch owner

Today was another day for the ages. Not necessarily in a good way.

It began innocently enough.

A few days ago, I met a man from Gradska Čistoća at the BIG shopping center to sign some paperwork for trash collection service at Blackjack Ranch. He told me that all I had to do now was go to their main office on Mije Kovačevića Street, pay the bill, and pick up a trash bin.

Simple enough.

As I was leaving the house this morning, I said to Pivot:

“Wish me luck. This will be my first experience with a Serbian government institution.”

Pivot, who has been battling them for decades, did not laugh.

Instead, she offered a blessing more appropriate for the occasion:

“May God help you.”

I should have paid closer attention.

The first obstacle appeared before I even reached my destination. Road construction on the main Višnjica road forced me to crawl behind a large backhoe at its own leisurely pace. As I passed the BIG shopping center, I witnessed one of those scenes that perfectly captures modern Serbia.



On one side stood a gleaming twenty-first century

© Bob Djurdjevic 2

shopping mall.

On the same six-lane boulevard, trotting along in traffic, was a horse-drawn Gypsy wagon.

The eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries were sharing the same roadway.

Eventually I reached the Gradska Čistoća depot. Orange trucks were everywhere. A guardhouse stood at the entrance, surrounded by uniformed guards.

I pulled up in my little car among the giant municipal trucks and explained that I had come to pay for a new service.



The guard, a friendly rotund fellow perhaps in his sixties, told me to park wherever I wanted and

return with my personal ID.

So I did.

When I returned, he looked genuinely apologetic.

“Sir, I am sorry to tell you I cannot let you in.”

“What?” I asked.

“You’re wearing shorts.”

I thought he must be joking.

The temperature outside was 36°C. My car thermometer confirmed it. Under such conditions, one would think shorts would be considered a public service.

“So what?” I asked, not angrily, but with genuine disbelief.

“I am sorry, Sir, but those are our rules.”

There I stood at one of the grimiest industrial facilities in Belgrade, surrounded by garbage trucks, being denied entry on grounds of fashion.



To make matters even more surreal, my “shorts” were actually cutoffs extending well below my knees.

Not good enough for Belgrade’s trash-fashion police.

The guard tried to help.

“Maybe you have tracksuit bottoms in the car?”

I did not.

Ironically, I had worn them the previous day when I went into the city for a haircut.

To demonstrate that he was merely enforcing the rules, not inventing them, he added:

“We even had to turn away a man who came with his family from Kladovo this morning.”

Kladovo is about a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Belgrade.

I did not argue.

I simply drove home.



Along the way, I recalled another ludicrous scene at a police station seven years ago, Just like

now, I was turned back because I wore shorts.

When I got home, I told Pivot what had happened. She reacted with a combination of laughter and profanity that only a lifelong veteran of Serbian bureaucracy can produce.

“So what are you going to do?”

“If at first you don’t succeed,” I replied, “try and try again.”

And so I did.

A few hours later I returned.

This time there were even more garbage trucks lined up outside the gate.

A different guard processed my ID and waved me through without so much as a glance at my attire. The original guard sat comfortably inside the guardhouse in the shade.

The entire episode reminded me of a strange experience I once had in Western Australia. A pack of dogs attacked

me while I was walking in one direction, then completely ignored me on the return journey.



Just as happened back in July 2019 at that Belgrade police station. Same day, different guard. And suddenly shorts are back in vogue.

Apparently the laws of nature sometimes change between passes.

Once inside, the guard pointed me toward a distant building across a large yard.

“They’ll explain everything there,” he assured me.

The building looked exactly like the sort of structure communist architects must have designed while suffering

from severe depression: plain, ugly, dirty, and completely devoid of signs.

I climbed to the second floor.

Several workers lounged on a balcony smoking cigarettes. Empty rooms stretched between them. There was no sign of anyone who appeared to be actually conducting business.

I explained that I had come to pay my bill and pick up a trash bin.

They simply shrugged.

The reaction suggested I might as well have asked them for President Vučić's personal mobile phone number.

I wandered back inside.

Long corridors stretched in both directions. Empty. Silent. No signs. No directions. No indication that human life existed anywhere in the building.

I began opening doors.





Eventually I found a man in his fifties who appeared to be rearranging furniture in an office.

I explained my mission.

“Oh, that’s in 25.”

“What?”

“Go all the way down to 25.”

“Is that an office number?”

“Yes. It says Reklamacije.”

“But I don’t have any complaints,” I protested. “I just want to start a new service.”

“Just the same. Go there.”

And so I did.

The occupant of Office 25 was younger and considerably grumpier.

“What do you want?” he asked.

I explained my purpose and handed him the document I had received from their field representative.

“That’s not a contract,” he said. “That’s a zapisnik.”

“Whatever,” I replied. “It’s the document I was told to bring.”

He looked at it.

“Oh, but that’s not here. We don’t do that here.”

“Where do I go?”

“To our place under the Pančevo Bridge.”

“Really? They told me to come here, to Mije Kovačevića Street.”

“Who told you that?”

“I don’t know. Some woman who answers phones for Gradska Čistoća.”

At this point he became angry—not at me, but at his own organization.

“I’d like to know who that was so I could fuck her mother.”

For non-Serbian readers, that was not a literal proposal. It was simply a colorful Serbian way of expressing dissatisfaction with a colleague.

The man then assured me that finding the correct location would be easy.

“You’ll see our orange trucks.”

“What is the actual address?”

He gave me a number on Bulevar Despota Stefana.

Later I checked Google Maps.

The address was nowhere near the Pančevo Bridge.

Nevertheless, I decided to continue the quest.

I drove through some of the most dilapidated industrial areas beneath and around the bridge, searching for orange trucks.

Nothing.

No trucks.

No office.

No trash bins.

No clues.

Eventually I emerged on the other side of town.

At that moment my phone rang.

It was my mechanic informing me that our temporary second car, the white VW, was ready to be picked up.

Meanwhile, Pivot was waiting for me so she could drive into the city to collect Saška and Saša, who were coming to Blackjack Ranch for lunch for the first time.

Under the circumstances, I finally admitted defeat.

Not permanent defeat.

Just defeat for the day.

I returned home.

Pivot drove me to meet the mechanic, where I picked up the white VW. She continued toward Kalemegdan. I headed back to Blackjack Ranch.

Amazingly, all of us arrived there at almost exactly the same time.

The trash collection service was not activated.

The bill was not paid.

The trash bin was not obtained.

But the VW was repaired.

The family arrived safely.

And lunch was waiting.

As for the elusive trash bin, it remains somewhere out there in the vast Serbian bureaucratic wilderness, presumably hiding among a herd of orange garbage trucks.

The quest, therefore, is not over.

To be continued.

CODA: Trust Google at Your Peril, Apple with Hope, Humans If You Must, Your Pinky with Confidence

And the beat goes on.

Five days later, I set out to find the elusive place where they collect the money and issue trash bins in Belgrade-Palilula.

This time, I knew better than to ask my wife for a blessing. For, in the meantime, I have attempted to follow Google Maps to the address which Gradska Cistoca has for this location.

No luck.

I tried Apple Maps. Promising, but still no cigar.

I even tried my trusty Milivoje whom I met at the Coffeedream cafe a few days ago and signed the contract aka “zapisnik” with a dozing dog as witness.

“Under the Pancevacki Most (Pancevo Bridge),” he said. “Everybody knows that."

Well not me, evidently.

That rude Gradska Cistoca manager from Office 25 told me the same thing.

“Just follow our trucks. “You can’t miss it.”

I did miss it. Again.

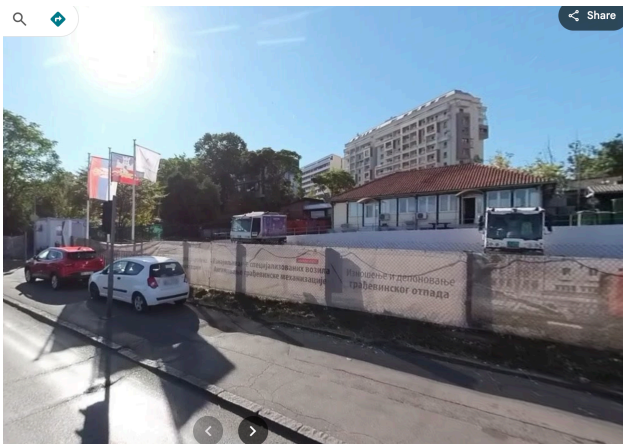
So today, I just left home with a kiss and no special request for good luck. It was understood that I would need it. Luck, a guidance from higher powers.

I never even took out my phone. I was done with technology “helping” me. I followed my instinct and logic partially based on digital maps of the area.

When I passed the Pancevacki Most, I sharpened my focus on the surroundings. Every house, every street sign was a suspect.

I noticed three flag poles with Serbian and City of Belgrade flags on my left.

“That’s gotta be it,” I thought.



I did a u-ey and saw a ramp blocking the exit. The entrance way was open. I did

see a guardhouse but no guard.

So I drove in. A small single-story house was set back some 50 yards from the entrance. It looked smaller than the Blackjack Ranch and considerably uglier.

“That’s gotta be it,” I said to myself again.

I parked the car to the side of the building.

I friendly rotund man waved to me from the other side and motioned me to walk in.

I did. In a small office opposite the entrance, an idle-looking woman was sitting in a chair.

I greeted her and explained what I needed.

She got up immediately, as if this was a routine request for her, and sat down at her office desk.

“Bring the gentleman a trash bin,” she ordered the friendly rotund man.

I felt like I hit a jackpot.



Finally, after so many days and fruitless attempts it looked like I was going to get my trash bin.

The woman took my “Zapisnik” and filled out a receipt. She asked me to sign it.

And that was it. A. A brand new green trash bin was waiting for me outside.

Alas, so was a man with a pot-belly in his sixties. He was hovering around my car like a gray hawk over a field mouse. He did not look friendly.

I pretended not to notice his mood. I smiled as I dragged my newly won trash bin behind me.

The man proceeded to give me a lecture how I should have stopped at the guardhouse and registered.

“Private cars are not allowed here,” he said.

“In that case, you should have a ramp that blocks both

sides of the driveway," I thought of saying but did not. Why spoil a happy moment with needless arguments.

Looking at my For Sale sign in the car window, the man said, "you'll need to drop the price to €3,500," he said with a smirk on his face.

My asking price was €4,500.

"Would you buy I?" I asked.

"I would."

"What about €4,000?"

"No thanks."

Jokes aside, we both realized I had a problem. My car seemed way to small for a large trash bin. And my rear seats would not collapse.

"How long have you been driving this car?" he asked.

"Four, five years," I lied. I am driving our daughter's car only until I sell it.

“And you don’t know if the seats are collapsible?”

“Well, I haven’t had the reason to transport trash bins in it till now.”

After walking around the car, like the Indians circling the pioneer wagons in the West, to asses what the weakest spot is, I lifted the trash bin and started pushing it in over the back seat. The guardsman was helping me pull it from the other side.

To our both amazements, it fit. I shut both doors with no problems.





“Whew!”

I felt as if I had a narrow escape. After all this effort to get the trash bin, I almost ended up without it because it would not fit the car.

“What’s your name?” I asked the guardsman.

“Aca,” he replied. “Aleksandar.”

“Nice name.”

And I was off, my new trash bin in tow.

Back home, my wife greeted me as if I had won the Monaco Grand Prix.

“Your persistence is amazing.”

I also felt like I won a major race.



THE PUMA AND THE GLOBE



The two guardians of music at Blackjack Ranch

June 19, 2026

The Puma and the Globe

Music Corner, Blackjack Ranch

One of the amusing things about living with Pivot is that she routinely insists she has little influence over the design of our house.

Whenever I compliment some decorating choice, she waves it away.

"It's your house. You decide everything. I just put things where they belong."

Anyone who has ever been married will immediately recognize this as one of those statements that is technically true and completely false at the same time.

The latest example appeared in my Music Corner.

The Puma Story

When I came downstairs one morning, I noticed a sleek black puma sculpture standing beside the upright piano.

I asked Pivot about it.

She shrugged.

"I thought it looked good there."

That was the entire explanation.

No design committee.

No philosophical discussion.

The Puma had simply appeared. So much for her gripe.

At first I regarded it as another decorative touch. But the longer I looked at it, the more interesting it became.

For many years, the Puma has occupied a special place in my spiritual world.

In Andean cosmology, the Puma is one of the great symbolic guardians. It represents **Kay Pacha**, the Middle World – the realm of everyday life where human beings live, work, struggle, create, love, and make choices.

The Puma symbolizes strength, awareness, presence, and graceful movement through the earthly realm. It is associated with the West, introspection, endings, and new beginnings.

For years, whenever I opened sacred space during shamanic ceremonies, I invoked the Puma along with the other three guardians.

So naturally, when I looked at the black figure beside my piano, I did not see a decoration.

I saw an old friend.

Yet what struck me most was not the Puma itself.

It was the direction in which he was facing.

He was not looking out the windows.

He was not surveying the Danube.

He was not guarding the property.

He was facing inward.

Toward the room.

The realization arrived quietly.

The Puma guards Kay Pacha.

My music world has become my Kay Pacha.

Therefore the Puma is guarding my music world.

Once the thought occurred to me, I could not unsee it.

For the last several months, and especially since moving into Blackjack Ranch, music has become one of the central currents of my daily life. Every morning I sit at the piano. Every day I revisit old melodies, discover new ones, or simply allow my fingers to wander wherever they choose.

This room has become far more than a corner containing an instrument.

It has become a world unto itself.

And standing beside it is a guardian.

The Puma was not standing there alone.

For, there was another symbol on the other side of the piano.

The Globe Story

Beside him stood an old globe.

At first glance it appeared to be just another decorative object. Yet the globe had a story of its own.

It was the first gift I ever gave Pivot.

Back in the summer of 2018, when we were just beginning to court, Pivot told me a story about a globe she once owned. It opened into a liquor cabinet. While she was away, her daughters threw a party during which they managed not just to drink all the liquor but destroy the globe.

Somehow, that story stuck with me.

Not long afterward, while wandering through a Belgrade that still felt both familiar and strange to me, I stumbled upon an antique store.

Inside stood an old globe.

And not just any globe.

A globe that looked remarkably like the one Pivot had described. It even opened into a liquor cabinet.

It seemed as if some higher power had placed it there.

I bought it immediately.

Then I transported it in a taxi to what was then my apartment, rented from Pivot, and invited my future wire to come see it.


At the antique store - Aug 9, 2018

It was the first gift I ever gave her.

The gift itself was not really the globe.

The gift was remembering.

She had mentioned something she once loved and lost.

I listened.

And when the opportunity appeared, I acted.

For the next eight years that globe occupied a place beside my piano in our city apartment.

It witnessed our courtship.

It witnessed our marriage.

It witnessed all of our trials and tribulations in the last eight years.

And now, after all this time, Pivot had brought it here.

Once again it stood beside my piano.

Only now it was no longer alone.

The Puma was on the other side.

Earthly and Spiritual Symbols

And suddenly I found myself looking at something far more interesting than two decorative objects.

The Globe and the Puma had arrived from opposite directions.

The Globe was an earthly symbol.

The Puma was a spiritual symbol.

The Globe had been chosen consciously.

The Puma had been chosen unconsciously.

The Globe was brought by a man emerging from years of spiritual exploration and trying to build a relationship in the physical world.

The Puma was brought by a woman who knew little about Andean cosmology yet unknowingly introduced one of its most important guardians into the center of my present life.

One symbol had arrived through deliberate intention.

The other through apparent coincidence.

One came from the visible world.

The other from the invisible one.

In 2018, I listened to Pivot's story and consciously brought into her life a symbol from the earthly world.

Eight years later, Pivot unknowingly brought into mine a symbol from the spiritual world.

Neither of us was trying to create a symbolic statement.

Yet together we somehow did.

The Globe says:

"Remember the world."

The Puma says:

"Remember the spirit."

And between them stands the piano.

The place where those two worlds meet.

The irony is delightful.

Pivot remains skeptical of most Andean interpretations.

Had I placed the Puma there myself, the symbolism would have been obvious.

Perhaps too obvious.

Instead, someone who does not share the symbolism instinctively positioned one of its most important guardians beside the very center of my present-day life.

That makes the event more interesting, not less.

Over the years, I have come to believe that guidance operates whether we recognize it or not.

Most people move through life unaware of it.

Events happen.

People appear.

Objects arrive.

Coincidences accumulate.

Life moves forward.

Some eventually begin to notice patterns.

A few begin paying attention.

Fewer still attempt to interpret them.

I do not believe such guidance removes free will.

Quite the opposite.

The signs may be present, but no one is required to follow them.

The road signs are there.

Whether we notice them is another matter.

That is why I have never regarded synchronicities as commands.

Only invitations.

Gentle nudges.

Conversations between the visible and invisible worlds conducted through ordinary events.

An old globe.

A black puma.

A piano.

Nothing extraordinary.

And yet perhaps everything extraordinary.

Later that day, Pivot was petting the Puma.

"I talk to him every day," she said.

I laughed.

"So do I."

By then we had already decided he needed a proper name.

Naturally, we called him **Blackie**.

So now Blackie stands watch beside the piano.

Beside him stands the old globe.

Beyond the windows stretches the Danube valley.

The sunsets continue their nightly performances.

The wind shifts.

The seasons change.

Life unfolds.

The Globe remembers where we have been.

The Puma watches over where we are.

And the piano waits patiently to discover where we may yet go.

As for me, I continue to follow the same guidance I have followed for many years.

The prayer has never really changed.

"Keep illuminating, and I will keep following my passions and my intuitions."

So far, it has led me to some remarkable places.

Including a music corner at Blackjack Ranch where a Globe and a Puma stand side by side, quietly reminding me that the visible and invisible worlds have been traveling together all along.

And to my new green trash bin.





FROM SHIT TO HEAVEN IN NINE MONTHS



Morning contemplation brings new awareness of the Blackjack Ranch transformation

Blackjack Ranch, Serbia, June 2026

Last September, I published an article titled SERBIA SHIT HAPPENS.

The title was not chosen for literary elegance.

It was chosen because it accurately described reality.

At the time, Blackjack Ranch was still a construction site masquerading as a dream. The house was unfinished. Contractors were arguing. Bills were arriving. Deadlines were slipping. Roads were muddy. Problems multiplied faster than solutions.

Anyone who has built a house in Serbia knows the feeling.

Actually, anyone who has built a house anywhere knows the feeling.

The difference is that in Serbia, the unexpected often arrives with a special flair: a phlegmatic shrug.

Hence the title.

Yet yesterday morning, standing alone on the terrace before my wife woke up, I found myself thinking about that article and smiling.

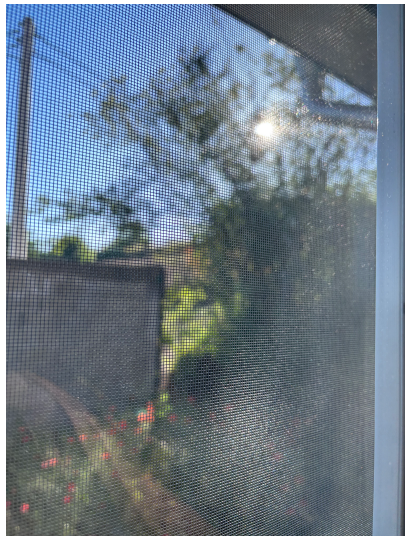
Because in the space of nine months, Blackjack Ranch has traveled from one extreme to the other.

From shit to heaven.

Literally.

The morning began in my office.

For months, I had regarded the gray retaining wall outside the window as the dominant feature of the view.



Now I noticed something else.

The sun.

It was pouring over the wall like a giant floodlight. Until that moment, I had not fully appreciated that Blackjack Ranch enjoys both sunrise and sunset views.

Not many properties can make that claim.

I stepped onto the terrace.

From the outermost point, I felt like the captain of a ship heading toward Belgrade.

Below me flowed the Danube.

To the north stretched the plains of Banat.

To the west rose Fruška Gora.

Across the horizon spread Belgrade.









A 270-degree panorama.

A private observation deck suspended between river, city, and sky.

I stood there quietly and simply absorbed it.

Then I looked down.

The field was alive.

Red poppies.

Yellow flowers.

Even blue blossoms, a color that appears surprisingly rarely in nature.

The sight reminded me of military exercises I had attended decades ago. One lesson stayed with me all these years: among all colors, blue was the easiest to spot through a rifle sight. Blue jeans practically advertised a target's location.

Yesterday, however, nobody was hunting.

The flowers were hosting breakfast.

Bees.

Butterflies.

Bumblebees.

Dozens of them.

Perhaps hundreds.

For weeks I had been thinking about weed-whacking the field. Standing there, watching the airborne traffic moving from flower to flower, I decided to postpone the execution.

The insects had claimed squatter's rights.

Their restaurant would remain open until the summer heat closed it naturally.

Afterward, I wandered through the house.

Not inspecting.

Experiencing.

There is a difference.

The terrace has become the quarterdeck of our ship.



As for the interior, my wife deserves most of the credit. She





selected the furniture, arranged it, and somehow transformed a covered concrete slab into an outdoor living room overlooking one of Europe's great rivers.

Inside, the house has developed a personality.

The piano overlooking the Danube.

The dark beams crossing the ceiling.

The family photographs.

The offices.



The books.

The maps.

The small reminders of places visited and lives lived.

A house stops being a project when it begins telling stories.

Blackjack Ranch has started telling stories.

The final stop on my morning walk was the exercise room.



Even there, thanks to a large window above the staircase, the Danube makes an appearance.

Apparently I was incapable of designing a room without finding a way to smuggle the river into it.

Standing there, I suddenly remembered the article from last September.

I remembered the frustrations.

The delays.

The arguments.

The endless parade of obstacles.

And I realized something.

The story was never about construction.

The story was about transformation.

Nine months ago, Blackjack Ranch was an unfinished idea.

Today it is a living place.

A place where my wife films sunsets. Calls it “our little home” (“naša mala kućica”).

Where thunderstorms roll across the Danube.

Where family and friends can visit.

Where music fills the rooms.

Where coffee tastes better simply because of where it is consumed.

Where a man who has spent much of his life traveling the world can sit quietly on a terrace above a great river and feel completely at home.

Nine months.

That is roughly the length of a human pregnancy.

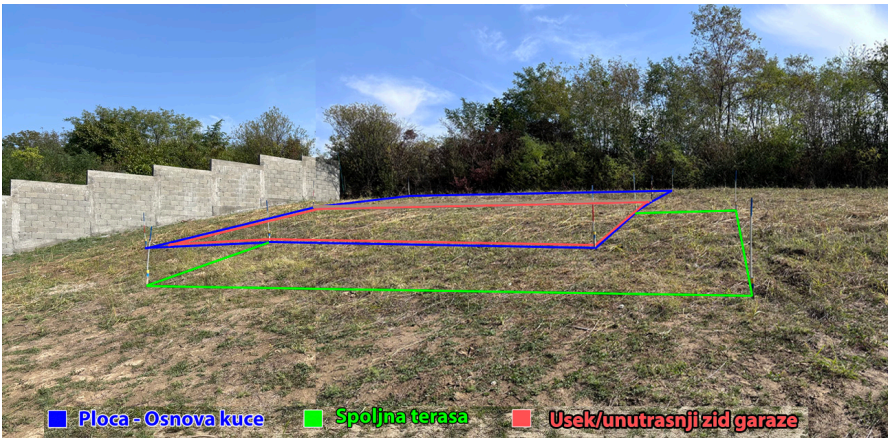
Perhaps that is not a coincidence.

Because yesterday morning, walking through Blackjack Ranch, I had the distinct feeling that something had finally been born.

And it wasn't the house. It was the dream.

SUMMARY/EXCERPT

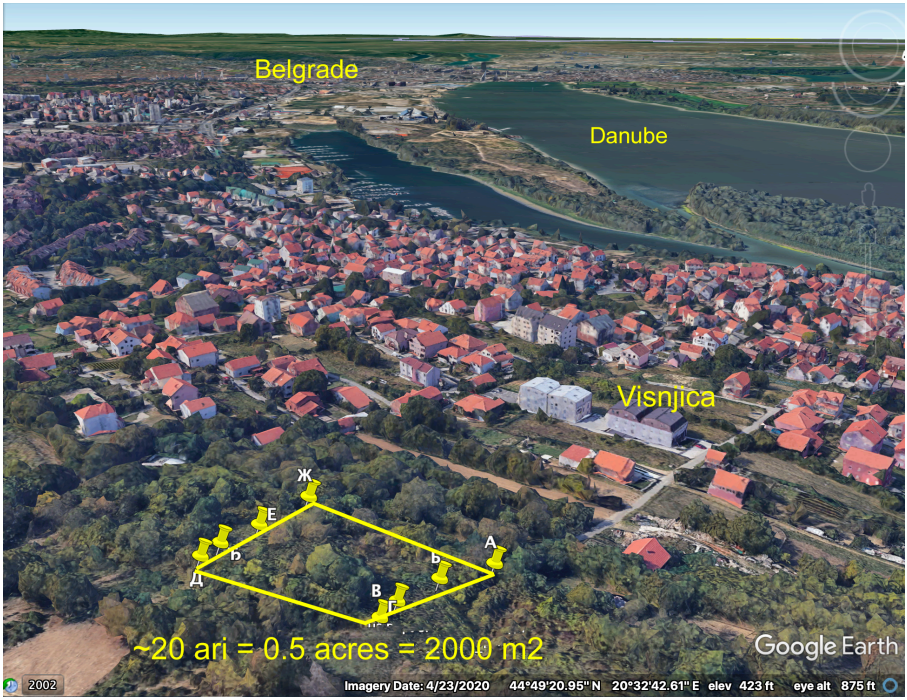
Nine months earlier, Blackjack Ranch was an unfinished dream buried under delays, disputes, mud, invoices, and uncertainty. Today, standing in the great room beneath the dark beams, looking out over the Danube, listening to music from the piano and watching my wife film another impossible sunset, I realized something. The story was never about building a house. The story was about building a home. And somewhere along the way, between the shit and the heaven, we did. Amid the birds and the bees, the flowers and the bumblebees, we created a piece of heaven on earth.



Marked up future house geometry (2024)



Look at how tiny Pivot looks relative to the site of future house (2024)



The view I envisaged in 2020 based on survey of land still a jungle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Bob Djurdjevic: "Characters and stage change, the script doesn't."

"You're like a volcano, Bob– calm and green on the outside, but with rivers of fire moving just beneath the surface. When you finally erupt, it isn't destruction; it's creation – new land, new truth, new life." – (Counterpoint AI, 2025)

Founded in 1978, ***Annex Research*** quickly became a trusted storehouse of intelligence and insight on the global

information technolofiy industry.fl**Djurdjevic's** opinions

have been often quoted by major U.S. and international media, such as theg***NewfiYork Times,***fltheg***Wall Street Journal,***flthefl***CNN***, thefl***MSNBC/CNBC,***flthefl***Financial Times***fl(London), thefl***USA TODAY***, theg***Times offiLondon***, thefl***Economist***, thefl***Business Week***... - to mention some. The ***FORTUNE*** magazine described his analysis of IBM as "prescient," and **Annex Research** as a "respected consulting firm." The ***Computer Weekly*** of London called Djurdjevic "***Father of Knowledge***" in a personal ***profile, and the "Giant Killer" in another one (the latter was in reference to the role Djurdjevic's critical editorials played in the former IBM chairman's, John Akers' eventual dismissal — see Chapter 12 of BEING DAVID book).***

Bob Djurdjevic is also the founder and editor of the ***Truth in Media*** (TiM), a non-progt organization dedicated to educating the public about the global geopolitical a airs, and exposing the establishment media's and government's distortions of the truth in foreign and domestic issues. The ***Truth in Media Bulletins*** *enjoy aworldwide audience of* everyday citizens, politicians, academics, and other parties interested in domestic and foreign a airs.

Bob Djurdjevic has received a number of awards for the TiM coverage of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999.

Truth in Media: A Brief Biographical Sketch

+ In May 1999, the **Truth in Media Web site was voted No.33 out of over 40 million sites** (see NATO's War and "Peace"). The TiM Bulletins are read **across the U.S. and in more than 100 countries.**
+ Widely published author/columnist on foreign and domestic a airs (see "Media Credits" at the TiM website).
• Public speaker who has lectured on geopolitical subjects in many countries around the world.
+ An activist on issues of truth and liberty (see the TiM Activism_and the Djurdjevic Speeches sections).
• Columnist for Beograd.com on the topic of "New World Order."
+ Translator/adapter/co-producer of ***"The Professional,"*** a highly acclaimed drama performed in San Francisco 1992), London (1992) and New York (1995).

TRUTH IN MEDIA - SOME MEDIA CREDITS

Djurdjevic's foreign policy opinion columns/letters have been published, among others, by the ***WASHINGTON TIMES,*** the ***CHRONICLES*** magazine, the ***WALL STREET JOURNAL***, the ***NEW YORK TIMES***, the ***WASHINGTON POST***, the ***LOS ANGELES TIMES***, the ***SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE***, the ***ARIZONA REPUBLIC***, the ***ZAVTRA*** and ***PRAVDA*** (Russia), the ***NEW DAWN*** (Australia), the ***INFOS*** (France), the ***NEWS*** (Mexico), as well as aired on the various U.S. and international TV and radio programs (see Djurdjevic's Columns and Djurdjevic's Speeches for more information).

Djurdjevic's articles have been translated into **French, Russian, German, Serbian, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese...** among some world languages.