



## YOUTH FROM BOSNIA: OUR MEMORIES OF LIVING WITH WAR

**“It wasn’t too hard to figure out that something had changed,** that there was a war. Everyone was talking about it. You could hear the shelling, the grenades – the sirens – when they went off you knew that you had to hide. In two or three days tops, you understood what was going on.

A lot of kids lost their friends. Some went to one side, others to another. In some cases we never saw each other again.

I remember one time. My friend and I were playing outside a building. We heard the siren. I was scared so I ran to hide. But my friend didn’t want to leave. He said, “Nothing is going to happen.” He stayed outside; I went inside the building. A grenade fell and hit him. He died two days later.

People didn’t think about having their hair done. You would see women without any make-up on. They stopped thinking about those sorts of things.

Lots of people lost everything. They didn’t have any money, not even enough to buy bread.

But there were others, some who somehow had more money than they did before. They seemed to get rich with the war. It switched some times.

People couldn’t sleep because of the bombing and the grenades exploding. And the fear. The air smelled like gunpowder.

Everyone was dirty. People couldn’t wash. There would be no water for days. Even when there was water, the people were too scared to leave the basements where they were hiding to go get it. So we were very dirty, so dirty. And many times thirsty. But the water was so polluted that you were scared to drink it because then you might get sick. No toilets. (Laughter)

Nobody could get through on the phone. Anyway, there was spying so it wasn’t safe to call.

We stayed in shelters – it was very boring but there was so much fear.

For me it wasn’t boring because the grenades were flying over my head.



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I played soccer all the time. When the sirens stopped or the shelling stopped then we could go outside. But most of the time we were inside.

Our parents wanted to protect us, to make things seem as normal as possible and also so we could feel safe. Lots of kids lost their parents during the war. So they had to go into institutions or other places.

We didn't hear anything about our dad for months. He was hiding in the dumps in Croatia.

I remember walking on the road with my family, carrying as much as we could. I felt so sad leaving my home. And all the people just looking at us, standing looking at us. I didn't cry outside, I didn't want them to see that. I just cried on the inside.

Some of the old people lost their health because of the air. There weren't any tablets for medicine so if you got sick you were in trouble. The worrying – some lost their nerves and went crazy. We got lice.

Some of the parks were burned down, others were wrecked. Why did they do that? It was only kids and old people who went to the parks.

Yeah, in our place they put landmines in the parks. Kids still went there, they would just go to the little parts where it was still safe.

With us, the family got separated. That was common. You wouldn't hear about each other or see each other for months. Some people sent their families away.

Everyone went their own way, everyone tried to save their lives the way they knew and could.

It was difficult to get away. Like for us, we didn't have identity cards so it was impossible.

Yes, and even for the others, they had to pay a lot of money to bribe and maybe they didn't have it.

When the men came back some of them had lost parts of their body. Others lost parts of themselves. They were scared, or wouldn't speak or they had nightmares and things like that.

My dad stayed the same.

My dad refused to talk about it.”