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Interview with Sadeta Hodzic (FA 1137)

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Project name: Bosnia Project
Field ID and name: KFP2016IYB_0003_KHsr0002
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Date: January 29, 2016
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Transcribing Conventions:

Use of square brackets [] indicates a note from the transcriber.

Use of parentheses () indicates a conversational aside.

Use of dash - indicates an interruption of thought or conversation.

Use of ellipses ... indicates a discontinued thought.

Use of quotations “ “ indicates reported speech.

Use of *italics* indicates emphasis.

Use of underline indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.

Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.

Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

[00:00:00]

KH: Okay, so um, this is Kate Horigan and I'm here with Sadeta Hodzic.

SH: Correct.

KH: Um, and today is January 29th, 2016. We're doing this interview in Cravens Library at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. Um, and thank you Sadeta so much for, for being here today, for your time.

SH: You're welcome.

KH: Um, so I want to just start by just asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself, your profession, your age, just some kind of basic details about your- who you are.

SH: Okay. Like you said, uh my name is Sadeta Hodzic, American friends call me "Sadata Hodzic." Um, I was born in 1971, in a small town called Bratunac, which is about ten kilometers of Srebrenica, and uh I lived a normal life before the war, going to high school, I was a high school Senior when the war started in 1992. I lived with my mom, my dad, and my siblings, so nothing special going on in our lives until 1992.

KH: Okay, so um, you, you mentioned your family, so your family is originally from-

SH: Bratunac.

KH: Bratunac, okay. Um, and I know you said it's sort of an ordinary life, but if you can take me back there what are some things you remember about your childhood? Um before the war, thing that you guys did on a daily basis, games or activities, or anything?

SH: Well, okay, well back then, uh we didn't have much like kids have today, and we had very limited television time because there was not much kids programming going on anywhere in our ex-Yugoslavia television. There was a lot of politics and a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff going on, and we would be rewarded with fifteen minutes cartoon every night at 7:15. [slight laugh] Right before the 7:30 news, uh we would sit down and watch fifteen minutes cartoon on the TV, and that was all TV, pretty much all TV time we had back then. [Then it] was uh playing and having fun outdoor and outside, you know? You go to school, um a lot of kids would walk to school, we went with bus, you know half of my school time I went with bus, half of school time I was walking to school back and forth, which is about two and a half, three miles each way. And then uh when you get home, and you would uh just take your clothes off, throw your backpack in the corner and you go outdoor. You would, you know, spend pretty much the whole time until, you know, dusk outside, you know, helping mom and dad uh in the, in the field, uh, you know, with animals, playing with your friends, just, you know, living pretty much outdoor. Um, my dad was a working um, only working person in the family, uh we had a big family. We produced a lot of stuff, uh a lot, you know, from a lot of potatoes, a lot of corn, a lot of wheat, and tried to produce as much as possible so we wouldn't spend money, you know, to go to market and buy stuff. And we had a lot of farmland so we, you know, produce a lot.

KH: Did you family sell those things or was that for your own use- ?

SH: Pretty much for our own use, and if sometimes we had an over, dad would take maybe once or twice, you know, to the market and, you know, sell, but um, we'd pretty much produce for our own use. Uh, we would uh, we had also animals, we had cows and sheeps, and a couple dogs. And uh we would um raise like uh, you know, like a little uh calf, we would raise and then we would sell, and then we would buy something, you know, that we needed. You know, it was sad because you raise for about a year the calf and, you know, you get attached and then somebody comes and takes it, and you cried but then you know it's, you're gonna buy something that you needed, you know, desperately that father was not, you know, able to buy with his uh limited income. And so, very simple life but happy, my childhood memories are very happy memory. We didn't have much but um it was happy, it was different than, than today. Uh, everything we had we loved it. I remember uh getting new pairs of shoes, that would like, that would be like a holiday, you know? And uh new pairs of pants or whatever, you know, I would cherish and I would be so happy, and today's kids, they just get them. [laughs] It doesn't mean as much and it was, it was different, it was different times. And I have very, very happy childhood memories, nothing uh major happened or any, you know, dramas, and you know, just normal life.

KH: Is there any of the, any one of those happy memories that stands out or comes to mind?

SH: Uh-

KH: Of that time in you life.

[00:05:01]

SH: School, school was that. Uh, when I think about school and sometimes my little one today, he doesn't like school, I say, "ohh," you know? "School is the best times." School was, I loved to go to school. Even though, you know, I went to school I would come home and I would take care of the household, or helping mom in household and stuff, and we didn't have washing machine in the house so everything has to be done with the hands, you know? Wooden stove, you have to cook everything in the wooden stove, heat the house in the wooden stove, and uh wash your clothes with with the hands, and you know, hang up whatever you can in the window to dry, of course, and somebody would hang them outside. But um school, I loved school. I- those are the happiest memories I have, I, I was good school, I, I mean I was lucky that I was good student, I loved to read, and a lot of times I tell my kids, you know, my mom would be, my mother would be mad with me almost every morning, especially in the winter. I couldn't go to bed without having a book under the cover, even if I was sleeping in a very, very cold room because we had only one wooden stove in the house that was uh providing us with the heat and also we cooked on it,

and uh, you know, I refused to sleep in the warm room when so many other kids, you know, they wanted to, you know, have more privacy, and I went and slept in the cold room. I could see frozen walls, almost frozen walls, so cold the walls that we- and, but I, I wanted my books so I would go under my blanket I would read book and I would be so, I wo- I couldn't get up to turn off the light because I was so nice and cozy under the blanket and I would let, leave the light all night long, and mom would be mad every morning with me, that I wasted so much [laughs] electricity. Which for us, back then, expensive and with one income only and six kids in the house, and everything else going on, with one income it was not easy. So you tried, you know, to save whatever you can, you know? And me wasting light that I didn't need it, it was- mom would be, would be mad with me, well almost every morning, you know, the same story, the same story. [laughs] Yes, school, school-

KH: Yeah.

SH: -was something that I, took- look at back very, very happy memories, I loved school.

KH: So you were one of six children?

SH: Yes.

KH: Tell me about your siblings, and where do you fall in that?

SH: Yes, um yeah, my parents had, like I said, six children, children. The oldest one was a boy, um he was born in 1962, the second one was a sister, she was born in 1966, um third one was a brother again, born 1969, he died in 1988. Uh, that's uh one thing, a sad memory from my childhood and still sad. He died from muscular dystrophy in nineteen nine-nineteen eighty-eight. Then I was the next one, after me I had a sister, another sister, and a brother. So we lost one brother in 1988.

KH: So and then there were two after you?

SH: Yeah.

KH: Um, and did you play with your brothers and sisters? And-

SH: Oh yes, oh yes. Simple things, you know, what we can find out- outside and stuff. Like I said, we didn't spend much time indoor because it was more fun outside than, than indoor, we didn't have much indoors. You know, like I said, television was not like today, and no computers, no, no games, no DVDs, nothing, nothing. I remember a lot of times we would

put uh like the, the radio under the window, turn it up and we're outside playing and there's the music going on and stuff, and uh yeah, it, it was nice. Uh, we were not even hungry. I remember a lot of times just, you know, being the- especially on the weekends, you know, in summer, being all day outside playing with kids and stuff, and we would just maybe run home and just to get a piece of bread and maybe a little bit of sugar on the top, just to get something in your system and you'd go, keep going back again. And uh a lot of times barefoot, you didn't care about shoes, and needed shoes, you didn't need the shoes. We would build like a, a little swim areas in the mountain, small rivers that used to come through, uh through our village, we would build like a little swimming pool and we would go there and trying to jump and swim, have fun and very simple life, happy, happy memories.

KH: Yeah, so-

SH: Very happy.

KH: -um, and then you lost your brother in 1988 and then the war must've started shortly after that, so-

SH: Yeah, 1992, yes.

KH: Tell me a little bit about that time.

SH: Um, I, I was going in high- I was high school student, about a- before the war started, we had a little incident uh close to my village. Um, in 1991, September of 1991, a group of young men, uh one of whom, one was my cousin, went to uh next city, we had problems with the gas shortage, uh benzine and stuff, and um, they took a car and went to next city called Zvornik, um, they heard there is gas available and stuff. [00:10:03] And they went to buy gas, and there was, I'm not sure, four or five guys in the car, and they went back from Zvornik towards our city, Bratunac, they came to a village called Kravica, which is very notorious, you know? It's a Serbian, you know, village, and uh someone saw them, uh that was the guy in a car that didn't like him, he didn't like them, and my cousin was I would say at the wrong place at the wrong time. As soon as they passed Kravica, Kravica with uh their car, they were attacked in an area, wooded area. They were attacked with guns, two were killed and uh, three were killed, I'm sorry, and one escaped alive. One of those three killed was my cousin too. So that was beginning, before 1992, that was, this, this happened in September of 1991, I was going to high school and remember my dad uh was working third shift. He was a security guard in a big factory, ceramic factory in Bratunac, and he heard about the incident and I remember my dad coming home around 7:30 in the morning and I have never seen my dad more scared and he's, you know, I could tell something was,

you know, happening. When I was so young, you know, I could tell he didn't, he didn't want to talk about, and I follow my dad outside and i said, "Something is going on. What's going on?" And he started crying and he told us that our cousin was killed and he was taken to Tuzla for uh autopsy and then all those things. And uh, you know, that was uh, you could tell something is, you know, something is coming, something is just not right. And then 1992, of course you know, you just um heard things happening first in other cities, and um people fleeing the towns, and you know, first you see things happened in Slovenia, then you see, see things in uh Croatia, and you don't think it's going to happen to you, but it slowly came over to Bosnia. And uh from being in our town, for- from Zvornik to Bratunac, and um a lot of women from our village and our city left the town because you don't, you know, you don't just wait for bad to happen to you, if you see it's coming you try to do something. And um, I remember um my sister-in-law, who was living at that time on her own with two little kids, one was seven years old and one was about ten months old, baby, you know, one night after I came back from school I went to see her and I said, "What are we gonna do?" You know? People are leaving, you know, especially women and children, a lot of men would send women and children out. There were buses and if you have a car you will take your women, your wife, and your child towards Tuzla, Tuzla was a safe area and little towns around Tuzla. And so I said, "What are we gonna do? You know, are we gonna do anything?" Um, she said, you know, "Wherever we're going I need an ID." I didn't have ID, I didn't have passport, I don't have nothing with me. ID was your way out, without ID you couldn't go anywhere. So she said, "If we're gonna do something, you have to go an apply for ID card," which I did. So I went to police station in Bratunac and um, I applied. I think it was a Monday when I applied, in April, and that Friday was the Friday that I went to pick up my ID card. I get it and I have it with me in my purse, and uh, that was the Friday I pick up my card in the morning, early, later on, lunch time, late Friday afternoon, [unclear] people came to town. And uh, I, I have to say I was lucky because when they came everything shuts down, nothing was working anymore, you know, they took over, you know? And uh we, I get my ID card, we went home, my- me and my sister, we talked to a guy who was uh later on killed, he was working for police station in Bratunac, and we asked for advice, "What, what do we need? What are we gonna do, you know?" People fleeing and, you know, things are happening, and he said uh, "I send my family to Lukavac, which is close to Tuzla, but I don't think it's gonna be safe there either." He said, "if you have anywhere or anyone, go outside of Bosnia, that would be the safest, right now, if you have somebody." So I talked to my sister-in-law and she had a cousin living in Macedonia, um a capital of Macedonia is Skopje, and um, she said, "Well we can go to her. Let me make a phone call over the weekend and we can go there for, til things pass." You know, till things settled, you know? [00:15:01] Which we did, and I remember it was April, I believe it was April 17th, it was a Monday, and I don't know very good, and I went down to Bratunac, we bought a um bus ticket from Bratunac to Belgrade and we took a bus. The town was, nothing was working, schools were closed, factories were

closed, nothing was going on, completely. No people in the street, I mean it was just scary, it was scary, soldiers with weapons and it was scary. Um, we took the bus from Bratunac, we drove towards the border, Serbian and Bosnian border, there's a river called Drina that, that's the border between Bosnia Herzego- Bosnia and Serbia, and um the bus stopped uh before we left Bosnia, before we crossed the bridge the bus stopped, they came in, you know, with big beards and big um machine guns and stuff, and you know, they were screaming and uh, um saying bad things, you know, and threatening to kill us, and you know, look- asking for IDs, asking for IDs to see who is Muslim, who is, you know, Serbian. And if they saw on the ID card you're Muslim they would say bad things and they would, I remember they took a couple young men who were, I didn't know them personally, I know they were from other villages because I'd seen them, but they took them out, they were on their way to work to Belgrade, those people, those young people were working in Belgrade, and uh they had some papers, from travel papers, you, you- they had to have some papers and they had those papers already. They took them out and they kicked them with machine guns and stuff, and uh they brought them back eventually, luckily, you know? And uh they let us go, so we were on the bridge, we are crossing the bridge, now we're into Serbia, they stopped the bus again for the other side. So now we are in Serbia so the bus stopped again, and then uh other guys came, scarier than the other first ones, you know? More, a couple came from the- on the first door, a couple came to the si- other, back doors, because bus had two, back and front doors. And um, they took a guy who had a bakery in Bratunac, he was uh Albanian, we know him very well, ev- everybody who from Bratunac know the guy, he had a very good bakery. They took the guy out and late- we didn't see what happened there, but later on we heard that he was killed, after the bus left the guy was killed right, right there. But they came to me and I was holding my head down, I was scared, I was afraid, and I had my sister-in-law, my, my nephew in my, in my lap, he was ten months old, next to me was sitting my sister-in-law with her seven years old, and then we had a neighbor which we took with us, a young girl, she traveled with us too because she wasn't to escape Bosnia too so she came with us too. We're sitting and, you know, I was shaking and stuff and they asked for IDs, so we give our IDs and they saw we are Muslim girls and they started yelling and asking where our mans are, our, our brother and husbands and fathers. Um, "we are running, we are saving the Muslims um, you know, kids," you know? They saw two young boys, they called both names. So it was scary, and I, I, I didn't know I'm gonna, you know, continue on the bus, I thought they're gonna take us out, they're gonna kill us, they're gonna do things to us, uh just I, I didn't think I'm gonna make alive. And uh, as they had our IDs in their hands and then say, you know, "that's it," uh another guy came in the front, something happening outside which I wasn't aware, he said, "we got to go, we got to go." They took those couple other people out and he just throw those IDs towards us and give a sign to the bus driver to take off, and we took off. A couple men were left behind, one of them was the bakery guy, and uh, you know, we took the road from there. A c- we stopped a couple more times towards Belgrade,

it was not bad. Um but we made it to Belgrade with the bus, um we went to see my uncle who was living in Belgrade, spent the night there at, at his house, and next morning we went back to the train station, bought a ticket from Belgrade to Skopje, and uh we took a train from Belgrade down to Skopje. Uh, c- which took a couple hours, it's not so far with train. We came to Skopje, and we call, my sister-in-law called her cousin, which she came very fast, and then we took a bus from the train station to her house and uh we spent about, I'm not- I tried to remember, between two and a half and three weeks we spent in her little house. [00:20:06] And that ha- lady had the smallest house that I've ever seen in my life, but the biggest heart. She took me, my sister-in-law, her two kids, and the other girls, a couple days after, my younger sister came with two other ladies from our village, and each of those ladies had two kids with her. So it was- we were sleeping in one big room, she had to take a lot of furniture out and she had to put like mattresses. We slept like, you know, next to each other, but uh like I said, she was a small petite women, a small house, but biggest heart ever. Her husband had to work almost three jobs to make sure that we had food to eat, to provide us with food and, you know, and diapers for kids and stuff that we needed, you know? And uh we, we were interviewed also for the local television in Skopje, they came and took interviews and uh she was able to get some uh food help from the local organizations, some Islamic organization down in Skopje. They brought some pasta, and rice, and oil, and sugar, and coffee, just to help out, you know? Nothing financial, but you know, just some food, you know, that they had. And uh the solution was not there to stay forever, you know, we couldn't, we couldn't. Um, that local um Islamic organization in Skopje find out that our- and they paid us, they pay us ticket, bus ticket from Skopje to Salzburg, Austria. We were told that we were going to Germany, the route ended in Salzburg, Austria, and uh that was very, very long and very hard, very hard um, three days bus ride from Skopje. We weren't went all around, uh Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, you know? All the way around, so it took us about three days from Skopje to get to Salzburg, Austria. And um, the, the, the bus driver stopped the bus and he said, "that's our final destination," and we, we thought we were going to Germany, no. It's a rainy day, afternoon, I remember it was in the evening hours, it's raining outside and he said, "that's it, we're going back. We're not going anywhere," you know? That's our final destination. And um, luckily we had a lot of phone numbers with us, that was one good thing. Uh we called some family members in Germany, and the first one we called couldn't help us. We called another lady and uh she was able to organize some help and she told us to go to train station, to second floor, it's much safer than, you know, ground floor, a lot of homeless people and stuff. She said "You go to second floor, you sit, find some quiet corner and wait for us, we're coming." Um, so I was so exhausted from three days in the bus, filled with the men, no shower, dry food to eat, just some bread and, you know, some like a sandwich meat. Uh I was exhausted, I remember that I fell asleep on my luggage. I don't know how long we waited there, three hours, or seven hours, or five hours, I don't have any clue, I just know that I was sleeping and sitting on my luggage and I was woken by somebody shaking

me on my, on my shoulder. They came, they came to get us but they came with just one car. They couldn't take all of us. What are we gonna do now? So since we were all like a family member, because the lady who came to take us, with her friend, my sister was married to her brother. So she decide she can take me, my sister-in-law, and those two kids, the other ones, they have to stay behind. But we didn't leave them behind, just stay there and do whatever, we were, we were able to find them an organization that took care of Bosnian refugees in Austria. There was other people also and, you know, going around looking for family members, so we were able to get in, you know, to put them, you know, and in a nice and safe place. We didn't just left them on the, you know, train station, and you, you, you don't know language, you don't know nobody, you know? We were able, you know, to work out and find, you know, a place for them and-

KH: Yeah.

SH: -left them behind. So we took uh, uh three people in the back with two kids, it was very crowded, small car. Germans, they don't drive big cars like here, they don't have SUVs and stuff, so small car, but I remember it was much more comfortable than being in bus with all those men, because the bus was packed with the men. [00:25:02] And um, we took it from the train station in Salzburg it took us about ten minutes, fifteen minutes maximum to get to the border. And uh, the first German borderline in my life was, was [unclear], which means you go back. We came to the uh passport control at the border, German-Austrian border, and those two ladies sitting the front, they are Germans, they have a German passport. So, I forgot to say before we left Skopje, Macedonia, we were able to get a passport. The organiza- uh the Islamic organization in Skopje helped us with getting passport, because if you want to go to Salzburg you have to have a passport. So they were able to, you know, help us to get a, you know, passport. So we had a passport, but they were ex-Yugoslavia passports, which were not [unclear] without reason, you know? The war was going on and all those countries said, "oh, ex-Yugoslavia, close the borders." You know, to, to get in, you need a reason. And uh, we came to the passport control and uh the lady that rolled the window down and they give them their passport, they took our passports and uh, he looked of course their passports say Germans, they're fine, then looked at our's and he was looking for a visa, and there was no visa, and that's when I understood the first time the word '[unclear]' means you go back, they can't let us go ba- in the country without visa [unclear]. And uh there was a couple days maybe we were short, you know, because the borders were open some, but at that time when he came to that, you know, it was closed. So what are we going to do now? We turned around, we get to the phone booth, and the lady call her husband in Germany. She said, "they won't- they, they're not going to come in, they won't let them through because they need a visa." And uh he was able, he helped other people before us, he was able to give us precise directions towards a tunnel that would take us to Germany. What are we going to do with the kids? They're

gonna start crying, they were asleep. So we left the kids in the car. We covered those two kids, my seven years old nephew and my ten years old nephew- ten months old, I'm sorry. We covered the blankets we had and the jackets we had and left them in the car with those two ladies. And us, me, my sister, and my sister-in-law, we followed those directions given to us on the phone towards the entrance, how far we have to go, where to take it out, if you take a wrong one you're gonna be back, you know, in Austria. The kids were in the car, those two ladies went back to the passport control, the guy recognized them, he didn't see us in the back, he didn't pay attention to other stuff in the backseat, there were just like blankets and jackets, he just gave them sign of the hand to go, and they left, they went into Germany. And us, we went down into, following the directions that were given, we went down into the tunnel, um and we walked, it was not like you crawl in tunnel, it was very nice, wide, like a concrete tunnel, with a couple exists, you need to know the right one where to exist. I remember being halfway in the tunnel and we heard noises, and I thought, "That's it. They saw us going in, they come to get us, that's it. We're going to end up in the jail." Um I remember I went down on my knees like I, I'm, like I'm, I'm going to throw up, I was so afraid that it, you know, and uh we just stood there and uh the people coming towards us were some Albanian boys and men, they were following the same uh trail or whatever, somebody told them the same, you know, route like we were following. And they wished us good luck, we wished them good luck, and uh we walked a couple more minutes, we came to the right exist, we walked up the stairs, the car was waiting right there, with the kids in the back. And I remember opening those car, the doors, and just going into there, close it, and the lady she took off, and for the next probably half an hour, maybe hour, my head was in the back looking if somebody's following us. If somebody's there, if somebody's gonna, [laughs] you know? But uh we made it, and we in the safe. So we, I don't know, that was probably ten, twelve hours ride from Salzburg to Nuremberg, and then from Nuremberg to Fürth, that's where the lady lived. She brought us to her house and we just collapsed, we were exhausted, we were tired, you know, we just went straight to sleep. [00:30:10] I don't know how many, how many hours I slept and how long I slept, the first things I remember waking up in the morning, taking showers, coming out to get a breakfast, and the phone is ringing. And uh, she was talking on the phone and I heard just say, "Oh no, oh no," and we didn't know what's going on, you know? When she was done, she said uh that she just got the news that my father was killed. Luckily that news turned out to be false, because whoever give the news she was thinking they're gonna kill him because he was taken. He was uh war prisoner for a couple weeks and he was beaten and, you know, abused, but he's alive. But that was the news we got the first thing, first morning into Germany the phone is ringing and that is the news, my father has been killed. It was very, very hard, till next couple weeks when we find out that he was not killed, and it was one of the happiest days in my life. We screamed, I thought the phone booth is gonna just shattered, you know, the glass and everything from our noises and our screaming inside the phone booth. And um, yeah we stay at that lady's house for a couple days, just to recover

from the long trip, and then she took us to an asylum center, in Nuremberg, which was a huge, huge center, a lot of buildings, a lot of people from all around the world. Um, we went in there, we applied for asylum, without an translator, without anybody helping us, they asked us questions. All I remember was saying, "ja, ja, ja, nein." I could say and sign that I'm biggest, I don't know, a terrorists or whatever, I didn't know what I was saying, that was something I remember. I- it, it, it was not, you know, very pleasant, but anyway, we stay in this center for a couple weeks. We had to share a room with other, luckily we know the family that we shared room with, but of course shower and the kitchen was with other people and stuff, it was not very safe. It was a lot of men, uh families and stuff, we didn't have much, we had a couple bags with us, a couple plastic bags with us, that's all we had. And um, later on they processed us and they send us to another town, which was another building where they kept all those people waiting for their asylum status to be, you know? So we're took there and uh we, we came in the middle of May, we came to in Weiden in Germany, it's an eastern German part, towards uh Czechoslovakia, it's a nice mid-sized town. Uh, and that's where I stay from 1992 till 1999, May 1992 till April 1999 I stay in that, in that town. Um, didn't have much at the beginning, you know, we had to work uh for a work visa, in order to receive a work visa in your, on your ID. We had to work for city, um like raking leaves and taking care of our parks and stuff. They, they would pay us two dollars to- I'm, I'm sorry, two German Mark, which was nothing, you know? Just to give us something, you know? But we had to work three months, in order to get the work visa we have to work for city, in, in Germany, and after three months you would get like a stamp, and then you were able to work, if you can you find a normal work, anywhere, anywhere you can work, you, you would be fine. So my first job was in McDonald's I remember, and that was uh, I worked there for a couple mo- uh months, and then I worked another job in the, uh, they call Imbiss. Uh, in Germany they say, "Imbiss," it's a, it, it's like a food court when you in our, you know, malls and they have like a different, yeah I worked there for a couple months and learned a lot of German with the older lady. And uh, I met Denis' father in Germany too, uh he is a different nationality than I am, he's from India. He was also a uh asylum seeker in Germany, didn't have much and I didn't care, I just fall in love at the first sight I saw him, and that's it, and I didn't need nothing else. And um, we moved in uh together and Denis was born a couple of years after, and that was uh *the* happiest day of my life, it still is it. [00:35:00] And yeah Denis was born in 1995, and uh, uh I didn't work uh, German- Germany has a different rules for mother than United States. I was able to uh stay home and take care of our baby. Uh, I was given financial help, I was given uh, um baby formula for Denis, and diapers, and a stroller, and the baby crib, and a lot, lots of stuff. And uh, Denis' father was working in a restaurant, he was a, a chef. He was uh making a lot of good food. [slight laugh] And um, but uh, you know, we know when 1995 they signed the papers and the war ended in Bosnia, we know that we can't stay there. So I heard from some friends in Germany, from Bosnian friends, there is a program that you can apply to come to United States. There was program for other countries, for Canada I think,

Australia, and the United States. You apply, you go to local Caritas, which is like a Red Cross, you go there, you get those papers, application, you apply, you mail in and you wait for interview, you wait for letter notified you about your interview. So I talked to his-Denis' father, Denis is my son, I talked to his father and uh, you know, we made decision, you know, that's best, you know? And uh I fill- filed those papers and waited for about two years for the interview. The was hard because what's gonna happen? Just waiting, you know, it's crucial. And uh, in meantime Germany could not send me back because I was in process to emigrate to United States, possibly emigrate. So they had agreement um where if you're in the process, if you can provide them with the proof that you apply for another step, another you know applica- they're gonna let you stay, till the process is finalized. And uh every six months I would go to that um place and get a mand- visa, you know, renewed and stuff, they called Duldung, they would give me for just six months, and in another six months I would go say, "yes, I'm still waiting." The guy wasn't very happy, he- I would tell he just can't, can't wait to get it off us. [slight laugh] But anyway, eventually the letter came in the mail with the interview appointment and time and stuff, and uh I remember it was in February of 1999, uh and I went with Denis together with the train, uh from Weiden, where we lived, to Frankfurt, Germany. We took a train and then we went there, uh it was like a military base, it was not Embassy. It was like an American military base with a lot of buildings and stuff, and I went there and uh we had a translator, which thank God was provided. And uh we took about ten, fifteen minutes interview, and uh I was um allowed to emigrate to the United States, um given permission to emigrate with my son, he was almost four at that time. And um, I remember the lady during the interview process ask me, after she said that I'm, you know, welcome to emigrate to the United States, she asked me if I have any family members, any friends, any relatives, anybody that she could send me to, somebody who would be able to help me at the beginning, me being a single mother. And uh, I just said to her, "I don't have nobody." If I have a pref- preference with the state also, which state I would like to go, if, you know, I, I remember saying to her that it doesn't matter if I go to California or Florida or New York, I don't have nobody, which I didn't. I didn't know, and, and I heard a lot of people went to America, emigrate to America, my ex- at that time, ex-brother-in-law was already in America, but I didn't have any contact with him, I don't know where he was, I didn't have any phone number, any address, and frankly I didn't want nothing to do with him back then anyway, so I was pretty much on own with a four years old boy. And um, we waited, the next step was to wait for the um flight ticket, they're gonna let us know the date you're gonna, you know, leave Germany, the flight ticket and all that information. So I went back to my town, and uh now you know the day is coming, you know? You try to, I was there for almost seven years, a lot of stuff in, in a little apartment you have to sell, you have to get rid of, you know? You just- I didn't want to go, that's the thing, I didn't want to go, because I was happy, I loved my life in Germany, I had good friends, I had a family. Uh Denis was going into kindergarten, he had friends. We just had a good life, I didn't want to leave, but we couldn't, we couldn't stay, we

couldn't stay. [00:40:02] I have a choice between um, refusing to go to America and waiting for Germany to send me to Bosnia. Or, you go to America and see how you like it, if you're gonna make it or not, if not, you can always go back to Bosnia. And uh, I know the chance that I had will not come again and I had to take it. I didn't want to go back to Bosnia and regret for the rest of my life, I could've, I should've, I would've. So i took the chance and I took the biggest challenge of my life, to sell everything that I possess in the two bedroom apartment. In meantime, Denis' father and I separated, he was not with us, he was living in Italy, that's all I know, I didn't have any phone numbers, no address, nothing. Um, April 19th, 1999 was the day that I left Germany. My sister and her husband took me to- me and my son, took us to uh Frankfurt Flughafen, um Airport, and uh we left on April 19th of 1999, we left uh Frankfurt, Germany and we landed in New York. And then from New York we went to Atlanta, and Atlanta, Nashville. And uh, before you leave Germany you're going through an orientation process there, coup- half a day seminar, they're talking about America, what's life like in America, culture, and all those things that you should know about America, and everything they said during the seminar was also pretty and nice, and you know, you just can't wait to get here, you know? You just want to take off right now. And uh, "oh, they're gonna be waiting for you," and "everything is gonna be- you don't have to worry, everything is organized, and paid," and you know, yeah right. April 19, 1999 I'm in Nashville, at the airport, and I'm looking, coming out with my son in one hand and one small luggage in the other hand, we didn't have much. I remember having one small luggage in my hand and the other one was, you know, in the airplane. Uh that thing had a lot of pictures, I took a lot of pictures with me. I know that I can buy all the other material stuff but I cannot buy memories and pictures, so I had those things. And I remember coming from the airplane and I was hoping to see somebody holding the sign with "Hodzic," you know? Nobody was there. We came to Nashville and I just looked around \, and holding Denis and looked around, and nobody there. And uh I had a white bag, IOM, I remember those three letters, and in the bag there was a lot of papers. Uh they give us the, the bag to take with us, I never opened the bag. I could've taken drugs with me, I could've taken guns, I don't know what was in the bag I just, it was sealed, and I just took the bag with me and it was three letters, IOM. And uh, everybody left the place, being coming you know from the, from the thing, and I just stayed there, nobody- and I remember, I saw a gentlemen, dressed very nice in a business outfit, and I went to him, towards him, because I thought, "Well I'm safe with him, he's dressed nicely and stuff like a business outfit." And I just asked him, "Can you help me?" Because we watched a lot of English movies in Bosnia with subtitles, and I know those couple words, you know? "Can you help me?" And God knows what he said to me, I don't know what he said, I don't remember what he said, I just gave him the bag. I just gave him the bag, I thought everything is here in the bag, you know I give him the bag and um he, he said, I remember he said, "Come with me, come with me." Looking back now, I was so naive, I was so I, I don't know. Um he took us to information booth and I remember lady uh announcing on

the speakerphone, I heard her saying "Bowling Green." So now I'm thinking she must be paging people from Bowling Green, Kentucky, "picking up parties uh please come here." Probably that's what she did, you know? Just thinking I heard Bowling Green Kentucky and I know I'm going to Bowling Green, Kentucky, and um he, he left and he say, "stay, stay." And I waited there, and the people who were on the way to pick up, pick up me and my son and a couple other families from Nashville Airport, there was an accident, there was a lot of traffic on I-65 South, something happened, they were late, but eventually they made it. [00:44:58] They came with the big SUV and uh they put me and Denis inside, and there was two other families that came also to Bowling Green, Kentucky. And uh, that ride was the longest ride in my life, you know? I was exhausted, the time difference and everything and uh, you know, we came home late in the evening. Uh he dropped first those families at their destination, and then he took me and Denis, um, my son, to a little one bedroom apartment on Glen Lily Road. And it was late in the evening, ten-ish, eleven-ish, and uh it was April, it was still cold outside, and uh he had a key to our little apartment, he opened the door and uh he took our luggage, which we didn't have much, one big luggage and one small that I carried with me, that's all we had. And he took he took it inside, he took look in the apartment and he left. Later on I, I- he left and he went home, he went home, he picked up his own big comforter and he came back with a big comforter because it was fresh that night, April, and he saw we don't have much to cover. We didn't have bed in our apartment, we had just like a, a mattress box, and the mattress on the top. That's where Denis and I slept, but there was not any com- you know, blankets, any com- just the bedsheets, unpacked bed sheets from Dollar Store. And he left, the guy went home and he got us his own comforter for me and Denis to cover that night, and uh I, I never find out his name. I wanted to thank him and stuff, I never out who was it, and uh later on I, I, you know, I used the comforter and I was- when I was able to afford a, you know, better, I give that comforter to Goodwill, because somebody's gonna need it just the way need it the first night when I came here. And uh, then he left and I looked around, there was nothing. I was alone, no phone, nobody, just me and Denis. And uh, we could've- if somebody knocked on the door I would open door because I was so naive, I was so trusting, I was so, I grew up in a different world that, you know, people here, you know? I grew up very safe and then, you know, my parents taught me to trust people and uh to speak the trust, and no matter what, you know? Um, today I know that we're living in very dangerous world, you know? Today I'm different, but back then I was ver naive, you know, very, very naive. If somebody would knock on the door at eleven o'clock I would open, now I would not, now I would not. But anyway, well back to bed, the guy told me that next morning somebody's gonna come from refugee center to take me and Denis to take all those applications for a social security number, medical card, the food stamps, whatever all those, you know, formal legality needs to be done. And she came, she took us uh, you know, next day we applied whatever we had to apply for, and I remember the next couple days we were just sleeping, we were exhausted and tired and uh didn't have much, didn't have- I cried a lot. It was, it

was a culture shock, you know? The night, it was dark, I didn't see much, but the next morning when I woke up and when I saw small houses and everything and uh I have told a couple friends, it was spring in Germany when I left and uh when I walked to the park in Germany they had the same flowers, but they smelled. When I came here, I saw the same flowers but they didn't smell. I didn't, I didn't smell the- I, I didn't get the same smell, it was like plastic. It was different. And then I saw people and garage sales, and I said, "They're trying to sell trash?" I didn't understand, you know, people putting things for garage sale and yard sale and stuff, I, back then it was a cultural shock, we don't do those things in Europe. Especially in Germany, they have very, very organized and good system and stuff going on, and you're there for seven years, you get used to it, you know? And you came here and you see stuff, I said, "Oh my God," it was big, big cultural shock. Big cultural shock. I didn't want to stay here, I was not, I was not happy, I was not. I cried a lot, I remember calling, when i finally get the phone hooked to my apartment, I called my sister, and she called me almost every day and I cried and, "I don't want to stay here, I don't wanna- get me out of here, get me out of here." Um, it was nuts, beginning was very hard, it was very, very hard. [00:50:09] We didn't have car, and you know, you don't have car here, especially in Bowling green, it's like you don't have legs, you know? In bigger cities maybe you don't need so much car, like in New York City, but here you do need car, we don't have any other transportation system. But now a little bit is going on, but back then, sixteen years ago there was nothing going on, just car everywhere. Which I did a lot of times, i walked with Denis to parks, and uh I didn't want to beg people to come and take me, give me rides, I would a lot of times call a cab, and I would uh pay cab to take me to laundromat to wash my clothes or I would pay cab to take me to WalMart to buy food for a week. I tried to be independent as much as possible. If I asked somebody to take me places it would be the last resort, that I have, you know, no other choice. I, i didn't like it. I was lucky to meet a neighbor next door, uh who was American, we connected and we're still friends, even today we're still friends. With her I started slowly learning English. She couldn't- I spoke German, spoke- uh Denis spoke German when he came to America, he didn't spoke any Bosnian, the only language he spoke was German. And uh he started Head Start program in summer, and I was afraid you know, "What's gonna happen with him? He doesn't speak any English, you know? He speaks only in German, nobody's gonna understand." But he picked up very, very quick, you know, English, and uh, and I, having communications with that lady on daily basis right next to my door, and I had a little radio in my apartment, you know, I was listening to local radio station, uh Sam 100.7, [laughs] Tony Rose. I was listening and I try, you know, I wanted to learn English as much, as fast as possible. I had a lot of mail coming, all those applications being processed and a lot of mail coming, and I hated uh opening mail and not knowing what does it say. It, it just bothers me, it bothers me, I felt like I never went to school a day. And I had a good uh dictionary that I brought, English uh German dictionary that I brought from Germany, and I would sit down when Denis go to his uh mid-day sleep, I would sit, take piece of paper and

that dictionary, and I would translate, the whole letter, word by word. I just, I didn't want to call my caseworker and say, "Hey, can you stop by and see what this letter says?" I needed to know what it's about, I don't need to know one hundred percent sure, but I- just to have an idea what's the letter about. And uh I was so driven, you know, that I had to learn English, like I said. And the radio was non-stop going on, we didn't have TV, you know, in our apartment, we didn't have much furniture either. And uh, I had a little money with me, I didn't want to spend because I didn't think I'm gonna say, I didn't want to stay. I wasn't happy, I was not happy, I didn't want to stay. It was not the life that I was promised during those orientation in Germany, you know every was talking "this, and this, and that," and I came and you see movies and you see stuff on TV about America and you think, "Oh my God, I'm going to live in Beverly Hills," and you know, all those things, and it was different. It was different than I ever would've thought it would be different, and i was very, very unhappy. There was a lot of days and night, and uh crying myself to sleep, and it was not easy. Um, a couple months into our um- after our arrival, I received a letter from um out local office, in order to keep my food stamps, benefits going on and my K-TAP, which is Kentucky Temporary Cash Assistance or something, it was not much, it was ninety five dollars, to guy stuff that food, food stamps would not covered. So in order to keep those benefits I have to find myself a job, or I have to volunteer. So there are- they cal a lady, I'm not sure if the organization is still in, intact. I remember it was Bowling Green Pride, that's how was it called, Uh the lady come one day to my apartment and she was able to organize a cab, which would come early in the morning, take Denis to Head Start, to daycare, take me to uh Heartland Golf Course, that's where I volunteered for four hours, every hour and a half hours, five hours everyday, five days in a week. And the cab would come again, later, pick me up, go to uh my son's place, pick up my son and take us home. That was um till she was able to find me a job. A job through temp-agency, and my first job in the United States was a job at Fruit of the Loom. She was able to organ- didn't have car, how am I going to work? Uh, you know, but they, she was able to organize everything. She, um- I went to the job readiness program, prepared me for interviews, and uh how to dress for an interview process, uh what to say. They help me, Oh my God, I, I cannot express how much, they were angels. She and her husband and the other people that i met later, they were angels, sent by God, you know, because I was in a dark place. I was in a dark place, I didn't like it, I didn't, I didn't, I just didn't know. I started working at Fruit of the Loom, October or November, I'm not sure of, 1992, but going to work with cab everyday. The cab would come on weekday morning, take Denis to daycare, take me to work, come back 4:00 to my work place, take me to my son's place, put up my son and go back home. Uh, our first Christmas in America, you know, we didn't Celebrate Christmas in Bosnia because Christmas- all of the Serbs celebrate Christmas on January seventh, uh December twenty-fifth was a regular day in ex-Yugoslavia, in the town and, you know, surroundings, so it was not a big deal. In Germany they did celebrate Christmas but it, you know, we had a small Christmas tree in our apartment, but didn't celebrate like traditional,

you know, Christmas and stuff. And uh, when we came here to America, the- my son and I, I met a lot of people and um working uh volunteer hours at the Heartland Golf Course, and uh Mr. Jeffers, who was a general manager, I think and he's still there, he and other people there surprised me and Denis with the best Christmas ever. Uh his wife, Karen, she was the lady who was organizing everything, the cab, she find me job. Um I remember one day she came to my apartment and she was suspicious, she was talking to me and asking if I'm gonna be home tomorrow night. "Yeah, I'm gonna be, I'm not going anywhere," where am I going, I don't have any care, I want to- and I'm gonna be here. Well she make- she wanted to make sure that I would be there, because she had something going on. And um, well next, next night, the Christmas, or the 24th of December, normal day, nothing happened until somebody knocked at the door. And then uh there was a bunch of people coming in and uh bringing furniture and television, and uh stuff for the house, salt, bedsheets and blankets and stuff. And uh, uh they brought pizzas and plasticware and all this stuff, I don't have to clean anything. There was probably seven, eight people coming to surprise me and my son. Uh, and then uh we're all talking and, you know, going around and stuff, and somebody knock at the door, and uh Mr. Jeffers said to my son, "I think you should open that, that door this time." And I remember my son going towards the door and he opens the door and there was Santa Claus, standing with the big black bag on his shoulder, you know? Came to see Denis, and that was special, that was a very, very special night. And uh that, uh those people are always gonna, always will- they are and always will be close to my heart because they are the one who brought me out from my black hole. They are the one who show me that uh there's still good people out there. You're not alone, you know. You're not my family, but a, you know, human being that needs help and we will help you, and they did, they helped me. It meant everything to me, just to have seen their love in their eyes and, you know, see my child so happy that night. It was priceless. It was priceless.

KH: Well I know it's been about an hour, I know that you have-

SH: Okay.

KH: -to um to be somewhere else, so I would love to continue talking-

SH: Okay.

KH: -but we'll-

SH: Okay.

KH: So is there anything else that you want to say right now before we stop or?

SH: No, no, we can stop.

KH: Okay, okay. Um, well again, this was uh Sadeta Hodzic, um January 29th, and thank you so much for sharing your story.

SH: You're welcome, you're welcome.

[01:00:26 End Track]