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## Interview with Azmir Husić (FA 1137)

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**Project name:** Bosnia Project

**Field ID and name:** KFP2016IYB\_0007\_BBsr0002

**Interviewee:** Azmir Husic

**Interviewer/Recordist:** Brent Bjorkman

**Date:** February 23, 2016

**Location:** Western Kentucky University Campus

**Others Present:**

**Equipment used:** Marantz recorder

**Microphone:**

**Recording Format:** WAV file

**Recorded Tracks in Session:** 1

**Duration:** [01:10:43]

**Keywords:**

**Corresponding Materials:**

**Context:**

**Technical Considerations:**

**Transcription prepared by:** Kaitlyn Berle

**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]

BB: Okay it's uh, February 23rd, 2016, and we are continuing the Bosnian Project. I'm here at uh BiH uh Express Trucking, with uh the owner and it's, it's really wonderful to have you. Can you tell me your name, and, and like we talked about, just maybe tell a little bit about, you know your life in Bosnia and, and like you said, maybe the trajectory that kind of brought you here, and your, your up and your downs like you said. Whatever you feel comfortable doing.

AH: Okay. Yes, thank you for coming in, and my name is Azmir Husic. Uh, I'm born in uh ex-Yugoslavia, on uh April 9, 1978, in the city across the river from my town called

Ljubovija. And uh, I was um in Bratunac, um about seventy kilometers from a city, the small village called Glogova. Uh, population of the city is, it's about uh ninety-nine percent of the Bosniak, and uh for all those years uh before the war, actually in 1992, my father name is Sudio [spelling] Husic, my mom is Hota [spelling] Husic, before war started I had uh two sister, Samira and Adilla. Uh in the Bosnian uh tradition um, the child, the male child, get over all the uh, after the parents, the male child get everything um, uh all like um house and all of the value that the the family have, it belongs, after the parents, it's going to male. If there's two of them, they share. Sister usually uh after they, they get married and they not getting pretty much nothing of the family, so they go into another house or change name of the family, and that's how it is in the, most of the, you know, back days. Uh now it's not like that, but used to be like that. And the father was, before war, I was in school, I was in um, just uh first going into high school, and uh he's telling me, "Son, you know, you need to be good in school, I want you to be one day doctor or somebody who not making hard money like me," you know? He was a construction person that worked on construction, but he did good, he did so well. We had beautiful house, which he's already make paid off, he making from the money he's been making, so we have probably about uh four to five acres land that we use uh for the, for the life. Um, mom did take care of kids at home while father did the work on his job, and when he's telling me those, I said, "Okay, I understand, I will be a good student but there is much- I already gonna have enough, I don't need a new house because I have one you already built, you know? It's going to belong to me, and I have enough land I can work on and everything, like, you know, little farm and everything." And he said, "Yes, but I don't want you to make hard money, and that's gonna be hard money to do." He say, "You better choose to be a doctor or somebody who will making- go to work, do eight hours job, and coming home to spend with family for the weekend." I said, "Yeah, I will do anything to be that kind of person," but that is May of- May 9th, 1992, that's the worst probably day in my life. When we all- it's Friday night, right before Saturday morning, we all were in bed, it's like five o'clock in the morning. We heard a lot of shots, we know it's been talking uh on the news the situation not good for the people, people need to turn their lights off at nighttime, we didn't know much, you know? Between, you know, we didn't know much about war. We, we so- we live so beautiful life, you know? We have our neighbors, the people actually gonna come later and burn our house, we have good lives with them. Some of our lands, it's been lined with them, we work on the other side, we work on our land just uh fifty yards down they work on their yards. We share water, even from same bottle, when we drink, we drink after them or they drink after us. We have some food left after the lunch and they don't, or otherwise we share the food. We never think that somebody will come in just the next day and try to kill you, which is uh all Bosniaks not believe in that. [00:05:07] We have just a, you know, a city called Bijeljina [unsure if this is the town he's referring to] about uh, it's, it's river Drina that's the state line between uh Serbia and Bosnia, just down maybe one hundred and twenty kilometer, fifteen days before they started occupying Bijeljina and killing people,

we watching uh on TVs but our parents and our community believed we didn't do nothing wrong, they're not going to do that to us, somebody down there do something. And uh, but it's common that May 9, 1992, that's when they started, occupied city of Bratunac, and our village named Glogova. I was fourteen years old on that date, and uh my mom and my two sister, Adilla, they were younger, and uh in the morning father just grabbed me, says, "We've got to leave, we've got to go to the mountains. We've got to run, they're gonna kill us." Uh, "Especially," he said, "if we run it all together, it will be hard time that we're gonna survive. They're gonna slow down us, mom and sister." They say all the females, woman and female kids, uh like maybe fifteen years old or younger, they will go in one house or big house, and all males, uh all mens with uh fifteen years or more, or fourteen, uh, uh they need to go to mountains because if they catch, catch them, they will kill them. And we run, you know, from the house, uh there is a one I can say uh mountain called uh, uh [unclear mountain name] where is uh we can see our house. We went there and go deep uh in, in mountain, and we actually go in a tree to watch, very high, that we can see house, our house, about three hours later get burned, and we cannot believe it's just started. Our house it's kind of on a, on- it was road, road run into, where the road split to the left and right, it's right first house when they get there. And uh, we heard a lot of shots, uh a lot of scream, a lot of uh yelling from the Yugoslavian's car, not, not the army when they [unclear], because they come in with the uh military trucks there, you can see the signs on it. And uh, they're yelling, calling names, "don't leave, we see you. Come back here, we're not gonna do nothing," and some people there they do that trust, but I was lucky that I'm there with all my neighbors and my family and my father, my cousins. They say, "No, no, we've got to stay, we-" they, they say, "they're gonna just trick us to get their way." And what happened that village have about uh, uh anywhere around two thousand population, it's a big village, and about uh anywhere about maybe five to six hundred thousand houses, all those is burned for- from May 9th to May 12th. And uh on the first day, on May 9th, they catch uh about seventy-eight people and they kill them all on one day, because when they left uh that May 9, we come back to village. Uh we tried to use water to stop house burning and it's, but it's too late. They even all our um, um animals we have in there, like cows, uh lambs, uh, you know, horses, they not let them out, they just burn it and they burned inside. It was a terrible picture, you- that's, that's something, that's uh probably that you know, ever would want us to see that after that life, it's [unclear] life for ten to fifteen years, because uh there is no human on this world that, that, that will death not gonna hurt them bad. We actually shocked, we, we cannot believe what's happened. And but the- after we see that they did not kill our's, uh moms and sisters, all, all of them, they actually split them in half, they take them to bus, bus them, then bus take them to first um territory, with the control of army. Uh actually at that time it was T.O., and that's called like [unclear, Bosnian term], which is like, I don't know how I will say that in English, but uh like, but it's like then after from T.O. then uh we turn to Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

[00:10:09] And uh they take them to their territory, uh we heard they did some, you know,

uh on those first day they did uh do telling bad words, but didn't hurt very much womens and, and, and uh, and the young uh, uh females, uh, uh kids. Um after it was, after that, when they started losing some of they uh soldiers, they did start do killing everybody pretty much. So then we spent the night in Glogova, uh seven days after they burned it. We stayed in mountains coming back to village, looking for, for some food left over somewhere or something, go back. Then after seven days we going on a, on a trip, uh it's uh for about twenty kilometers, which is about anywhere around maybe thirteen miles, uh during nighttime to cross uh between the lines they, they controlled to cross to the city called Srebrenica, which is at that time they still, uh Yugoslavians come out of the army still didn't make it there, they will try to occupy that ten days later. So we actually going there to be there, not even know what's going to happen, maybe they will come there to try to occupy. But when we started coming to the town, um there is some people there already organized, all men they're ready to fight, really with no guns pretty much, maybe one gun on ten people, and they already got uh organized after they heard our story, what's going- what happened just uh thirteen miles down on the, on the river. They say, "We got to do something or same thing is gonna happen to us." Then we get there and get support uh, uh from them, and get in all together. Uh on those days I already have fourteen years and I come there with my father only, mom and sister left uh because when they count all people they say it was too much people to go all at one time because, you know, the- again, the women will slow us down. And we cannot trust that if they- that they gonna not gonna kill all women and uh small kids, you know? And that's why they, you know, left them. We we cross, we hope they are gonna transport because uh they did transport some of the women and the small kids to Tuzla and they left some of them, because then later we figure out why they did that, because they know the men will come in for the rest of the people they did not transport, they'll try to take them away, and that's gonna be chance for them to shoot all those men, and that's what had happened actually. Then when we get there, then we heard that our moms, my mom and my sister and many others, still down, didn't go nowhere. House is burning, they don't have nothing to eat, and, you know, those message already get out, come to my father, my uncles, my other neighbors, and so they say, "We've got to go now, back, to try and get them here." And that's what happened, they go there and like first time I think it's a hundred men was ready to go and they tried to get in and about thirty of them get killed. Then they, you know, didn't cross, they come back, they fail, they didn't be able to make it to them. Then they gonna go again, and uh when they go, when second time they do a little bit, you know, you know, tactic. They want in there late at night, uh they have another group who will go on another side where they concentrate on other group, but actually they really, I don't know, about eighty of them that try to make, they cross and they pull them out, like three days later they bring them all to Srebrenica too. So we spent all time together, my mom and my sisters, uh there till 1993, when uh Srebrenica come to be zone of United Nation uh secure. Then when they get that, the- there is uh- they make somewhere in December of 1993 to transport, because it's too many

people on a, on a small place. [00:14:58] And they also like have agreement that a lot of women and kids and uh all the people need a held help, uh held help to go to Tuzla, and they put them on uh big semi trucks. Just imagine this, uh it's December, it's outside, it's minus, and they transport people like animals on a, on, on truck, uh with a truck driving maybe sixty kilometers an hour, with, you know, trucks even not have uh, you know, tarp around, nothing. You there, just depending how is it on that time, but many of them say they can survive, it's gonna be about four to five hours drive, uh they do use blankets and everything. And I went on that truck too with my mom, and when we get very close to uh cross the line, there is a, I think at that time over there like it's a United Nation uh from Canada, soldiers, they controlled that, that zone, and they want in every truck to see that any men, because they know if they go down if they see there is a man uh maybe ready that they can say they look like the can be soldier or something, they will take him off and kill. And one of the, when the soldier come on the truck, he step on the tire and up, he looks at me, he says, I didn't know at that time but uh he pointed to me with his hands to stand up. When I stand I up I was very skinny, but very tall guy, you know, I'm now 6'3". When I stand up, he see how tall I am, he said, "If you go down," he just pointed with the, with uh, with his hand under his neck, "they gonna kill you," you know? I didn't know at that time what they're telling me but I see that his movement with hand, he said, "You've got to come out because they're not gonna leave, they're not gonna left truck leave with other people if you don't come out." So I said, "Okay." Then my mom started crying and my sister, "Brother don't leave us, you don't need to go," because they know where I'm going now. I tell them, "You just stay here, you'll be fine. I'm go- I'll find a way to get back to the city of Srebrenica, and I will find my father there, my uncle," and that's had happened. I step out and I run, and when I step out they says, "run back to Srebrenica," and I run back maybe ten kilometers, then I get back. When my father see me he said, "What happened? How come you got back?" And I explained to him what happened, and he said, "Okay son, we'll leave now together," and we leave those two days till uh 1995. There's a lot of days with no food, uh nothing for life, you just there actually pleasing God and uh pray every day for better. And it's coming up, after many, many days of pretty much when you- like after that many days we started even to say, "Let's get this over, even if we die we'll be happy," because we're just so tired. For 1993, even what we passed before, there is really not much war, they didn't come into town, but they keeping us the same like you have uh animals in a farm and you put them all fence around, even with everything, with uh electrical wires, they cannot- you know, we all feel like that, we inside and we cannot go nowhere, and they have full control of what is coming in and what is coming out, and, you know, it's really scaring everybody. We've been without our, you know, close family, we know that mom and sister are in Tuzla, we getting like every maybe two months by cross- Red Cross mail, they can just write down where are they and what, what kind of life they have. Uh not much, but not that you need to be saying anything because all those mail go through uh people in Bratunac, with Serbs, uh Yugoslavians [unclear]. Serbs, they control that, they

want to see everything what they say because they don't want any good message passed. So if you got to write down anything about, and any question about uh how's your life in Srebrenica and you try to, they will, that will never make it to them. If you writing down that you have bad life, you don't have nothing to eat or something, that mail you sent never will make it to them. Only if you how you're good, how you feel good, how's everything okay, those mails will always pass, but if you writing story, what's really going on, that mail never will make it to them. [00:20:03] So uh and it's come in Ju- two-thousand uh- I mean uh 1995. When we all think nothing gonna happen again uh because we are under United Nation. When the United, United Nation get to ninety-nine- 1993, even all those guns we have, we never have small guns, uh I mean big guns, we always had just small guns uh with the, you know, when the- we never have any heavy vehicle, and it's about forty thousand of population, and about half of that is men, aged between fifteen and eighty, and half of them women. What happened? Why we have that percentage? Because they took, in 1993, a lot of women and small kids, by convoy they get all the way to Tuzla. And night before that eleven come, uh we have call, a meeting actually in front of them, and when they say, "We making trip tomorrow to Tuzla, they're gonna occupy this," we see the United Nation not do anything. And they show us map which way are we gonna go, and the, the people that lead, uh at that time, they say they can be like uh one of the- somebody who gonna control this trip, that say how many people, who goes first, who gonna go last, what are we gonna do if people get injured by the, by the trip. So, and that's a trip of a hundred and twenty kilometers, and the later return is gonna be for six days. And later we gonna call that "the trip of death," so road of deaths. We crossing a lot of mountains and when we started moving on that morning, I have my father, me, my two uncles, and my two first cousins, six of us leave house. Uh, my uncle's wife, she's making us a little bread that morning, everybody to have it in bag, because, you know, it's just a little bit of the flour she have, you know, that's how much she can make only. And to have that in this trip she went to United Nation zone, where there's the military of Canadian control, I think at that time it was a Hollangian [00:22:49] people, Holland uh military was there. And because all of us, you know, if we go there we know we're gonna be killed, so we make decision, we gonna go on mountains and trip through mountains to uh get into territory that's controlled by Bosnian Army. Six of us left, right on the first day, uh after maybe first ten hours walking, I lose, I was lost from father, my uncles, and my two cousins. There was shooting all over, it was, it was something like, you know, you in, let's say like on, if you just on a field in a stadium, uh you right there in center and they all around, you know? It's look- and they all, you know, shooting at you and you're just trying to pass, and then that's what happened. About anywhere around fifteen thousand people try, all men between fifteen, maybe even fourteen, till maybe eighty years, try to go through mountains. And uh, on the first uh, on the first day when they, they already know which way we're gonna use, and they construct lateral army on that area, and really on the first day I think it's over maybe two thousand will get killed. And when they see that we're getting very close, then

they- easy for them, they jump on the trucks, back up, uh and just go in front of us again for next maybe ten, fifteen kilometers, to get concentrate, get ready, because they know the road we're gonna come, and do the same thing over. And that's what happened about four times before the last line we can cross to get on our territory. By that time I lose- I didn't know what happened, uh because when they try, when they're uh shooting us, everybody running, you know? It's fifteen thousand people, just imagine if you have fifteen people- fifteen thousand people just two foot between, you can see how long would that uh, how long that will take from first guy to the end, probably anywhere maybe around at least maybe seven, eight miles will be men behind men standing that long, so it's very easy for them. But they use a tactic, they leave in uh, on the side, on the way we came, where we go, left and right probably radius of maybe um a hundred yards, they put the, uh, papers would say "mines" on it, the, the, the, the like uh, how would you call that?

BB: Land mine or?

AH: Mines that when you stop and they explode?

BB: Yeah, yeah.

AH: Yeah. Yeah, they all like that, because we thinking it's our people to just uh, you know, don't want you to go there, because we thought those people in front of us, we have people to lead, we keep thinking they leaving this because they want to remind everyone else to not go left or right much often because they're gonna get killed by that, by mines, you know? And uh then after maybe two days, when they tell us that's gonna slow down us, then they figure out, they said, "Don't pay attention to that, that's not from us. They come in there and they leave that." So when they figure out what's going on, they tell us, "Those, if you see they say, don't pay attention, we didn't leave, they leave that." And that's what happened uh, it was, it was five, actually six days and nights, you know, there is no night, there is no night in my life as of now that I'm willing to bet that I don't think about that. There is not even one night. There is probably no one day if I have free time that I'm not thinking about it. It's all- you know, and nothing you can do, it's coming to your mind, you know? You're coming and you're always thinking, "what can you- what you should do on that time to maybe help somebody else to survive." I was across uh line to our army uh for six days, when I cross it, just me made it. And uh days coming after that, uh you know when I crossed the territory they call the army, Bosnian Army controlled the city of Tuzla. The first month it was uh crazy days, everybody calling everybody, meeting, you've got to go miles and miles to see if there's anybody. There's some people still coming after ten days, after fifteen days, after twenty days, then my uh cousin, my first cousin from my uncle uh [unclear name] he's make it over, and uh after twenty-eight days, then I meet him and I ask him, then he asking me, "What happened with uh uncle, and his father, and other



uncle and his brother?" I said, "Did you see him anywhere?" I said, "Last time I see him there," he said, "I see him there last time too." Then he tell me his story of what happened, he got to go back, actually when he see that is, that, that, that he losing, he was really, he was about uh, at that time, older- he's older seven years than me, eight years actually, he's uh really good uh soldier. And when he see that they, they not with him, he's wait somewhere till dark and go flipping people to see if he can see if any of them either my father, or his father, or his brother. And he said, "Azmir, you're not gonna believe it but," he said, "you know the area called [00:29:01]?" I said, "Yes." "When I go back there, I've be going there for five nights, there is no room on the land that I can step because that is all people. I have to step on the people to be able to walk, or flip them over to see if it's any, anybody that I know." He said, "That's something, you know, that's something that nobody can believe," and he did make it there. Then after that I meet with my mom and my sister, I was uh seventeen years old. Then I talk with them about life, we started losing any hopes for father and our families, our close family, that they will survive because it's already getting a month, two. Around the first month, you know, when I see, see my mom, you know, she tell me how many places did she- did change, because we don't have a house, we are there, refugees. [00:30:03] Whatever she got they keep it for like maybe a month or two, then say, "You've got to move now to another place." They'd been moving like the, what we call like shuttle center, like school, if they have kids all going to school they put there, maybe in the school, they use them and put maybe there five hundred people to live, in all classroom. They bring them in, you know, like, you know, a refugee camp, and uh...nothing pretty much better there too, you know? But I thought, "How we gonna live?" And she said, "We fighting every day to make it the, you know, life's alright." We- she's going to- like uh some people they luckily there to do something, some work, cleaning house, uh washing windows, uh do some work outside on the, on the, on the land, just for the piece of bread. Then I say, "Okay," then I make decision because even at that time um, just people that stay in the Army they did have something, there's support because they want to have uh all soldiers like in the Army, Bosnian Army, when they go on the, on the, on the front to fight, you know, back, at least left uh his family with food, you know? That way he can be more, concentrate on the, on the, on the lines when they go to fight. Then I make decision to go in one of the special forces in the, in the, in the Bosnian Army, they're called [unclear]. Then I make it uh to that um, to be, to join that Army. They're only hiring the people that not have life- uh they not have a wife and kids, they not married, so only hire the young people. Uh then when I come there, they say, "Do you- are you married?" I say, "No, I'm seventeen years." They say, "Okay, you can join," and then look at your skills, how you look, and say, "Okay, you can join Army. Do you have a mom? And who else do you have in family?" I said, "I have mom and sister." "Don't worry about them, we'll take care of them. We'll send them food, they will have everything what they need, all you need to join our Army and do what is getting ordered from us." I said, "Okay, as long as you take care of my mom and sister I will, I will do anything you put in front of me,"

you know? That was uh, right maybe a month after I get back from Srebrenica and I join uh, uh that group of special forces, uh till end of the war. I did have uh some orders in front of me, I survive and war is over, and after that they uh, because we joined special forces, when it's war over, they want us to do job to start like be uh police officer. So we did some tests and everything, and they, they hire us to be, uh polici- police officer. I was probably maybe lucky, it was then up to be to be in the President uh house, I mean the uh President house to uh, uh make security there around uh was the President. And uh, really when we get there, it's turning to better, we can, you know, we getting some pay for, for doing the job. We started making uh first money, we'd be able to buy some clothes, send some money to mom. I probably see my mom and my sister every three months, for maybe twenty-four hours. You've got to report where you go, which road you're gonna use, when you're gonna be back, so then later I was organize my trip to- it was 1997, then uh we talking a lot of people move to another part of Europe, uh to try and make better life and everything. I was kinda still a little hopeful in those days that my father, my uncle, somebody from Srebrenica gonna survive, because of those fifteen thousand, I never explained that, probably anywhere around eight thousand something did never make it that road, about seven thousand of us did pass. So if you look it's about more than half, half of that never make that trip to, to Tuzla.[00:34:52] And uh, in October 1997, uh I applied to come in for- to United States. I didn't have a clue about United States, all I know is just what I see in movies, you know, some maybe bigger city, Los Angeles, and uh and New York, maybe Chicago, some movies, you know, I really didn't know much about it. Uh I never heard actually about Bowling Green. I did hear I think about Kentucky in school, uh we did study about uh some states and we know that Kentucky was, you know, in uh- we heard about how this country is very popular with the running horses, uh all that Kentucky Derby and everything. Then when I finished my interview they offered me uh where, where I'm gonna choose to go, but actually before that, um I was talk with the, one of- because I was police officer and I have a, I'm meeting people, like ministers for uh refugees, and I, one day I was uh do work for him, following him actually like security from one town to another, and I talk with him in the car and he said uh- and I tell him, "What do you think? What is good for me to do? And uh I'm from S-" you know, we called Srebrenica all that, I want to have just better picture I tell him what city I'm from. He said, "I don't know what I can tell you, just this, don't go to Europe, because the days, and days then will- Europe will just support you for a couple years, and they want you to go back to your town, home town. And it will be hard to exist," he said, "even if war is over." He said, "If you can go to America or Australia, or Canada, that'd be something that I suggest to you." I said, "Wow, I know where is uh America, I just heard, I know it's way, way, you know it's different, everything is. Is said, "America," you know? And, or Australia, even farther. Then I say, "Okay," then I make decision that I want to go to America. And then I get married, but he's telling me this, "Never go single, because you coming- if you come to America like single, especially young men like you are," I was at that time, nineteen years

old. He said, "America have everything, you getting lost there. You can be maybe one day," because a lot of opportunities, you know? He was really telling me like father, "If you go there," he was scared for me that I was going the wrong way, I will be maybe drug dealer or something. He said, "You know, a lot of-" you know, he said, "If you go there, you will start making money, you will have no wife, you will start doing this, you've go to understand." He said, "If you want to go, make sure you're married, because the wife will keep you close, you know? Family will keep you- you will go out and you will get family and you will think about, you're not gonna have much room to think about bad stuff." Which his turn may be right, you know? Then I make uh, apply, application to come, and uh we have two interview, on the first interview they usually ask, you know, where are you from and everything, see if you qualify to be, enter, like refugee in the United States. Then you have second interview when they recap everything, but I think, like time, it's usually taking like forty-five to sixty days between each interview. I think they did maybe look a little bit, search history of whatever we say on the first interview, and they make, you know, second interview decision, are you going to the United States or not. Then when- after my second interview, we pass and we land uh January 21st of 1998 in Detroit. And I- when I choose actually, on second interview they give me offer of where can I go, either Bowling- I know that I'm coming to Kentucky, but they say, "Louisville? Bowling Green? Or Lexington." Then I ask him, "Can you just tell me something about Louisville, Lexington, or, or, or Bowling Green?" Then they explain to me about uh Louisville, it's, I think about that time it's uh Louisville have over a million population. And they tell me about last one, and I say, "What this mean, this Bowling Green?" They, they explain it's Bowling Green, what is it? It's like city with a lot of greens, and uh, you know, pretty good land, uh a lot of flat, and they say it's about uh, at that time, about fifty thousand maybe population, a small town. I said, "I'll go there, because small town, it's better for me, you know? Bigger town, you know, a lot more problems." And I say, "Okay, I choose Bowling Green." Then I- that's how I come to Bowling Green.[00:40:06] When they come pick me up, uh I live in the State Street. I didn't- I still- I think it's 1-4- uh, I'm not what's the number, but I know it's State Street as soon as you pass now U.S. Bank and everything, I know you pass that your right, on the right-hand side. Then they bring me and my wife, because I married just three months before I applied for application, then bring us there in a house. I know they have one mattress in the room, nothing else. Uh, of course that mattress they maybe pick up from somewhere, but it's, it's not brand new, it's an old mattress with a lot of uh stuff on it and everything, and we have one blanket and a couple uh pillows and uh, you know, and we started living there. We, you know, when the first time wake up in the morning, we just go in the window very scared to see what we're going to see on the street, you know? The street right in the crossing. To be honest, I'm not racist, but uh we see first time have to, because we never have black people in, in Bosnia. I'm not racist but we never leave, and my neighbors is all black people, I was like, "Wow, we are here," you know? We're thinking that's something, you know? But they turn us, we see they're just like

human beings like everybody else. They nice, they come and shake us hands, asking us, "How are you?" We didn't able to talk because we don't know any English at that time, you know, and we see they're just every like- same like us, you know? They're nothing different, they're all made from blood and meat, same like we are. And it's like they start, you know, I can say this truly, if I did have an option, that first maybe month, just to somebody come pick me up, take me back again to my Bosnia, even if I live- just if I know that I will die next year, I will say, "Okay, just take me back," because that's how I was scared, because we don't know, we lost, you know? We are big shock for us, even we go everyday to refugee center and they talking to us how we need to adopt this life. But we started work and after six month, I promise if they sent in ten thousand people to try to catch me and take me back, they will not be able to catch me, you know? I will find a way to go around. And uh I started to like it, uh we-

BB: Where did you work when you first-

AH: When I start-

BB: Factory or a-

AH: A factory. My first job I get it like after Tori, my wife, she started nineteen days after we get in to work in [Phalflex unsure of factory name] custom division, Portland, Tennessee. That's her first job, and I get uh, my Social Security didn't get it quick like her, I get my job I think like the thirty-five, six days and my first job it was woodwork industry, right off Louisville Road. My, that's my first job, then later of course and everything, I tried to move to uh work with the wife because we can use one vehicle to transport and everything, and I started working at Phalflex custom division in Portland, Tennessee. That's my second job, and uh I work there for a little while together and then I work there on shipping. I'm meeting a lot of truck drivers coming in, but on the time I'm driving to work everyday I started loving trucks, even I love them before because I watched some movie how big that truck is, always uh something for me. Whoever drive that truck they must be man, you know? You're operating that big vehicle, you know? And I started talking more with those people when they come into shipping where I work, I started talking with those drivers and they telling me how good job they are and everything. Then I was trying to, you know I already started to learn some English and I said, "Okay, I'm, I'm gonna go to drive truck because I can make more money," because in that time I work like for maybe \$7.25 an hour, uh even some of, part of the, of the, of 1999, I do work two jobs, full time. Work here locally in Bowling Green in days and work down in, in Tennessee, then I made decision to try to work uh do driving truck. [00:44:58] And then I apply for my cousin, my first cousin, which is son of my uncle, his only son left. Actually what is [unclear] of three fathers, uh I'm the single uh man in the, in my family, I have two sister, my other un- uh

first cousin Nelly he's living here now too, he's only son in his family. And my third uncle-second uncle, uh he have two son, and another one, Hussain, he didn't make it, but the other one, uh his brother never make it on that uh trip from Srebrenica to Tuzla. So then I bring him here and we want both together to tra- uh to school for to getting CDL license. Then after we're gonna drive together, Denis coming uh we started driving and we pass, I get my license in January, beginning of 2001, and both of us, we get them like I think fifteenth of January, something like that. We pass CDL and we get CDL in our hands and we started looking for the job to drive truck. Then they expect us, for first couple weeks, to train with the trainers, to show us how we need to drive, the paperwork, what you're doing, what, what else has possibility you have beside driving. Then after three weeks, we join together driving one truck, like team, and this life, everyday it's better and better. Then my mom and my sister are in Bosnia, so then I fill application, send in paperworks, I wanted to bring them in, which they come around 2001, in the, in the, in April. So they come here too. Then we have my cousin, my first cousin Nelly, his mom left over there, and uh we send her paper, we bring her over here, her in too. It's kind of connecting family, you know? They are closest family and you have right when you get here to fill out all applications, and once you're making some money you can, you know, get your closest family to come. And we started driving truck and uh life is changed everyday. I started driving company trucks, after six months I make enough money, I buy my first truck, and driving all across the United States. Then my first daughter I get-

BB: So you're doing long haul stuff?

AH: Long haul. After, you know, first time I didn't have a clue, it's, you know, kind of scary, you know? You, you just hear, you know, when they say, "Texas," "Wow, Texas, I got to go to Texas, how am I going to make it?" But, you know, we buy map, we read the map, "Okay, this is the road we're gonna use." In school they teach us how we gonna find the closest road to the, to the, to the city, from city to city, or state to state, and we learn a lot of stuff, you know? Maybe most of the people now in the United States don't know what is those mean, equal numbers and odds, and like all those numbers you can divide, they, they only for east and west. Like 40 can go only east or west. Uh maybe I-10 it goes east or west, but 95, it only can go north and south, or 65, north and south, like, you know? And, you know, and we started and after maybe two, three years, I know every state very well. I know every town, I know every good restaurant can you stop to eat, I know um cities that have rush hours. When you go, when you go across Atlanta, Georgia, you're not going in Atlanta at seven o'clock in the morning, you go in Atlanta either after nine or before six. So all that, you know, by the time you're doing job, you get used to it. Then my mom and sister come here and life change, like it all ready before I started my company I already have two kids, I have uh my oldest daughter, Erna, she's uh born in 1999, then I have Ernod, he's born uh two years later. Then life change [clears throat], then a lot of

Bosnians started coming, seem like I was probably in the first hundreds that arrived in Bowling Green [phone pings] and I bring here already my mom, my cousins. That's how somebody else did it, then they bring somebody, and that's how we're building very quick from I think 1997 to 2002 when the probably last Bosnians come. It's probably come anywhere about four to five thousand people, for those four years. [00:50:02] So we got to see more people, we try and, you know, do for somebody, you know, to help them out, and it's not same like for me when I just- when the first hundred arrive and then for somebody coming in two years, because they have somebody, they can tell them, "Don't be afraid," like me when I was- wake up after, on uh January 22nd, when I wake up first thing when I was coming to Bowling Green, "Uh don't be afraid to go in window and look, all these people is good. We'll come and we'll take you to grocery, to buy groceries, or bring you this. Don't worry, we, you know, we'll take care of you." It's very, you know, big difference.

BB: It is different.

AH: When we first arrived, we don't know nob- even if somebody tried to tell us, we not be able to, to understand what, what they're telling us. And uh, you know, that's, that's the, that's the everything. When I arrived here I didn't have any money at all. Before I will have trip from uh Zagreb to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Detroit, Detroit to Nashville, and all I have is twenty-five dollars, actually it's twenty dollars, and uh I'm in the Amsterdam airport and I need a bottle of water, actually my wife needed a bottle of water, she didn't know if she's pregnant at that time or not, because we'd just gotten married and she said, "Oh I just need some water," and I went there and I asked, "Can I have a water?" And, you know, in my language, [phone pings] I need this, I point with the finger, I don't know what the person is telling me, he's probably telling me what it costs. All I know I take the twenty dollars and leave that and I grab that water, bottled water, and take it, you know, away, and I leave the twenty bucks. I know he didn't go after me, so he's maybe happy that I'm paying twenty dollars for the bottle of water, you know? I think it's, it's a really way, way what this probably cost. Then I arrive here with no money at all, not even one dollar. Then after, you know, years, days and days, years, years, it's every day better and better, and uh before I opened my own companies I have eleven trucks that I own, to lease to another company. After that I'm making good monies and all these people I have- I tell them how good to drive truck. "Let's come, I'll help you. You go finish the license, I will train you and I will give you truck, you drive uh for me. Then when you make up some money, good, you can buy your own truck, we help somebody else." And that's how we did it, 2004 I started my own company and in 2004 in uh August we already running maybe sixty, seventy trucks. Then that's when a lot of things changed very quick, you know? Like buy a house after that, uh work with people, making more money, organize everything, uh even we trying to have like a where we all Bosnians meet and talk through the problems. Who can we help?

Who have any problems with uh, you know, finance? With getting job? We help them. So then people, most of these people getting to know, know very well, and most of them getting trust, you know? They're coming to me, everybody asking to do something. I was helping them on this, or this, or, you know, always something, even buying cars, uh find a good job, uh, you know, or finding a good deal for the car. They're calling me everyday, "Can you go with me?" You know, "You're here, you know, how is it to go to Nashville? We heard we can buy our car at an auction for less money than we can pay a dealer." We, you know, we're talking about it, we want our community to grow, you know, to get established. Then I started this job and uh we work hard, we are people to- that trust in work, and back in uh about 2009, 2010, we want our kids to know a little bit of history of, of all of us, and we started uh to tell who we are, or what is our religion, and everything, and we started building mosques, uh one on Blue Level Road. And by that time they wanted me to be President of uh, of uh Bosnian Islamic Center, and uh I tell them what strategy we can do, that was the plan.[00:55:06] When we needed to meet before that, we ran to one place around Dishman Road, it's like just small uh I think shop there, like maintenance, car, car shop, it's car service, and we rebuild that. Everybody gives some money, we rebuild that so we can use like what can we meet? Where can we go to talk? And where can we go every day to pray for a better life and everything? And uh then we buy that land on Blue Level Road, and we raising money from the people, from our members. We started with maybe fifty something, right in 2012 we have over two hundred, everybody bringing their kids there, uh to study about our religion and everything. And right in 2011 when we started building mosque, we didn't have any money and we started raising money from the people, they want to donate, make donation, then in 2012 we're making final opening of mosque where we already built for like nine months, which we pay like cost of, of, of that it's about 1.1 million, and maybe \$60,000, it's been paid for. All these people coming with no dollar in pocket, ten years later uh, you know, ten years here they will be able to make mosque without any credits or nothing. So, and all these Bosnians they really appreciative for everything the United States did for us, for especially United States and Bowling Green to welcome us, and uh give us this opportunity just to live like everybody else. Then I concentrate after that, when we finished that project I said, "I cannot do this anymore. You better get somebody else now." I concentrate always on my job, and today we are here, what is it 2016? An established company, making good for, you know, live-

BB: Lots of employees?

AH: A lot, a lot of people, we are most company to do contract, like owner operators, but we organize most of them, jobs for them. And uh we are really happy with what we get, and uh, you know, and after that project is over, from all these days uh spending here, I come here with my wife, and in 2012, in June, they go back to Bosnia, my wife and my

four kids. So I'm now coming back to Bosnia with, you know, totally different, somebody who left and coming back now with four kids. I was kind of afraid of how my kids, because my older daughter she's already uh fourteen years, thirteen years when she go back, you know? They, you know, it's not the same, you know, like here, here it's kids been born here and they know about some life here, so there it's a lot different, so how are they gonna take that new life in Bosnia? But they did adapt good, and they there, they like it. They're now coming here for visiting and going back, so I'm there now, spend a lot of time. I'm the- there is no men in Bosnia that don't like soccer, so I'm fine with soccer, so now I'm there join team, they're called Sloboda and when I get there, back in 2012, Sloboda is uh established in 1999, and uh it's really one of the teams uh join always highest league in ex-Yugoslavia. Uh and uh when they get there, uh when I get back, they're actually one league down because of all the problems they have, you know? They are one league down, and uh that's my team that I liked since I was a child, you know? Then I see they're in a bad situation, then I walk to the mayor of the city, I say, "I want to help establish Sloboda." He said, "Are you sure? Many of them tried, they didn't make it." I said, "I want to try because that's the team I like and I will do anything to try to get them back in Premier League." He said, "Okay, it will cost some money, we'll need some money." I said, "I'll try my best. I'll be at least loyal to you." Uh he's the Mayor of the city, he can have budget on, you know, to get- I said, "At least I will do my best, I will try to talk with the people, find some money. I am willing to give some money to establish Sloboda. Even if you help us, I think we can make it." He said, "Okay." Then they organize a meeting and they voted for me to be President of Sloboda.

[01:00:21]

BB: In '13, right?

AH: Uh in 2013, in February.

BB: I saw it on-

AH: Yes, February, yeah.

BB: I saw it, I saw that.

AH: It's the 14th of February, 2013. Then um, I started from nothing, they owed a lot of people money and uh, you know, I got a call every day, maybe five to ten people, they say "Sloboda belongs to me, money for this, for this," for the restaurants, hotels, the uniforms, uh stores, everybody the people did work and, you know, they say, "I didn't get my pay for two or three years, all of that." I say, "Okay, let's talk," and then we organize again. "We'll take care of everybody, just be a little bit patient. Let's do some work, we need to play to



try to get in the Premier League where it's a high, where you're getting some money. Where can people coming to watch they paying tickets for watching and everything." But we down one league, we're no interest to nobody. Then I bring in uh Ćiro Blažević, he's the coach of Croatia, when Croatia was uh third on World Cup, and nobody believed that coach like Ćiro Blažević come, you know, to take Sloboda over, you know, own league down. That was, in Yugoslavia, nobody ever believed that Ćiro will take any teams from ex-Yugoslavia. But when I tell my people what we need to do, and they, everybody gives some ideas what to do, I said, "We need something like positive shock," something like, you know, when you get shocked with, you know, with something like really good. The, the- you feel very bad and then you, when you like, just as you like for the health shot and you feel better after that, I say, "We need something that will change." And everybody say, "We need to do this." I say, "We need to bring Ćiro Blažević, he's the only man that can." They say, [BB laughs] "Are you crazy? He will never come here." I said, "We've got to talk with him. You know, I've got to talk with him, he might." I just ask them, "Are you all, are you fine with that?" They finally said, "Oh yes, of course we're fine, you know, but you're just wasting your time, you know? He's not gonna come." Then I get a number and I call. When I call him, and he's a really funny man, you know, he's- when I call him and tell him why, he said, "Yes, what do you want?" I said, "Um I would like to see if we can talk, uh for you to come to take Sloboda to be coach." He said, "Are you joking with me? Are you finding me to joke with?" You know, he's really a tough guy. I said, "No, I will please if you can just give me a chance to talk with you for ten minutes, I will come to Zagreb, Croatia, I will drive, all you need just to get in town." He said, "Okay, be here tomorrow at eleven o'clock." I said, you know, I said, "Okay, I'll take it." So I go back, it's about five hour drive, I should maybe leave early in the morning, but what is something happened, you know? I know I did have good car, but what happened, then uh, you know, I'm not gonna be welcome in front of him any, ever again. Then I go that night, I went to hotel, I make sure that I can make it and wait for him, then I come there and we make deal in five minutes.

BB: Seriously?

AH: Five minutes. When I come there and tell him who I am and he was thinking that probably cannot do nothing but he just want to give us chance. He had his son with him, while he does all the paperwork for him, and he have the lady, her name uh, I think um [unsure] and she do something uh about all contracts with him. And I tell him, "Okay, what can you do to offer us?" Actually I was sitting on the other side, on the bar, when they- he said eleven, they come in there maybe fifteen minutes to eleven, and I wait for my appointment at eleven o'clock. And I saw him but I know he don't know me, but I know who he is, and I saw him there walking and they sit maybe five tables across, then I wait for my time. About five minutes before eleven, I stand up, walk to their table, say, "Excuse

me, I'm sorry to interrupt you but Mr. Blažević can I have picture with you?" He said, "Okay son, let's do it quick, but I'm waiting for somebody to meet here at eleven. You can take that picture quick." [01:05:01] And I hand my phone to his son to take a picture, and I get close to him and when he takes picture, there was a booth with uh three chair. He sitting in booth, his son sitting on the left and that lady on the right, and there's one chair available, and he hand me phone back, then I pulled that chair out and sit. He said, "Hey, you just asking for pictures, that's, you know, I'm waiting for somebody to have meeting." Then I give him my hand and say, "Okay, I'm the Azmir Husic, the one you're waiting for," I say that. "Oh man, you already got me," he said, "You already got me." Then he started taking- telling me what, what kind of requirements for him to come to Bosnia. I said, "Is that all you have to say?" He said, "That's my requirements. If you meet this I will be coach of Sloboda, Tuzla." Then I tell him, "Do you want me to do- meet finance requirement right now, or when you get there?" Then he's look at me again, he didn't expect that answer from me. You know, how somebody can, you know, make that decision that quick, and he even offered you, "Do you want me to finish finance request right now or when you get there?" He said, "Can you do fifty percent right now?" I said, "Yes, it will just take me to go back to to my room and do that," it was cash price. Then I went up to room and I bring him mon- you know, what he's requesting, in an envelope, and then he's looked to that lady and his son, he said, "What to do now? It's over." He was thinking it's all just a talk, you know? He didn't believe me. He said, "What are we gonna do now? This guy make it, everything that we asked." And then his son tell him, "So now you can, you've got to go, you've got to be coach of Sloboda." And that's what happened, and we bring him there for six months agreement. When he's coming in, nobody- it was all over news, uh about Ćiro coming to take Tuzla. They're telling my names a lot, you know, they say about how I did that good, and nobody believed. And everybody know that, that Ćiro will, you know, change. [unclear] that Tuzla have about one hundred and twenty-five thousand people, and it was changed just in twenty-four hours, everybody talking about Sloboda, about Ćiro, about how they're gonna go next week to watching games, uh all positive stuff. And in six month, with Ćiro and us to work, support, we did make it to Premier League. And I have strategy, we say we're just gonna survive first year, we get back in Premier in 2014, and we're not gonna do much because we already spent a lot of money, you know, on players, on Ćiro, on, you know. First year I want only to stay in Premier League, not be one of the fourteenth or fifteenth place, which is taking you out, back in Second League. So, and we hired some other people to come in and we find other players and we survive that 2014-2015 on ninth place. Then we do a lot of reorganize, now on 2016, 2015-2016, after first eighteen match, Sloboda leads first and it's very, very good possibility that we will play, will play uh Europe in a qualifier, for Europe. So we'll see, we have twelve games left, we hope we'll keep one of the first three places. So those first three places play with uh- first one play championship, and uh second and third place play um, what do you call uh, Europe Cup, so we'll see.

BB: What's the season? What's the season?

AH: Season 2015-2016-

BB: What time- what, what month to what month is it?

AH: It will be end, last game we'll know in May 14, that's why I'm going tomorrow and our first game of twelve games left starting Saturday, on tomor- on uh, on the 27th. And uh, last game will be in May 14, then we'll know what position we are, and I hope we'll keep one of those three, first three places, so that's what we need.

BB: Mhmm.

AH: It's big change, life, you know?

BB: Wow.

AH: But I can say one, only one message for all world, all people on the world, never give up. Never give up, because uh when you just, you know, I know there is many people like me, but to- 1992 I was that close to lose my life, and I've been every day for three years, *very* close to losing my life. Life is, you know, maybe there is more nights in those three years that I pleads God to get and die next day than wake up and be healthy again, you know? And it's turn, big turn, you know, and but I can just say message never give up, always fight for better. Stay and y- everybody can do it. If I can do it, everybody can do it.

BB: Thank you.

AH: Thank you never much.

[01:10:42 End Track]