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Interview with Adisa Omerovic (FA 1137)

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Project name: Bosnia Project

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Interviewer/Recordist: Ann Ferrell

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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]

AF: So my name is Ann Ferrell, and I'm talking with Adisa Omerovic. Um, today is November 5, 2015.

AO: Yes.

AF: Um, and we're gonna um, we talked a couple of weeks ago, and we're gonna kind of pick up, maybe not exactly there, but-

AO: Mhmm.

AF: -in general.

AO: Mhmm.

AF: I know we had talked some about your childhood-

AO: Mhmm.

AF: -and um some of your memories, and-

AO: Yes.

AF: -and about your, your dad in particular, and your granddad.

AO: Yes.

AF: Um, can you talk some about what you remember from your childhood?

AO: Um, after the war?

AF: Sure.

AO: Okay so in '95, I, I was only four years old at that time, um, and I'm actually surprised myself that I can remember some of these things-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -but I think that's just a gift from God that he gave me that I can remember, to, you know, do this, to pass it on, you know, to people. Um, but '95, I can't really remember a lot of it right then, but maybe like going into '96, '97, um, you know, I remember my parents struggling, you know, for my father to find a job, um, to find anything really just to support us. Um, we moved around, I mean to little villages, to towns, um, to anywhere, anywhere really where we didn't have to pay money for it, [background noise] but everywhere we would um find a place, we had to, you know, pay money for it, like kind of like a rent. Um, I mean right now when you say that rent um, you know, rent amount, it's not a lot, but back then, you know, without a job, without anything-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -I mean it was a lot.

AF: Were you with other family, or was it your parents and your sister?

AO: Well when we [clears throat, says excuse me] um, when Srebrenica happened in '95, uh and when they transported us all the way over here to Tuzla, um, we ended up in uh about, I think, I'm not sure of the distance, but close to Tuzla, we ended up in town um called Potocari, and that was a school. Uh, that's where my family and I ended up. And then I think I told you last time, um, you know we shared classrooms with all these other families and that's where my father showed up.

AF: Right.

AO: Um, from that I remember my father finding a, a guy that lived right there, right close by that school, [train in the background] um who had a brother who lived somewhere in Austria I think, and his house was sitting empty. So the guy said, you know my father found him and my, um, [train noise continues] um, my father said, you know, "If, if we can live there, you know, uh, we'll, you know, we'll give you something in return as soon as I start working, you know?" Uh, they give stuff out to refugees, you know, like um furniture or something [train noise] um, and my dad said, "You know, anytime I make some money, you know, I'll, I'll give it to you for rent, you know, we'll pay for electricity and everything, for all the bills."

AF: Let's pause for just a second, I'm so sorry.

AO: Sure, it's fine. [train noise continues] It's just so loud.

AF: I know. [laughs]

AO: So he found that, um, [clear throat] nice man, who had a beautiful house, and this house that we moved into, I mean it was, it was a two story house, uh, but all we cared for was a room just for for us. My sister was still little and at this time she was um two years old, um, so my mother was, you know, struggling. Trying to find clothes for us, trying, you know, trying to, just like any mother and father, any parents, they wanted the best for their children, they didn't want us to feel what they were going through, but I feel like they uh older children, they feel a lot, a lot of that, um, even if it's going through a disaster like that or not. Um, the older children feel what their parents are going through so they kind of, you know, take in- I took it differently, I mean it, it got to me. I feel like I'm the way I am, this today, because of all everything that happened, you know?

AF: Absolutely.

AO: Because of everything that I've watched my parents go through, you know?

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Um, so we moved to that house, and uh, I think we were there for a little, then we moved to another house, then another, then another, we moved seven times. Uh, until we got to this one house, um, right before I started school. Um, and the reason we moved there was because we didn't have to pay anything, we didn't have to pay rent. My father, before that, while we were moving, he found a job, um, as a truck driver, um and he was driving all over Europe. Thankfully, you know, he got a job, but we wouldn't see him for month, you know, because it, it was a long roads, long trips. Um, but he, you know, he made money to support us. Um, we found this house and uh, I, I mean it was a beautiful house, but um, all these refugees from all of our villages, uh, were put in that house. [00:04:59] Um, and the room we got was just one bedroom.

AF: For-

AO: It was on the second floor-

AF: -for your family?

AO: -just for the four of us.

AF: Yeah, yeah.

AO: Uh, so what we did, uh, the- when you come up to the second floor there was a- I believe I counted fifteen stairs, because I have always counted stairs whenever, even to this day whenever I go up the stairs or down the stairs. There was fifteen stairs to get to the second floor and then you have to pass by the entrance to that, you know, second floor, and then you have to go on the balcony all round to get to the entrance. Remind you that this is a bedroom, so the door that we got into was the balcony door, um, and it was just a little, I can't know the size on top of my head, but it was just a small bedroom, decent bedroom size. Um, of course the doors was still there because you could enter into the second floor of this house. So the lady that was there, she only had two children, um, but she said, "You can have this one," uh mind you, she's a refugee as well, a refugee family but she lost her husband during the war.

AF: Did she own the house? Or-

AO: No, no-

AF: -she just was staying at this- ?

AO: -this guy, whoever bought the house, I think uh at that time, this was a uh, I believe this was like a Croatian little village.

AF: Oh.

AO: Um, and then they just said, "You know, you can do- use these house-

AF: I see.

AO: -to put these refugees in." And none of us were paying for it, so we all just [background noise] kind of like ran for it. Um, and this woman she lost, I mean I really feel bad for her, she lost her husband, and she was left with two small children, but you see how we talked about psychological torture not just from the sides of Serbians and Croatians at that time, or to this day too, um, there's a psychological torture of pe- between our people too. She lost her husband, and I don't wish upon that upon anyone, you know? Um, but she saw that a family of four, a husband and a wife and two children came, so she said, "I won't give you this big room that I have," she had a bigger room to give us, "I'll give you the smaller one." She told my mom, "because you have a husband and I don't have one."

AF: Wow.

AO: So my mom said, "We'll just take whatever you have." Uh m- this wasn't her house, but she- it wa- whatever she was able to give up-

AF: Right.

AO: -you know, they put us in that. So I finished uh three grades of school, in that little room. My father was always on the road, um, you know trying to make a living. My mom, uh, she would go work at- excuse me, work um, help our neighbors out, you know with uh their land, growing crops and stuff, that's what we were living off of. So she would be working out on farm all day just to bring something back, to kind of help her husband, you know? To no- make him feel better, like you know, "Here we are, fighting for this together," you know? She, she was so good, I mean, just going through everything. I can't imagine being twenty-seven years old, having your husband out, you don't even know where he is trying to make a living for you and your children, you have a five or a seven year- six year old and a four year old you have to put through school now, um and you're living in a bedroom.

AF: Yeah, incredible. So was she, she was doing farming specifically to bring food home not to, not for pay but to bring to- ?

AO: Like you know, they would give her uh, you know, vegetables, uh fruit, something you know? And in return-

AF: So they paid her in the, in-

AO: In like that-

AF: -food.

AO: -yeah, but it- these were like our neighbors, you know-

AF: Right, okay.

AO: -who she would help, uh, because you know you would need your neigh- that's you know, that's- going back to what we talked about last night-

AF: Yeah.

AO: - you know? You'd look uh at your first door neighbor better than your family in some cases, because you never know what you'll need them, when you'll need them. Um, so you know she would help them out all day, sometimes, you know, they will give her money, you know? But she'd never really wanted to take the money unless she really needed to, because she'd rather have food, you know? So, um, I started off uh my first grade in that house, um, and I met my best friend was also from Srebrenica, uh, they lived in the first floor. She- it was her, her father, um, her mother and her younger sister, then her grandparents and her two uncles. One uncle was married with two children and his wife, the other one wasn't. So there was like four families living in the first one, the first floor. But it was like one whole family in that big house, you know when we would have um gatherings, we would all just gather just like as one big family, because they were, you know, they were not separated but their family was far away from them-

AF: Right.

AO: -you know, maybe in Sarajevo or Tuzla or somewhere.

AF: Did you cook togeth- was there like one kitchen, like the communal kitchen?

AO: No, everyone had their uh, uh stove.

AF: Uh huh.

AO: Um-

AF: In the bedroom? Or in the room?

[00:09:56]

AO: Yeah, yeah. We had, oh yeah, in our bedroom we had a stove, we had a refrigerator, um, we had, you know, like a TV cabinet, um, a sofa, all of that in that little bedroom.

AF: Wow.

AO: Ju- like living space, so all of that is in there. Um, of course our uh- we didn't have a bathroom, uh so the people that were living down there, my mom would sometimes ask, you know, "Can we use the bath- you know, can I use it to shower my kids?" Or she would just get um something, um, what do you call one of those? Um-

AF: Like a tub? Or- ?

AO: Like a tub, yeah, she would purchase one of those big tubs and just, you know, shower us in there, I mean forever, because she, she didn't want to always bother them. Um, so we didn't have a bathroom in that, we would always have to go outside, there was an outside bathroom. Um, after that, yeah I started my uh first grade with my best friend, she was um, sitting, we were like sitting in the same chair, you know? At, at that time, where the school system was, you're with the same teacher for four years, and then after those four year you move on, to fifth and six because you get accelerated. Um, so I had the same class for four years, it was uh, it was nice, it was awesome. Um, but, you know, my best

friend and the person sitting with me at my desk, um, you know she was a Bosnian Muslim, but then I got close to this one girl, her name was [Boyana] and she was a Croatian. Um, we got very close, she just lived um close to the school, on the other side. Um, and I don't know how but we, we became really close even though, you know, that was just after the war. That's why we said like at that time no one really concentrated on this war that just happened, we just-

AF: Right.

AO: -wanted to, you know, get into schools, get, get, find a home, find a job, you know, just kind of like move on from this disaster. And um, then she was the one that sat next to me in school, for the next, I don't know, maybe like three years. Um, because in the second grade my best friend moved to Australia, so I was left with [Boyana] and then a few of my other friends. Um, I had a, I had a fun childhood while I was there, you know? But it was always, um, I guess I was, because I was the older child, I was always think like, "Oh, what is my father going through? What is my mother going through?" Like when you see your mom, you know, like hiding in the corner of the bedroom like counting the little money she has left over because the new school year is coming up, she's, if she's gonna have enough to close u- clothe us, and buy us shoes. And you know, when winter was coming, I mean that woman, we had snow, I mean it's not like here, if you have snow you don't-

AF: Right.

AO: -go to school.

AF: Right. [slight laugh]

AO: I mean if it's up to your [slight laugh] neck, you go to school. And she would follow us, because we had to walk to school, she would follow us down almost halfway to, to where the school was to make sure we got there safe, and then she would wait, wait for us, and then, you know, bring us back home. And she was just amazing, uh she did- even if there was like a problem between, you know, like I mean there uh obviously there was a finance problem because there was no money coming in at the beginning, but she never, her and my father never wanted us to feel that.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Uh when my father would come home, and they gave him a nickname here, uh Srce, and that means heart. Um, and everyone in here in town knows him by that. Um, even back in Bosnia, you know when he would be coming home, we lived in uh, there was a line of houses in that little village we lived in, um, and our house was number nine. [snapping sound] Well, before you coming to us there's all these other children in these houses, uh, my father wouldn't come home, you know, for maybe two, three months uh and then when he would, he would buy all this candy and all these snacks, bring them, bring these uh full bags of snacks and candy and by the time he comes to us, he never came empty handed to us, but he would pass these uh snacks and uh candy to these kids-

AF: Wow.

AO: -to these children. And, you know at times when my mom, you know, would get upset and she would say, "You know like you have children, no one ever gives you anything to your children. There's- you know, these people aren't work." And he would always say, "They ha- you know, this is me, this is the way I'm gonna give, you know, God will give back to us in someday or another." He would always say that, "God will give us back in someday or another." So I never understood why, you know you would get upset too because, you know, all this candy that your father bought, he gives it out to someone else, and then of course he never came empty-handed, but it's like, "I want- maybe I wanted that, you know? Maybe I want to eat another snack of that." But as you, you know, go through life, and now I'm like, I'm thankful for- it taught me a lesson. [00:15:02] Like you gotta give, what we just talked about before this, you've gotta give good for good to come to you.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Um, so I took lessons out of things like that in life. So then, um, I don't want to go into like too much detail of that childhood, but it was fun. Um-

AF: Well can you talk a little more about school? Was it, so was it, um, mainly Cro- um, Croatian kids? Or- ?

AO: It was mixed.

AF: It was mixed.

AO: It was mixed, because um that part, like right by the school there was a church and then uh there's like a-

AF: What kind of chur- like a, a- like a Catholic church or- yeah?

AO: Yeah, a Catholic church. Um, and the- you would hear the bell, everyday you would hear it. Uh, I think it was like every hour. What is it every hour or every day? I'm not sure, but I know the bell would go off, I mean we would hear it. Um, but then we would have- uh the mosque was also very close by-

AF: So there was a mosque?

AO: -by that school. There was a mosque, yes. So it was Catholis- uh Catholics, Muslims, a mix, I mean everyone was there. Um, but we would have, you had an option of signing up for um, like an Islamic class, which taught you like um, the like main beliefs of Islam, and uh it didn't- doesn't go in too deep, but you know, like um, the most important things in Islam.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Um, so we Muslims took that, but I don't know, I'm not sure what the Croatians and the uh Serbs went through too. Uh, it was like a dance class or something that they would go to instead of uh that class, because they would leave during that hour.

AF: Huh.

AO: You know, because it was only for like Muslims. Uh-

AF: So they weren't taking like a Catholic class or an Orthodox class, or whatever they-?

AO: Uh, no, not that I remember. Um, but then we had our Sundays, what you guys- Sunday school, every Saturday and Sunday we would go to the mosque to, you know, teach and to learn regular studies, Islamic studies. You know, like prayer, and fasting, and pilgrimage, and all of these things, um, so- or like reading the Quran, uh reading the Arabic language, everything, that's what Sunday school was, or is still today. Um, but about school, what else? I mean I had that class.

AF: Yeah. How about language? What- ?

AO: Language, like we had to take, it was like [Bosni-], Bosnian Engli- like English here, Bosnian uh language. Um, it was, you know, spelling, and writing, and we had to write uh what is the uh text or the script that Senida mentioned last night when we were talking about the C's and the S's?

AF: Um, the Cy- uh-

AO: The Cy-

AF: -Cyrill- not Cyrillic.

AO: Cyrillic, it is.

AF: Cyrillic, yeah.

AO: Yeah. We- they taught us that, you see? Um, that, that, that's not like Bosnian Muslim, that's more of the Croatian Serbian side, the Cyrillic is, but they thought, "I know how to write Cyrillic now." Um, and then uh we had like science, what you guys would- like nature, we'd learn about nature, and we'd go outside for fall, they would teach about- uh teach us about different uh, um, trees, like the names of different trees and the leaves. If you see a leaf on the um, on the ground, you would be able to tell what tree it fell off of. Um, during the spring, you knew the name of every flower because like, I mean, they were on it. [AF slight laugh] Yeah, it was very like OCD I feel like. Um, and then I had uh, this was fun, I was in um, kind of like arts and humanities, um, they had one of those classes, and they would give you like a song uh to learn, um, and then they would bring audience, like our parents, and wou- they would perform like uh there was a dance group, like a folklore group, like I was telling you about, uh that danced. There was a Muslim one, like a traditional Bosnian Muslim group, and then there was one of, that they did. Um, like a Croatian one I think. You know, they had different type of dances, um, and I remember I was, I think it wa- this was like third grade, where they gave me something to like, um, read by memory, and I was starting to be so good at it then every time like they would have that they would ask me, pull me out of class to, yeah, to go and perform that I guess [unclear] call it a performance [00:19:31]. So every time I would finish they would, you know, tell me, "Oh you did so well, so well," because I was always like serious, I mean I still am, like I was a serious student, you know? Like I liked to follow rules, and like if my teacher tells me do something then I'm gonna do it, if she tells me to read ten pages, I'm gonna read ten pages, and like in, um, I read about or I watch a lot about education now, how teachers are treated. You see a lot of videos on Facebook now, I mean it's just absurd, like-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -everything. We, we wouldn't even, we were not allowed to speak badly to our teacher, to say "no" to our teacher, that's the respect you brought from the home, first of all, but that's something they taught you in school. When a teacher or professor walk, would walk into a classroom, you would have to stand up, and then wait for her or him to get to their desk and they would say, "Okay, you can sit down." Um, when you were um asked a question, you would stand up to answer a question. I mean it was very- and that's what I- something that I, I liked a lot, you know, it taught you respect for not- not just elderly, but you know, um, the teachers, the doctors, people, intellectuals, like Nermin mentioned that last night. [00:20:48]

AF: Yeah.

AO: It was you respected someone's education and you respected their position. Um, same thing, you know, in the, in a mosque or a church, you know? If you were- I told you the church was there if we were to see the priest, you know? You would, you know, ask, you know, "Hello, how are you today?" No matter what religion it was, you always asked some how they were. You know while we were walking to school there was a- it wasn't like three to three, or eight to three, um, school system, it was a fi- like a first shift and a second shift. Um, they would shift between us on masters or quarters, um, so let's say first and second grade would go 8:00 AM to 11:00 AM, they would let- have like three or four of class, then you have a second shift from like 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM. Um, and then like when we would walk in the morning, you know, you would see all these people waking up and drinking their coffee on their balconies, if you were to pass by someone, especially Bo- like Bosnian Muslims, like the grannies, and not tell- say "Good morning, how are you?" um they would like go to your mom and be like, "Okay, she didn't say- she didn't say- she didn't ask me how I was doing." So that's how children were taught respect, you know? Um, but that was, that was something fun that I remembered.

AF: Yeah.

AO: Uh, we took um, we took a lot of field trips, um, and uh, in those four years, I think. I think we took two or three that I remember mostly. Um, one was far uh from that school, but it was mainly about nature. Um, and I feel like people should push on that here, um, you know doing more hands-on things?

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Uh, because children understand that better than- I mean I remember that, I mean it's still in my head, you know? Um, twenty something year- not twenty, but fifteen years after I remember, you know, my field trip, and I remember the tree that we went to look at, you know? And why, and what tree it was, what it grew on, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Um, but like they would take us to fun field trips like that. Um, that was, that was school, that was the classes, I mean it was fun classes. Then later my mom signed uh my sister and I up for like dance, uh it was a dance class, after school, um, and again of course you had to pay for that, but that was right before we came to America. Um, and this guy, I think

he was Croatian that was teaching us, um, but there we uh learned like the traditional dances. There's um like two, three types of traditional dances, then he taught us Salsa, and like more of the formal dances, which was really fun-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -I really appreciated that class. Um, uh what else? Like a choir, there was a choir-

AF: Mhmm.

AF: -um where we'd sing, uh, like happy sounds, you know? Like children's songs, like first and second grade. Uh, but we also had a religious choir in, in the mosque, you know? Where we would, um, teach kind of like, not teach but uh sing gospel uh songs, gospel music. Um, so that's it about school.

AF: Yeah. Will you- and I know you said, you know in that period, like you said, people were really trying to like, "okay, let's move on, let's not focus on what happened," but as a kid in the school did you feel like, you know, you're Boslum Muslim- Bosnian Muslim, and, and you're a Croatian, and you're Ser- I mean did you? Was it like- ?

AO: You did.

AF: And how- what, what did it, what was the different? Like how did the- how would you describe the difference?

AO: Like, I mean they tried, uh, the teachers really tried for us not to feel it because they just wanted us to uh- but you can like, I mean, I felt it. Like you can feel when it's, when it's the hour of, you know, the Islamic studies, it's like, "They have their Islamic studies class, you- those of you that are not in it, let's like leave," like they'll go outside on the playground or something. Um, I don't know, for our holidays like we didn't go, I never went to school for the first day of our holidays, um, but like you, you would feel it, like it's stra- maybe during the interview I'll remember how, you know, how it wa- like different ways that I felt it, but I mean you could feel it.

[00:25:11]

AF: Yeah, and that's hard to describe so I'm sorry that it's a hard question.

AO: It's hard. No, no, no it's okay. Okay, for example, that girl that was, I was best friends with, well became best friends with, [Boyana], um I mean she was like a pure Croatian, she went to church, just like I was a pure Muslim, I went to mosque, I pray, you know I tried to pray at five times a day, I fasted the month of Ramadan, everything, everything. Um, she was a pure Croatian, and one time my mom, uh, her mom invited my mom over for uh like coffee, uh and it was her birthday, so my mom was like, "Oh, should I go? Should I not go?" because of what everyone else would say, and like I was a child, you know? So I think my mom wanted me to be happy, so she said, "What do you think?" I'm like, "Well it's her birthday, like lets just go now." So we went there and this lady was really nice, I mean she, she even like had presents for me and my sister, because she wasn't a refugee, she was, you know, living there. Um, and like it was, you can *feel* it, you can feel that Muslim or that religion difference, you know? Um, but no one really said any- like no one would say, "Oh you're Muslim so let's watch out," or something. Um, but like

I know my mom was probably like, "Oh what are, what are these Bosnian Muslims gonna say?" You know?

AF: So she was worried about what-

AO: She was worried like-

AF: -her-

AO: -I mean and she, like my mom, her sisters, six of her sisters lost her husband, so you've got to like look at it from her point of view too. Like is it okay? I know I'm making my child happy to be friends with this girl, but you know, what would my sisters say? Maybe someone of her family killed her husband- you know? Like those kind of things-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -and that's like psychological torture again, it's like thinking about this is going to bother. Even though you're okay with that woman, you see that that woman is really nice, her children are really nice, she's raising them well, respect this and that, it's still that like psychological torture inside.

AF: Yeah, everything that she represents.

AO: Yeah.

AF: Do you- if you- do you need to get- ? No. So um, so then you came to the U.S.? Can you- how did that happened?

AO: Oh my God, that, that was um [microphone noise]-

AF: And if I skipped anything-

AO: -a psychological torture. No, we can go back and forth.

AF: Okay.

AO: Um, so my dad was always a fighter, I think I told you that before, like he would always, even to this day, like if he ha- if he puts himself- if he has a goal for himself, he's going to achieve it no matter what. He was a truck driver his whole life, that's what he was doing, he was working, I told you, in Serbia before the war.

AF: Right.

AO: He was, uh, driving a truck and making pretty decent money. Um, and this was like 2000, that um his aunt, uh, applied to go to America and everyone was applying, and I think in 2000, excuse me, my uh best friend, the one that was um sitting with me in school, uh she, they moved to Australia, but no one knew that they applied, they kind of kept it on the down low, because like you really didn't know if you- because we have to go through interviews and I'll get to that in just a moment. Uh, so they kept it kind of quiet, kind of like for people not to jinx it, um, and they like went and I remember when my best friend left I felt so lonely, because we did everything together. I mean we were the same age, we had the sisters the same age, our parents were the same age, I mean it was just perfect.

AF: And you lived in the same house, and went to the same school-

AO: We lived in the same house, we went, yeah, to the same school, same grades, everything. So when I- when she moved away, like I lost her, so I felt like I lost a part of myself. She knew like, she understood what I was going through in that school and I understood what

she was going through. And um, they moved- before I say this, you asked about languages, in fourth grade, um, this is when we knew uh my father had applied, so I'll just go side-by-side on that. Uh, so he applies for us to come to America, but his aunt, before he does that, in 2000, she applies with her two daughters, and she lost a husband and her son in the war. So uh, they approve her and it was like a year-long process or something, so she comes here in 2001, directly to Bowling Green, um with her two daughters. So it was just the three of them, they found a one-bedroom, one-bathroom apartment here off of Russellville Road, um and my aunt tells my dad, she calls from America, you know like at that time was like, "Oh America." I mean it still is the land of the free and the land of the dreams, you know, you make your dreams come true here, but it's like she's calling from America, uh we couldn't believe that we had a relative living in America, you know? Because like during the war and those times, like America just seemed so far away, like if someone can just come and help, why is it so far away? So she told my dad, she said, "Okay Mirsad, you need to apply." He said- she said, "I know you love the European style living and all of that," and he- she's like, "You need to do this for your children. You need to do this for the, you know, better future of your children." And of course my father knew that, so he applied and he didn't tell us anything. He didn't tell my mom anything, he was like, "If we pass, we pass." [00:30:34] And when he applied he included, because he has a younger brother I told you, uh at that time he was uh an adult, he was- I don't know what year that was, he was eighteen, nineteen, nineteen at that time. Um, so he could take care of himself, and of course, um, his- their mom, in the application he, he listed all of us, so he listed six of us in the application, including him mom and his brother. Um, my uncle didn't tell us that he had applied himself uh before, that's- I think he wanted to kind of like take care of things, you know, on his own. So he had applied for the entrance to the United States uh himself.

AF: Just by himself?

AO: Just by himself-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -and he didn't pass. But he didn't tell my father that, of course my father didn't tell anyone that he was applying, so on the application he listed his name and his mom's name and we went to like the first interview, we lived in Bosnia but we had to uh, you know, uh we had an address in Croatia, um our friends they kind of like gave us the space to live there, um, so we would go from time to time to Croatia, um it was a really nice house too. Um, we would spend, you know, some time there and then uh from there we would go to the interviews. Um, so our house, uh our address was listed because we really didn't have- this was not our current address, you know? In Bosnia over here, because it was someone else's.

AF: The house where you were living with all of the-

AO: The house, yeah.

AF: Yeah.

AO: So we had an address in um Croatia, and um, they called us for interviews. So the first interview we went to, it was all six of us. And I really can't remember the first interview, um but I remember the second interview, um because I remember coming back from the first interview and I was very nauseous uh because I remember some of the questions that they were asking my father and they were very like direct, like "What do you remember from the war? Like what do you remember when they- when you separated from your family? And what do you- what was the hardest moment in your life? Like it was just, it was all about the war, you know?"

AF: Yeah.

AO: And um, when they called I remember coming back, my grandma was telling me, she said, "You know, if you're nauseous look on the road, look at the road, you know? While we're driving, it's not- you're not gonna be as nauseous." She's like, "Don't look, you know, on the sides, don't look at the windows, it's gonna make you more nauseous," and then I remember falling asleep. [clapping sound] The second interview my father says that um the man who called him uh for the interview, he said uh, "You, your wife, and your two children are okay to come to the second interview. Now as for your mom, I don't know what you're going to do because your brother is declined for the second interview, uh, your mom you can leave your mom to come as a family with you, or you know, separate her and just leave her alone." So we didn't know what to do, you know, like my father was like, "This is his mom, what is he gonna do?" But then again his um his brother is gonna stay alone, I mean he wasn't, he just- this child just, he was sixteen years old um when the war happened [clapping sound], you know?

AF: Yeah.

AO: He's not that stable enough to be by himself.

AF: Right.

AO: Um, so my father, you know, like thought about it. He was like, "Well if-" first he said to my mom, he said, "If all of us can't go, none of us will go." Well my mom got upset, she said, "I have two children to think about, okay? Like your mom can take care of, [slight laugh] you know, her son, I have to think about them, and it'll be easier for u- for us to help from over there, you know, fin- finance-wise, than all of us staying here and just like looking for it to fall out of the sky. So my father said, "Okay, my mom will sel-" uh his mom would stay with [clapping sound] his brother, so four of us went on to the second interview. When- it was in Croatia again, um, and when we came to the second interview uh there was an American gentlemen. He was, of course, interviewing, and there was a translator lady uh at the- she was probably Croatian. Uh, I remember he had on a white um, shirt on, um, and he had on like a blue uh tie with white something- stripes on it. [00:35:00] And he was um, you know, a little bigger of a gentlemen. Um, he was really nice, very polite. So we sat down, it was like my father, my mom, me and my sister. So I sat there, and you know it's funny because you asked about uh, earlier you asked about languages and my favorite classes, um, I always loved math, I really did, but I don't know

why at the interview, it might've been I was afraid of something, I don't know, but he was asking questions, um, and this lady was translating over to my father, you know? He said, "What do you wish to- what do you wish to accomplish, you know, if you do enter um America?" And he said, "You know, I just want my, I just want the best for my children. I want them, you know, to have a roof over their head, not to be afraid, not to *run* away from anywhere, you know? Just to be safe, be free, to get an education, to use that education, to give back to, to who- to whatever county is providing that for them." Um, and I was sitting there and my- they really didn't ask a lot of question to my mom but for some reason the guy who was interviewing he looked at me and he said, "And for you?" And I was like, you know, I was like, "What is it now?" And he said, um, "What do you remember from the war?" It's as if he knew that I remembered all these things. And I said, "What do I remember, or-" I said it in Bosnian, "or what was the hardest part?" He said, "What is the hardest part for you?" And I, I really like, I, I mean I didn't lie, I couldn't lie at these interviews. I was a child, um, but I was ten years old at that time we were doing the interview. He said, "What was the hardest part?" And really, before those interviews, I would have consi- you know how I was separated from my grandfather?

AF: Mhmm.

AO: I would have dreams of him, like, you know, him coming to me and saying, you know, "Everything's okay, don't worry. Everything will be okay." Like he was pushing me like to go on, go on, like at some point in life everything is gonna be okay. Um, and then the Chetniks, the Serbs, you know, when they were walking into the bus, like I would have nightmares of that. So I told the guy who was interviewing us, I said, "The most scary part for me is going back to sleep and not knowing what, what I, what I'm going to wake up to, because I have these nightmares of- I dream of my grandfather, you know? Being taken away from me over, and over, and over again. Is it ever gonna stop? Like is that ever gonna stop? Is that picture of that guy coming and taking that child away, you know? Is that ever gonna go away?" And he looked at me and he said, "That's enough, you don't have to say anything else."

AF: Wow.

AO: And then he told us to, um, he apologized for ask- for if that was like a lot for me because I was a child. And I was, I mean, right now I'm really emotional about it, but at time, I mean I was so strong I wanted him to know what I was going through. Like I am a child, I am ten years old, this happened to me. I was four years when all of this chaos happened. Like you cannot be okay, you know? You cannot be- it's the psychological torture, we keep saying that over and over again and it is. You go to bed, you have these nightmares, you have these dreams of everything that happened to you. I mean that followed to even nightmares to this day sometime. Um, and he told us, told my mom and my sister and I to leave the room, um, and then he left my father alone. I don't know what he asked him, my father really didn't say anything else, um, but he brought us back in and then he wanted to be more positive. [laughs] And he said, uh he was asking about favorite uh what were,

what were my favorite classes in school, [laughs] and I was, I was always a patriot for, you know, like even American uh like of course it's the land of the free, but I'm also a huge patriot of Bosnia, like because that's my country of birth, that, you know, that's where I was born in. Um, and at that time, I mean, I- probably the patriotism kicked in then because the guy was like, "Okay what is your favorite classes [laughs] in school?" And I said, and all my life, I mean all those ten years I said, "I love math, I love math, I want to be a, you know, a te- uh a teacher for math or whatever, a math teacher," and uh, he said, "What is it?" So I'm like, you know I have my mom and my dad to my right side and my sister her, and he goes, "What is your favorite class in school?" And I said, "Bosnian language." [00:40:06][laughs] And here I am, trying to go to America, okay? [laughs] My father turns away like this to the left and he was like, "Really?" I was like, and I said, "Bosnian- " I was so proud to say it, I said, "*Bosnian language.*" [00:40:06] He said, "Well that's nice," and the he goes to my sister and said, "Hasnija, what is your favorite subject in school?" because she as uh like second grade at this time. And uh, she said, "*Math* is my favorite subject in school," and my father said, "Good job, Hasnija." [clapping] [AF laughs] And I was just like, "You know what, okay, I love Bosnian language. I don't care what you say." [laughs] But that was funny, we laugh about it to this day. My father was like, "We're trying to go to America, what makes you think that loving Bosnian language is gonna get into it?" I'm like, "I mean that means that I'm, someday I'm gonna love the American language, you know?" [AF laughs] So that was funny. That was funny, but at that interview they let us know that we have passed, and that we were going to America. So then uh we had to get um, go through like physicals, you know? Um, make sure everything was okay with our health, and [sighs] so in 2002, we had a huge like going away party, everyone came. I mean there was like music, and of course food and everything, even though it was such a sad moment, going to America was, I mean, awesome. My dad pulled all, pulled all of his friends with um like music instruments and I mean it was out in the open, like right in front of the house. We were dancing and singing, and it was like that-

AF: What did you picture of America?

AO: What did I pic- uh-

AF: Yeah.

AO: Yeah, that was funny that-

AF: Oh, I'm sorry.

AO: -no, no, no, that was funny that you asked because um we would watch these movies, you know, American movies, and this is funny [clapping sound] I laughed at this. Um, when we came here, we came to a one bedroom apartment to my father's aunt's hou- apartment, and it was a one bedroom, bedroom, and one bathroom, so there was seven of us in there, for like a m- two months, I think. Uh, and I was like, "Okay," I was telling myself, I didn't, I really didn't want to express my feelings to anyone else, I was like, "Well okay, this might be just for the beginning," because the picture that I had was like, "Okay when

I come to America I'm gonna have a maid, I'm gonna have a huge house, like the White House." Seriously! Like that's what America was pictured to us! I'm gonna have a maid, she's gonna come and bring in my u- school uniform every morning, she's gonna ask me for breakfast. I mean it was, I, I laugh about it to this day, [AF slight laugh] it's funny. It-

AF: Do you remember what movies you would've seen, that you got the-

AO: I can't remember.

AF: -image.

AO: I just remember the White House, and the-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -maid, and, you know, her bringing in like the clo- the uniform to the little kids. [AF slight laugh] I was just like, "Okay, wh- when is the maid gonna come? Like I'm ready for her." So [laughing] then we move, move into our own apartment, [laughs] move into our own apartment, and I was like, "Okay, she might come here." And my mom this whole time she's like, "What are you waiting for?" And one thing I said, I was like, "You know what guys, I'm tired of this." And my dad said, "What, what are you tired of?" Th- they were afraid, you know, of us getting used to this, you know? Because like no one knew the language. So I said, "You know what, I'm tired of this. I want the maid to come, I want my big house," because at that time I, I had to take care of everything, you know? Um, my father just got a job, my mom just got a job, my mom worked first shift, so my dad worked second shift so they could- one of them would- were, um, with us at all times. Um, I started sixth grade here, my sister started fourth grade, um, of course my father was away. They, they couldn't learn the language, I mean even to this day they just know a few words, just to get by. Um, well I mean we went to the international school here, to the International Center, um, there was like morning classes, but I picked up what I needed to pick up. But I learned English by watching *Barney* and reading Arthur books, and um I don't know if I told you that, but *Barney* and *Clifford the Big Red Dog*, [both laugh] really, I think that's how I learned the language.

AF: Yeah.

AO: And it was- so we came during the summer of 2002, in June, uh, August, school started.

Um, and it was hard for me then because, I mean, I just now learned some of the English, you know, language. Uh, so going in and not knowing, like I didn't even really know any of the Bosnians here either, um putting into these classes that I don't know what I'm gonna get out of, you know? But I knew that I always wanted to be a straight A student. Uh so there was ESL, but you know even before school started, my father said, "Okay, we don't know the language, here's a checkbook, here's a book we get for like first- what is- first hand." First hand like the numbers uh in Bosnian numbers in English, "Every bill that I get, make sure that it's paid on time." He said, "You're gonna get a check," and that's how it was. He said all of our-

[00:45:10]

AF: So that was your responsibility to take-

AO: That was my responsibility at twelve years old.

AF: Wow.

AO: Um, he said, "Ev- you know, every Friday or every two weeks," whenever they get paid, "Mom and I will bring you the checks, you, you know, calculate how much you need for the bills, you put that on there," and like that was me. [clapping sounds]

AF: Wow.

AO: Writing checks out. To this day, and I don't mind it, I mean it's-

AF: No wonder you're in accounting. [both laugh]

AO: Right? That's why I love accounting. But I'm thankful, I don't complain about it, I'm really thank- because that, I mean, that did make me grow up faster, you know? I mean it forced to it, but I'm thankful for it, you know I'm more open minded now um about things. Um, but I did start school then, um, and I remember myself- I don't know if I told you this, I feel like I've said this story before but not sure to you. Um, my math teacher was really nice, Ms. Cone, um, she took the time out of class time to make sure that I understood, like at that time it was like fractions, division, something like that. She would say, "Adis- " like in middle of the class, "Adisa, do you understand?" Like she would take the time to make sure that I understood that, and I really appreciated that. Um, my science teacher, not so much. She did not like us, she did not like us Bosnians. Um, and you ca- you can tell that, you know like you were talking about the feeling, um, because I was so stressed out, you know with taking care of everything at home, and you know, and while I was doing all of this, you know I was worrying about my sister. She wa- I- she's very, uh we spoiled her. She's not that spoiled now, but she spoils herself, but we spoiled her as a baby because I said, 'If I have to go through this as the older child, I don't want her to feel any of this.' So I said to mom and dad, like, "Whatever you need done, just come to me. Like don't, don't touch her, let her have the childhood that I did not have." Because I wanted her to experience, you know, elementary school, and middle school, and then when she started middle school I told her, "Go sign up for soccer," like, you know, go have, have something to do, do something fun. So she was playing soccer for like six years. Uh she was awesome, she had her little team and you know, they were traveling and winning games. So she experienced that middle school and high school life, which I didn't. Um, you know she went to um, she did go to prom, um, I went just to the senior prom. Um, she went to, I think junior and senior prom, she went to like Homecoming and all of these things, you know, like all of these fun things that col- you know, uh, high school and middle school kids need to do. But I always said, "Don't- I don't want her to affect- I don't want to affect her life what has affected me." Um, so in my science class, you know, I was stressed out and I was always af- afraid of blood, um so my nose started bleeding one day because of all the stress. And we were just outside on the um, on the playground, and it was really hot out too, so we come in and like in science class, uh, my nose started bleeding. So I was like embarrassed too, like if there was something wrong I would always be like quiet, so I, I don't know what I did, but I asked for paper towel, uh

and this African American, um, was there across, and he went and got it for me. Um, and he said, "Here you go," so I thanked him, and she saw that something was wrong. So all I did was put the- it was the brown paper towel, just put it, you know, just to hold the blood. Um, and she screamed, she said, "What are you doing?" Like when she would yell, I mean she would scream, her face would get so red and you can see her veins like, she said, "What are you doing?" it's- the gentleman, Scooter was his name, "Um, her nose is bleeding, like let her chill for a second." She said, "No!" She said, "Get out and take care of that, go to the restroom!" Like she told me to get out. So I get out, like this is like in front of the classroom, in front, in front of my peers.

AF: When you're in like sixth grade?

AO: Si- this was sixth grade, and um Warren Elementary. And um, I get out, go to the restroom, come back and like it was, I mean you could still- I was crying because like I was upset, so you, you know, I was sobbing after and she said, "Are you crying?" She said, "Get out of my classroom and do your work in front of the classroom." She kicked me out of the classroom that day.

AF: For having a nosebleed and then crying because you'd been embarrassed by her?

AO: Mhmm, yeah.

AF: Wow.

AO: Yeah. So then I, I, I never liked her. I mean how can you? Like I'm trying to fight here to learn something in your class and you're-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -making me- thankfully I didn't have to stay long there, because I had ESL so I had- I asked the ESL teacher just to whatever that hour of class was, to be with her, to learn English. Um, so I got out, but like my uh social studies, she was, she was African American, she was fun. I mean she um, she kind of reminded me of my teacher in Bosnia, like she was really nice to all of us, but she took her work seriously and she wanted us to take our work and studies really seriously, um, so that was fun. And then I got into middle school and high school, and I got through all of that. I was the first-

[00:50:31]

AF: Well you said earlier that when you started school you didn't really know many Bosnians here?

AO: I didn't-

AF: Was-

AO: I didn't know anyone.

AF: And was there not- I don't, I mean I think the Bosnian community here has grown-

AO: Oh yeah.

AF: -since that time.

AO: Oh it has.

AF: Right, is that-

AO: I mean at that time it was- we were kind of like the last train, as we like to say, to come to the United States in 2002.

AF: Yeah.

AO: At that time most of them had, you know, befriended like all, all the Bosnians already had their little clicks. Um, so I just came in there and uh I became friends with my best friend now, Melissa, um then, and she was a straight A student and we had, I mean our goals were the same. Um, so it was good to have her, we were in-

AF: Was she Bosnian?

AO: She's Bosnian.

AF: Yeah.

AO: Mhmm. And we had- we wanted to get out of ESL because we were like, "Okay, we really than- we are really thankful for this class because it's gonna like teach us English, uh but we want to get out because we want to provide that we can be in a regular English class," and that's what we did. Like we were there for a little bit of sixth grade and then we got out and we went to regular English class.

AF: Wow. So by seventh grade you-

AO: Yeah, I was in the regular, I didn't have any ESL, only like if we wanted, like in free time, if we wanted to go there and just work. Which we did, we took all the free time we could to improve our writing, uh and spelling skills. Um, but I remember like all my seventh and eighth grade papers, you know you had to have like a portfolio, um, I would write about- see how much this has affected me? I would always write about how I came to America, like all of my papers were like, "How I came to America, um, my childhood in Bosnia," or something like that. It was always about my like personal narratives. Um, and I think that says a lot about a person, you know, like what they write about. Um, so all of my teachers said that they enjoyed reading about it, you know? And I think that I always um, like even if it's you, like if I meet you I like to know what you went through so I can better understand you. Because at that time I felt like these girls that, you know, I was hanging out with, Bosn- not Melissa, she was very like me, you know? We wanted to know- we wanted people to know where we came from, but we also wanted to learn like the ways here.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Where I felt like everyone just kind of like collided into this society, and just kind of like took this as is, you know they kind of forget- forgot where they came from, uh and that bothered me a lot. Um, I think it's important for you to remember where you come from, you know? That's, that's what make you the person you are today.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Um, so, um, middle school, yeah middle school was okay. High school was, um, in 2005 was when I started high school, but um, my father and I had to go bury, um, my grandfather, his father, um July of 2005. So I missed like two or three weeks because I

stayed for so long in Bosnia, of my freshman year. And you know, like freshman you're a freshman now, so I come and it's like a totally different world than middle school.

AF: Hmm.

AO: Yeah, and then I just kind of, I don't know, went by. [slight laugh] Um, I mean I had good grades, you know? I always- I really didn't my- I'm not that type where like I'm gonna push myself and sit down and study for hours, I'm more of a visual person. That like- I liked when teachers would explain to me better, like especially in a picture, um, and I think that's why I like math a lot, because, you know, you have to see it to be able to understand it. Um, but I really didn't have any i- a lot of issues. Um-

AF: Well how about the Bosnian community, because now you are-

AO: Mhmm.

AF: -quite involved.

AO: Oh yeah.

AF: So how did that develop over the years? Your involvement.

AO: I mean it really started from the religious point and [unclear] uh because um I started, I remember in 200- excuse me, in 2002 by August we were moved into our own apartment, and at that time there was not a mosque here in Bowling Green, but there was like a Islamic school, which was right on Old Morgantown Road, um and we would go like for Sunday school. And I, I remember, because in Bosnia I pushed for it, I would go by myself, you know? If my best friend or my sister or someone wasn't able to go, I would go by myself, walk like two kilometers to get to the mosque so I can push myself to learn more. [00:55:06] And um, when we came here I said, "Mom and dad, like you need a- I want to go, I want to go," because someone had to drive us, you know? So Melissa went, uh of course, and she said, "Well I can come, like mom and I can come pick you up, you know? And like your mom can come take us back." So that's how, what we did.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: You know, the Bosnian community kind of like, "You pick my child, I'll pick your's up." So they kind of exchanged, rotated on the transportation. Um, but that's how it really started, like you know we would have programs and, and that um mosque. I guess you can call it mosque, it was the Islamic kind of school um where we would have like prayers, you know? Especially for Ramadan, for the fasting, uh fasting month. Um, we would have uh programs almost every night, uh and I kind of got involved in that. Then we moved to Old Dishman Lane over there, um, and that's where it really started.

AF: Mhmm.

AO: Um, it started from there, but then uh we had the 2012 um- when we were there right before 2012, a convention of Bosniaks. Um, the choir group, we had a choir group and I kind of, I mean I didn't take over, but like I was kind of like the head person there, you know? Kind of gathering everyone together to come to practice, you know, organizing these events. Uh so then we have 2012 opening of the mosque on um, over on- off of Russellville Road-

AF: Mhmm.

AO: -on Blue Level Road, and there's one on Old Morgantown Road. Um, and then it just started from there. Then I think I got more into the politics of the Bosnian community, and you know, the American community here. Um, I received a Woman of Achievement award in 2014, um here, uh from Bowling Green.

AF: From the cit- from who?

AO: From um, what is the name? The Human Rights-

AF: Oh, the Human Rights Commission?

AO: The Human Rights Commission, yes. Um, they have a drawing or something, and someone nominated me. I got a letter, I was like, "Where did this come from?" Um, so they had- and then I got a little star that says uh, "Youth Achievement," you know, because I've organized a lot of uh youth events here within the Bosnian-American community. Um, and it just kind of really started from that convention I think, it was a huge event, I mean we had to organ- at that time I think we had about over eight thousand people that came into Bowling Green, which brought a lot of business to Bowling Green, which we were excited for. Um, I mean we hu- we had a huge tent, we had huge programs and events, you know? Even at Western we had a week long program with the, uh, films and movies showing. Um, week prior to that, um, we had pictures of Diana's um photos. She, uh she had like a set up of her gallery, of photos she took back when she went back in 2010, I think. She followed my mom and her sisters, of the burial of their father and um other people who were from Bowling Green, uh so she did a story of them. Um, so I, I think that's- but I've always kind of, you know, been the person to help others, and I'm always- and it's not just, you know, just because it's Bosnian community, I think um, I would be involved even if it was, you know, any other um community. Um, but I think it's mainly because of that, because I, I stay in it because I don't want people to forget where they come from. That- that's-

AF: And why is that important?

AO: Because it makes you who you are today. Like that- that's- I feel like you have to, I keep going back to my childhood because there's a reason why I'm here today, you know? Like there is a reason I am the way I am, because of everything that I lived in my childhood, you know? I mean the, the steps I took to come here, you know? And each individual, you know? Um, and it doesn't have to be a Bosnian, or you know, has to live through the war, you know there's people that move from, I don't know from Canada here, or from Mexico here, and each one of them have their own stories that I feel like people need to listen to to understand. Like don't- I can't stand when people judge others, like you don't know. I don't, I don't have the right to judge you of the way you look at other people, because maybe something happened to you in your life that made- makes you think that way, you know? Um, so that's, that's the reason I really push for that, I just don't want people to forget where they come from and I want them to appreciate everything they have today. And I feel like, um, you know with the trucking business growing I mean it,

there's so many Bosnian companies here, but it's like, "Okay slow down, just a bit," you know? It's like you- [01:00:00 begin new track] we didn't have anything, you have a lot now. And just, just slow down and be, and be thankful and appreciate for everything you have now.

AF: Yeah.

AO: Yeah.

AF: And I know you talked about going back to Bosnia of course to bury your grandfather.

AO: Mhmm.

AF: Have you been back other times?

AO: I have, I was there in 2005 for the burial of my grandfather. 2007 uh the four of us went, my mom and my sister, and my fa- uh dad, uh we went. We wanted to have a, uh that's what we said at that time, we wanted to take a trip together as a family because we knew it would be hard later, you know? Like I would start high school, and my sister would start high school or middle school, and then you know with my parents working, it just wouldn't- it would be hard for all of us to go. I mean and plus it's way expensive, at that time it wasn't that bad, but right now it's like [whistling sound]. I mean you have to have, for four of us to go now, you would have to have just six, seven thousand dollars for tickets. [phone vibrating]

AF: Okay, so you said in 2007 you went back as a family?

AO: Yeah, we went back as a family, um, and then uh we visited everything we wanted to. Um, but then I went, 2011, I went by myself. I did a, a teach and travel program through an org- organization called uh Federation of Balkan American As- Assoc- Association, excuse me. Uh, it's out of New Jersey, um and what they did is they take uh back students um from America, and we were teaching like the summer schools of um, you know, schools throughout Turkey, English. Um, so I did that but- so I went in 2011, and then I took a like, I think it was 10 or 14 day uh trip to Bosnia. Um, and there I learned that my dad's, um from his uh dad's side, only aunt passed away. I landed in Monday and she passed away Sunday night. Um, so that was hard, that was a hard trip for me because, you know, that was the only family we had left from my grandfather's side, uh but I was glad I was there, you know, to help my uh aunt, my dad's sister. And, you know, everyone there kind of liked to see everyone. Um, I really didn't do a lot of fun things then because, you know, you were mourning, but um, I got to see them and that's the best part, I mean spending time with them. Um, and then I just hate coming back. I mean not coming back here, but saying bye to them.

AF: Saying goodbye, right.

AO: Uh it's- you never know if you're gonna see them again, and that's the hard part. And um I went back last year as well, 2014 I did the same thing. I did the teach-

AF: The teaching and-

AO: Mhmm, teach and travel, uh excuse me, but I went to Bosnia before I did the teach and travel. And this time I was only there for ten days, and this time I made sure I explored,

because even though we lived in Bosnia, it's just like here, you know, in the United States, um there's some people that never leave Kentucky-

AF: Mhmm.

AO: -the Kentucky border, you know? And same thing for us over there, like I went to uh different parts of Bosnia, like I went to Mostar, uh it's the- where the old bridge is, and you will hear stories how, you know, um beginning of the war they would put up old tires to protect the old bridge because it was so ancient and it was so something that they want to, you know, save-

AF: Yeah.

AO: -but, you know, these- the Serbian Army was uh bombing that, and they wanted it gone. Um-

AF: Did it get destroyed?

AO: No it did not get destroyed.

AF: Wow.

AO: Mhmm. Um, and then I went to um- where else did I go? Was a little small village where they had like a um, a religious center there, but they have this um, you know Bosnia is very rich is uh resources, and we, we talked about that last night, why they wanted the land that we were in, uh but no one's using it. Um, it's very rich in resources and we went to this beautiful, it w- it was like a waterfall, I mean it's just beautiful, and there's a lot of tourists in Bosnia now, I mean Americans, Australians, Canadians, all over Europe, a lot, and it's called Buna [in Bosnian]. Um, there is a little house there, there is restaurants around it, I mean it's beautiful, it's awesome. Um, and I just went like to Sarajevo, and Bascarsija, Bascarsija is the little uh old town. Um, you go in there and you have little shops, and then there's mosques and um some schools there, um it's very traditional, it's a very traditional old time village. Um, I went back to Srebrenica, of course.

AF: Yeah.

AO: I went back to um our house, because my dad, he started building uh, you know we talked, last night we talked about uh transferring all the peop- all the land to their name, so it took about two years for my father to transfer all the land to his name.

[00:05:06]

AF: From his father?

AO: From his great-

AF: -or his grandfather?

AO: Yeah, grandfather. Um-

AF: I'm sorry, grandfather or great grandfather?

AO: Grandfather.

AF: Grandfather.

AO: Yeah, which he was- he can't even remember him. So it was like my grandma had to give permission for this and this, and I mean, they had to like have witnesses, it was a two year process, and of course it cost money too. So it took my dad to go like two years in,

in a row other there to finish that. And then in 2011, we started building it, uh building our house there. Um, and I mean it's built now, um we're just doing, you know, little things inside like the tiles, and the hardwood flooring, and actually they just got done with that. My parents were just in Bosnia this summer, for seven weeks, they went for seven weeks, and um they finished all of that. So right now it's just like the outside detail. Um-

AF: So that will be a place where your family can go, when you go to Bosnia you can live there.

AO: Yes, yes, mhmm. So and, and that will remind me of my grandfather, everyday I was there, just last year, and I cannot sleep in that house and I don't know, I, I mean it's probably still- I think it's more of happiness than it is what I'm afraid of, you know? It's just I can't believe that we're in our house, in our own land, you know after everything we lived through. And I remember po- posting a um some- I post the picture on Facebook and I said, you know, "Finally on my own land." I mean I can't even describe the feeling.

AF: Yeah.

AO: I mean it's just, it's awesome. You know, to- that- I'm like, why- how can you not or how can you forget where you come from? And then how can you forget everything that you were given, you know like the America opportunity. Like, I mean, none, none of us would be able to repay everything, you know, we receive here. The education, the freedom, I mean freedom of speech, freedom of religion, I mean even now there are people living in that part of Bosnia and kids are being discriminated against because they're forcing Serbian language and not Bosnian language onto them. In the middle of Bosnia-

AF: Yeah.

AO: You know, like where in America can you see that happening? If your child doesn't want to learn something you just sign the form and that's it, no one can force him to do that. This is psychological torture. Uh, so it was an amazing feeling, but I know I'm- I stayed there for two nights and I, [clapping sound] I couldn't sleep of excitement. I was just like, "I just want-" because I wanted to wake up like at five o'clock in the morning, go out to my balcony and drink coffee, and just listen to Drina, Drina is the huge river um in Bosnia. And that's, I mean, it's an awesome river but um Serbs took advantage of it, they would kill our civil- you know, kill our people in that, in Drina too. As much as it, as much as there is good stories of Drina, there is so much bad in there too, because they said that uh it's the river of Bosnian Muslim blood. Um, there were so many dead bodies um found, but there are so many destroyed because, I mean the water took it. But I wanted to get out, out in my balcony and just listen, just listen to the nature, and you know, think of the good memories in Srebrenica, of me and my grandfather playing in front of that house that wasn't our's. Uh, you know, think of the good, you know? Like being able to go back to America and knowing that I'll have a job, I'll have a home to come to, and then at any time I can just come back here and visit. You know, come back to Bosnia and visit that place, and I'll have a, you know, like my father said, "I'm not just building this for

myself," you know? Even now, as I'm getting married, you know, he said, "Tomorrow you can go to Bosnia with your husband and you'll have, you'll have somewhere to go," you know? And it's awesome, I mean living out in the villa- I think now we, we mourn for living the village life than the city life, because we're all so tired of this, you know? But we're forced, I feel like we're forced to do this now, um because we're just in that system, you know?

AF: Well I know we're out of time-

AO: Yes.

AF: -and I think that's a beautiful way to end.

AO: Yeah, yeah.

AF: So thank you so much.

AO: No problem, thank you.

[00:09:37 - end track]