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## Interview with Denis Hodzic (FA 1137)

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**Project name:** Bosnia Project

**Field ID and name:** KFP2015IYB\_0007\_BBsr0001

**Interviewee:** Denis Hodzic

**Interviewer/Recordist:** Brent Bjorkman

**Date:** November 6, 2015

**Location:** Western Kentucky University Campus, WKYU NPR Studios, Bowling Green, KY

**Others Present:** n/a

**Equipment used:** Marantz recorder

**Microphone:**

**Recording Format:** WAV file

**Recorded Tracks in Session:** 1

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**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: Means pause. Solid means go.

DH: [laughs]

BB: Alright, this is Brent Bjorkman, uh I am here with Denis Hodzic. We are starting take two of uh an interview that we had been starting with our, for our, our Bosnian culture project.

Um, and we're just gonna talk to Denis about his life, growing up in um Bowling Green, and just kind of see where that goes from there. Um, it is November 6th, 2015, uh here on the campus of Western Kentucky University and in the studios today, recording at WKYU-NPR. So thanks for meeting with me today.

DH: Thank you for having me.

BB: Um, so it's kind of like, you know, we did this one before but it didn't really work out because something was wrong with the file but um, you know tell me a little bit about yourself and um, you know, how you, you and, and your family came to Bowling Green, um, you know tell me your journey a little bit.

DH: Well, my journey as the journey of most of the people my age, um is it begins from the conflict, the war that came from, that was happening in the mid-nineties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Um, my mother had to flee the country when she was I think twenty-one, and she fled and the only way that she ended up- I was born in Germany, first and foremost, but the way that she ended up in Germany was through a series of underground tunnels, and uh just pretty much getting smuggled from country to country, through um Austria and Switzerland, and then Croatia. Um, and that's of course how she got to Germany. But uh, once she got there the German government granted her asylum as a refugee. Um, one of the stipulation that eventually when the war ended that she would have to go back to Bosnia, um, and that kind of changed after the war ended, but basically as for I was born, I was born in Germany, in a little town um about an hour and a half outside of Munich. And um, lived there for about four years before I, before the war ended and my mother and I immigrated to um United States. And the way that that happened was basically she entered what was called at the time, I'm guessing it w- it- the way that she put it to me was it was called a lottery, and you pretty much put your information into the system and um you get put through this series of algorithms or whatnot, and then drawn at random um to see if you can come to the United States. There was other countries accepting refugees at the time too, Australia, Sweden, um Denmark, Finland, Norway, um Germany even kept some, of course Turkey kept a lot of people, and then, but United States was the main, main um country that was accepting refugees. And she ended up winning the asylum, and we got pushed to Bowling Green, Kentucky, we've been here ever since.

BB: Okay, okay. What year would that have been in?

DH: 1999. Yeah, we've been- we- first, first day in the United States was April 19, 1999. So I was three months, no I was, excuse me, I was three years and eleven months old at the time, but I still remember the flight.

BB: Tell me, tell me-

DH: The flights.

BB: -about that flight because it must've been very...it was such a change, so when that's ever happened to me before it's the sensory things, or like the nuanced little things maybe.

DH: Mhmm.

BB: Can you tell me like what this new world was like for you?

DH: Yeah, and I, I mean of course you know the human mind is a miraculous thing, you know? But, I mean, the fact that I still even remember some of the scenes is, is, is astonishing to me. I don't remember what I was feeling at the time, um I do just remember snapshots, so just visual images. Um, but I do remember a couple of scenes. As we were leaving our apartment, I was sitting in the car and she, my mother was saying goodbye to her family,

her sisters and um, distant family. And I remember the flight across the Atlantic, um, mostly during the nighttime though because it was, I think it was through Northwest Airlines. At the time it was Northwest Airlines and I don't know what- they're obviously not a company anymore, but um, basically the, the, the, the snapshots that I remember were just- and like I said there was barely any emotion that I can remember attached to it because it was such a young age, but I do remember like watching the, one of the movies, they had the big TVs in the front for each cabin and the movie that was on that was playing was um *Perfect Storm* with George Clooney, and I think Matt Damon, but I, I know for sure George Clooney was in that. Um, I remember seeing and I remember having to stand up over the seat to, to you know, to see if my mom was sleeping, we were sitting on the right side of the plane. Um, I remember landing, going through Customs I think at JFK, and then from JFK to Dulles, Dulles to BNA-Nashville. And then we had an airport shuttle take, uh take us an hour drive from Nashville um to our one-bedroom apartment, which was granted to us, which the Inter- the International Refugee Center in Bowling Green had helped set up for us as part of the relocation program for, um, refugees. [00:05:08] And uh, the first night at that apartment, you know we had, my mom brought two suitcases, and there was pretty much nothing else, you know? There was so many possessions that she had to leave behind in Germany, most- I think one suitcase was full of pictures, my mom was a really big fan of pictures. But um, first night there was a mattress on the floor, uncovered, um no bed sheets, no nothing. The apartment was pretty much unfurnished, and that was our first night. And it was just a really uh awkward and hard, tough time for the first couple of years. Of course the first couple of months and leading into the first year, it was the hardest because my mother did not know English, I did not know English, and um, it's just really tough when you don't have anyone, you know? She was, at the time, twenty-eight? She was twenty-four when she had me, so yeah, she was twenty-eight at the time. Um, it's just really, really hard, you know? You, you don't c- you don't know the language, you don't have anybody, you don't know- you left everything you know behind, all your comfort, it's, it's gone, and you have to start from zero. Your education means nothing because you're coming from what was recognized as a Third World country, so whatever education you finished, even if it was college, tough luck. Um, so it was, it was just really struggling. We didn't have a car, she, of course she couldn't get her license, so everywhere we went we had to um take a taxi or take, you know, call a cab to pick us up to go to the laundry mat and do the laundry, or go to Wal-Mart and get groceries, or to walk to school and walk back, and there was just a lot of um, a lot of struggles initially, but pushed through. And uh I just remember a lot of um seeing, she, she would always try to be strong, but I, I remember seeing and I remember hearing sometimes that, you know, it, it was, it was hard on her for sure, but um here we are.

BB: Did she, did she hide her emotions trying to be strong for you? Or how- ?

DH: Yeah.

BB: Yeah.

DH: Yeah, for sure. She found solace in music, she brought, she brought some cassettes over, the old, the old cassette, front and back ones, um and some CDs. And uh she found, she, she, she found her release kind of within some of the songs, some of the like ballads if you will, um of some of the famous singers from Yugo- ex-Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia. So, that's, that's what she was, but, you know, I, I remember, I remember that just being a really tough time, and I never let on that I knew, but I was always aware of it, and I would always, you- I mean for me too personally, I was um, I wasn't in the best situation in terms of schooling, so I wasn't the best student at the time, uh the, you know, there's, there's trends with low ec- socioeconomic status, you know? Just some of the, some of the exposures that you have.

BB: So where were, where was the first apartment, if I can just break in. Whe- was in a- explain that a little bit I guess.

DH: It was on, it was here in Bowling Green, um in the city school district, so my school district was Dishman-McGinnis, and it was on Glen Lily Road. And um, actually interesting that something I didn't mention last time, the uh, the one-bedroom apartment that we were in is attached to a g- what is still attached to this day and was at that time of course to a bigger building, um same color everything like that, same side laminate, all that kind of stuff, um and one of my mother's best friends that she ever met lived right next door to us. They weren't best friends in Bosnia, but they met and then they kind of just clicked and-

BB: Was she a Bosnian?

DH: Yes.

BB: Uh huh.

DH: Yes. And then her son was my first friend in the United States and we're still friends to this day. Um, and that's kind of, you know, how we, how we um helped cope with each I guess, like she helped my mom cope and my mom helped her cope, and my friend and I, his name is Nihad, he's at- he's uh electrical engineering right now on Western's campus, but uh we kind of had each other, you know? So there was always kind of something to help with that process. But we lived on Glen Lily Road, and the schooling I just remember was really, not the best for my situation as bar- being- barely being able to speak the language. And then you know, as an immigrant, I don't remember any kind of, you know, physical, verbal abuse or anything like that, I do remember a lot of people being very understanding and being very welcoming, and that was a very good thing. It really- that's, you know when somebody, as a parent, I mean obviously I don't know, but just rationalizing it from my point of view, as a parent, you know, seeing someone take care of your child and help you out through a hard time for you, you know, that kind of is uplifting. So um, that really helped her out of course, and there's people that took care of me while she was going to work, you know? She had to work at Fruit of the Loom on the assembly plant here in town before she became the translator, before she learned English, at the Health Department then she was the translator for all the Bosnian people that came in through town and that's how they all met her, you know? This- because she was-

BB: What was her na- what's her name again?

DH: When you pronounce it in Bosnian it's [pronounces "Saw deta"] but in English people say Sidato or um, you know, the- with the maybe more of a country accent like "Sidayda" or something like that, but Sadeta is how you spell it, but um she's a, she's my rock, that's for sure. [00:10:13] A lot, a lot of good stuff, a lot of, a lot of really tough stuff, but a lot of good stuff.

BB: So like when you and Nihad were hanging out [clears throat] was it like, like thinking about childhood games, or like were there, did you guys like hang out together? Or were you like included in stuff? Or maybe, maybe it was a situation where a neighborhood they didn't have pickup games of this soccer or baseball or anything.

DH: Yeah, no, it wasn't very much of um, that I remember, sports, it was just us being inside because we didn't really know many people. Um, like I said, my, my family wasn't here, her- um Nihad and his family they didn't come until a little bit later, and um except for his mom of course. It was just mainly us, we mostly just stayed inside and if we went outside it wasn't um, it, oh of course, you know, we enjoyed the outdoors and I'm not, not saying that we didn't go outside and play sports and stuff, but it was just mostly us, it wasn't other people that we knew. We the, the couple that were across from us, that lived across from my mom. They, my mom is actually still friends with them to this day, because it's kind of like that Bosnian principle like "Know your neighbor," and that kind, you know, "be friendly to your neighbor," and you know see if they, you know, "I scratch your back, you scratch mine" or whatever. And we actually knew them, and they ended up moving to Arizona but they still keep in contact, so...but I mean it, it was, it was us for a while until, you know, you started getting into school and you start meeting people, and I mean still at that age, five to six year old, you're still not fully, of course mentally, shaped with the understanding that you and I have today, so there's still a lot of stuff that you're missing. Maybe you don't, you know, realize some stuffs going on that you would have realized at this age, but I mean for the most part, I don't know if I'm repressing it, like maybe that's a, that's a job for a psychiatrist to figure out, but um I don't remember any kind of negative experiences towards me or Nihad. Of course I'm not him, I can't, you know, fully testify, but whenever we were together we, you know, we just stayed inside and played with whatever we had, like toys or I don't know, video- PlayStation, so that was, that was it when we were inside together, and then outside, whatever we could find.

BB: So you kind of alluded to a little bit, I think we may have talked a little bit about it, so you must have come here and you were, you were probably categorized as kindergarten? Or was it a first grade when you first came? Because you said at first you weren't a good student, and that's an interesting story how what kind of influences in the school, was it a good school, was it easy compared to Germany? Or was it-

DH: I don't remember much of my German education, but in Germany you start going to school when you're three and you go to kindergarten for three years. Um, that's the way it was when I was there. So I'd already had schooling in Germany, but of course you come to this

country and the education system is different, naturally. So they started me out in kindergarten, and I just pretty much had to repeat, once I learned the language it was easier, um but repeat some of the stuff I had done, and then they just pushed me through first, second grade, etcetera, etcetera. I was at Dishman-McGinnis um from kindergarten through second grade. And actually before kindergarten, my mom through it would be beneficial for me to attend uh the pre-school program through Community Action Head Start, um and I did that for I don't know, it was, might have been a couple of months. And then when enrollment happened I just finished a full year of um the kindergarten, and then everything was smooth after that. But I mean the situation the kids, you know the people always around, the just having, having those kind of barricades in place, I can, just from my own experience, I can tell that there is a uh there are barriers in place when it comes to kids that come from low socioeconomic status for sure, because, you know, sometimes the schools in those areas maybe don't get as much funding, or they don't have as, you know, the necessary supplies, they don't attract the best teachers because of the areas that they're in, and that was one of the issues I felt like at the time, you know? It- Bowling Green Independent School District as a *district* do- as a whole does well, you know? And when compared to the rest of the school districts in Kentucky, but you know, some of their, some of their star schools, like Potter Gray and McNeil of course, in nicer neighborhoods, um and then, you know, your demographics are a lot different too. So, that's just the way it was until we ended up moving for my third grade year to TC Cherry School District, which is, which was at the time actually one of the best schools in the state I think, if I remember correct. It was a National Blue Ribbon School in 2003, through Bush's program. Um, and the administration and the teachers there *really* straightened me out. I mean, there's-

BB: How so?

DH: Discipline. Um, and of course at home helped too, once you started getting a, a stronger foundation, an anchor and everything like that. My step-dad, well he's not really my step- they ne- my mom and my step-dad never married, but it was just kind of a uh, kind of like in Bosnian culture if you live together, you're together. So, you know, it- they never actually signed the marriage license, but um they've been together now for, coming up on thirteen years, and he was in the military for a while, um the National Guard and, and active infantry in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the Persian Gulf War, um, and he helped for sure. [00:15:06] Um, but then Susan McCloud, the principal at TC Cherry, she helped a lot, and then my teachers at TC Cherry helped a lot too. They just really got me on, on path. And it was actually interesting um-

BB: Do you have a story? A particular story or something that really made you go, "I gotta get on board or, or-"? Were you, were you a trouble maker or what do you mean?

DH: When I was at Dishman-McGinnis I was, I was, I was getting in fights, uh I uh was not a good students in terms of my work, um, I was not, I just was, you know your, your stereotypical like problem child. So one of the things that helped snap me into- the, the story that comes to my mind is after we got out of the school, out of the- into a different

school district, um there was initially you know, it wasn't like an overnight thing, it takes a little bit to transition from those old habits and to inform better ones, right? But I had gotten in trouble at TC Cherry my third grade year, and my mother decided enough was enough and she pulled out, I don't know, I don't know what made her decide to do this but it's just the story that comes to my mind. She pulled me out of school one day, out of um, I'm sorry not out of school, out of the um, after school program that was run by Big Brothers Big Sisters, I think. Or was that Community Action? I forgot. But it was basically she pulled me out of that, and she left work early one night, and um just kind of quiet the entire time and it was, it was getting darker, it was um, so I'm guessing it was right around the same time of year. I forget what time of year it was, but it was getting really dark really early, so one night she just kind of drove around for a little bit and um when, obviously when we left Dishman-McGinnis we had left that old one bedroom apartment behind. So she took me back to that, that one bedroom apartment, and we just kind of were there for a little bit. We still knew the people that were living around there, so we knew the uh, the um, the, the plumber that lived behind us that helped us with like some household issues and whatnot, went to go see him, said "hi," whatnot. Left, and she took me from there, and that's when we started started talking just a little bit. I was sitting, it was um, it was in a Pontiac Sunfire, just one of those little, I don't know little trivia snidbits but uh she drove from Glen Lily Road and she took me to the richest neighborhood that she knew, that she could find in Bowling Green. And she said, "You know what schooling does? This is where we were, this is where we are now, and this is where you have the potential to be. You choose." And from that moment on it stuck with me, and that in, and, in combination with the, the, the administration at TC Cherry, and some home, some home discipline, really just one hundred and eighty degrees. Um, they put me in advanced everything. They, they- I could have skipped a couple of grades if I wanted to but we didn't decide to push it, they just had me re-do the work and it was okay. Um, I was in Project Challenge in, in my fifth grade year. I was doing algebra in sixth grade. I was doing pre-algebra fifth grade, algebra sixth grade, which, I mean, in terms of cognitive development, that's really, really early, and then geometry seventh grade. Um it was just really, really early, so I mean in terms of math and science and everything, it just, that, that's the story that sticks with me. Um, it's, it's probably one of the most powerful stories I have, and it's something so simple, but it was just, it, it was just a little nuances like about her, because my mom was a very affectionate woman, um, and it's not that she wasn't being affectionate towards me, it's that she was being intentionally withdrawn. So as we were driving around, I don't remember if it was raining or not but I do remember it was dark, and she was just being, you know, kind of quiet. Radio wasn't on or anything like that, Pontiac Sunfire was a five-speed, manual, so she was, you know, shifting gears and whatnot, I remember that. Um, I remember kind of looking out through the windows and, you know, "What's going on?" You know? "What's- what did I do now?"

BB: She acting different.



DH: Yeah, she's acting different. And then just going to that- just having that visual of imagery of thinking, "Do I really want this life? Do I really want to end up like this? Do I-" You know, she's- I remember her saying some stuff like, you know, "Do you want to end up like as a- do you want to collect trash for the rest of your life? Or, you know, you want to clean, you want to be a janitor for the rest of your life? You want to clean hotels for the rest of your life?" And just kind of thinking, "No," and you know, she said, "This is where we are now, and look how hard we've had to work to get here, right? And this is where we used to be, the way that you're going you'll end up back here." And then she took me to that rich neighborhood, the really huge houses, ex- extravagant, you know, acres of space, whatever Bentley in the driveway, I don't know, and that was like, "Okay." "This is- " and then "this is where you have the potential to be," so.

BB: Sacrificing, and teaching and sacrificing, and seeing your potential and maybe helping you live the American Dream more?

[00:20:02]

DH: Yeah. Yeah, pretty much, I mean that's, that's what I like to think. To some people the American dream is, is dead, to some people it's well and alive, it just depends on their situation, you know everything is conditional. You can't always anticipate the conditions, but it is, it is conditional, so you just have to make the most of it, and I've, you know, it's, it's been a long road but, you know, sixteen years later, my goodness gracious, it'll be seventeen April 19th of this upcoming new year. But uh, we're here, and I'd like to say that, I think it's safe to say that, she's made it, I'm still on that, you know, my, my school work. To my- in my mind, I'm nothing, you know, compared to my mother. She- the stuff that that woman's had to endure and, and, and has in the face of adversity just, you know, knocked it back. She could write a book about it, and maybe not as non fiction, like you know, "Who's this woman? Who would want to read about her?" But, you know, if you turned it into a fiction novel and change a couple things, people could buy it. That's, that's how good her story is, and that's her, that's, it's like how moving her story is, it's um something. And of course everybody's story is unique, we all have our own individual stories, but um, there's no kind of cookie cutter sob story when it comes to her, it's, it's just really unique, which is, I don't know, it's why I say that my mother is my rock, because without her I'd be nothing.

BB: Yeah you said that she's your best friend and, and so do you talk like, is it a negotiation thing or is it that you're this old now so you don't have to be...what am I trying to say? She, uh she's your parent. She's-

DH: Yes.

BB: -she's your, she's that. Has it changed though since you've become more of a man? And, and um where you can play around a little bit more but yet she always has that...?

DH: Yeah, "Get on your stuff," that's right, when especially when I was in high school, uh she when I, when I was in high, when I was in high school she was more tight um when it came to my grades because she knew what was at stake, in terms of scholarships and whatnot. So

she would always ride me for, for the, for the smallest little thing, like I had a my, my German teacher, and of course German came naturally to me because it was my first language, but my German teacher in high school was and still is the, she's still there and she's a very, very smart woman, I mean she gradu- she has a PhD from Yale in German, and her dissertation is like on ancient Germanic languages, and she can read like German from a thousand years ago. She's at, teaching at Bowling Green High School. Um, she, she would grade on these little five point scales, and if you missed one little thing that cuts you for, that cuts you from a five out of five to a four out of five, and that's an eighty percent. And you miss one little thing every single little time, that eighty- those eighty percents add up really quickly, and God forbid you miss a second one because that's a sixty percent. And my mom would see that, she'd be like, "Three out of five? That's a sixty percent, that's not good." And I'm like, "You don't know what- " you know what I'm saying? So it's just little nitpicky stuff like that, but she was really tight on me in high school, and she's a little, you know, she's a little more laid back because now it's, it's kind of my turn, you know? It was on me to take the responsibility in high school as well, but even more so now because, you know, I earn my scholarship and it's up to me to keep it. So I have to keep it and it's up to me to do what I want to do to get the grades and get the scores, and the s- the electives and everything that I need to take my next step. So she still kind of keeps a wary eye like, "Okay, hey maybe you're kind of going out a little bit too much lately, how about school? Did you forget your studies? Blah, blah, blah." But um, she, she has mellowed out a little bit, and I'm glad that she- every single time she asked me about it I never took it as nagging, I always understood that she, that that's her way of showing that she cares about me. Every parent has, you know, a duty to make sure that their, to me at least, to make sure that their child ends up being the best version of themselves that they can be, and that's honestly the only thing that I see that's she's done, is trying to make sure that everything, all the work that she's put into me, doesn't go away for like one stupid night, or, you know, like one bad thing or like a bad exam or something like that. So, she's um, she's not a slave driver, she's not a tiger mom, but she knows, she knows how to stay like, "Okay, school first. You- okay that's nice you have friends and a social life and everything, that's nice, I understand you need that, but school first."

BB: Yeah.

DH: So-

BB: [clears throat] You think over time and depending on how things go, you said she's got quite a story, you think maybe she'll share parts of her life with me maybe If we talk to her?

DH: Maybe. That's the thing is she's uh, she doesn't acknowledge how, how different her story is and she doesn't, just from what I can tell at least, she just lives her life on kind of a day-to-day basis, just kind of worrying about herself, myself, my brother, and um and our situation. Um, maybe, if she was so inclined to, it's just I would have to, you know, see if she'd be comfortable with everything going on, recording for the archives and everything like that for the-

BB: Right.

DH: -for the project. [00:24:58] But um, I mean she's told me of course, and uh of course it's- there's got to be s- and I don't doubt it, there's got to be stuff that she hasn't told me, so I don't know how much she would disclose. I'm sure she wouldn't mind talking about it, the same way, you know, that somebody that's lost a parent to the war wouldn't mind talking about it, that never knew that parent, but had they known that parent maybe it was a tougher situation. Um, but I'd, you know, I'd have to see, for sure I mean I'll, I'll ask her.

BB: And I think that we all filter things, depending on who we talk to, you know, or as intelligent people we're "okay I share this with you or I share this."

DH: Yeah.

BB: What are the things that, you know, you're, you're a son, and, and a very special son because of the situation, it's, again everybody has different situations. What kinds of things did she, would she continually talk to you about? Bos- I mean would she share things about Bosnia? Or, or did it all depend? Or would, or would she get, you know, would she think and then maybe she was a little, you know, feeling a little heartsick sometimes and she would share more? Where- what are the things that you feel comfortable sharing with me that she, she is-

DH: She wouldn't talk to me about it very much, it was kind of that dark period that she just not necessarily wanted to forget but wanted to um not focus on. She, she tried- her, her number one focus that I could tell was me. Um, so you know, she- everything- to me she has told me that like everything that she had done was for me, you know? Like leaving her family behind, coming to the United States, because in Germany it, it goes back thousands of year- a thousand years at least, but this idea of the Volk, the people. That you are the, you're the true people that belong to this state and everyone else is an auslander, or outlander. That idea is something that's still alive in Germany today, even after, you know, what those, Hitler and the nazis have been, you know, removed from the equation. That idea still exists, especially now that Turkish immigrants that are living in Germany, population of eighty-million people I think, Turkish people might be ten or fifteen million, they're kind of really looked down on as second class citizens, and I'm not Turkish, but boy do I look like I am. So my mom kind of, she told me that she kind of factored that into her decision making process, saying "Your quality of life here wouldn't have been the best. You know, your opportunities might not have been the best compared to the United States," where originally it was called the melting pot theory, well not it's more of a salad bowl-melting pot intermediate, you know kind of like a stew, where it rit- ri- you know, retains some of its original parts, but there's that little melting pot piece too. Um, but she was like, "You know, this is, this is a better situation for us." You know, it takes a lot of courage and a lot of, a lot of balls, for lack of a better term, to get up, leave everything you know behind, leave all your comfort with a three year old child, not knowing the language, leave your family, everything, to go to a country you don't know. Even if it is America, even if you do have that idealistic, opportunistic idea of the American dream and what not, it's still, it, it's,

it takes a lot of courage. Um, and that's definitely something that she had, for sure. Um, and so I mean, uh, I don't know sometimes it's uh, it's weird to think about that when it came to my mother and I she didn't really talk too much about Bosnia, because she, not necessarily because she wanted to forget about it, but just because she was focused on me more or less. Um, I did- we did, we had talked about it, you know? She told me what was going on, she didn't tell me the nitty-gritty details. For her, for, what was for her part, she didn't really have to experience much of that because she got out before it got really bad, which was really fortunate on her part, but she had stories that she told me much later, you know stories about her sister, my aunt that lives in Texas, stuff that she had to go through in, in Srebrenica and Tuzla, um with the UN. And she told me stories about, just in general what was going on, of course. And my grandpa, when he came to the United States the first time he told me his story, and that was something that, it was just kind of like, "Wow," opened my eyes. Um, and of course the older you get, the more and more you find out, the more and more that your parents are comfortable with you handling in terms of the nitty-gritty details. You don't really want to tell a six year old kid that, you know, thousands and hundreds of thousands of people being slaughtered for almost no reason, or a very crappy reason. So, um, I mean I- what I did pick up, I picked up from other people, you know? Because of course there's always gonna be exposure in some way, even if your mom doesn't- even my mom doesn't talk about it to me, I- my friends will talk about it that they heard about this from one of their parents, and then you have the internet, and then you have social media, or just media in general. Um, and then by word of mouth from other people's' parents that I would overhear them talking about, and then you'd ask a couple questions and then they'd mention something to you as an aside, so I would pick up enough but I didn't really start learning about it a lot until I got into my adolescence, so...

[00:30:03]

BB: I mean that's a, safety latch or whatever, I mean you don't give a six year old kid-

DH: Yeah.

BB: Any kid the, you know?

DH: Yeah. [sniffles]

BB: Did you ever visit Bosnia?

DH: Yes. In 2001, my mom took me out of school, out of Dishman, and we were gone I think for a full semester. And we went to Germany and we went to Bosnia, and that's, that what she told me was kind of like her way of confirming that her initial beliefs about you know, the life in Eu- in Europe versus the life in United States, kind of confirming that that was right. Um, we visited Bosnia in 2001 and, you know, saw my grandparents and everything, saw my cousins, and aunts and uncles, or actually, aunts and yeah, my uncles were not in Bosnia at the time. And that's when she made the decision like, "Okay, we're gonna stay in the United States. It's gonna be where we're gonna live, and then we're gonna continue our life there." Um, then I had- the second time that I have, and of course before then, I had been before then when I was a baby and you know, much, much younger, but of course I

don't remember that. Um, you know, last time I have gone was in 2013. I was there for three weeks, I went with my uncle that lives in Bowling Green, and his wife and her daughter, I went with them. It was kind of like my graduation present. So I went with them, we spent three weeks there and then half a week in Germany, and then ended up coming back to the States. And it was actually really cool, it was uh, we, we took a road trip of the entire county pretty much. So landed in Sarajevo, stayed there for a couple days, and then ended up going to Tuzla. From Tuzla we went to, we didn't stay in Tuzla we just kind of passed through initially, um-

BB: Rented a car or drove a car?

DH: Yeah, my uncle rented a car, a little Chevy Aveo, [slight laugh] and of course everything in Europe is m- is um, transmission is manual but he, he found one that was automatic because he was just more comfortable. And the driving, oh my goodness, it's crazy, like going through the mountains and stuff like that, it's really narrow and the drivers themselves are ridiculous, like they don't obey the traffic laws and nobody cares, it- they just go. Um, we went to Tuzla and then we went to the city that my family is from, which is Bratunac, and the selo, or the village whereas the selo is the Bosnian word, is uh Hranča and that's where we stayed for a couple of days and then we went around, you know, Srebrenica, Potocari, Boljevići [uncertain about this town name], which is where my grandmother and her family, her side of the family is from, saw some family over there. And then we sp- after a couple days there, we went up to the- along the eastern coast, along the Drina and up to Zvornik and everything like that, then back over to Tuzla. Then from Tuzla we went to go see my uncle's wife's family, the first time that they had been back, like their family, their land, and their home that had been destroyed, all that stuff, first time that they had been back since the war ended, and so twenty years, yeah. And it was very emotional, very powerful, and that's Kotor Varoš, which is kind of north, middle north part of Bosnia. And then from there we went more to the western portion, which was uh Banja Luka, which is the second largest city in Bosnia, and Prijedor, Sanski Most, which is- I have family in Sanski Most it's closer to the northwest portion of Bosnia. And then back down through Jajce and Zenica, um Travnik, Vitez, those cities, those are like the heart of Bosnia right there, so the- they when in the '92, '92- '92 through '95 the Serbs never really, and the Croats really never um advanced that far in. There are Serbs and Croats of course that live that far in, um and there's, you know, in tw- in 2013 I saw the Croatian flag flying on the street within Vitez, which is if you- it's almost literally in the center of Bosnia, which is the center of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it's not Republika Srpska, it's in the center and you have a Cr- you have Croatian flags on the street, because there's so many Croats that live there, you know? And you try to tear them down, God forbid but you put a Bosnian flag up and they tear it down, you can't say anything, you know? It's just that kind of stuff that still exists, some tensions there, of course. But um from there then back to Sarajevo, we spent there, and then we went down to Mostar. And Mostar is actually a very, very old Ottoman city, um it's been around for awhile, and just a lot of really, really

nice scene- scenic stuff there. it's a UN um Heritage Site, I think, one of the fifty or a hundred UN Her- Heritage Sites in Europe. And then back up to Sarajevo and then we went to Germany. But pretty much like if I had to draw a map, it's like starting from Sarajevo and then circling around to the north pers- portion and coming down and back to the, back to Sarajevo, going south towards Mostar and then coming back up and then flying to Germany. So we didn't really go s- like the southern, southern portion of Bosnia or the northwestern portion of Bosnia, but we pretty much saw the entire county in three weeks.

[00:34:59]

BB: Do you think they had a certain thing that they wanted- was it, was it for your purposes? Uh, I mean was it for you and the- and your I guess it would be your cousin?

DH: Yeah it's, it's actually, it's actually kind of odd to think about. She's not, she's not actually my cousin by blood, but how can you have a cousin through marriage? Is that possible? My- it's my, my uncle's wife, she- daughter, but it's her daughter from a previous marriage, so it's not my uncle's-

BB: It's not your blood-

DH: Right.

BB: -relative.

DH: But we grew up as like me kind of being her big brother figure, so we're not actually related but kind of through association and marriage we are, so I guess you can call her my cousin, yeah? I th-

BB: Depends on how you explain-

DH: -I think that makes sense.

BB: Depends on how-

DH: Oh yeah she-

BB: It's really about your feeling about her, so in my mind she is your cousin.

DH: Yeah she's my family for sure, that's no, that's no doubt about it at all, and we, we're really close today too, so.

BB: Where did you stay? Where, where were you staying when you were dr- going- stopping all of these places?

DH: In, in, in Sarajevo my, my uncle's wife, her sister owns an apartment compl- an apartment complex? Or an apartment, just an apartment in general, in Sarajevo, in um Stup, which is one of the like, I don't know how to describe St- there's different portions of Sarajevo that there I guess you call it a suburb, i'm not exactly sure what it- how would you describe it, but it's in Stup, it's really close to the airport, Butmir SSJ. Um, that's where we stayed in Sarajevo. In Tuzla, pretty much we went to Tuzla because my uncle's step-daughter has a, has some kind of family there so she wanted to go see them. We stayed at a hotel, the Hotel Tuzla. Um, and then we went to my grandpa's house, stayed there while we in Bratunac and around Srebrenica and Potocari, that's where we stayed with my grandfather. And then as we were driving from, from there we, we didn't really stay at those other cities up, up the coast, um uh, I'm sorry, not up the coast, up the border of Bosnia. We just kind of drove

through them and saw them, but um we over to Kotor Varoš um I don't remember staying there either. Bosnia is a small country, so you can, you can pretty much drive, if you wake up at 5:00 AM and drive through like I'd say to midnight, you could go from the further, the far east to the far west. So we, we went, I think it was all in one day, it was from, up from Bratunac over to, and then over from Tuzla to Kotor Varoš, and over from Kotor Varoš to um Sanski Most, and at Sanski Most my uncle's wife, her parents own a house there that they had been building because we parents for some reason had land out there, I'm not sure. Um, and we stayed in there home, and then, you know, we went around and saw my family that lived around us and whatnot that are over there. And then as we traveled we decided to go back to Sarajevo, we didn't really stay in uh any of the other cities, we just stopped and kind of saw some of the sites, you know some of the old um castles, and just some of the scenes, like some of the waterfalls and whatnot. Um, headed back to Sarajevo and once again the apartment, and then in Mostar we just spent the day there and then back up to Sarajevo. So it was, it was nice not having to pay for uh for housing, that's for sure, but um it was pretty expensive if I have to be honest, it was an expensive trip. It was-

BB: Your grandfather still there?

DH: -well worth it though. He's still there. Yeah, he's still there. He-

BB: Is he proud of- I mean he must be happy you're, you've chosen to do what you're doing. Was there ever anything like he would like you to come back?

DH: Not that I know of, I- he is, he has pictures of all of us, you know? In his, in his home, and of course that's he living- that he's living in now is not the home that my mother and my uncles and her sisters grew up in, it's completely- it was destroyed and they put up a new home when we came back to Bosnia after the war. But um, he's got all of our pictures and he's proud of all of us, I mean he, he understands the situation, I think maybe in his heart he kind of wished that we'd eventually all come back, but that's just I don't know, that's not the way that our families want to do stuff, so um we bring him to the United States every other year because may he- my grandmother passed away in 2005 so he's kind of by himself, but he has his brother that lives next door to him, and he has, his brother has a wife and everything like that and the, the village that my family is from pretty much everybody that lives there is all- is somehow related to you, so you have a lot of family and stuff. He's, he's um, he, he's got, you know, farm work and stuff that he can do, so he's tries to do that kind of stuff whenever he can. And then we bring him here, and when he comes here he's bored because, you know, what can you do other than watch Bosnian TV? We have to order the, the box from him to get the Bosnian channels. And my mom works during the day, so you can't really entertain him except stick him in front of the TV and give him stuff to eat. And same thing with my uncle, you know he works from one-thirty I think to ten o'clock at night, so maybe a little bit in the morning okay? And my family down in Texas, this is the same thing, everybody works during the day, kids are going to school, so I mean what can

you do? He likes that open just where he, where he's from, where he's familiar with, you know? And he likes doing what he does, so um-

[00:40:06]

BB: Is he a farmer?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, they, they- still is, yeah. Don't really have the land to d-, do- not that we don't have the land, it's just the terrain isn't very favorable for livestock, it's more of, you know, crops and stuff like like. There are some sheep that they have and some lamb, um but you know, bovine creatures, no. No, no cows, no horses, no none of that that I know of, it's just very, very rugged terrain kind of, so. Not like Rockies rugged, but maybe a variation of Appalachian rugged, so...he's still there. He- I, I, in my mind I don't think he wants to leave because the, the graves of our relatives and everything like that. Like his wife, his- my grandmother is of course buried there, right next to his house. So, um, or not right next to it, but within the vicinity, within a hundred meters maybe. So, they actually told me stories when we, in 2013 when we came back, so in front of my I guess he's my great uncle, his brother, in front of my grandfather- in grandfather's brother's house, there's a field, and overlooking, or right across from that field there's a mountain, and right over that mountain is Srebrenica. So we were walking one day kind of and they were showing me around, telling me "this is our cousin from this and this. Like this is how we're related, blah, blah, blah." And we get to this field right in front of um his brother's house, and they tell me a story when they came back, the first time to the village, to pick up the pieces and start over. That there was a artillery piece that the Serbians put up right there, on that, in that field, and that shot across the hill and bombarded Ser- uh Srebrenica. And they said when they came back, that hill was covered in artillery shells, covered, to the point where they had to spend weeks moving it. Moving all the shells out of there, and they did it by hand, there was no horses [slight laugh] or anything like that to help. So that's just one of the powerful stories I remember because in Sarajevo if you go to Baščaršija which is the main kind of attraction from Sarajevo that I, that I know of, um they have um these craftsmen that take old artillery shells and old artill- alt- artillery pieces, bullets, you know, thirty-eight caliber, forty, fifty caliber, um small nine-mili- just rounds that were, that had the shells um-

BB: Casings.

DH: -discarded. The casing yeah, the casings that were discarded. And some of the huge artillery shells, they take them and they do work with them, they en- they make them ornate, as like tourist attraction kind of like-

BB: Like engraved?

DH: Engraved with whatever, engraved with nice and decorations or something like that. You can- they turn them into pens, you know? They have this old uh fifty-cal pen that I got, that I brought back and it was, it's a fully functioning pen, but the casing is from a fifty-caliber bullet. So they, they've turned them, you know, into kind of um souvenirs, if you will. Um, and that's what kind of came to my mind, it was always like well I had never really asked what happened to those things, but every single time I think about, you know, [00:43:07]



and, and Bosnia, that's one of the things that pops out in my mind was just having that visual imagery. It, it was like a slanted kind of hill and then over there of course you have the mountain, so it's just picturing having an artillery piece, which is obviously probably from, you know, when Serbia was allied with Russia, so it was probably a Russian artillery piece, something like that. It probably had the red star on the side of it or something, shooting over repeatedly and having those shells pop out, pop out, pop out, and getting so many shells that it, that the field was full, just that visual imagery blows my mind. That, that's one of the stories that stuck with me, for sure from that trip. It was a great trip, I- it was expensive but I'd do it all over again, if in a- if, if I could-

BB: Did they help pay for it? Like did they-

DH: My, my grandfather?

BB: You- your, your, no your un- your uncle?

DH: Oh no, no. My mom paid for it, it was my graduation present.

BB: Oh it was from her-

DH: Yeah, but-

BB: -but your, your uncle-

DH: He would-

BB: -was the one who took you?

DH: Yes.

BB: Yes.

DH: Exactly, yeah. They took me, my mom she couldn't get the time off work, so it was just my uncle and his, you know, his wife and her daughter and myself, so there was four of us, and it was a great time and I enjoyed every bit of it. I wish, some people have been fortunate enough to go, you know to go every year, or to go back every other year, I've been twice that I can remember, and the first time I barely remember, but you know this, this last experience I remember very, very well. It's actually really funny too because when I talk to some of the like elders from our, from our part, our neck of the woods, um I can describe the landscape and I can describe the roads, and then what, and what road takes you where as if I had lived there, and they, they point that out to, you know? It's like when I described to you at our last meeting about that church that the grandma had the- where they build the church over the mass grave. How I described to you that like the road goes to the left toward Zvornik and it goes up and toward Glogova, Bratunac and, and toward the coast, or toward uh the River Drina. When I, I had been there once, and I came back and you know was talking about that and some of the older guys are looking at me like, "[speaks in Bosnian]" which is like, "you, you remember that really, really well and you've only been there once. We're surprised." [slight laugh] So, um-

BB: What a great way to connect with [clears throat]-

DH: Yeah.

BB: -with that one ni- that one experience as a, an adult, I mean a young adult-

DH: Mhmm.

BB: -um being able to articulate that to them and then having that connection when you come back and-

DH: Exactly, because they don't expect that you, you know? They expect you to just remember what, okay maybe some of the sites, so you remember the old bridge at Mostar and, you know, the divers because this really, I think it's um ninety or a hundred meters or something they jump, and they're, they're really famous for that what Mos- one of the things that Mostar is famous for is their divers. Or um maybe the castle at, at Vitez which is in the center of Bosnia, it's just really old medieval castle that's still there. Maybe some of, maybe the food? Expect maybe to remember the food, or maybe you remember some of the attractions from Sarajevo like Baščaršija, or um, or the huge olympic stadium that we have, or uh I don't know, they don't expect you to remember the landscape, that's for sure. And in fact that I came back and remembered the landscape, you know can tell them the roads and everything, and I wasn't even the one that was driving, it was my uncle that was driving. [slight laugh] They were just really surprised, but um I don't know, I guess, you know, that's the way the brain works, you remember stuff you care about I guess.

BB: It's a good quality to have actually.

DH: Yeah.

BB: Yeah, to be able to visualize and, and then to articulate it back.

DH: Mhmm.

BB: So how do you identify yourself? You know we talked about you growing up, like ethnic or just growing up here and, and as you get more intimate with whoever it is and you start to share more about yourself, um I don't know it come up, early in a, a relationship? Or the, I mean you know, a friendship or-

DH: Mhmm.

BB: -getting to know somebody. Um you know, do you see yourself as- do you- how do I self identify?

DH: I, I definitely identify as a Bosnian-American, without a doubt. America is my home, that's- it's very easy for me to say that, I don't have to choke those words back. This country has been very good to my mom, and it's been very good to me as a result, and the opportunity that it has provided is, it's one of the embodiments of the American dream, in my opinion. You know maybe to some people it's not, but in my opinion it is. Um, so I fully consider myself American, I have American citizenship, I've had it for a long time. Um, I know it's maybe, you know, maybe some people would scoff at me or scold me because of it, but just because of the schooling that I've been through and the curriculum that I've been through, I know more about the history of this country than I do that of Bosnia. Um, I mean it's understandable of course too, because as my mom was getting her naturalization, doing her naturalization tests, um with- to get naturalized, um I was helping her because I had already known all the content from school. So, um I do definitely identify myself as American, and I mean there's a couple of other countries in the world if I'm being super critical that I could picture myself perhaps living in, but um America to me always will hold a very, very

special, very, very, very special place in my heart because of the stuff that we've been through. Um, but at the same time I was raised as a Bosnian, you know? All my best friends, they're all from the same county, some of them are from close to where my family is from, you know? Um, that's the culture that I was raised with, that's the food that I ate growing up, it's the music that I listen to, that I *listened* to. Um, it's, it's the dance that I, well I'm not very good at the dance, I'm actually pretty bad, I'm not a good dancer, but um it's the dance that I witnessed or participated in, it's, it's all that. The embodiment of our culture, it's the religion that's behind our, behind the very idea of the genocides that occurred in Bosnia that I, that I identify with. I'm estranged from my father's side of the family for, you know, that's just the way it happened, it wasn't for anything bad it's just, you know, he, as an illegal immigrant living in Germany, he, he couldn't stay. So one- by the time they caught up to him he had to flee the country, and then we went to the west and he went to the east. It's just kind of he fell apart. While my mom always told me good stories about him, it's just um, you know, he's out of- he's not unnecessarily totally out of the picture, but he's out of sight, out of mind type of thing. So you, you know, somebody lives four thousand miles away from you, you kind of- it's kind of hard to maintain a relationship over fifteen years. But um, you know I've seen him, but still, you know, his, his side of the family is estranged and he's pretty much estranged, that's the way I was raised. I was raised Bosnian, but at the same time of course I am an American, so. Anyone that knows me knows that I, more than the next person probably, I know a lot about how our infrastructure, political structure, um history for sure, the language itself. you know? Of course with you I'm speaking on a more of a kind relaxed basis uh from my standpoint, but you know when you get in front of, I don't know someone that you need to be articulate, you know? In a, and, and very, very, very formal with, then you know the way I speak changes. [00:50:06] Um, definitely, definitely, definitely identify myself as a Bosnian-American without a doubt. I do, I do take pride in both counties, and of course there's a lot of apathy that I have on var- on various levels too because I see the w- I see how it is on a lot of spectrums and I'm just like, "Why?" But that's just the way that the world is and you kind of have to live with it. Um-

BB: You mean general apathy? Uh, uh, a-

DH: Towards certain situations like, I don't know something that sticks out in my mind right now, something I saw last night on social media, of course we just had the Govern- the Governor was elected for Kentucky, right? There was two point two million registered voters in this coun- in this, in this state, we had sixteen percent of the electorate show up to vote, that is just some kind of general apathy right there, as if my vote even would have counted. That kind of ideology is probably like, "Yeah, that's why we had sixteen percent show up," but at the same time, I do know that even if I had shown up it wouldn't have made a difference. So I mean, just kind of that towards some of our political stuff, and then for some of our uh our policies, and just the way that people are, because my, part of the way that my mother raised me is to have very strong moral foundation and that's something

that a lot of people are missing, especially my age. Um, the need to conform is a very, it's, it's, it's ever present to a lot of people, to me, I think it's a bunch of bull. People, you know, people talk about peer pressure, I think it's a bunch of bull. Of course there is peer pressure, but if you don't want to do something you don't do it, it's as simple as that. If the person that you're with or the people that you're with don't respect your beliefs than you're wrong the rou- you're around the wrong people, you know? Another thing that's, you know it's kind of a blessing but a curse at the same time is this stuff, technology.

BB: Your cell phone, smart phone.

DH: Smart phones, technology in general, as it evolves, as it becomes better, it helps us, of course, but at the same time it makes us lazier, right? I, I ran into a student today that couldn't multiply, had to get her phone out to multiply, as if she didn't do multiplication tables in elementary and middle school, but she forgot what seven times eight was. Come one, you know? She, she- it's not- and she had the iPhone, she swiped the app up and did seven- "Oh yeah, that's right." Come on! You know what I'm saying? It's just some of the stuff I'm just thinking like, and then the whole, I don't know, like from my perspective social media, and this is just me ranting so I'm sorry, but it's like social media, I understand how it can be used as a tool for information and whatnot, but I see some of the stuff that people my age do on social media and what they post and what they put, and that's- okay there's negative stuff that they put on there, but even some of the stuff that i don't understand like what's the need to post a picture of yourself everyday? You think somebody has forgotten how you looked? Or if they can't look through the old pictures? Okay maybe every other couple of weeks, or if you've got some progress at the gym, or if you have a baby or something like that, but you're taking selfies every day from different angles to make yourself look better to get millions or hundred or thousands or whatever of likes to feel better about yourself, validation from people you don't even know? As if you should care about what other people don't think, think of don't think about you. I don't know, it's just, this is just me going off on tangents but it's some of that general stuff, some of societal stuff that I kind of feel apathetic towards, um but you know that's everywhere. That's every county, every society has issues, no matter where you go. People like to badmouth United States that live here sometimes, especially if you come from a different country, they think about like, "Oh, it wouldn't have happened like this, or it wouldn't have been like that," oh shut up, just shut up. You have no idea what you're talking about, just, just shut your mouth and continue on your path. Um, this in, in my opinion it's just, it's just complaining, it's just noise and then complaining, so.

BB: You sound like me.

DH: [laughs]

BB: You got an old soul, man. You're an old man.

DH: [laughs] I've actually been told that, yeah. I have actually been told that, many times.

BB: I think that's why we get along probably, it just- I, I think the more I, I don't normally comment on when I'm doing oral interview but uh, just getting to know you and, and all

our friends that are in our group, our cohort, [clear throat] when I wake up in the morning now I'm always quite thankful, I've always been pretty thankful, you forget after a while that the selfie thing, you know it's just like how self-absorbed can you be? Or self-absorbed with things that are still quite special and, and people have a quite, quite a nice life here and, and I can appreciate learning from other people's hardships. Maybe it's not their hardships but they have been articulating their family's hardships or their people's hardships to me, and just thinking, you know, how can I help to tell this story? How can I help to make that better? And how can I...and then also like think, "Oh my God, I'm very grateful of where I am."

[00:55:02]

DH: Yeah.

BB: And having to be-

DH: Yeah.

BB: -be able to be here with you and, and talk. Anyway, that's enough of that.

DH: For sure, I feel like a lot of people take their situation for granted because they don't know better. You know you're born into a certain set of circumstances and you're fortunate to be born in that circumstance, you know? If born and being born into this country you have a much better chance of leading a successful life on whatever you define success as than being born in, you know the south Sudan, Darfur, Kenya, um Cambodia, Burma, Myanmar, whatever they want to call it, Bosnia, you know? People, people take these kind of things for granted because they don't look on it you know from, from that kind of perspective. It's kind of that self-absorbed, centralistic, individualistic mentality, um that to be honest, it's, it's kind of pushed on people at a young age, you know? It's, it's, it's the difference in culture, like a g- I mean a good example from my point of view, in Bosnian culture you- the second you turn eighteen you're not pushed out the door, you know? It's like you stay until you get married, until you're ready to live your life. I know a lot of kids that have been pushed out of the door by their parents at eighteen, "there you go, get on." You know what I'm saying? It's just, it's that kind of some of the culture differences that I can, that I see and people take their help for granted all the time, it's the number one thing I feel like people take for granted. They don't understand how [snaps] quick it is, you know? We believe, and especially people my age, that we're indestructible, that we're indestructible, and it's just not accurate at all. And I see, and I mean Homecoming week, I have, I've seen students, I've seen students come to class so hungover or still drunk, what's the purpose, you know what I'm saying? You can have fun without liquor, or if you can learn how to control it, you know what I'm saying? I, it's just, I'm not gonna [slight laugh] start this, but um it's just the stuff like that, you know? Every society has pluses and minuses, but without a doubt United States of America is a- it's a good country to live in. It's probably in terms of freedoms and you know people say, "freedom isn't free, etcetera, etcetera," but we have a lot of freedom in this country. We have a lot of freedom to say what we want to say. There's that whole, you know, politically correct thing and don't hurt somebody's feeling

like okay, that's another side of the issue, but um we have a lot of freedom in this country. Sure you can complain about healthcare and this, and this, and that, and Canada is doing this, or Germany's got this, or Sweden's got this, Denmark's got free education, whatever. You can complain, you can nitpick all the want- all you want, but it's a great place to live in my opinion. It just depends on what part you live in of course, but there's uh without a doubt. It, it- here's the sad part, just kind of off on an aside here, if I had the choice between having, you know, the means to live anywhere I wanted to in this country or anywhere I wanted to in Bosnia, I would still pick this country, because I know the situation in Bosnia, how it is now, which is what kind of the stuff we talked about last meeting, and compared to our situation in this country and some of the stuff that we have to deal with. I show documentation that says I'm a United States citizen I can go anywhere I want to except for North Korea, right? I show a Bosnia passport, cut that number in half, right? Or if I even have a Bosnian passport, you know how do I get that Bosnian passport? I, I got my United States passport because my mom naturalized and I was underage, I didn't have to do anything but live here.

BB: You were under eighteen or?

DH: I was under eighteen, yeah, and that was the law at the time. If you were under a certain age then you don't have to take the test to naturalize, you just get, you know, the naturalization from your parent. And that's what happened, it was so easy. Of course it was, you know for my mom it was a little bit different because she didn't have the formal education for- from the humanities side of, you know the history and the, the government side of it that they put on those tests. But um I'd already had it, so for me it was like, "Yeah, I mean if I even have to take the test, I'll crush it." But go over to that, go over to Bosnia and you have to deal with some of the stuff that we talked about last time, I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to subject myself to that because I know what's waiting for me, and I know what's wait- I know what I have here and I know what I would lose going over there, and that's sad. See because I think that the diaspora was about, I don't know, a million people, if that, and maybe three hundred thousand were killed during the war total. I know that there's a hundred thousand, I think is the official agreed upon number, I- and this is not one hundred percent accurate, I don't know, but I think officially agreed upon in terms of, not casualties of war, in terms of innocents that were killed. In terms of the mass killings and stuff, I think it's a hundred thousand. Um, and of course Srebrenica is the only one that's classified as genocide by the United Nations. Or not even the United Nation, I'm sorry, they said no because of Russia, um by um the International Crime Tribunal for former Yugoslavia and for pretty much everyone around the world.

BB: And the Hague.

DH: And the Hague of course, yes. Um, NATO, but UN, thank you Russia. {slight laugh} Um, I wouldn't, I wouldn't want to subject myself to that, I wouldn't want to subject my family to that, because and, and yes, you know, you need, you know our, our relatives that are still there are fighting a very difficult fight, you know it's psychological warfare, you know?

They've stopped the, the physical, you know the ammunition shooting, but it's very much a psychological war that's been going on still for these last twenty year and it has not stopped, and it will not stop.

[01:00:21]

BB: What kind of ways, like marginalaz- marginalization and things like this? Or?

DH: Yeah, um just the ways that you're looked upon, you know? My mom, my mom made a- my mom and my uncle that was with me when we went back to Bratunac in uh 2003, or 2013 I'm sorry, made a very interesting point, they said, "We walked these streets, and we grew up here and this was our home, you know? This is our city, we, we- this was our place. And now I don't feel at home, I feel like I'm a stranger in my own place because I turn and everything I see are people that I know that want me dead." How can you, how can you go back to that? Why would you want to go back to that? And that's that kind of mentality that like yes, that's what they, that's what they wanted to instill. Those aggressors, those criminals, that's what they wanted to do, and those that come back and that have the courage, that have the want to go back, you're still gonna fight that war on a daily basis. Fifty-two percent of the GDP is put towards government, it's all just layers of BS, it's all just bureaucracy and red tape that you can't get through anything. It's all just- I wouldn't want to do it. I wouldn't do it. That's why my mom didn't do it, she knew what was coming. She didn't know to what extent, but she knew it was coming, so this is why we're here.

BB: Well what would you like to come of this project? You know, when we first started meeting informally and thinking about [clear throat] before we started interviewing, thinking about how to, you know, make this uh an important validation, teaching tool, celebrating tool maybe, about culture, you spoke a little bit about it would be nice to be able to break down barriers in certain ways.

DH: Yes.

BB: And I don't know if you wanted to maybe go on that a little bit because um maybe these are initial interviews and, and, and a lot of what we talk about here might guide how we do other interviews, and maybe you'll lead me to some of your friends or family, or I'd like to just hear a little bit about that because that was very important to me, um maybe get that on the record.

DH: Some of the things that I'd like to get out of this project would be a full on exposition of our community and our culture to the community of Bowling Green, and then that's what we start out with but maybe on a bigger scale eventually. Because, you know you can't set your goals a little too high and then get a little unrealistic, so obviously this is the place where we live and this a place where we can affect the most, initially. Um, there have been some misperceptions about our community and our background that I have come across. Um one of the unfortunate things, and this is, this is kind of bleeding in toward one of those things that I see, is when you have parents that come from a war-torn nation and they come to this country and they bust their butts to do what they can to give their kids what they need, and whatever that means, whatever means necessary, they do it. Kid gets what they need, the go

through school, they have all the opportunity, they were raised here, they have the language, they know the language, they have the means, and they squash away their potential because they are falling for this black hole of a s- of, of rhetoric that's being pushed for people that are my age, that you have to sexualize yourself, that you to be cool you have to, you know, you have to drink or this, and this, and that, you lose your moral foundation. And you have a very stubborn Bosnian male population that's, and that's a stereotype but I will be very honest with you, most of our males are pretty stubborn in a lot of ways, it's just that Bosnian pride. It's- there's some jokes about it within our community, amongst ourselves too. You have that kind of- some of these people that, you know, that go out there, and I mean there's, there's people, it's not just Bosnians, it's everyone, and there's all these- there's people from every single background that do this, but for some reason when you're seen as an outsider, the things that you do wrong are more scrutinized than what you do, and they forget about what you do right, you know? So they have those people that go out there and, you know, maybe they start some fights, or you know, they're not very polite, or this, and this, and that, and you have these negative experiences that remain. So I've seen and I've heard of these negative impressions, and it would just be a shame to like leave that negative impression to, to those people that I know of, and that's like a very small group, you know? And then on a bigger scale, that's just the Bosnian people, but of Islamism in, in, in general. Ninety-nine percent of the Bosnians that I know in this town are Muslim, okay? And all the stuff that the media pushes, I don't care what you watch, unless you watch C-SPAN or Al Jazeera, because obviously they're not going to push propaganda against Islam if it's Al Jazeera, but maybe BBC Global or, you know, The Daily Mail, um, The Guardian, this kind of stuff that, that are kind of less bias maybe, this rhetoric that's being pushed from the media bigotry, it's just bigotry, that's all it is.

[01:05:18] I mean obviously there's a couple of networks that I'm thinking of that are a little bit more on the side of bigotry uh than others, but that kind of stuff it's just instilled in the people's mind, people fear what they don't understand. And the only way that you can change it is by educating them. So if you show someone how we are, and what our culture is about, what kind of people we are, where we come from, maybe they'll be like, "you know what? They're not all that different from us, you know? They're just like us, they just come from a different place, speak a different language, and worship a different- wor- worship the *same God* but I didn't even know it was the same God." You know? That kind of stuff, I really just want to, me personally, help expunge that negative, if any, emotion or negative outlook towards our people and our religion if possible. Yeah we're kind of in the south, we're kind of in the Bible Belt, okay that's understandable, Bowling Green as a community has been very welcoming to, as have I told you before when we were building the mosques, the only thing that we ran into that that I know of, in terms of tr- in terms of like, "okay you shouldn't probably do this," is don't do the call to prayer out loud from the tower, the minaret, or on a loudspeaker because we don't allow church bells, so we have to be fair and say, "okay guys look, it's not oppression it's just, it's a city ordinance.



Maintaining the peace, you know?" Kind of separation of church and state type thing I guess. That's it, and that's- nobody really had a super huge objection to that. You go to Islamic country, Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, any of those countries, you're gonna hear the five calls of- the five daily calls to prayer, every single day. When you're in the United States it's a little bit different, you're not gonna hear that. You know maybe you go to the south, you hear some church bells, I, I don't know, but you know, that's one of the only things. So I mean Bowling Green as a community has been very, very welcoming and understanding but I feel like there is still some kind of a this perception of *my* people, especially my age group, that needs to be expunged, and the best way to do that is of course show people what you really are. That's not necessarily gonna help totally, because those people that are doing those things are, you know, are stagnant, they're not changing, they're gonna do what they want to do, but then you can see like, okay, yeah there's, it's just how it is. And that's what I want to kind of do, that's from my perspective. My biggest thing too is because people look at me they don't think Bosnian, they don't think Hispanic, they don't think Latina, they think, they think Turkish is the thing that I get the most. Um, they think in, in this population, because we have a lot of Saudi students on campus so they think, "Okay, maybe he's a Saudi student, or maybe he's from Pakistan or whatever," it's that perception that you just want to educate people to expel ignorance. That's my goal, that what I want to do. And of course you have to be careful with what your source is, because you don't want to educate them incorrectly or educate them in a biased way, so you give them a neutral, middle of the road point of view and you let them make their opinion. And if that's their opinion, then it's their opinion. It's a shame if it's, you know, the wrong opinion, but everyone has their own perspective so you just have to live with it. That's what I want to do, that's what I want to get out of. And of course, you know, you know for Western, you- International- "leading university with international reach," how much more international, you know, can you be? Well you have these people that have been living here since '95, since some before that, you know? They've contributed to the community, they've gone through your system of education, they've gone through and some of them are coming back to your system of education, getting masters degrees and getting PhDs, going and getting MDs, why not recognize them and understand who they are? That's, that's, that's what I want to do. I think that our goals kind of align, me and you personally, um but then the people in our working group as well. You know chronicling the stories that got us here, and showing people what, what we actually went through, and maybe, you know, once you know where we come from, maybe you can understand a reason why we do things a certain way or why we are the way we are. Um, but yeah. I just went off on like twenty tangents. [slight laugh]

BB: It all came back to the same place through.

DH: Yep.

BB: It was good, I mean I look forward to thinking about how we can accomplish some of these things, how we can set some goals over the next couple years, and how can we share

something maybe like we're in this NPR studio, maybe we can take some of this audio and create something, a couple nice little tight packages where we can share some of the initial voices, and we can share with people what we're doing, we're- our movement over time as a project anyway.

DH: Right.

[01:09:59]

BB: Maybe that's one facet. Um, I would like to be able to break down some barriers, talking about the one God idea, you know we view it differently.

DH: Oh yeah.

BB: I think visits to uh sites, worship sites-

DH: These- yeah, the fir- for sure, for sure, uh that's a very, very big thing, and that's something that I've actually talked, and Western is very good, some of the professors on Western's campus are good about going to the mosques. And I've actually taken a couple students, or a student specifically that I remember with Nermin together um that I remember off the top of my head when I was a freshman, and it was just really eye-opening experience for her because I had, at the time she had, she has unisex name, Riley, so I don't know why but my mind automatically taught- I tell you why, because I had a really good friend in high school that I played tark with, his name was Riley, so that's why I thought she was a guy, but what she was messaging me, she was asking you know, "how should I dress?" I was like, "You know you're, you're not going in here to pray, but just be respectful." And then she took that as like, "Okay." Then I saw her and I met her and I was like, "Oh, crap. You're a girl, I should've told you something different, you know?" So but she had kind of thought ahead and assumed, "Okay probably, you know out of respect, a head covering would probably be the better thing to do." And she was, you know, she was right. Um, but it's a very good thing because you, you get to that, you get to that level and you, and you see, you know, some of the, the architecture that's the same or very, very similar, and then you get to see the religious principles that are almost identical. The biggest dissension between Islam and Christianity is that in Islam Jesus is not the son of God. He is a prophet and he's a very important prophet, just like Mohammed, just like David, just like Adam, just like Noah, just like Abraham, just like whoever else you want to pick out. In our mind, in our religion, he's not the son of God, but we worship the same God. That's the biggest dissension, people don't even know that. They're like, "Well they worship this and this God. They worship Allah, that's something different," you know? It's the same thing, it's just we don't believe in the trinity, and the trinity is, you know, father, son, holy spirit, which is Catholicism, and we don't believe that Jesus was the son of God. So we don't worship Jesus, who in some people's mind is God, you know part of the trinity of course, that's the biggest difference. We don't worship Mohammed either, we worship the one God. And the Arabic translation of the word "Allah" to English is God. And you translate it to any other language, is also God. [slight laugh] So it's, it's just they're using a different language. You're not gonna use Latin characters with an Arabic language that uses Arabic calligraphy, it's the word that

means the almighty, the one, you know? So it's just that kind of stuff that's just so getting people to wrap their heads around that concept and then thinking , okay, well maybe it's span- it spurns some interest from there. Like, "Okay, well what else?" Like, "Oh, okay, there's this too." Like, "Oh really? Okay." You know what I'm say- it's just ignorance is uh I think it's a very big problem in this country, not just on religion, on a lot of issues. So, educate, educate, educate, educate.

BB: Anything else you want to talk about today? I, I am asking that as a serious question.

DH: Not that it comes to my head, not off the top of my head, no.

BB: Well we'll talk again, you know?

DH: Yeah. Um, not that I don't want to talk about anything, it's just I feel like I've said a lot and I don't really know where to go with it.

BB: Sure. I mean, you know, I think we can both digest a lot of things and you'll find the more and more we talk, or the more and more maybe we do interviews with others together, we are going to be like maybe writing a note to one another, or you may write me the next day and saying, "Oh I, I, we forgot to ask such and such."

DH: Yeah, yeah.

BB: And that's the wonder of, of this kind of work, so.

DH: Okay.

BB: Thank you very much.

DH: Thank you. Thank you for listening.

[01:14:05 End Track]