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Interview with Nermin Peimanovic (FA 1137)

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Western Kentucky University, mssfa@wku.edu

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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 <u>underline</u> indicates movie, magazine, newspaper, or book titles.
Names of interviewee and interviewer are abbreviated by first and last initial letters.
Time is recorded in time elapsed by the convention [hours:minutes:seconds].

[00:00:00]
BB: Okay, today is November 9th, 2015, and this is Brent Bjorkman. We are working on the Bosnian Project, along with Kentucky Folklife Program, Kentucky Museum, and I'm here with uh Nermin Peimanovic. Um, Nermin and several other people in the Bosnian community have been crucial to helping us, you know, learn more about them, learning more about their, their journeys here, uh intimate stuff about themselves and families, and uh, and life. And we hope to uh use this to go forward with a number of different projects and ways to share and validate uh Bosnian culture in Bowling Green. And these are some of the first, we're just getting to know um some of our uh principle colleagues that are a part of our team, um as we go forward. So, Nermin tell me a little bit about um, tell me a

little bit about yourself. Um, maybe say your name and uh, you know, where your family is from, and uh, you know, maybe it can be kind of linear. We've talked a little bit off, without the, the uh tape rolling, or without the digital recording rolling, you know maybe tell me just a little bit about um, you know, where you come from. And we can just start by talking about, you know, you know where you were born and, and those sorts of things.
NP: Okay. So uh my name is uh Nermin Peimanovic, uh I was born in eastern Bosnia, uh in a village called uh Milačevići, which is kind of on the border between Serbia and Bosnia. Um, I have uh a younger brother, uh that's uh three years younger than me. Um...
BB: Yeah.
NP: So kind of, kind of just gonna- that, that, that's short, so uh I lived uh there for four years, uh before war started, then moved to Srebrenica, a nearby town. Then from there, uh over to uh [00:02:12 uncertain of town name] which is kind of a part of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in that time it was held by uh Bosnian, um Bosnian military, Bosni- Bosnian Army. So um after that, I lived there for five- seven years, and uh, you know after my father came in nine- ninety five from Serbia to, to, to a place where we were living, uh we lived there for five more years, and in 2000, in 2000, uh actually October of 2000, we moved to the United States, in Bowling Green. So we um been here ever since, uh-
BB: How old were you?
NP: October 20th.
BB: What date?
NP: October 20th, 2000.
BB: So a little over fifteen years, yeah? How old were you when you came here then? I didn't do the- I wasn't adding very well there.
NP: So I was twelve when I come.
BB: That's- okay that's what I was thinking, you were twelve.
NP: So I was twelve when I can, and, you know, been here fifteen years, so I've been here more than, than, than in Bosnia, so.
BB: Yeah, so yeah. So those- so you were twelve, that, that's quite a time to come somewhere. I mean, you know? It's before you're a teenager, you're not a tiny kid anymore.
NP: Yep.
BB: Um, your brother is younger than you or older?
NP: Younger, uh three years younger.
BB: Okay. So what was that, do you remember, do remember the, the time when you first came to Bowling Green? Like the flight, and is it, is it kind of- I was talking to Denis I think, and he, he had these just like little like, and this was, this looked this certain way, or there was like looking out, or what I saw on the plane. Or do you- was it a, was it a big deal? Were you excited? Were you apprehensive? Were you scared and-
NP: So um-
BB: -did you already have family? Some- did you know people here or?

NP: No, we, we didn't, we have one kind of distant cousin that, that came here from uh, actually from Germany, um, as, as a refugee, so that's how we ended up in Bowling Green. So uh we learned that, you know, we're gonna go to United States about a month before we actually came here. So uh until then and it was in the process and you don't ever know if, if you, you know, gonna be okay to go or not, if you're gonna get, you know, your visa, and, and your, you know, I-94 uh legal resident card. So um, so a month before you learned you're gonna go to completely new country [slight laugh] um, you don't know the language, you don't know anybody, you, you just kind of, you're going somewhere that you don't know anything about. So when, when I came here, uh the only wor- [BB coughs] word that I knew was "thank you" in English language, that's it. [00:05:03] And uh during, you know, my, my schooling in Bosnia I learned German instead of English, so it's completely different, uh no English knowledge at all. Um, so that was my first time in a, in a plane um in my life, so.
BB: Wow.
NP: When we came here I came to uh Chicago O'Hare Airport, uh and actually first thing I saw it is Great Lakes, uh and quite ironic that, you know, after a few years, you know, in school here, I learned that those felt home, so I don't know what to say, I came to home, right, first. [slight laugh] So, um, but I remember in, in Chicago that, you know, we were waiting for a really long time uh because we did- we didn't know at all, it, it's difficult to find your baggage and, and so forth, so we were kind of let uh on, on a plane, last one to, to leave, and when they uh realized it, you know, the flight attendant realized um who were are and, you know, they tried to find a translator for us. Uh, I remember the uh, us carrying this uh, my, my dad carrying um white and blue bag that read uh like OSA [not sure what this is] or some organization, UN organization, that was actually part of uh getting us, you know, refugees into the United States. So by this bag you were recognized that you were a refugee, so um, you know when we got off the plane, they find us, uh finally found us a translator that could, you know, we could just see where we're going next, and from Chicago we flew uh, flew to Nashville. And uh same kind of story there, you know? We were left- last one to leave our place, and [sighs] you know, last one to uh, to depart from actually from the airport. So [sighs] that, that's how kind of we ended up in, in Bowling Green, you know? When we left the uh Nashville uh our cousin that was over here already came to pick us up, and you know, we came to Bowling Green, um, so.
BB: Who was on the flight? Your, your father and your brother?
NP: Yeah, my, my father, my mother, and my younger brother, so all four of us.
BB: And was it through, was there like a sponsorship thing? Or was it just that there was a refugee resettlement? Or did you- did some like family or anybody help, help with any pur- thing or, you know did you have- did, did- was there an apartment that was paid for for a period of time or?
NP: Well, this [sighs] um an- anybody who move to the United States uh from Bosnia and after the conflict, it was because we could not return to our previous home, or, or, you

know, that we lived in before the war, so everybody came as a refugee and the uh organization, I, I think it, it was through USAID or, or OSA, like some of the uh UN organizations, um, so, that, that we came here through, and it also went easier if you had anybody that you knew in the United States that would kind of sponsor you and say, you know, you're gonna live by, with them and they're gonna help you out, so it went easier that way. Um, and we were just lucky to have a cousin here before us. Um, so when we, when we came, uh, we actually for about ten days with our, with our cousin, in his apartment. Um, and after that we, we, you know, we found a, a apartment that I remember uh my dad and, you know, kind of family struggling because, and this, this, this is really common for anybody that came, in Bowling Green, in order to rent an apartment you had to have some credit history, right? And you didn't, uh it's, you know, your tenth day here, you don't know much, uh so, but how they, you know, they, they kind of, they, they uh, a man who was renting all those apartments, you know, kind of, we explained the situation so he knew what was going on. Um, so that's, that's how you kind of start up, um you do get some social help, but I remember after six months that uh the plane tickets that we actually, that was paid that was for to, to come here, it was kind of like a loan, right? So after six months, when my dad found a job, he had to repay that to, to uh, you know, I guess U.S. government. Um, you know so we started from absolute zero, [slight laugh] we actually, in order for us to came here, we had to borrow money from, you know, friends in, in Bosnia just to kind of, you know, pay for the, for the travel, or for the trip, um, besides uh plane tickets to get here. So, that's, that's how we started out, from absolute zero.
[00:10:29]
BB: Was it hard to find a job for him or for your moth- did she stay home and he was trying to find jobs? Or did your-
NP: Yeah, my, my dad found a job I think it was second months, second month that we were here, he, he found a job. And luckily at that time uh U.S. economy was doing really well, um in this area, uh so let's say so, with the help of refugee office here in town, uh he found a job and, and that didn't require them to speak English right away. Uh, so that's how he kind of started out, and he started up in uh Portland, Tennessee, in company called uh, I, I don't think it exists anymore, called Phalplex, [00:11:14 unsure of company name] uh they did uh wheels for, for chairs and so forth. So that's where he started. Um, [sighs] about six months after that, my mom started working too in the same place, and um, you know, they, they were doing callpooling- carpooling between him and, you know, a few other, a few of the other people, for months and months before we could afford to buy a car. And I remember our first car [laughs] was Buick Regal, and uh my dad bought it for I think for like a thousand bucks. Uh, so that, that was kind of the, the highest reward to get your transportation, because, you know, you couldn't go anywhere without, without a car at that time, and it still is the same way, so.
BB: Uh huh, was a big deal though.

NP: It was, it was. It, it, you know, af- after that, you know, if, if you needed to go in a store, um you had to call your friend who, who has a car to come me pick or "what time do you go where you're planning to go in the store so that we can do with you?" You know? So that that way you don't have to make two trips. So in the beginning it was, it was really, really difficult, and if, you know, for Bosnian community, if it didn't kind of help together and, and, and then when, when they first came, if everybody kind of helped newcomers or what- whoever came, um the whole kind of community was really small at that time, but everybody kind of started from the same point so people who were here, you know, first or before us, it would, they would always help with anything they could. Um, and, you know, besides that, refugee office was big, big help, you know, getting all of your, you know, utilities and kind of, you know, aids to, to your legal system here, so.
BB: Yeah. What was um, what was school like? I mean what time of ye- so you were in October so [NP clears throat] you got, you, you went probably right into the school system, or, or-
NP: Yes.
BB: -maybe you had a week or two to?
NP: I, I think I had, actually a week and a half. Uh, I started in the seventh grade, so-
BB: That's about right though, right? Twelve years? Uh, yeah.
NP: Yeah. Seventh grade, well it, it's, it was, it was a difficult adjustment. I mean for, for months I mean you would just sit in the class and you wouldn't know what's going on, you know? And luckily teachers at that time understood, you know, that we, or I actually don't know how to speak any English at all. Um, so they were really unders- they were really, they understood the situation and they were a- they, they were really glad to help in any ca- any way they can. Um, I, I, I know that my seventh grade, [sighs] I just kind of passed, because of my situation. Um and one thing to mention, uh in science class and, you know, I, I always look at this uh as, as a really difficult situation for me because uh being an electrical engineer now, you, you know you, you always toward science and math, and I remember my science class in seventh grade, I had an F, right? In math class, um, and this, this is really, it was u- something unique, and I think that teachers understood that, you know, there is a potential in students but it just the language barrier that's preventing, uh preventing us from, you know, being able to learn new material, and, and, you know, do the uh all the testing, and kind of everything that goes with schooling. [00:15:19] So in math class, uh it, it's of course, math is math, and it's universal, right? So we were doing this uh academic quizzes uh all of the time, to just kind of test before quizzes and before tests, it would do kind of simulating academic quiz, and basically what it is is to teach you to write up um a problem on the board and you had to solve it before you get it, your, your team would get a point, and I remember there was another Nermin uh and both of us were in the same team, and every time we would do, we would solve the uh problem first, and it was kind of unusual for teacher um to see that. So after the class she kind of stopped us, and there was one girl that was uh there before us that, you know, that could speak English

and, and translates Bosnian, so teacher said, "It's uh, you know I cannot believe, um and it's really difficult for me to understand how two, two of you guys that just came here without knowing any English can solve this faster than rest of the class, and, you know, and, and get it right." So it, it was, it was kind of um good to hear that from, from a teacher, and I always go back it's like, you know, there's always potential in student but the language barrier is what prevents it uh from, from reaching that potential sometimes.
BB: And you need to hear that at that time, you were probably like-
NP: Yes, yes.
BB: "Oh man, I mean how am gonna, how am I gonna make it in this-
NP: Yeah.
BB: -all these different subjects?" It's like, "Oh wait, I got this subject. I know math."
NP: Yeah.
BB: So how was the- was there tutorials that you had? Did you have some translations or did you have special, a special course just for you and other Bosnians, like uh, English as a Second Language? Uh or?
NP: Yes,-
BB: Yeah.
NP: -we, we had, we had English as a Second Language, I think I had it from like seventh grade to, to ninth, ninth grade. So what three, three, three and a half years, to four years.
BB: Was it within your regular class day?
NP: Yes, yes, it, it just a extra class that we had. Um, I think you had to have like some kind of electives or, or whatever you had at, at end of the class, and, you know, we, we didn't have, the way they were scheduled, it, it was always end of the day, um, so I, I, I didn't know how uh that time how they did schedules, uh how they made up the schedule, but it counted as a credit for something, for, for I guess Engl- English.
BB: Mhmm.
NP: Um, so we are every- we had that class every day, um, through four, three years.
BB: Mhmm. How did the kids treat you? The other classmates from around here? Did you-
NP: Uh.
BB: Or where did you go to school? What parts, uh were you living where you are? Like where you- what part of town did you grow up in?
NP: So I grew up in uh Rock Creek, which is kind of around the uh water park.
BB: Oh.
NP: Um, so that district is uh for Moss Middle School, so that's why I started in Moss Middle Schooler- school. Uh, you know [00:18:45 unclear] [sighs] it, it, it's, it was, it was different from, from, you know, kid to- everybody kind of treated you, treated uh treated you differently. Um, most of the time I mean, everybody was friendly, right? And everybody knew what was kind of going on, uh from time to time, you know kids being kids, you would, you would get some uh unusual and awkward situations, um but, you know, you just kind of learn to work on that, and just continue with, with, with your

business. Uh, I think most difficult is um when there's a lot of kids that didn't know that you don't speak English very well, so when they would ask you something and this, this, this happens to everybody who kind of starts to learn different languages, you could understand what they are asking or telling you, but you have a difficult time returning or answering them. So I had couple situations where I understood what they told me or what they asked me, but I could not really tell them what I wanted, so you, you get those looks that, you know, to those kids it's kind of, you know?
BB: Yeah.
[00:20:12]
NP: You know, "he doesn't know anything," you know? "He doesn't know how to speak or anything like that. He doesn't know anything. He's kind of," you know?
BB: "Come on! Come on!"
NP: Yeah.
BB: Yeah.
NP: So, but you kind of learn to overcome that and, you know, as, as time progresses, some kids that kind of give you those awkward looks before, once you learn English you became really good friends with them, so.
BB: Did you parents know any English? Or how did they progress, did they do okay?
NP: No, they didn't, they didn't know any, uh, any English at all. Um, I mean they, they started working at factory, uh that's there for jobs and um, you know, in factory once you learn one, one- how to do um do the type of work that they, that's acquired, or required of you, there's not much talking, it, it's kind of repetitive, everyday same, same stuff that you do.
BB: Oh.
NP: So they didn't really engage into learning English really fast, and it was up to myself and my brother to uh learn it and then help them out, translate whatever they can.
BB: That [clears throat] that's something when I make friends in communities like, like this one, you know it's like you have one foot in their, their world, and then you have this other foot in this other world, and you become this conduit, right? To, to assist them and to teach them, and probably from the very beginning, right?
NP: Yeah, and, and I could tell the most difficult uh part of that is [sighs] you know when, when they would, they would get sick, and you had to go to, you know, emergency room or just regular doctor, and, you know, they, they tell you what's wrong with them and, you know, what, what's going on, but you have difficult time translating everything to a doctor so he can understand exactly what's going on and give them proper treatment. And you were always afraid that whatever doctor says um you try to really hard to translate exactly what he said, because, you know, one missed translation, you know, leads different direction, and, you know, might give you, your parents uh, uh un-proper treatment, and then, you know, they get more sick. So, yo- you- [sighs] that was the most difficult

situation you can get into, you know? Translate for somebody, you know, in, in, in emergency room or, or in a, in a doctor's office.
BB: Mhmm. Did you, you know we've talked the last few weeks, couple months, when we've met about um, well now there's three mosques here and, you know? Just thinking about the support sy- you know, the support system, you've often times said too sometimes neighbors are almost more important than family, in a, you know, in a way in the communities, as you're growing, getting to be part of the community. Um, was, was that, you know, was it, if it's appropriate to ask I co- was it uh, is the mosque part of a social or a religious part of your family? Or was it, was it important or, um I know that you're involved in uh, on some of the councils um that are connected to um the mosque, so I, I'm just assu- assuming that, that you have a growing role in that, and, and, and has it always been that way for you and your family?
NP: Um, I, I recently uh joined the uh Board of Directors for Bosnian Islamic Center, but when we first started out here in, in 2000, um we had I'd say about fifty families that were here before us, um so how everything started up with, you know, you, you can look in history be- prior to 1991, um Bowling Green didn't have any mosques or Islamic centers at all, and it was the first families that came here, those fifty or so that came here, that started up gatherings, right? You know, in Bosnian culture religiousness plays a big role in how you're raised up and, you know, how you- how gro- how you, how you grow up and, you know, how you interact with people. So, that, that was one, one of the things that kind of brought us here, is, is because of, of a different religion that, you know, you were persecuted because you have different names, you believe in different things, or you had different religion and that's why you kind of came here. Um, so, when those families came, you know, they felt a need uh to get involved and, you know, continue expressing their religions, uh religion freely. [00:25:11] Um, so, the first, first they started in, in, in a house, right? Uh they, they started gathering in one house and, you know, over the weekend, you know, they would do nightly prayers mo- mostly, and over the weekend you would have this um children uh that would kind of, that were taught some small uh verses uh from, from Quran, and as, as, as community grew, um we rented out a place in Old Morgantown Road. Um, it, it was, well I think maybe hundred, maybe a hundred and fifty square foot, it, it, well it was more than that, but it, it, the place is still, still, still down, so it's, it's one of, one of the building in uh Old Morgantown Roads that we rent, and we were there for fi- no, four years. And by that time, it, you know, was 2004 already, and Bosnian community, community really grew from 2001 to 2004, really rapidly. Um, and at that time is when we, our community got our first Imam uh to come here from, from Bosnia. Um, and after that it kind of all uh started really catching up really seriously, and more, more people were involved in, in, in growing, uh growing the uh Is- Islamic commun- Bosnian Islamic community, and that, that around that time is when we met with uh Doug Tomorski [00:26:45 uncertain of this name], uh who kind of helped uh Bosnian community too, in a way that, you know, financially grew, that financially helped with the, with the building of

our first mosque. Um, so, [sighs] I think first one was open in 2006, from, from '04-'06 is where really a lot of [unclear] was happening. Um, so second mosque was built in 2012, and um, that's- the se- second mosque is, it is exclu- exclusively Bosnian-Americans, um while the other, the first mosque is kind of all Muslims that come in Bowling Green. Now it's not that, you know, this one is for the- these Mu- Bosnian-American Muslims, this one is for all Muslims, it's just kind of naturally how, how it falls, because uh Bosnians are, Bosnian Muslims are, are, are different, and, you know, [sighs] it, it's what they call European Muslims, really moderate European Muslims, right? And the religion, you know we practice, it's really uh liberal com- compared to some of the Middle Eastern countries. Uh, most similar, you know Bosnian how they practice is, is what, how, how it's at, how it's in Turkey, it, it's almost one-to-one comparison, you know?
BB: Oh, Turkish practice uh is very similar to your practice?
NP: Yeah, that, that's how we got actually Islamic Bosnians is through Ottoman Empire, and, and, you know, what today is Turkey, so it's uh, they brought really liberal form uh of, of Islam. Um, so that's why you kind of have um Bosnian Islamic Center and Islamic Center, is that Bosnians want to continue to have not just Islam, and you know, reli- uh religion, but we also want to integrate a lot different parts of our culture in, into that, and that's why it's not called just a mosque, it's Islamic Center, Bosnian Islamic Center. So it, it, it's not just there for prayer, it, it, it's for cultural, cultural gatherings, uh events, and so forth. Um, so, you know when, when you tour, uh, uh the islamic Center of Bosnia, Islamic Center, you'll see some differences, and the way we practice it's, it's different. I should not day different, it, it's just, different form, uh I should say. Um, so, you know, Bosnian-American community, as, as every other community there were, were people that came United States, wants it to hold intact that core culture, for as long as, as they can, so that, that's why we felt a need that we need to have a Center that's gonna be exclusively for Bosnian-American, uh and, you know, that's gonna kind of teach our culture and, and children, teach the Bosnian language, and teach them Bosnian culture, and try to continue to have that for, for next generations.
[00:30:27]
BB: That's great. Yeah. I was thinking about that [clear throat] Islamic, what's the name of it? Islamic Cultural Center? No.
NP: Uh, it's Islamic Center of Bowling Green and Bosnian Islamic Center of Bowling Green.
BB: Yeah. I was thinking of like Jewish, Jewish Community Center in Loui- it, it's much bigger, it's somewhat- there's sports activities, and there's book readings, and there's time to have fellowship, and it's, it's a multi-purpose-
NP: Right.
BB: -cultural-
NP: Right.
BB: -well, cultural place.

NP: Yeah, and that, that's, that's what we have planned for, for our, uh Bosnian Islamic Center is, right now we have, we are in plans, uh, to enter a multi-year project that's gonna encompass a lot of architecture and a lot of activities very centered uh around Bosnian culture.
BB: Lots of engineerings that gonna take place to create this thing too, I'm sure. So it's kind of phased?
NP: Yeah.
BB: You have kind of like different-
NP: Yes, yes, yes.
BB: -phases and, and we're at the beginning, kind of?
NP: Yeah, yeah. We are concept creating-
BB: Yep.
NP: -uh drawings, those things architects would say. And, you know, what's actually, um, interesting about Bosnian Islamic Center is the kids. You know, in 2000 we were all really teenagers, right? And we are the first ones that have kind of started going into, you know, sc- uh weekend school, and, and learning now all of the, so all of us are kind of in Board of Directors of Bosnian Islamic Center, and you know, now we have engineers, um you have um a lot of business owners, um a lot of folks that graduated as a- in business school, so all of us are kind of now together really educated, and, and leading, leading the Center. Um, when I mentioned one of the projects, our architect is, is Bosnian-American, you know, who has masters in architecture. And he's actually, what's really unique about him, is he's, he, he knows the culture, right? And he's bringing the architecture from Bosnia and incorporating it into the modern architecture here, so he's blending two together, so.
BB: You're the, you're the leaders now, man. You're stepping in, you're stepping into these new roles. Pretty exciting, you know? You've got your own family now, and a lots happened in fifteen years. [slight laugh]
NP: Yes, yeah. Well for, for me really a lot happened since uh 2010. I got married in 2010, my first son was born in 2012, my daughter is born in 2015, um, got a house, started a family, so last, really last five years have really accelerated uh for me. Um, and, you know, part of, part of the things is, as I say, you know, is look, is you look at the history in the United States, you know language starts to fade away after second, third generation, so what our parents wanted us to do, you know a younger generation that kind of got educated here, is to start taking over, so that we can be role models for even younger generation that, you know, that needs to kind of take this over after us. So, that's why you see in our Board of Directors, uh I think the oldest guy is like thirty-four years old, everybody, you know, is below that. So we're trying kind of to be role models for younger generations, that they can in a few, four or five, five years they can take over and continue, so.
BB: That's great. Did you, did your parents tell you stories? Did they keep, did they keep culture and old stuff, I mean did you talk about the past? When we were speaking informally, I mean you, you've shared a couple stories that I always wish I'd, I always feel

like I should have the tape running on your all the time because, we've talked about a possible art project, maybe we talk about things that were left there and going back and seeing things, and have you been, have you been back there, uh since uh coming here, or? Once?
[00:35:03]
NP: Yes. Uh, my first time I was, I was there in 2006, uh we went there for a month. You know you can call it a vacation but it's not really a, a, a vacation. It, it's, it's really time when you, when you go back and, you know, it's a first time that we went back to our uh house that we had before war, and as, as I mentioned day before, you know, in order to, for us to hide from shelling, constantly shelling, during the day, my, my dad dig up the like uh under the house, they have this um kind of just a big hole, and put in like a lot of, a lot of um cut trees, just kind of cover up. Um, and, you know, going back in 2006, there were still uh stuff that didn't burn up in, in, in that, our hiding place, and I found sandals from my brother, and, and my, myself. So it, it, it was kind of, you know, once you, once you are there, everything starts rolling back, um, for you, and, you know, all these old pictures starts coming up, and, you know, you're, you- even though I was only four years old when all of that happened, I still have like snippets of time that I really vividly remember uh what was going on, and, you know, later on I had, you know I learned what actually happened, but when I was there for first time uh, I still remember the road, I still remember the uh way which we moved to kind of hide from, you know, shelling, and, and, and, you know, all, all the bullets flying around, around us. Um, and actually in 2006, I purposely wanted to go in the same way uh to a certain, certain extent, and just kind of, you know, [sighs] not re-live, but kind of, just kind of bring old memories back to see, you know, how, how much you can- thankful I am now uh to survive all of that. So, it, it's uh, first time it's really difficult to go back in your old place and, and see, you know, this is where you are, actually this is where you're born. And, you know, this is, you know my parent's uh before the war, um my dad did a construction uh in the hydropower plant, and bridges, so with him having really good job at that time, they were really well off. Um, you know, he built his own house when he was twenty-two, and my mom was twenty-one at the time, and for that time and that age, um they were really well off. And when the war happened, everything is kind of, you know their whole dreams kind of disappeared. So watching my parents, uh, first time there, was really, really difficult, and really a deep breathe from my dad and my mom that, you know, this is where we started our dreams, but they got destr- destroyed.
BB: Wow. Nermid, did the whole family go to, return in 2006 to that trip?
NP: Yep.
BB: Wow. Your parents are still, uh what do they do now?
NP: Um, and you know as I mentioned uh before, my dad um worked in factory jobs, just odd jobs, for nine years. And after that, you know when the economy kind of went down in '08 and '09, that's when he uh got his CDL, and started driving trucks. Um, he opened his company, with my brother, in 2012, so that's what kinda he, he does now. Um, you know

they, they operate small, really small company through driving the truck, and my dad- my brother is kind of doing day-to-day operations. Um, my mom, um, I think she started stopped working at kind of the same time, because of economy, and really, you know, with me getting married and, I needed a babysitter [laughs] so-
BB: So she stopped being-
NP: -she should- she, yeah, she is, she is helping us-
BB: Childcare.
NP: -you know, baby- babysit our kids and so forth.
BB: Do they live near you?
NP: Yeah, yeah, just a couple streets over.
[00:39:56]
BB: So how did- in interviewing different people, some, some people are the first genera- some people weren't even bor- like Denis, born in Germany, you know? Very different, or maybe a little bit different, I don't know. Um, how do you identify yourself? Like today are you Bosnian-American, or I'm Bosnian, or what kind of, like the-
NP: Oh, you know, I, I've lived here more than I've lived in, in Bosnian, right? So, you know, you, you can't say, you know, you're just Bosnian anymore, you, you grew up here. Um, this is your, your new ho- your home now, and for better part of my life, this is who I am, right? And that this, this society has created who I am. Um, you know, long time I, I was thinking, you know, you, you really cannot say, "forget all prior to 2000. Forget Bosnia and all this stuff." It, it's, your life started there, so you cannot, never forget where you kind of, that part of your life, but at the same time, you know you are here now, so I th- think the best um way to describe it is, and I saw, saw this picture the other day, is Bosnian growing, uh American growing Bosnian roots. So, you know, simply put, Bosnian-American, you really cannot say just American, or you're just, just Bosnian, because, you know, right now about half my life I spent there, and half I, I've spent it in, in United States. So you really cannot forget, you know, kind of where you come from, but you, you can just kind [sighs] you know say I, I, I'm a Bosnian and just kind of keep that culture, it's not, it's really not possible. You, you have to uh integrate in, in, in a society you live in, so.
BB: Have any more members of your family, cousins or anything, you in 2000 you come over you had somebody you knew here but, and then it's grown. You know, I was here in ninety, going to school here in '96, '97, and '98, yeah there were some Bosnian families here, but I returned now in 2012 to today, it's ma- it's, it's major, and I was just trying to think about that network, or were you part of any more, any other family members coming?
NP: Yeah, [sigh] I had two uncles, um grandmother, yeah, just my two uncles and grand-grandma are here. Um, I have three aunts, and one more uncle that are, are still in Bosnia. So, about half.
BB: What's, what do you think, what's it like there today in Bosnia? I mean we talked a little bit about the, the wild power sharing of different, governmentally and um, do you

hear news, um do you hear Bosnian news all the time? Do you- is it streamed into your house?
NP: Yeah, yeah, no, we, we do, and I do follow news regularly, um it just kind of keep, keeps me informed, right? But [sighs] in a, you know, Bosnian it is, it is unique.
BB: Yeah, tell me-
NP: Really-
BB: -tell me some more, because you, you know a lot about it. It'd like to maybe send ten, fifteen minutes, you know just talking your take.
NP: Yeah, but Bosnia is really unique. Um, it, it, it's hard to explain every, everything, you know? And really fast because-
BB: And you don't-
NP: -you have to, you have to back, you know, fifty to a hundred years to really understand what was going on. Um, I'll try in five minutes, or five, ten minutes.
BB: And you can go- you're- I want to to be mindful of your time, otherwise my time is your time, I mean if you want to spend some that'd be great.
NP: Yeah. So [sighs] you know, we, we always, the, the last war that was, that was fought, the, one of, one of the slogans was, you know, "let's get all of these people that live in Bosnia back to grand- our grandfather's religion," which is, you know, I always thought Orthodox Christianity, right? But, and, and I think that resonated a little bit with, with, with the world, but you know if you go back to even Ottoman Empire, um Bosnia being geographically where it is, had it's own religion, um, and they're actually called Bogomils. [00:45:14] That's how it's called in Bosnia, and I don't know how it, you know, what, what, how it's translated to English. But they, they had their own religion that was really, because of geographical isolation and really mountainous uh terrain, and you know when the east and west church split, it kind of split right in-between. So because of that, they were really isolated and they had really, really early forms of Christianity. Um, so when Ottoman Empire came, they saw that the Islam, uh the religion that Ottomans brought, was really similar to what they believe in, really, really similar. So they massively started converting to, to, to Islam and that's why you see, you know, Bosnia the only count- well it was the only country in Europe that kind of massively, the population massively converted to, to Islam, and just because, because of that. So ever since then, um, Bosnians, or Bosniaks, uh were always kind of tried to be ex- exter- exterminated. Um, and it's always been, you know, "we need to convert you back to our grandfather's religion," which is really not really, really great term to say it. Um, up to, over the centuries, you know, it went back and forth between Ottoman and Austria-Hungary Empire trying to take over Bosnia, but one, one thing that happened that I think that lead in, into the, a lot of nationalism, um, and that kind of played in, into this last war, is in 1887 when Austria-Hungary came and took over Bosnia from Ottoman Empires, that when you start seeing Serbs, Croatians, and Bosniaks kind of start dividing Bosnia, and, you know, trying to call Serbia as your homeland, just because their Orthodox, and trying to create Croatia- call Croatia their homeland because

their Catholics. And then you have Bosnian Muslim population who kind of called Bosnia their, their home, and they didn't have any other home. Um, so that's, you know, fast forward, in, in, in '92 that's where it kind of started playing out, you know? Everywhere in Bosnia where Orthodox lived is, belongs to Serbia, everywhere in Bosnia where uh Croats live, or Bosnian Catholics, that's where all Croatia land is, so they created this, Serbia and, and Croatia in ninety- prior to '92, created this master plan that they just gonna split Bosnia up. Well in order to do that, the big problem is, is Bosnian Muslims who were a majority of, of, of, of the land, or majority population, um at that time. So the only way to do it is to cleanse, or ethnically cleanse that part of the population and just kind of divide it up. Well, that didn't go so well for, for them, luckily for us. They did kill a lot of people, uh displaced about fifty percent of the population in three and a half years. So, you know, it, it's just really difficult to explain everything in a really, really short period of time, but you know fast forward now, in nineteen-ninety- '95, when uh Dayton Accords were signed, which by the way, um twentieth anniversary was just a few days ago, um it, it set up the country [train noises in the background] and be- being moderated by um, by Richard Holbrooke, I, I believe, and this my, just my opinion, um knowing the system here, it was set up to be similar to how the United States was set up, two different entities, two different kind of states in a bigger coun- in, in one country, [train noises] um, [Brent apologies for the train, the two discuss the noise]

[00:50:37]

BB: So when the Dayton, twenty years ago the Accord and, and Richard Holbrooke was there, what was the um, and you were, I think you were about to say, you know, what you think he was- they were trying to do, was, was what?

NP: Well what tried to that they were- the, the main goal was to stop the war, right? And stop kind of fighting. So the, the political system, they, in order to come to the peace, every side in the conflict learned something from selves, to ensure that they're not over, over, over voted, or kind of- every side wanted to make sure that the other side doesn't get upper hand.

BB: That they get their share and they-

NP: Yeah, yeah, they get their equal share, and nobody is, is- gets, gets the upper hand, right? So the way that it's set up right now, and this, this is just ridiculous, you know here we have one man or woman, one vote, and, or one citizen, one vote, in Bosnia it's not like that. The way, you know, that there are three sides fighting, right? Serbs, Croatians, and, and Bosnians, so right now, if, if you're clare- or declare yourself as Bosnian-Serb or Serb, or you know, however you want to call it, you know you have one vote, um Croatians, and just kind of depending on different a uh group that you identify yourselves- wi- self wi- with, well, population is not the same, uh Bosnian Muslims and, and those who call themselves Bosnians are, are still the majority. Um, Bosnian-Croatians made about like fifteen percent, and Serbs made about like thirty to thirty-four percent or so, f- so, or so, I, I, I don't know exactly, so you have those fifteen percent having equal votes as, you know,

people that had fifty, over fifty percent majority, and, you know, thirty percent having same. So one Bosnian, or three Bosnian votes count as one Croatian votes now. [slight laugh] So, it, it, it's set up in a, in a way that's a political monster, they call the country, and I, I think that there is a lot of potential in, in, in Bosnia, um as far as tourism, as far as energy, producing energy, a lot of heavy industry, um but, nothing is being used because of political gridlock that's kind of holding country down. And in the last ten year, no progress has been made, at all. In first ten years after the war, uh because international community was really pressuring down on, on politicians, especially Serbs and, and Croatians kind of get together and, and kind of build the country that's more center- uh centralized, with, you know, one capital city, one president, and really build a central government. And first ten year, um, a lot of pressure came from the United States and European Union to kind of make it work, and predictions were that in twenty- uh two-thou- uh two- 2004, that by 2010 Bosnia will be applying for UN, to be a member of uh, uh European Union. Well, in 2006, um, there were uh elections, and uh a lot of Serbian nationalists came to power, right? So ever since then, there is no progress, and I think there is predictions now that we're actually going to step back. Uh, so for ten years it was just they tried to make more problems and you have one side that's trying to solve these problems and kind of keep, keep, keep the country together, um and still, ten years, or yeah twelve years after the prediction was made for the European Union, there's still no obligation, and still sit- standing still. [00:55:03] So, it's what, what people say now is, is that war actually never started- never stopped in Bosnia. Um, you know, it, it, it start- it stopped fighting with weapons, you know, and, and killings, but the conflict is still going, and it's what you call "cold war," right? it, it's still going and every opportunity that uh Serbians get, and, and Croatians get, um, they try to make more problems that they will show the international community that Bosnia is not capable of being united country, and that they, everybody needs to go their separate ways. Um, so a lot of discrimination going on, um, a lot of political unrest still.

BB: Is there- are there any movements within the country, or from our- from your side now that this Bosnian-American side- I mean is the gridlock just, for the foreseeable future just this is the way it's gonna be for years and year, or are there people working to- is it too massive a problem to?

NP: Yeah, uh there's, with current generation of politicians and without any pressure from United States and European Union, there's no, there's not really hope uh that wi- anything was gonna change. The only, and, and to make it even worse, um, the government of Republika Srpska, which is the entity of, uh a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they just enacted a referendum to basically get um, it, it's a lot of stories that this is just a question that they want to ask people, but really, behind the scenes it's trying to get a legal uh standing that the uh constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be uh, it's not valid in fifty-percent, or forty-nine percent of the country. So basically, you know, saying Kentucky, yeah, I, I don't want to follow United States constitution, I want to do my own way, right? So that, that's basically creating a legal way to say, you know, we want to

separate. So if this is ha- if this happens, um, and, you, you know, over the course of history, a lot of different powers and a lot of different militaries tried to separate Bosnia, and tried to kind of divide the country among, among themselves, and everybody failed. Bosnia is a thousand years old as a, as a country, you know, nobody could do that. So right now, even if, if this referendum goes and, you know, they, they vote "yes," and it gives them uh legal, legal standing and everything, if they try and proclaim independence, I am one hundred percent sure that another conflict will not be avoidable. Um, and one thing I can tell you, you know, lived through that, and knowing a lot of what happened, this one would be worse than one in '92, much, much worse. And the reason [train noise in background] I say that, and I'll tell you a story of my uh, my nephew, um, my aunt and my uncle got marri- married in, in Srebrenica, uh, uh, uh, and when in '95, July of '95 when Srebrenica fall in Serbia hands, my aunts was three months pregnant. Uh um, so my uncle was killed in that genocide, so uh after all that, my nephew is born without, you know, without fa- ever, ever seeing his father, um and the only memories he has is, is a picture um of his father in a uniform, and it, it's a uniform of uh Yugosla- Yugoslavian National Army, the same Army that killed him, because, you know, when he was young everybody, every male had to serve in, you know, like a year in, in that Army, and, you know, the only picture he has that survived is that picture. So, you know, he is, he's twenty year old now, and you, you can't tell him that, um, you know, we're just gonna go and separate this part of the country. Um, there, there's still, you know I didn't lose my parents, right? In that, in that conflict, but for kids that have lost their parents and knew what happened, um, there's still that part of them that's, that just wants, you know, our revenge, right? [01:00:45] Which is, you know, it, it, the revenge is prohibited by our religion, you're not, you cannot do that, but [sighs] you know, when conflict starts, and I hear this from a lot of people, um, some kind of blinds fall in front of you and, you, you don't, you don't see much, right? Um, and, and from what I can tell you, it is [sighs] a lot of, there's a lot of orphans in, in Bosnia, and a lot of parents that were, that were killed in conflict, and for those kids now that you tell them, you know, "your parents were killed and now we're gonna go and, and separate again," just them would not rest, um and just kind of raise their hands and say, "okay, you go ahead and do it." Um, there's just no way, no possible way, and, you know, if, if this all goes through, you know, and today is 2015, if it happens in 2018, you can for certain expect a conflict in Bosnia.

BB: Hmm. Yeah, when can it end? I mean it's, hmm.

NP: Well it, it's, it, it, it's really a complex situation to, to explain, you know, and even, even, even in one interview, it, it's tough to go really deep into it to understand the mindset of people that, that were there. Um, and the people that survived, you know, Bosnians that, that survived, [sighs] and, and me, as, you know, being Bosnian-American, um if I was there and, and conflict had to happen, there is no way that you would just say, "eh, go ahead and do it," you know? There's just no way. Uh, and, and, that no other majority

population in Bosnia is feeling that way right now, so, you know, you, you can, you can push a group of people so far-
BB: Uh huh.
NP: -but once you get past the limit, then, you know?
BB: Mhmm.
NP: You, you've gotta stand up and, and defend yourself, so.
BB: Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. It's uh, yeah, you, you wish there was a way that there, those feudings are deep.
NP: Well there, there, there is, there is a way, but, you know, it, it was one of your meeting that I mentioned um, one guy, that, you know, that's in political life right now, he said, you know, "how can I forgive or uh forget somebody when they are not asking for my forgiveness," right? So if, if they are not willing to come and, and, you know, start building um, a country, you're not a country, then there is no room for, for nego- neg- negotiations, right, and, and I, I think [sighs] majority of, of, of Bosnian-Serb population, even now in, in a, a country, doesn't want to see another conflict, but what's happening really because of political situation, you have nationalists running half of the country, right? And they are really, deeply corrupt, so they are afraid if, if they are, you know, come from, down from power and somebody else is elected, they will be pros- prosecuted for corruption, and boss will end up in jail. So, what they are doing right now is just stirring up all old wounds, and bringing all old national, national uh rhetoric, and trying to stir up this s- uh conflict again, so they can stay in power for as long as they, they wish. [01:05:04] Um, um, and you know, again, they, they can go so much, right, before they, they overreach the limit. Um, so that, that, that's what's happening, I, I don't think anybody want, wants to see another conflict, but you know, if, if, if it comes to that point that, you know, there is no other way, and I don't think that majority of Bosnian population would just let half of the country kind of um go and declare its independence, I don't think that's going, that's, that's going to happen. Um, and, you know, that, that's uh, if you follow the news, it, it's, you know particularly on this issue and Bosnia, and that's what internationally community, including the United States and European Union uh politicians, that's what they are saying. Um, nobody thinks, nobody who, who understand the situation thinks that the referendum would happen, or can happen, without um conflict, that's gonna erupt again. And just a few days, just a few days ago actually, um, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, um has said that, you know, if, if, if because of the crisis, our refugee crisis that's going on with the Syrian uh refugees, uh through Balkan states or countries, and because of what's happening in Bosnia, that conflict is really likely. So, you know taking in consideration all, everything that's going on, you know, if, if they continue in this, um, this direction, and don't change their direction, I, I think conflict is really, really likely, in a few years.
BB: Hmm. Well we're gonna continue um to talk for years to come, but this idea about understanding the news, is there an English speaking vehicle for Bosnian news that I could be looking at? Or is that, is there no such a thing? You know, is it just well, "well check the

BBC and go under 'Bosnian,'" is that, is that the best thing for me to do, or is there a Bosnian-American uh or I guess English speaking uh?
NP: Uh there is, there is this TV um station, I think they have newspapers too, uh it's called And One, it's uh backed by CNN but-
BB: And One?
NP: And One. I think they have English version um too. But a good resource for any information on Bosnia would uh, is uh Christiane Amanpour-
BB: Oh yeah.
NP: -uh from CNN. [Brent speaking at the same time] I think she has, yeah, I think she has an, a program that every week, a weekly program. She, she is a re- uh, you know, reporter that-
BB: For years.
NP: -for years, and years, and years, that spent in Bosnia doing, doing the war there. So she knows a lot.
BB: I remember her there.
NP: Yeah, so she really, really objective, and really to the point, and anybody who seeks good resource, I think she's, she's a really valuable resource.
BB: All right. Um, yeah, yeah it's uh, is there anything else you wanted to share right now? Thank you for your time.
NP: That's uh, that's about it. [laughs] [01:08:54]
[Brent turns the recorder back on]
BB: You've got three presidents?
NP: Yeah, three presidents, you got uh a body of [01:09:09] that it call like ministers, or they just secretaries, right? Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of uh State, and so forth. Then you uh two Houses, of, of government, you have um Parliament, uh which is upper house, and you have um, just uh, [whispering to himself] you have two, two for- two, you have Parliament and you have a, another house, like just like Senate and House Re- Reps, you, you have them there too, and that's on a, a country level. Then you had two entities, which are basically their own really autonomous states. Uh each has President, Vice President, it has Parliament, um, and two houses, you know, Parliament and then uh ano- another house. And then, to make it even worse, in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there's ten regions, and every region has a Prime Minister, Secretary of Commerce, and their own Parliament, so it's like layers, and layers, and layers of government that's just really, you, you can't get stuff done, it, and it's really irrational. Um, how they- [01:10:37]
BB: How do they pay for it all?
NP: So it's been estimated that in, in Bosnia they have- oh by the way, they have seventeen percent sales tax on everything you buy. Um, and, you know, through, through taxes, right? But how they get paid for it? They, they can't, and, and that's, that's not a thing. Every year you- they go more in debt, in debt, and you know, in debt, and they just keep borrowing

money because they can’t, you know, climb up. So, it's estimated that in Bosnia uh average worker works six months for um for state, for, for country, right, for taxes. But all, all of the money that's, that's generated [sighs] because of, of, of the size of the government and su- and bureaucracy that's going on and corruption, all of that doesn't get into, put into right, you know, where, where it, it needs to be, um, and you, you have situation now where you have more retirees and more pension plans than you have uh workers, so [slight laugh] the, the, the income that's coming from the workforce, it's not enough to offset the pension that you had to pay. And just, just one, one details that, that's really, just, you can't wrap your head around, you know, living in, in this country, there they have this law, that they have seriously passed. If a government official, you know, in Parliament, if he gets, if somebody else get elected in his place, for a year uh he receives uh what they call "white bread" which is basically like a percentage of his pay, even though he's not in the position anymore he continues to re- uh, you know, receive his salary, for a year, for not doing anything, which is just like you, you really can't understand. Um to, to me, you know, it's just, just ridiculous. Um, and, and, see, here, you know when you, when you elect official you expect them to represent majority and kind of represent people, well there what happ- what, what's happening, you have a lot of different parties and usually, well not usually but every time, they disregard what their constituents want and they strictly vote on their party lines, how the President of the party wants, that's how everybody votes. So basically you have, you know, all of the officials that, or politicians that are in Parliament, and this voting uh bodies that, you know, vote for a country, and, you know, steer coun- country in directions, there's only uh about six people really that, and those are six presidents of, of major political parties, that kind of control every- everything. And what's really [laughs] what's really messed up, is, is you have a president of the party um that's telling the president of the country how to vote, because there's three, three presidents and every- ev- an- any law they sign, and anything, any, even every, you know, press release that they give, they have vote on it and if uh one of them rejects it, it cannot go, so all three of them have to-

BB: Veto power.

NP: Yeah.

BB: Where everybody has a chance to veto some- something.

NP: Yes, yes. So, all three had to agree before they would even, they would, they would give a press release. So you have a, a, a president of a political party that doesn't like that, what, what's going on, and he uh instructs the president of the country not to, to vote in that. [01:14:59] So right now it's at all stop, right? So you really have six people who are really controlling everything, and, and, you know, without them, nobody in the party cannot go in, in, in any direction they want, or any how, how people wanted to do. Now, there are some minor exceptions, and those are on really low local level, like mayors. Mayors really try to ignore what's going on in, you know, uh country level and, and, and, [unclear] level, um so there are some cities where our really, really educated people are

mayors, and those are exceptions, and when, when you see those people leading and, you know, leading the right way, um, there are cities that are booming, and they actually have more jobs than people in them, but those are a really small percent, really a minority now, so.
BB: That's some disfunction man.
NP: Yeah, it is. There is no country in the world that's more politically complex than, than Bosnia.
BB: Yeah, yeah.
NP: Yep, so.
BB: That was a good, good encapsulation as, as best you can. [laughs] Wow.
NP: Yeah. It-

[01:16:25 End Track]